

Prevalence and factors associated with bullying among primary school children in Erbil city, Iraq

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Abstract

Background and objective: Bullying is a common phenomenon in childhood. It can have a serious effect on well-being and education. Several international studies have revealed that bullying is a regular problem in schools. This study aimed to determine the prevalence and risk factors of bullying among primary school children in Erbil, Iraq.

Methods: A school-based cross-sectional study was carried out among 400 children attending eight public primary schools from different socioeconomic statuses in Erbil city from October 2022 to February 2023. Data were collected by using a self-administered questionnaire in the local language with the researchers' direction and guidance.

Results: Out of 400 students, 52.7% were males, and 41.7% were females, with a male-to-female ratio of 1.1:1. The mean $\pm$ SD of age was 11.12 ± 1.13 years, ranging from 9 - 13 years. The prevalence of bullying was (55.8%), and the most common types of bullying were verbal (39.9%) and physical (38.1%). The adjusted logistic regression analysis revealed that being male gender (OR=2.23), age > 12 years (OR=2.33), going to school on foot (OR=2.17), illiterate mothers (OR=0.29), illiterate fathers, read and write, primary school and secondary school (OR=3.58 OR=2.77, OR=4.23, and OR=2.74, respectively), families fight at home (OR=2.15), students bullied by family and or siblings at home (OR=2.58) were significantly associated with bullying behavior.

Conclusion: Bullying is relatively high among primary school children in our region compared to neighboring countries. Parents and teachers should acknowledge and address such problems and encourage collaboration among professionals in the education and health sectors to understand the exceptional problems children experience and identify bullying.

Keywords: Bullying; Prevalence; Factors; Erbil city; Iraq.

Introduction

Bullying and victimization are common in childhood and take many forms, including gossiping, name-calling, exclusion, and pushing or hitting.⁽¹⁾ Bullying is the systematic abuse of power through aggressive or intentional harm-doing by peers, which is repeated and includes power imbalance.⁽²⁾

Bullying can be physical, verbal, nonverbal, or psychological, ranging from making gestures to purposefully leaving someone out of a group. The latter, known as indirect bullying, is difficult to detect but employs

dangerous social isolation as a weapon.

Some recent studies show that bullying has a negative impact on student's mental health as well as their academic outcomes. The performance of victims and bullies at school is usually poorer than other children who are not involved in bullying.^(2,3) A new method of bullying that emerged with the invasion of technology and social media into daily life is called cyberbullying, which means it is a form of bullying that is performed with digital technology.⁽⁴⁾

Other specific forms of bullying, which are relatively less studied, are racial bullying,

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that is, attacks toward peers from different ethnic backgrounds, and sexual bullying, that is, any bullying behavior, whether physical or non-physical, based on a person's sexuality or gender.⁽⁵⁾

Bullying can result in considerable negative effects on the individuals involved; therefore, all forms of bullying should be taken seriously.⁽⁶⁾

Children can be involved in bullying as victims and bullies, and also as bully/victims, a subgroup of victims who also display bullying behavior. Victims also tend to show specific characteristics. They are often anxious, insecure, and cautious and have low self-esteem.⁽⁷⁾

Research has revealed that the prevalence of bullying and victimization is high in elementary and secondary school based on a survey of students aged 11–15 in 40 countries concluded that 27% of children had been involved in bullying either as a victim, perpetrator, or both. There was also gender variation across countries, with ranges of bullying prevalence from around 9–45% for males and from 5% to 36% for females.⁽¹⁾

Modecki et al.,⁽⁸⁾ reported the average prevalence rates of both traditional bullying victimization and perpetration to be 36% and 35%, respectively. However, another study on cross-national trends in bullying in 33 countries based on the Health Behavior of School-Aged Children survey (Chester et al.),⁽⁹⁾ has shown a decreasing tendency in bullying prevalence in around a third of the nations. However, the study concluded that large between-country differences in school bullying victimization remain.

The primary reason for school bullying involves gender and social norms and the wider background and structural factors like age, socioeconomic status, and cultural and environmental factors.⁽⁷⁾

When it comes to the geographical distribution of school bullying prevalence, results of the international Health Behavior of School Children survey demonstrated that bullying was most prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa (48%), North Africa

(43%), and the Middle East (41%).⁽¹⁰⁾

Generally speaking, the bully occurs in groups or alone and differs from school to school. Victimized boys are more likely to point to an individual when they bully, but the bully frequently has a group of supporters who help to sustain that behavior. Girls are more likely to report being bullied by groups.⁽¹¹⁾

It is commonly assumed that bullying is a normal part of childhood, including minor ill behavior and annoyance. However, it is increasingly shown that bullying is a problem that can be harmful to students' well-being. Furthermore, there are rapid socio-cultural changes and increasing misuse of social media. There is scarce published data about bullying among children in our region. According to a previous study conducted in Erbil City, the overall prevalence of bullying was 60% among adolescents Aged 13-18 years (2017).⁽¹²⁾ No studies among primary schools have been conducted in Erbil city. The current study studied the four types of bullying: physical, verbal, social, and more than one type of bullying. The main objective of this study was to determine the prevalence and factors associated with bullying in primary school students in Erbil City.

Methods

Study design and setting:

A school-based cross-sectional study was carried out from October 2022 to February 2023.

Sample size and sampling method:

Four hundred students from eight public primary schools in Erbil city, the capital of the Kurdistan region. A multistage cluster sampling method was used to select the students. From the lists of all Erbil city primary schools obtained from the Directorate of Education, we randomly selected three schools from each region with low and intermediate socioeconomic status and two schools with high socioeconomic status by choosing a random number from a random table.

This selection strategy was used to have participants representing different socioeconomic areas of Erbil city proportionately. The socioeconomic status of the regions of Erbil city was determined based on the Erbil Governor's office classification. According to the language teaching in that school, there are four types of schools in Erbil: Kurdish, Arabic, Turkish, and English. Some of the 1st three types are male or female schools, while English schools are mixed. The classes were identified by the administrative department of each school. In each school one to two classes from each of the three grades were randomly selected. Written informed consent was distributed to the 420 students to be signed by their parents or other household guardians and returned the day after. On the next day, only 400 students in the selected classes returned informed consent signed by their parents. Therefore, they were invited to participate in the study. Data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire in the local language with the researchers' direction and guidance at the beginning of each session after explaining the study's purpose with the teacher's assistance. Permission was obtained for students to take 5 minutes at the beginning of the session to complete the interview. Data collection was completed in five days.

Inclusion criteria:

Students from fourth, fifth, and sixth grade

Exclusion criteria:

Students from first, second, and third grade

Data collection:

A structured questionnaire was used for data collection, which included the student's age, grade, sex, nationality, education, and occupation of mother and father. The school children's socioeconomic status was assessed by collecting data about the number of family members, the number of years of formal education of father and mother, home ownership, crowding index, and possession of a car.

A modified socioeconomic status scoring

scale was adopted to classify the students according to their socioeconomic status.⁽¹³⁾

The total score (21) was divided into three equal categories: 1-7 (low SES), 8-14 (medium SES), and 15-21 (high SES). The scores were distributed as follows: For each mother and father, educational level=4 scores (institute/ college=4, secondary school=3, primary school=2, read and write=1 and illiterate=0). For each mother and father occupation=4 scores (high professional jobs =4, non-manual skilled or semi-skilled occupation=3, Manual partially skilled or unskilled occupation=2, unskilled manual worker=1, unemployed/retired=0). Home ownership =2 scores (owned=2, partially owned=1, rented=0). Car ownership=1 score (owned=1 and not owned=0). Crowding index (CI) =2 scores (CI<1.5=2, CI 1.5-2.9=1 and CI>3=0).

The occupations were categorized as follows:

(1) High professional jobs as doctors, dentists, pharmacists, engineers, lawyers, large business directors and/or owners, company directors, and managers.

(2) Non-manual skilled or semi-skilled occupations such as school teachers, clerical workers, health care workers (other than doctors, dentists, and pharmacists), small business owners, military, and policemen.

(3) Manual partly skilled or unskilled occupations such as labor workers, casual workers,

(4) Unemployed and retired, including housewives

The household crowding index was calculated by dividing the number of households by the number of rooms (except kitchen and bathroom).

The bullying part of the questionnaire was developed based on the literature review.⁽¹⁴⁾ It included questions related to bullying, such as type of bullying, frequency of bullying, and reporting bullying to others. Physical bullying includes hitting, kicking, tripping, pinching, and pushing. Verbal bullying includes

name-calling, insults, and verbal abuse. Social bullying includes lying, negative facial or physical gestures, mimicking unkindly, playing nasty jokes to embarrass and humiliate, and damaging someone's reputation or social acceptance.

Ethical Consideration

This study was approved by the ethics committee of the College of Medicine, and the approval of the heads of the schools was obtained. Written informed consent was sent to the student's parents or other household guardians to be signed and returned. Then, students' assent was obtained before the interview. Participation in the study was optional. The respondents and their parents were ensured that their responses would be kept confidential and private and that the collected information would only be used for research purposes. Anonymity was ensured by not mentioning their names. Each student was interviewed separately, and the questions were asked to the students similarly.

Statistical analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, version 26) was used for data entry and analysis. Frequencies and percentages were used for data presentation. Chi-square test (χ^2) was used for the association between categorical variables. Fisher's Exact test was used when the expected count of more than 20% of cells of the table was <5. Multivariate logistic regression was used, and adjusted OR was calculated. *P*-value <0.05 was regarded as statistically significant.

Results

Out of 400 students who participated in the study, 211 (52.7%) were males, and 189 (47.3%) were females, with a male-to-female ratio of 1.1:1. The mean $\pm$ SD of age was 11.12 ± 1.13 years, ranging from 9 - 13 years and more than half of them were in the age group 10-11 years. The majority (92.5%) of students' parents were living together. More than half (57.5%) of students belonged to medium

socioeconomic status, and half used to go to school on foot (Table 1).

The result showed that 223 (55.8%) students had been bullied. Out of those, 55 (24.7%) have been bullied once, 150 (67.3%) on occasion, and 18 (8.0%) every day. The most bullying type in the study sample was physical and verbal (38.1% and 39.9%, respectively), and most of them (39.0) were bullied in the classroom, and more than half (56.1%) were bullied by one person. Among bullied students, 75.5% told others that they had been bullied, and most of them (73.2%) told their parents about that, and among those not telling others (*n*=55), 36.4% mentioned being scared as a reason behind that. Out of 400 students, 35.3% have been both bullied and bullied others. Among those who bullied others, that was because they did not like classmates (51.2%) and just for fun (23.2%). Details about the pattern of bullying are shown in Table 2.

Table1 Socio-demographic characteristics of primary school children

Variable	No.	%
Gender		
Male	211	(52.7)
Female	189	(47.3)
Age (years)		
9	25	(06.3)
10-11	208	(52.0)
12-13	167	(41.7)
School grade		
Fourth	93	(23.3)
Fifth	90	(22.5)
Sixth	217	(54.3)
Parent's relationship		
Still together	370	(92.5)
Divorced	10	(2.50)
One died	15	(3.80)
Both died	5	(1.20)
Socioeconomic status		
Low	115	(28.7)
Medium	230	(57.5)
High	55	(13.8)
Modes of transportation to school		
By Buss	81	(20.2)
By Car	119	(29.8)
On foot	200	(50.0)
Total	400	(100.0)

Table 2 Prevalence and pattern of bullying among primary school children in Erbil city

Variable	No.	(%)
Have been bullied (n=400)		
Yes	223	(55.8)
No	177	(44.2)
Bullying status (n=400)		
Been bullied	82	(20.5)
Bullied others	27	(06.7)
Both been bullied and bullied others	141	(35.3)
None	150	(37.5)
Times been bullied (n=223)		
Once	55	(24.7)
On occasion	150	(67.3)
Every day	18	(8.00)
Type of Bullying (n=223)		
Physical	85	(38.1)
Verbal	89	(39.9)
Social	6	(02.7)
>one type	43	(19.3)
Bullying place at (n=223)		
Classroom	87	(39.0)
School yard	60	(26.9)
Street	64	(28.7)
Bus	12	(05.4)
Bullied by (n=223)		
One person	125	(56.1)
Group	98	(43.9)
Have you told anyone you have been bullied (n=223)		
Yes	168	(75.3)
No	55	(24.7)
If yes to whom have told been bullied (n=168)		
Parents	123	(73.2)
Sibling	5	(3.00)
Teachers	25	(14.9)
Friends	15	(08.9)
Reason not to tell anyone have been bullied (n=55)		
Scared	20	(36.4)
Shame	9	(16.4)
Doesn't matter	24	(43.6)
No one to tell	2	(03.6)
Have you ever bullied anyone (n=400)		
Yes	168	(42.0)
No	232	(58.0)
If Yes why you do that (n=168)		
Just for fun	39	(23.2)
Dislike schoolmates	86	(51.2)
I don't know	43	(25.6)
Do you interfere when someone get bullied (n=400)		
Yes	288	(72.0)
No	112	(28.0)
Do your parents or siblings fight at home (n=400)		
Yes	109	(27.3)
No	291	(72.7)
Have your parents or siblings bully you at home (n=400)		
Yes	159	(39.8)
No	241	(60.2)

Table 3 shows that the prevalence of bullying was significantly ($P < 0.001$) higher in males (64.9%) than in females (45.5%). The highest prevalence was observed among the age group 12-13 year, ($P = 0.003$). The results revealed a statistically significant association between mothers' and fathers' education with bullying ($P = 0.041$ and $P < 0.001$, respectively).

There was also a statistically significant association between mothers' and fathers' occupations with bullying ($P = 0.013$ for both). A statistically significant association was found between the socioeconomic status of participants and bullying, which was highest among those of low socioeconomic status (60.9%), $P < 0.001$.

Table 3 Association between socio-demographic characteristics of primary school children and bullying

	Bullying				Total		P -Value
	Yes No.	%	No No.	%	No.	%	
Gender							
Male	137	64.9	74	35.1	211	100.0	<0.001
Female	86	45.5	103	54.5	189	100.0	
Age in years							
9	12	48.0	13	52.0	25	100.0	0.001
10-11	99	47.6	109	52.4	208	100.0	
12-13	112	67.1	55	32.9	167	100.0	
Grade							
Fourth	54	58.1	39	41.9	93	100.0	0.329
Fifth	44	48.9	46	51.1	90	100.0	
Sixth	125	57.6	92	42.4	217	100.0	
Mother educational level							
Illiterate	38	66.7	19	33.3	57	100.0	0.041
Read and write	54	58.1	39	41.9	93	100.0	
Primary school	44	52.4	40	47.6	84	100.0	
Secondary school	64	59.3	44	40.6	108	100.0	
Institute/ college and above	23	39.7	35	60.3	58	100.0	
Father educational level							
Illiterate	18	64.3	10	35.7	28	100.0	<0.001
Read and write	46	61.3	29	38.7	75	100.0	
Primary school	52	69.3	23	30.7	75	100.0	
Secondary school	75	59.1	52	40.9	127	100.0	
Institute/ college and above	32	33.7	63	66.3	177	100.0	
Mother occupation							
High professional	3	25.0	9	75.0	28	100.0	0.013
Non manual skilled	13	38.2	21	61.8	34	100.0	
Manual partially skilled or unskilled	8	47.1	52	52.9	17	100.0	
Unemployed and retired	199	59.1	138	40.9	377	100.0	
Father occupation							
High professional	18	39.1	28	60.9	46	100.0	0.013
Non manual skilled	31	47.0	35	53.0	66	100.0	
Manual partially skilled or unskilled	90	63.4	52	36.6	142	100.0	
Unemployed and retired	84	57.5	62	42.5	146	100.0	
Socio-economic status							
Low	70	60.9	45	39.1	115	100.0	<0.001
Medium	136	59.1	94	40.9	230	100.0	
High	17	30.9	38	69.1	55	100.0	
Total	223	55.8	177	44.3	400	100.0	

Table 4 shows a statistically significant association between modes of transportation and bullying that was highest among those who go to school by bus and on foot (61.7% and 61.5%, respectively), $P = 0.002$. There was a statistically significant highest prevalence rate of bullying among those with no good family relations or teacher relationships, who feel

unsafe at school, and who have low final year mean marks ($P = 0.005$, $P < 0.001$, $P = 0.025$, and $P = 0.003$, respectively). The highest prevalence of bullying (76.1%) was found among students whose parents and or siblings fight at home and students who have been bullied by them at home (75.5%), with $P < 0.001$ for both.

Table 4 Association between bullying and certain risk factors

	Yes		Bullying No		Total		P Value
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Modes of transportation to school							
Car	50	42.0	69	58.0	119	100.0	0.002
Bus	50	61.7	31	38.3	81	100.0	
On foot	123	61.5	77	38.5	200	100.0	
Parents relationship							
Still together	203	54.9	167	45.1	370	100.0	0.176*
Divorced	5	50.0	5	50.0	10	100.0	
One is dead	10	66.7	5	33.3	15	100.0	
Both dead	5	100.0	0	0.00	5	100.0	
Relation with family							
Very good	160	51.3	39	41.9	93	100.0	0.005*
Good	52	69.3	23	30.7	75	100.0	
Not bad	9	81.8	2	18.2	11	100.0	
Bad	2	100.0	0	0.00	2	100.0	
Relation with teacher							
Very good	93	46.0	109	54.0	202	100.0	<0.001*
Good	90	60.4	59	39.6	149	100.0	
Not bad	34	79.1	9	20.9	43	100.0	
Bad	6	100.0	0	0.00	6	100.0	
Feeling safe at school							
Yes	203	54.3	171	45.7	374	100.0	0.025
No	20	76.9	6	23.1	26	100.0	
Final year mean mark							
90-100	51	42.9	68	57.1	119	100.0	0.003
80-89	69	54.8	57	45.2	126	100.0	
70-79	51	64.6	28	35.4	79	100.0	
60-69	26	60.5	17	39.5	43	100.0	
50-59	18	78.3	5	21.7	23	100.0	
<50	8	80.0	2	20.0	10	100.0	
Parents or siblings fight at home							
Yes	83	76.1	26	23.9	109	100.0	<0.001
No	140	48.1	151	51.9	291	100.0	
Have been bullied by parents or siblings at home							
Yes	120	75.5	39	24.5	159	100.0	<0.001
No	103	42.7	138	57.3	241	100.0	
Total	223	55.8	177	44.2	400	100.0	

* Fisher's Exact Test

Multivariate logistic regression analysis of variables associated with bullying revealed that being male gender (OR=2.23), age > 12 years (OR=2.33), going to school on foot (2.17), illiterate mothers (OR=0.29), illiterate fathers, read and write, primary school and secondary school (OR=3.58

OR=2.77, OR=4.23, and OR=2.74, respectively), families fight at home (OR=2.15), students bullied by family and or siblings at home (OR=2.58) and students have bad relation with teachers (OR=2.9) were significantly associated with bullying (Table 5).

Table 5 Multivariate logistic regression of bullying with certain risk factors

Variables	B	P	OR	95% C.I. for OR	
				Lower	Upper
Male gender	.802	.002	2.231	1.348	3.692
Age <12 year (reference)					
Age >12 year	.848	.002	2.334	1.372	3.970
Marks		.827			
80-100 (reference)					
60-79	.161	.570	1.174	.674	2.046
<60	-.045	.939	.956	.301	3.039
Transportation to school		.043			
Car (reference)					
Bus	.684	.062	1.982	.966	4.066
On foot	.775	.016	2.170	1.156	4.072
Mother education		.269			
Illiterate	-1.234	.048	.291	.086	.988
Read and write	-.933	.088	.393	.135	1.147
Primary	-.939	.079	.391	.137	1.117
Secondary	-.477	.329	.620	.238	1.617
College and above (reference)					

Table 5 Multivariate logistic regression of bullying with certain risk factors (Cont.)

Variables	B	P	OR	95% C.I. for OR	
				Lower	Upper
Father education		.029			
Illiterate	1.277	.038	3.586	1.071	12.004
Read and write	1.021	.043	2.775	1.033	7.455
Primary	1.444	.002	4.238	1.700	10.565
Secondary	1.011	.007	2.748	1.317	5.735
College and above (reference)					
Father occupation		.510			
High professional (reference)					
Non-manual skilled	-.588	.241	.555	.208	1.485
Manual partially skilled or unskilled	-.062	.899	.940	.362	2.439
Unemployed/retired	-.295	.558	.745	.278	1.998
Mother occupation		.864			
High professional (reference)					
Non-manual skilled	.323	.712	1.381	.249	7.651
Manual partially skilled or unskilled	.591	.584	1.805	.217	14.997
Unemployed/retired	.702	.448	2.019	.329	12.386
Family fits at home	.768	.015	2.156	1.160	4.007
Bullied by siblings/ or parents	.949	.001	2.583	1.494	4.466
Socio-economic status		.203			
Low	-.086	.908	.917	.212	3.970
Medium	.490	.406	1.633	.513	5.194
High (reference)	.490	.406	1.633	.513	5.194
Bad family relationship	.093	.925	1.098	.158	7.631
Bad teacher relationship	.903	.071	2.467	.925	6.582
Constant	-2.537	.001	.079		

Discussion

Bullying in schools is an issue that researchers, educators, parents, and students are all concerned about.⁽⁹⁾ According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, nearly one-third of young teens worldwide experience bullying.⁽¹⁰⁾ This study is conducted for the first time among children in the region. There is only one study that addressed this problem, but among adolescents in Erbil city in 2017).⁽¹²⁾ The main purpose of this study was to study the prevalence and risk factors of bullying among primary school children aged 9-13 years in view of tangible change in the socio-cultural community in our region in the last several years.

The current study showed that the prevalence of bullying is relatively high (55.8%) among primary schools compared to several neighboring countries, which indicates a serious problem in Erbil and should be taken into consideration. This finding is higher than that reported in Jordan and Lebanon, where the prevalence rates were 47%,⁽¹⁵⁾ and 50%,⁽¹⁶⁾ respectively. However, it was less than that reported in Egypt (77.8%),⁽¹⁷⁾ in China (73%),⁽¹⁸⁾ in Saudi Arabia (64.7%).⁽¹⁹⁾ These differences in prevalence among countries might be related to cultural and methodological variations in describing the problem and to differences in study populations. These findings highlight the universal feature of the problem, though different definitions of bullying might constitute a limitation to this type of comparison. In this study, bullying was highest among students aged 12 years and more.

This finding agrees with a study done in Egypt,⁽¹⁷⁾ while a study from Brazil found that the prevalence of bullying decreases as age increases.⁽²⁰⁾

The current study showed that bullying was significantly more prevalent among male students than females. This might be due to cultural factors, as males in our community have more freedom and power and are less disciplined than females.

Another potential explanation is that girls are more conservative than boys in our context, have fewer real-life relationships, and spend more time at home. A similar finding was reported in several other studies, such as studies conducted in Egypt,⁽¹⁷⁾ Nigeria,⁽¹⁷⁾ New Zealand⁽²²⁾ and Palestine.⁽²³⁾ On the other hand, a study done in Indonesia observed no significant relationship between gender and the experience of being bullied.⁽²⁴⁾ This difference in result might be related to variations in the study setting, sample size, and tools used to determine the prevalence and pattern of bullying among participants. Verbal bullying was the most prevalent type of bullying in this study, followed by physical bullying. This finding is consistent with studies done in Saudi Arabia⁽¹⁹⁾ and Brazil.⁽²⁰⁾

The highest prevalence of bullying in the current study was observed among students with low educational levels of mother and father. This finding agrees with a study done by Bjereld et al. among Nordic children.⁽²⁵⁾ On the other hand, a study conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia surprisingly found a higher prevalence of bullying among highly educated parents.⁽²⁶⁾ The reason behind that is unclear but might be related to the small number of high-educational level mothers in their study sample.

Prevalence of bullying was significantly high among those whose families frequently fight at home, students who have been bullied by family and or siblings at home and have bad relationships with teachers at school (OR=2.15, 95% C.I. of 1.16-4.4.00, $P = 0.015$, OR= 2. 583, 95% C.I. of 1.49-4.46, $P < 0.001$ and OR=2.46, 95% C.I. of 0.925-6.582, $P = 0.07$ respectively). These findings might be explained that bad relationships with parents and teachers and feeling unsafe at home might decrease the self-esteem and value of the child. This finding is in consistent with a study done in Sweden. They showed that bullied children had poorer relationships with parents and

teachers than non-victims. Victims had higher odds of finding it difficult to talk to parents about things bothering them, of feeling that the family was not listening to what they had to say, and of having low confidence in their teacher. Parents and teachers play an important role in helping victims of bullying to prevent, cope with, and end bullying.⁽²⁷⁾ It has also been discovered that these children are often less empowered by their parents, may lack confidence, and are subjected to poor role modeling.⁽²⁸⁾ The value of developing nurturing skills and safe and effective family communication may extend beyond the home.

This study results showed that two-thirds of the students who have been bullied told others about it, and about two-thirds of them told their parents since these ages are more sensitive and tend to be closer to their parents.

In the present study, about two-thirds of the students who did not feel safe at school were victims of bullying because bullying has many negative consequences on the students that make them dislike school. Schools can offer students safe learning environments by implementing programs that prevent bullying, offer staff training, and include intervention programs. These programs are most effective when they require educators to teach coping strategies to all students, address student mental health issues, and encourage support from parents. Furthermore, student success will increase as educators, parents, and students work together to create a caring and safe school environment.⁽²⁹⁾

The current study has some limitations. The causative and direction of the relationship cannot be established in this cross-sectional study. Further longitudinal research is needed to support these findings and to truly test the causality between the socio-demographic factors and bullying behavior. The study did not include one to the third-grade primary school students because of the difficulty in

obtaining information from these ages.

Conclusion

Bullying behavior appears to be a widespread problem in schools in Erbil city. It is relatively high among primary school children in our region compared to neighboring countries, especially those with low socioeconomic status and who have bad relationships with their families and teachers. Parents and teachers should acknowledge and address such problems and encourage collaboration among professionals in the education and health sectors to understand the exceptional problems children experience and identify bullying. Further future studies are needed in the region to increase the knowledge about bullying and effective intervention.

Competing interests

The author declares that he has no competing interests.

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