

Revealing Bullying Victimization Among Higher Education Students with Disabilities: Perspectives from the UAE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the occurrence and correlates of bullying among individuals with disabilities in higher education. The sample included participants with diverse types of disabilities and educational backgrounds. The findings indicated that a substantial number of participants had experienced bullying, often linked to their disability status. Bullying was commonly reported among peers of similar age and gender, and took various forms such as harassment and verbal insults. Responses to bullying varied, with some individuals choosing to ignore the incidents. The results also suggested that gender played a role in the prevalence of bullying, while the type of disability had a less pronounced but still relevant effect. The study highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to address bullying in higher education settings for students with disabilities.

Keywords: Victimization, Revealing Bullying, Students, Disabilities, Higher Education, UAE

INTRODUCTION

Bullying remains one of the most pressing and complex challenges faced by societies around the globe. Yet, before the 1970s, it was not widely recognized as a significant issue. The first comprehensive research on bullying was conducted in the early 1970s by Dan Olweus, a Swedish psychologist (Duncan, 2013). It might be reassuring to think of bullying as behavior limited to childhood or that universities and colleges—seen as centers of intellectual and cultural development—are exempt from such problems. However, this perception does not align with reality. Although the study of bullying in higher education is relatively recent, building on earlier investigations in schools and workplaces, current research reveals that bullying in universities is both common and varied. Some researchers suggest that the distinctive social complexities and hierarchical nature of higher education institutions may actually contribute to the persistence and development of bullying behaviors within these settings (Ahmed et al., 2022; Tight, 2023).

Hwang et al. (2018) described bullying as a complex social interaction marked by an imbalance of power and deliberate intent to cause harm. They highlighted that the most frequently reported types of bullying experienced daily by children included name-calling (90.3%), rumor-spreading (89.1%), social exclusion (60.8%), and physical aggression (63.1%). Similarly, Sulaiman (2021) defines bullying as a repeated pattern of aggressive behavior directed at a student, resulting in emotional or physical distress. This aggression can be direct, such as verbal or physical

attacks, or indirect, like the spreading of rumors. Importantly, indirect bullying can be equally damaging as direct forms of aggression.

Bullying and victimization are concepts also used to characterize situations in which a student experiences negative actions from one or more other students., With intent to harm. According to Olweus, D., (1990), bullying is characterized by repeated and regular actions over time. This study explores the widespread issue of bullying in educational settings, focusing on its negative impacts on students across cognitive, emotional, social, personal, and academic dimensions. The effects extend beyond individuals to affect families and society, making it a significant concern in contemporary psychology research. Particularly concerning are the potential severe outcomes, such as suicide, among university students, including those with disabilities integrated into mainstream education. (Abdo,2020). (Wolke, D., Woods, S., & Samara, M, 2009) indicate that bullying has been observed individually by one or more parties, where this behavior is intentional and causes pain to the victim in the physical, verbal, or emotional sphere, or is sick, and in order not to Act as bullying or bullying must be real and involve not eating between the bully and the victim. Berg, K. L.et al.(2015) confirmed a connection between exposure to bullying and mental health impact. Results indicated that a quarter of youth with disabilities (YWD) reported experiencing three or more instances of victimization in the previous year, compared to 19% of non-disabled youth. Additionally, 75% of YWD reported higher levels of victimization compared to their non-disabled peers. The prevalence of clinical depression was significantly higher among YWD (14% vs. 5.5%), and for every 1-unit increase in victimization, the odds of clinical depression were 92% higher among YWD. Among youth in Child Welfare Services (CWS) who reported three or more incidents of victimization, 24.4% of YWD and 2.2% of non-YWD had Child Depression Inventory (CDI) scores in the clinical range.

According Al-Darmaki F, et al (2022). Students who have been subjected to bullying often experience a range of psychological difficulties, including anger, distress, emotional outbursts, difficulty focusing on academics, depression, anxiety, and fear. Research shows that individuals with a history of bullying tend to report significantly higher levels of depression, anxiety, and symptoms related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than those who have not faced such experiences. This highlights the urgent need for mental health support for victims of bullying. However, it remains unclear whether these students have accessed counseling services provided by their universities.

To address bullying effectively, it is essential to implement comprehensive and long-term prevention and intervention strategies. These strategies should engage not only students, but also faculty, administrative staff, and even parents, creating a campus-wide culture of awareness and support. Evidence suggests that the most effective anti-bullying initiatives are those that adopt a whole-institution approach within a multi-level public health framework. Consequently, educational institutions should prioritize the development of awareness programs that inform students about bullying and its harmful effects on the university climate. Additionally, providing targeted psychological support can help affected individuals cope with and recover from the emotional consequences of bullying.

International research has consistently shown that students enrolled in special education programs are at a greater risk of being bullied than their non-disabled peers. This trend was supported by findings from Whitney, Smith, and Thompson (1994). One particular study focusing on 93 students with disabilities and a comparable group of peers in an inclusive educational environment reported concerning rates of victimization. Specifically, 55% of students with mild learning disabilities experienced moderate to severe bullying, while the rate rose to 78% among those with moderate learning disabilities. In comparison, only 25% of students without disabilities from the same setting reported similar experiences. These results are consistent with those of numerous other studies, which underscore the heightened exposure of students with disabilities to different forms of abuse within school environments.

Jones, L. et al (2012) Through a systematic examination of 10,663 references, 17 studies were selected from them. They found that 16 of these studies provide appropriate evidence for the prevalence, and their results confirmed that people with disabilities are more exposed to bullying, abuse, and violence than people without disabilities.

Olweus (1993) presents a thorough definition of bullying, describing it as a repetitive pattern of physical or verbal aggression driven by hostile intent, which causes distress to the victim. He outlines three key elements that characterize bullying: its repetitive nature, the harm it causes, and the unequal power dynamic between the individuals involved. This definition forms the basis for understanding and addressing bullying behaviors. Research consistently indicates that students with disabilities are more likely to react to bullying and experience higher victimization rates compared to their non-disabled peers. While limited research exists on differences in bullying involvement among students with disabilities, initial findings suggest a higher likelihood of involvement in bullying dynamics among this group. McLaughlin et al. (2010) conducted a thorough literature review, finding that students with special educational needs or disabilities are disproportionately represented as both perpetrators and victims

of bullying. The researchers suggest that this overrepresentation may stem from specific disability characteristics, class placements, and experiences of marginalization.

Rose et al. (2011) adds to this discussion by suggesting that students with disabilities are twice as likely to associate themselves with both bullies and victims compared to their peers without disabilities. Overall, the existing literature consistently portrays students with disabilities as frequent targets of victimization and shows a higher prevalence of engaging in bullying behaviors than their non-disabled counterparts.

Bullying is on the rise and has become a significant educational, social, and personal issue, negatively impacting the overall academic environment. It hinders the cognitive, emotional, and social development of individuals. It violates students' right to learn in a safe environment, which is an environment where students feel psychologically secure from violence, danger, and threats to their academic achievement (Khasawneh, 2020).

Espelage et al. (2015) pointed out that the most important factor that leads to bullying against people with disabilities is their lack of social skills and effective communication skills, and this applies to autism spectrum disorder. This is also confirmed by (Little, 2002) that people with autism spectrum disorder are more vulnerable to abuse. They are often subjected to higher levels of repeated abuse compared to students with other disabilities, this is also confirmed by the fact that people with autism spectrum disorder are more vulnerable to abuse, Which increases as an adverse reaction to their angry reactions and emotional problems (Rieffe et al., 2012).

The university environment, known for its significant contributions to social life, unfortunately, becomes a challenging terrain for students with disabilities who frequently encounter hostile situations, enduring chronic teasing or bullying from their peers. While some degree of teasing is considered normal in social interactions, research suggests that approximately 8-14% of individuals with disabilities face chronic and harmful teasing or bullying experiences (Nansel et al, 2001).

Young et al. (2012) confirm that people with disabilities, regardless of their classification (visible or hidden) are more susceptible to bullying compared to their non-disabled peers. This bullying often stems directly from the student's disability (Whitney, Smith & Thompson, 1994), increasing the likelihood of experiencing peer rejection, a key precursor to victimization (Martlew & Hodson, 1991; Whitney et al., 1994; Hodges, E. V. E., & Perry, D. G. 1999). Students with disabilities often encounter difficulties in social skills, either due to the nature of their disability or because of social isolation and peer rejection from segregated environments. This places them at a higher risk of being targeted for bullying and victimization. For instance, little, L. (2002) study found that 94% of children diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome experienced peer abuse, including bullying (75%) and non-sexual assaults (15%). Research also indicates that students with various disabilities, encompassing visible and invisible disabilities, physical, developmental, intellectual, emotional, sensory, and others, are more prone to heightened victimization through bullying. (Siebecker, A., Swearer, S., and Lieske, J 2005; Regional Education Laboratory, 2010). Studies have reported high rates of bullying, such as 34% of students taking ADHD medication experiencing bullying at least 2-3 times a month (Unnever and Cornell, 2003). Students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorders also face high victimization rates (Jimenez, S. M. 2022)). A Japanese study found The total proportion of children with stuttering who were questioned, imitated, and laughed at was 66.6% (Kikuchi, Y.et al., 2019). Blake et al. (2016) confirm that while bullying rates are generally high, they escalate significantly among students with disabilities compared to the general population., with specific disabilities such as ASD, learning disabilities (LD), intellectual disabilities (ID), ADHD, affective disorder (ED), and language and speech disorders experiencing a pronounced increase in bullying incidents.

Studies by the Pacer Center. (2012) highlights that student with disabilities are significantly more likely to experience bullying, with the association between bullying and developmental disabilities being two to three times stronger than for children without disabilities. Alarmingly, approximately 60% of students with disabilities in universities report regular bullying, compared to just 25% of their non-disabled peers. Additionally, individuals with disabilities face higher rates of cyberbullying, which further increases their vulnerability. Despite the presumed cognitive, psychological, and biological maturity at the university level, students with disabilities remain susceptible to bullying and its detrimental effects on their academic performance, mental health, and social relationships. While striving to build connections and access academic resources, these students often encounter social exclusion from peers, which can lead to negative outcomes and sometimes provoke retaliatory bullying behaviors. In light of these challenges, this study employs self-report measures to thoroughly investigate bullying-related behaviors among individuals with disabilities, focusing on both perpetration and victimization, as well as the complex interplay of contributing factors. Consequently,

The Study Aims to Answer the following Research Questions:

- What is the extent and nature of bullying experienced by students with disabilities in UAE universities (including its forms and common locations)?
- Are there statistically significant relationships between students' demographic variables (e.g., gender, type of disability) and their exposure to bullying?

- To what extent does having a disability contribute to students being targeted by bullying behaviors?

Objectives

The objectives of the current study can be outlined as follows:

- Examine the prevalence, forms, and locations of bullying experienced by students with disabilities in higher education institutions in the UAE.
- Analyze the relationship between students' demographic characteristics (such as gender, age, and type of disability) and their exposure to bullying.
- Explore whether disability status is a significant factor contributing to the risk of being bullied.

By pursuing these objectives and seeking to answer the study's research questions, the study aims to contribute valuable insights into the dynamics of bullying among students with disabilities in the United Arab Emirates, shedding light on the contextual factors, patterns, and consequences associated with this social issue within the specific cultural and educational context of Emirati society.

RESEARCH METHOD

Design

This study adopted a quantitative descriptive research design and utilized questionnaires as the primary data collection tool. The aim was to examine the prevalence and related factors of bullying experienced by students with disabilities in higher education settings. The sample consisted of participants with various types of disabilities and educational experiences. A descriptive design was deemed appropriate for this research, as it enables the collection of detailed information, fosters a deeper understanding of the issue, and effectively addresses the research questions.

Sampling

The study focused on a primary research sample comprising 135 individuals (male and female) students with disabilities (physical disability, hearing impairment, visual impairment, and learning difficulties). The investigation was conducted within the academic environment of the University of Sharjah, providing a specific context for understanding the experiences of students with disabilities. This setting was chosen to capture a comprehensive picture of the challenges and dynamics prevalent in a higher education institution. Demographic characteristics of the research sample are detailed in Table (1)

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Research Sample are Detailed

Gender	Percentage	Frequency	Age	Percentage	Frequency
female	45.9	62	18-22	26.7	36
male	54.1	73	23-27	30.4	41
Total	100.0	135	More than 27	43.0	58
			Total	100.0	135
Type of disability	Percentage	Frequency	Educational level	Percentage	Frequency
Physical disability	27.4	37	Bachelor's degree	80.0	108
Visual disability	22.2	30	Postgraduate studies	20.0	27
Specific learning difficulties	20.7	28	Total	100.0	135
Hearing disability	29.6	40			
Total	100.0	135			

Table (1) presents the following findings: The sample comprised 135 individuals with disabilities. The age distribution indicated that the highest proportion was in the More than 27 years age group, representing 43% of the sample, while the lowest proportion was in the 18-22 age group, accounting for 26.7%. In terms of gender distribution, males constituted 54.1% of the sample, while females accounted for 45.9%. Across disability categories, the highest percentage was observed in the Hearing disability category, representing 29.6%, and the lowest was in the Specific learning difficulties category, accounting for 20.7%. Regarding educational level, the highest proportion of the sample had a bachelor's degree (80%), while the lowest had completed Postgraduate studies (2.6%).

Research Instrument:

Bullying Scale for University Students: To obtain a comprehensive understanding of bullying behaviors among university students, a specialized measurement scale was systematically developed, informed by an extensive review of existing literature and previous empirical studies in the field. The finalized instrument comprises two key components, each designed to capture distinct dimensions of the bullying phenomenon. The first section, focused on demographic and contextual information, includes 12 multiple-choice items addressing various aspects such as types of bullying behaviors, locations where incidents occurred, and possible underlying motives.

The second section explores the frequency and nature of bullying-related experiences. It contains five items measuring the prevalence of such behaviors using a Likert-type scale ranging from “never” to “7 times or more,” allowing for nuanced analysis of students' exposure levels. This section aims not only to quantify exposure but also to shed light on the actions taken and the personal experiences of the respondents in relation to bullying.

To establish the validity and reliability of the measurement tool, it underwent evaluation by a panel of academic experts and specialists in psychology and education. Their constructive feedback prompted specific revisions to several items on the instrument. In terms of reliability, internal consistency was assessed through Cronbach's alpha for each subscale. The “Being Bullied” subscale achieved an alpha of 0.755, the “Places and Forms of Exposure to Bullying” subscale had an alpha of 0.705, and the “Frequency of Exposure to These Experiences at University This Year” subscale demonstrated strong reliability with an alpha coefficient of 0.914.

Procedure

The questionnaires were administered to students with disabilities across various disability categories during scheduled sessions coordinated with university support centers. Prior to distribution, the purpose of the study was clearly explained, emphasizing the importance of responding honestly to the items related to bullying experiences and contexts. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain strictly confidential.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted using R statistical software (R Core Team, 2020), incorporating several specialized packages, including *psych* (Revelle, 2020), *lavaan* (Rosseel, 2012), *semTools* (Jorgensen et al., 2021), and *semPlot* (Epskamp, 2019). Additionally, IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26) was used to perform both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. The analysis included techniques such as frequency distributions, percentages, mean scores, standard deviations, Pearson correlation coefficients, chi-square tests, regression analysis, and reliability assessments using Cronbach's alpha and omega coefficients. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were also carried out to assess the psychometric validity of the scale and to uncover significant patterns within the dataset gathered from the study participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following data collection, meticulous analysis, and the exclusion of non-serious responses, the participant's responses to the bullying scale yielded the following key findings:

Table 2. Distribution of the participants according to Incidence of Bullying

Have you ever been Bullied?	Percentage	Frequency	What did you do when you were Subject to Bullying	Percentage	Frequency
yes	40.0	54	Told someone about	2.2	3
no	60.0	81	Replied in the same way	1.5	2
Total	100.0	135	Ignored it	28.1	38
If you were a victim of bullying. how often did this happen to you?	Percentage	Frequency	Stayed at home	5.9	8
None.	60.7	82	Avoided the person who bullied you	17.0	23
1-4 times	16.3	22	Not applicable	45.2	61
5-9 times	4.4	6	Total	100.0	135
10 times or more.	16.3	22	Were you knowing the person who bullied you	Percentage	Frequency
every day	2.2	3	Yes	36.3	49
Total	100.0	135	No	23.0	31

The motivation behind the bullying which you were subject to was	Percentage	Frequency	Not applicable	40.7	55
Your young age	1.5	2	Total	100.0	135
Your vulnerability or disability	25.2	34	The person who bullied you was	Percentage	Frequency
Your size	1.5	2	Same age as you	31.1	42
Not applicable	57.0	77	Younger than you	14.1	19
All the above	14.1	19	Older than you	5.2	7
Speech problems	.7	1	Not applicable	49.6	67
Total	100.0	135	Total	100.0	135
Was the person who bullied you of your gender?					
Yes	23.7	32			
No	30.4	41			
Not applicable	45.9	62			
Total	100.0	135			

Table (2) illustrates the exposure of sample individuals to bullying. When asked about their experience with bullying, it was revealed that 40% had previously been subjected to bullying. When asked, how often did this happen to you? shows that the majority experienced no bullying (60.7%), followed by 1-4 occurrences (16.3%), and 10 times or more (16.3%). And when they asked the motives behind the bullying to which you were subjected, the highest percentage attributed to your vulnerability or disability. and that's a percentage 25.2% followed by 14.1% indicated that it was due to all the above reasons, Then the proportions were equalized between attributed to your young age. attributed to your size.1.5%, pointed to speech problems. 0.7%, And when they asked Were you knowing the person who bullied you ? 36.3% responded that they knew them, while 23% responded that they did not know them. The person who bullied you was Same age as you %31.1, Younger than you 14.1%, Older than you 5.2%, and when asked about the person who bullied you about your gender? 30.4% responded that they are not of the same gender, while 23.7% responded that they are of the same gender. "When faced with bullying, the most effective response reported by participants was to ignore it (28%), followed by avoiding the aggressor (17%), staying at home (6%), and telling someone about it (2%).

Table 3. Distribution of the most likely Places for Bullying to Occur, Places do you Think are Unsafe

What are the most likely Places for Bullying to occur at the University?	Percentage	Frequency	Which Places do you think are Unsafe at the University?	Percentage	Frequency
Car parks or bus stations.	5.9	8	Bathrooms.	22.2	30
Corridor.	7.4	10	Corridor.	9.6	13
Cafeteria.	9.6	13	Cafeteria.	3.0	4
all the above	62.2	84	all the above	26.7	36
Accommodation	2.2	3	Accommodation	3.7	5
Classrooms.	4.4	6	Classrooms.	15.6	21
Sports complexes.	3.0	4	Sports complexes.	11.1	15
Inside buses or cars.	4.4	6	School yards and streets	4.4	6
WhatsApp and social networking sites	.7	1	Nothing	3.7	5
Total	100.0	135	Total	100.0	135

Most of the sample individuals indicated that bullying occurs in all the mentioned places, with a percentage of 62.2%. Regarding unsafe places, 26.7% also reported that bullying occurs in all of these locations.

Table 4. Distribution of the number of times sample members were exposed to bullying at the university this year

Forms of Bullying	Never		1 or 2 times		3 or 4 times		5 or 6 times		7 times or more	
	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F	P	F
Harassment by other students	54.8	74	39.3	53	3.7	5	-	-	2.2	3
Calling me with insulting or offensive words	80.0	108	17.0	23	.7	1	2.2	3	-	-
Beating and pushing by other students	86.7	117	11.9	16	-	-	-	-	1.5	2
Threatening by other students	83.0	112	15.6	21	-	-	-	-	1.5	2
Spreading rumors or telling lies about me	90.4	122	6.7	9	-	-	.7	1	2.2	3

Table 4. illustrates the extent of the sample individuals' exposure to various forms of bullying, specifically "Harassment by other students." It indicates that 39.3% reported experiencing it once or twice, while 3.7% reported being subjected to it 3 or 4 times. Additionally, 2.2% reported experiencing it 7 times or more, while 54.8% of the sample individuals indicated that they did not experience it, regarding "Calling me with insulting or offensive words," 17% reported experiencing it once or twice, and 0.7% reported being subjected to it 3 or 4 times. Those who experienced it 5 or 6 times accounted for 2.2%. However, 80% of the sample individuals reported that they did not experience it, as for "Beating and pushing by other students," it is evident that 11.9% experienced it once or twice, while 1.5% experienced it 7 times or more. The majority, 86.7%, reported that they did not experience it, regarding "Threatening by other students," 15.6% experienced it once or twice, 1.5% experienced it 7 times or more, and 83% did not experience it. Finally, concerning "Spreading rumors or telling lies about me," it appears that 6.7% experienced it once or twice, 0.7% experienced it 5 or 6 times, 2.2% experienced it 7 times or more, while 90.4% did not experience it.

Table 5. Association Between Gender and Exposure to Bullying (Chi-Square Test)

Gender	Experienced Bullying	Did Not Experience Bullying	Total
Male	33	40	73
Female	21	41	62
Total	54	81	135

$\chi^2(1) = 1.80, p = .18 \rightarrow$ Not statistically significant

Table 5. Results from a Pearson chi-square test examining the relationship between gender and bullying experience. A significance level of $p < .05$ was considered statistically significant., suggesting that bullying occurs among both males and females>

Table 6. Association Between Type of Disability and Exposure to Bullying (Chi-Square Test)

Type of Disability	Experienced Bullying	Did Not Experience Bullying	Total
Physical Disability	10	27	37
Visual Disability	6	24	30
Specific Learning Difficulties	28	0	28
Hearing Disability	10	30	40
Total	54	81	135

$\chi^2(3) = 53.35, p = .01 \rightarrow$ Statistically significant

Table 6. The chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between type of disability and exposure to bullying, $\chi^2(3) = 53.35, p = .01$. Notably, students with specific learning difficulties reported the highest rate of bullying (100%), whereas students with visual and hearing impairments experienced relatively lower rates.

These findings suggest that the type of disability plays a crucial role in vulnerability to bullying, potentially due to varying levels of visibility, communication barriers, or behavioral traits associated with each condition.

Table 7. Examine the Statistical Relationship between Demographic Variables and the Exposure of Students with Disabilities to Different Forms of Bullying.

The Statistical Relationship between the Demographic Variables, and the Exposure of Students with Disabilities to Forms of Bullying					
Variables	Sig.	Beta	B	T	Std. Error
Type of Disability	.030	.185	.437	2.201	.199
Age	.764	-.029	-.100	-.301	.331
Educational Level	.704	-.037	-.260	-.381	.681
Gender	.022	.206	1.157	2.311	.501
R2	.0940.				

Table (7) presents the statistical relationship between demographic variables and the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying. The table indicates that there is a weak but significant relationship between Type of Disability and the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying (Beta = .185, $p=.030$), as well as a weak but significant relationship between gender and the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying (Beta = .206, $p=.022$). No significant relationships were found between the remaining variables and the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying. Additionally, gender was identified as the strongest factor affecting the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying (Beta = .206). The independent variables explain approximately 9.4% of the variance in the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying ($R=.094$).

CONCLUSION

The study included students with disabilities from a university sample, examining their demographic traits to establish the correlation between these traits and their encounters with bullying.

First: the results related to the extent to which individuals with disabilities were subjected to bullying, 40% had previously been subjected to bullying. the exposure of individuals with disabilities to bullying may result from a lack of awareness among members of society about the nature of disabilities. This can lead to the formation of erroneous ideas and stereotypical concepts regarding the capabilities and possibilities of people with disabilities. Consequently, discriminatory behaviors and targeting of individuals with disabilities increase, thereby amplifying their vulnerability to bullying, the recurrence of bullying against individuals with disabilities may be attributed to ignorance and insufficient understanding of disability, leading to distorting the image and forming misconceptions about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities. It can also be due to; it may be traced back to the impact of initial bullying experiences. If an individual has been subjected to bullying earlier, it may lead to the formation of a negative self-image, making them more susceptible to future bullying due to psychological vulnerability and involvement in repetitive cycles. As it appeared, the majority, when asked about their knowledge of bullying, indicated that they are aware of it. This suggests that the bullies are among their social circle, leading to an increase in the recurrence of bullying, as it appeared, Individuals with disabilities are subjected to bullying because of their disabilities, and this stems from the incorrect perception of disability in society, as it has been observed, individuals with disabilities experience bullying in various places, and there is no specific location where their exposure to bullying increases more than others. Finally, the results revealed that individuals with disabilities tend to ignore the bullying they face, which can increase their exposure to bullying.

Second: the results related to the extent of the sample individuals' exposure to various forms of bullying, an increase in harassment faced by individuals with disabilities has been evident by other students, the reason behind the rise in this form of mistreatment is its prevalence among people with disabilities, who frequently experience various forms of harassment. This includes verbal abuse, where they are subjected to inappropriate language, as well as judgmental looks and, at times, physical actions such as pushing, hitting, or improperly handling their belongings. It also appears that people with disabilities are exposed to Calling them with insulting or offensive words, as some offensive words are used for the purpose of mocking people with disabilities and their disability. Regarding the exposure of individuals with disabilities to pushing and hitting from other students, it can be attributed to a lack of awareness and understanding about disability. When there is insufficient understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, it can lead to a distorted perception of them and result in

negative stereotypes about their capabilities. Finally, individuals with disabilities are exposed to the spreading of rumors about them. In many places, they are not easily accepted, leading to the fabrication of lies and rumors by some individuals to get rid of them.

Third: The study found no significant relationship between gender and the prevalence of bullying among students with disabilities ($p=0.18$), indicating that bullying occurs among both males and females. However, there was a significant relationship between categories of disabilities and the prevalence of bullying ($p=0.01$), suggesting that bullying is more prevalent among individuals with learning difficulties compared to other disability groups.

Fourth: Regarding the statistical relationship between demographic variables and the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying, the study revealed a weak but significant relationship between the type of disability and exposure to bullying (Beta = .185, $p=.030$). This indicates that certain disabilities are more prone to bullying than others, with bullying potentially being more prevalent among individuals with learning difficulties compared to other disability groups.

The study found a weak but significant relationship between gender and the exposure of students with disabilities to forms of bullying. to forms of bullying (Beta = .206, $P=.022$). The exposure of people with disabilities to forms of bullying varies according to gender. Males may be exposed to pushing and beatings more than females, while females may be exposed to harassment more than males.

Comparable findings were reported in the study by Ersozlu et al. (2020), which demonstrated that students with disabilities are more likely to experience victimization and engage in physical altercations than their non-disabled peers. The study revealed that students with learning disabilities and those on the autism spectrum reported elevated levels of bullying in inclusive educational settings. In contrast, students diagnosed with intellectual disabilities or emotional and behavioral disorders experienced higher rates of victimization in more restrictive learning environments. Furthermore, increased involvement in fights was most frequently observed among students with autism spectrum disorders, emotional and behavioral challenges, and other health-related impairments, particularly in restrictive settings. The study also discussed the broader implications of these findings and suggested areas for future research.. As recommended by Ibrahim, F. M.,et al. (2023), bullying prevention programs should prioritize enhancing victims' self-esteem to help them overcome feelings of inferiority and detachment. Furthermore, there is a critical need to strengthen legal and institutional policies within university settings to ensure accountability and protection. Future research is encouraged to employ comprehensive tools that capture underreported bullying forms, including cyberbullying and sexual harassment, to enable a deeper understanding of the root causes and to propose actionable solutions.

These observations are in line with those from previous research by Pincay et al. (2024), who indicated that stigma, negative attitudes, and traditional beliefs about disability contribute to societal perceptions that children with disabilities are less deserving of dignity and respect. Such perceptions may partly explain their heightened vulnerability to violence, including bullying. This issue is particularly concerning given its direct impact on the development of positive peer relationships, which are crucial during adolescence as they support key developmental tasks such as identity formation, the development of social skills and self-esteem, and the pursuit of autonomy. Bullying, therefore, poses not only a threat to the psychological well-being of these students—manifesting in anxiety, depression, and maladjustment—but also hinders their active participation in school life, academic achievement, and holistic development. These findings underscore the importance of studying bullying among marginalized groups, especially students with disabilities, who are disproportionately affected. Understanding the predictive and protective factors associated with their overrepresentation among bullying victims is essential for the development of effective policies and intervention programs aimed at combating peer violence and social exclusion in school settings.

Supporting these results, Hartley et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of bullying research as a key approach to understanding how students in special education navigate social inclusion. Their study, which surveyed 3,305 students who reported being victimized two to three times per month or more, provided valuable insights into the patterns and frequency of bullying experienced by this population., revealed important differences in the patterns and impact of bullying between students in general and special education. While verbal and relational victimization rates appeared similar across both groups, students in special education reported significantly higher instances of physical victimization and suffered greater physical and emotional harm, as well as elevated levels of psychological distress. Alarming, students also reported that teachers and school staff were more likely to engage in verbal, relational, and even physical bullying towards students in special education. These findings not only highlight the disproportionate burden of bullying faced by students with disabilities but also raise serious concerns about the role of adults in perpetuating these harmful dynamics. Such evidence further reinforces the urgency of implementing systemic measures to protect vulnerable student populations and ensure safe, inclusive educational environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends enhancing awareness among university students regarding the profound impacts of bullying on individuals and society, with particular emphasis on students with disabilities. It is essential to integrate discussions on the psychological and social consequences of bullying within educational curricula to promote understanding and inclusion. Universities should prioritize the prompt reporting of bullying incidents and ensure accessible psychological support services for affected students. Moreover, further research is warranted to investigate the multifaceted effects of psychological, social, and academic bullying on students with disabilities. Finally, developing a comprehensive institutional strategy to effectively address and prevent bullying within the university context is imperative.

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Co-Author Contribution

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest related to this article. All authors contributed equally to the conception, design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript. AMS led the study's conception, while AFA and AHS were involved in participant recruitment. NAS contributed to the statistical data analysis, and HMA and AHA contributed to crafting the final study report.

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