

IMPACT OF BULLYING VICTIMIZATION ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL SCHOOL CHILDREN'S DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS IN NORTH CENTRAL PROVINCE IN SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

Depression is a persistent mental illness that affects populations worldwide. Previous research indicates that depression affects 19.4% of the Sri Lankan population, with the Anuradhapura district reporting 17.9% and the Polonnaruwa district reporting 14.4% prevalence of mental diseases. Depression significantly impacts special education students, with bullying recognized as a leading contributing factor among vulnerable populations. Given the substantial empirical research gap in this area, this study provides a thorough examination of the impact of bullying victimization on depressive symptoms among special-education students. This positivistic, deductive, and quantitative study applies both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The population comprised 551 special education schoolchildren in North Central Province, with a sample size of 241. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS version 21. Significant regression coefficients were identified for bullying victimization (H1: $\beta=.779$, $p<.001$) and its dimensions: relational bullying (H2: $\beta=.280$, $p<.001$), physical bullying (H3: $\beta=.474$, $p<.001$), cyberbullying (H4: $\beta=-.063$, $p=.264$), and culture-based bullying (H5: $\beta=.168$, $p=.003$) on depressive symptoms. Four hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, and H5) were supported, whereas H4 was not. Physical bullying showed a significant correlation with higher depressive symptoms, unlike cyberbullying among special education children in the North Central Province. This study validates existing relationships and offers culturally relevant insights for the North Central Province. These results have implications for customized interventions aimed at reducing depressive symptoms among children with special education and creating a supportive developmental environment. Education policymakers are urged to promote safer and more supportive learning environments. Understanding the various forms of bullying and their impact on depressive symptoms will help educators and mental health professionals develop effective prevention and intervention programs, improve school environments that promote a pleasant and inclusive atmosphere, reduce bullying and its negative consequences on mental health, and support future research.

Keywords: Relational bullying victimization, physical bullying victimization, cyberbullying victimization, culture-based bullying victimization, depressive symptoms