

RESEARCH ARTICLE

School-Aged Bullying History, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Depressive Symptoms: A Study of University Students in Malaysia

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Abstract: The present study investigated school-aged bullying history among university students in Sarawak and its relationship with depressive and PTSD symptoms and types of bullying. A total of 499 university students ($M_{age} = 19.52$, $SD = 1.58$) participated in this cross-sectional study, of which 72.1% ($n = 360$) were females and 27.9% ($n = 139$) were males. Results indicated a high prevalence of bullying history, 38.1% ($n = 190$); 21.4% ($n = 107$) identified as victims, 9.4% ($n = 47$) bullies (perpetrators), and 7.2% ($n = 36$) are bully-victims (being both perpetrators and victims). Participants with a bullying history scored significantly higher in depressive and PTSD symptoms. Based on the present findings, school-aged bullying history is one of the potentially traumatic events experienced by university students. The present findings contribute to the knowledge of the risk of developing depressive and PTSD symptoms. Prevention and intervention plans are needed to prevent school bullying from getting worse. Finally, it should be cautioned that this study adopted a convenient sample, and thus, the results cannot be generalized to other university students.

Keywords: School-aged bullying, depression, PTSD symptoms, university students, trauma

The impact of school-age bullying can be devastating. Incidents of school bullying reported by the Malaysian media have drawn public concern over aggressive behavior among adolescents because they have involved serious physical injuries and, in some cases, death of the victims (Yaakub et al., 2010; Saibon et al., 2012). Malaysian Global School-based Student Health Survey conducted among 25,507 students aged 13 to 17 years old in 2012 revealed that 17.7% of school students admitted engaging in bullying behavior (World Health Organization, 2012). It is believed that countless bullying cases remain unreported and are

perceived as part of normal growth experiences or school traditions (Wan Ismail et al., 2014).

Extensive studies have been conducted on bullying in recent years. Some studies explored the demographic variables of the students involved in bullying (Khamis, 2015; Wan Ismail et al., 2014), causes of bullying (Salleh & Zainal, 2014), characteristics of bullies and victims (Ndeti et al., 2007), and types or forms of bullying (Vambheim, 2010). Previous studies also examined the negative impacts of bullying, such as depression (Jamir & Devi, 2014; Uba et al., 2010; Md Isa et al., 2021), anxiety disorders (McCabe et al.,