Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences

Depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms and Resilience in Relation to School-Aged Bullying History among University Students in Sarawak

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Master of Science
2020
Depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Resilience in Relation to School-Aged Bullying History among University Students in Sarawak

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A thesis submitted

In fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science

(Psychology)

Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
2020
DECLARATION

This is to certify that the thesis work entitled “Depression, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms and Resilience in relation to School-Aged Bullying History among University Students in Sarawak” has been done by the candidate herself. This thesis does not contain any material extracted from elsewhere or from a work published by anybody else. Information derived from the published work of others has been acknowledged and a list of references is given. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Firstly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor Prof Dr. Siti Raudzah Ghazali for the continuous support of my Master study, for her patience, motivation and immense knowledge in supervising me as her student. The door to her office was always open whenever I ran into trouble spot or had a question about my research or writing. She consistently allowed this paper to be my own work but steered me in the right direction whenever she thought I needed it. Your passion for research and clinical work in helping those who were suffered from trauma exposure and PTSD have inspired me to use our academic pursuits to contribute to those who needed it.

I would also like to thank Dr. Chen Yoke Yong who were involved in this research project as a dedicated and supportive mentor. Your insightful comments and encouragement also the hard question which incented me to widen my research from various perspectives have strengthen me to keep going and finished this thesis. I could not have imagined having a better advisor and mentor for my study.

My sincere thanks also go to staff and participants universities in Sarawak which are Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM) Samarahan Campus and Ministry of Education for giving me permission and their full support during data collection and not to forget the participants who were involved directly in completing the questionnaires and sharing their stories and experiences. To answer the questionnaires on school-aged bullying may have raised thoughts, feelings and images long buried or considered best forgotten and it was not an easy thing to do. Listening to their experiences was one of the greatest learning I had throughout this journey.
ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the school-aged bullying history among university students in Sarawak and its relationship with depressive, PTSD symptoms and resilience. Cross-sectional design was adopted and 499 university students (Mage = 19.52, SD = 1.58) participated in this study with 72.1% (n = 360) were females and 27.9% (n = 139) males. Results indicated 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) bully-victims (both being perpetrators and victims). Result shows no significant association between bullying history and type of schools attended. Participants with bullying history who previously attended boarding schools scored significantly higher in depressive and PTSD symptoms as compared to those who previously attended non-boarding schools. Resilience and its relationship with depressive and PTSD symptoms revealed no significant relationship among university students with the history of school-aged bullying. Based on the present finding, school-aged bullying history is one of the potentially traumatic events which frequently happened both in the boarding and non-boarding schools. The present finding contributed to the knowledge on the risk of resided in the hostel dorm with the history of school-aged bullying leads to the development of depressive and PTSD symptoms. Resilience does not play significant factor in minimizing the depressive and PTSD symptoms among students with bullying history, instead it might play important role in protecting students from dropping out of school or perform academic poorly. Prevention and intervention plans are needed to prevent school bullying from getting worse.

Keywords: School-aged bullying, depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms
Kemurungan, Simptom PTSD dan Daya Tahan berkaitan dengan Sejarah Buli dalam Kalangan Pelajar Universiti di Sarawak

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji sejarah buli sewaktu bersekolah dalam kalangan pelajar universiti di Sarawak dan hubungkaitnya dengan gejala kemurungan, simptom PTSD dan daya tahan. Kajian keratan rentas telah digunakan dan 499 orang pelajar universiti terlibat dalam kajian ini dengan 72.1% (n = 360) adalah perempuan dan 27.9% (n = 139) lelaki. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan peratusan kejadian sejarah buli yang tinggi adalah sebanyak, 38.1% (n = 190); 21.4% (n = 107) dikenal pasti sebagai mangsa, 9.4% (n = 47) pembuli (si pelaku), dan 7.2% (n = 36) pembuli-mangsa (kedua-duanya iaitu menjadi pelaku dan mangsa). Dapatan kajian menunjukkan tiada perkaitan yang signifikan diperolehi di antara sejarah buli dan jenis sekolah yang dihadiri. Peserta yang mempunyai sejarah buli dan menghadiri sekolah berasrama penuh mempunyai skor yang tinggi dalam simptom kemurungan dan simptom PTSD berbanding peserta yang menghadiri sekolah harian. Daya tahan tidak mempunyai peranan penting dalam mengurangkan simptom kemurungan dan simptom PTSD dalam kalangan pelajar universiti yang mempunyai sejarah penglibatan dalam buli semasa bersekolah. Berdasarkan kajian ini, sejarah buli adalah merupakan salah satu peristiwa yang berpotensi menyebabkan trauma. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada pengetahuan baru iaitu, pelajar yang menghadiri sekolah berasrama penuh dan mempunyai sejarah buli berisiko mengalami simptom kemurungan dan simptom PTSD. Daya tahan tidak memainkan peranan penting dalam mengurangkan simptom kemurungan dan PTSD dalam kalangan pelajar yang mempunyai sejarah buli, sebaliknya daya tahan mungkin memainkan peranan penting dalam memastikan pelajar dapat
meneruskan pengajian di sekolah hingga berjaya dalam bidang akademik. Pelan pencegahan dan intervensi bagi mencegah kes buli di sekolah adalah sangat diperlukan.

*Kata kunci:* Buli semasa bersekolah, simptom depresi, simptom PTSD
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

School-aged bullying has been reported as a major public health problem (Isolan, Salum, Osowski, Zottis & Manfro, 2013) due to its high prevalence reported recently. Malaysian Global School-based Student Health Survey has been conducted among 25,507 students aged 13 to 17 years old in 2012 revealed that, 17.7% of the school students admitted engaging in bullying behavior (WHO, 2012). The incidents of school bullying as reported by the Malaysian media has drawn public concern over aggressive behavior among adolescents since it involved serious physical injuries and in some cases it leads to the death of the victims (Yaakub, Haron & Leong, 2010; Saibon, Rashid, Ali & Syed Abdullah, 2012). For instance, within 2004 to 2010, Malaysian media reported two death cases of bullying victims and another case in which the victim suffered serious physical injuries (Yaakub et al., 2010; Saibon et al., 2012). It was believed that, countless bullying cases remain unreported and perceived as part of normal growing experiences or tradition when enroll into the school (Kevorkian & D’Antona, 2008; Wan Ismail, Jaafar, Sidi, Midin & Shah, 2014).

Extensive studies have been conducted on bullying for these past years. For instance, some studies explored on the demographic variables of the students involved in bullying (Wan Ismail et al., 2009; Wan Ismail et al., 2014; Khamis, 2015), causes of bullying (Hj Khalid & Md Johan, 2007; Salleh & Zainal, 2014), characteristics of bullies and victims
(Ndetei et al., 2007), types or forms of bullying such as direct versus indirect bullying (Wang, Iannotti & Nansel, 2009; Vambheim, 2010) and classifications of student involvement in a bullying situation (Glew, Fan, Katon, Rivara & Kernic, 2005; Salmivalli, 2010). The previous studies also examined the negative impacts of bullying which include depression (Uba, Yaacob & Juhari, 2010a; Jamir & Devi, 2014), anxiety disorders (McCabe, Miller, Laugesen, Antony & Young, 2010), PTSD (Idsoe, Dyregrov & Idsoe, 2012; Khamis, 2015; Nielsen, Tangen, Idsoe, Matthiesen & Mageroy, 2015), suicide ideation (Winsper, Lereya, Zanarini & Wolke, 2012; Espelage & Holt, 2013; van Geel, Vedder & Tanilon, 2014), delinquency (Jeong, Davis & Han, 2015), criminal offending (Farrington, Ttofi & Losel, 2011) and many other psychological problems. These findings serve as a clear evident that bullying is not just a temporary school problem, it also affects the long-term psychosocial adjustment and development of an individual (Ttofi, Farrington, Losel & Loeber, 2011).

As it appears to be widely known that the negative impacts of bullying are devastating, it is also important to note that not all of the students with bullying history suffer serious psychological problems. This group of students was known as being resilient, the personal strength that would help to protect the students from the negative impacts of bullying (Bowes, Maughan, Caspi, Moffitt & Arseneault, 2010). Previous literature emphasized that, by assessing resilience among those who were involved in bullying can help in developing effective bullying interventions (Bowes et al., 2010). Thus, studying bullying, resilience, and its impact of the psychological aspects of individuals is important. The following paragraphs introduce some important terminologies including conceptual definitions in this study.
1.2 Definition of Terms

Conceptually, a definition of bully was obtained from one of the leading experts in research on bullying:

“A student is being bullied when another student or several students say mean and hurtful things or make fun of him or her or call him or her mean and hurtful names, completely ignore or exclude him or her from their group of friends or leave him or her out of things on purpose, hit, kick, push, shove around or lock him or her inside a room, tell lies or spread false rumors about him or her or send mean notes and try to make other students dislike him or her and other hurtful things like that. When we talk about bullying, these things happen repeatedly, and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself. We also call it bullying, when a student is teased repeatedly in a mean and hurtful way. But we don’t call it bullying when teasing is done in a friendly and playful way. Also, it is not bullying when two students of about equal strength or power argue or fight” (Olweus, 1996, p.265).

Based on the above definition, the important elements in defining bullying are: “physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, pain or damage to the victim; an imbalance of power (physical or psychological), with a more powerful child (or children) oppressing less powerful ones; and repeated incidents between the same children over a prolonged period” (Farrington, 1993, p.384). Although there is no universal operational definition of bullying, most of the previous researchers use the above-mentioned elements in defining bullying. Therefore, as a reference, this definition was used as the operational definition to analyze bullying history among university students in Sarawak.
1.2.1 Involvement in bullying

School-aged bullying is a group phenomenon (Salmivalli, 2010). All students who present in the bullying situation are somehow involved either as the bullies, victims, bystanders or defenders. Rigby and Slee (1993) proposed three dimensions of interpersonal relations in a bullying situation; first, tendency of the student to bully others, second, tendency of the student to be bullied by others and third, tendency to relate to others in a prosocial and cooperative manner. In a bullying situation, prosocial or cooperative manner could denote many things for example, defending the victims or cooperating with the bullies or staying uninvolved (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman & Kaukiainen, 1996). In other words, each student plays an important role in preventing the bullying situation to happen or from getting worse but most of the students prefer to stay uninvolved in order to avoid being the next victim (Tsang, Hui & Law, 2011). Three groups of individuals who were directly involved in bullying situation comprise of bullies, victims and bully-victims (Arseneault, Bowes & Shakoor, 2010). Further explanation of these groups was discussed in the next section.

1.2.1.1 Bullies

Bullies refer to the students who initiate or engage in one or more bullying behaviours. Rigby (2007) characterizes bullies as “aggressive, impulsive, physically strong or able to ridicule others effectively, low in empathy and uncaring, low in cooperativeness and contrary to some expectations, they tend to be high in self-esteem and have many friends” (p. 72). In addition, bullies also have been found to enjoy harassing other students over a long period of time and they rationalize their act of bullying by asserting that victims provoked them (Olweus, 1997; Farrington & Baldry, 2010). Bullies were found to be poor
in emotional self-regulation (Garner & Hinton, 2010) and believe that the society is tolerant of their act of bullying others (Marini, Dane, Bosacki & Cura, 2006). In addition, bullies tend to be involved in more serious behavioural problems such as delinquency, criminal offending, diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder (Copeland, Wolke, Angold & Costello, 2013) and those who reported being a bully during school-aged would continue to bully others when they enrolled into higher education institution (Adams & Lawrence, 2011).

1.2.1.2 Victims

Victims refer to the students who were being bullied and less powerful to defend themselves. Generally, victims are characterized as socially weak, timid, non-assertive, introverted, low self-esteem and have few friends (Olwues, 1983 & Rigby, 2007). They may perform academic poorly, avoid school in order to escape from being bullied continuously and at risk dropping out of school (Rothon, Head, Klineberg & Stansfeld, 2011; Brank, Hoetger & Hazen, 2012). In worst scenarios, victims were found to be at high risk of depression (Fleming & Jacobsen, 2009; Perren, Dooley, Shaw & Cross, 2010; Uba et al., 2010a; Copeland et al., 2013; Jamir & Devi, 2014), anxiety disorders (Mccabe et al., 2010), PTSD (Rivers, 2004) and suicide ideation or attempts (Klomek, Sourander & Gould, 2010).

1.2.1.3 Bully-Victims

Bully-victims refer to the students who engaged in bullying behaviour in one situation and in another situation they were being bullied (Ong & Elliott, 2010) and unable to defend themselves. Research suggests bully-victims comprise of the victims who had experience of being bullied and they turn to bully other students (Ong & Elliott, 2010; Adams & Lawrence, 2011). Bully-victims usually are small in number compared to bullies and
victims, characterized as aggressive, provocative, having problem in concentration, and ineffectively retaliated when they were bullied (Berger, 2007; Salmivalli, 2010). The differences between bullies and bully-victims are bully-victims have few friends (Unnever, 2005), dislike by peers (Veenstra, Lindenber, Oldehinkel, De Winter, Verhulst & Ormel, 2005) and some teachers and students believe that bully-victims deserve to be bullied (Olweus, 2001). On the other hand, bully-victims differ from victims in which they are aggressive and provocative while the victims are submissive and does not retaliate when being bullied (Auma-Okumu, 2012). Bully-victims are the most at risk-group of suffering various psychosocial negative outcomes as compared to victims and bullies (Conners-Burrow, Johnson, Whiteside-Mansell, McKelvey & Gargus, 2009; Estevez, Murgui & Musitu, 2009). These group of students were found to exhibit more hyperactivity, emotional problems, peer problems and conduct disorders as compared to victims and bullies (Khamis, 2015).

The following chapters review some literatures and highlights the knowledge gaps related to bullying and its negative psychological impact on individuals particularly university students. Subsequently, several research questions, research objectives, and research hypotheses will be presented as it is guided by thorough literature reviews to justify the importance of this study.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

Bullying cases in Malaysia were mostly associated with the students who attended boarding schools as compared to non-boarding schools. Various media reported that, a bullying phenomenon most frequently happened in the school dormitory. Previous studies
conducted overseas has shown that, students who attended school dormitory reported frequent engagement in bullying behaviour as compared to students who attended non-boarding schools (Chui & Chan, 2014; Pfeiffer & Pinquart, 2014). Thus, the present study attempted to determine if there was a significant association between bullying behaviour and type of schools attended among Malaysian population. Additionally, the present study attempted to identify the significant contributor of school-aged bullying behaviour towards students’ current level of PTSD and depressive symptoms.

Historically, in the 1970s, the pioneer of studying bullying behaviour systematically was conducted among 2nd and 9th grade Norwegian and Swedish students by Professor Dan Olweus (Pontzer, 2010). He found 7% of them were being bullied in the past months. In Malaysia, the interest of bullying problems started to arise since the violent bullying cases were reported by the media involving serious physical injuries and even death of the victims (Yaakub et al., 2010). The Malaysian government even started the bullying awareness campaign in the school named “Say No to Bully” but the effectiveness of this campaign remains questionable. Research on school bullying in Malaysia has been growing in numbers. It investigated various aspects and consequences of bullying (Isaac, Hodges & Salmivalli, 2008; Adams & Lawrence, 2011; Ttofi, Farrington, Losel & Loeber, 2011; Takizawa, Maughan & Arseneault, 2014). The negative consequences of bullying specifically PTSD and depressive symptoms has been reported frequently as the negative consequences of bullying conducted by researchers (Fleming & Jacobsen, 2009; Ong & Elliott, 2010; Idsoe et al., 2012; Jamir & Devi, 2014; Kaur et al., 2014; Nielsen et al., 2015).

The rapid growing of bullying cases signifies the importance to study further the school bullying problems among students in Malaysia. Previous findings have shown that, the devastating consequences of school students being involved in school bullying such as
depressive and PTSD symptoms. Yet, some of the previous studies also shows that, resiliency is one of the positive outcomes of school bullying as the individual can treat it as the motivator not to drop out of school and learn from bad experiences. Few cases have shown that, depended upon individual, negative experience can be serve as a motivator to achieve success as it is one of the way to prove that, being humiliated because of weaknesses and turn weaknesses as our advantage is something that people most value of.

**Figure 1.3: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

**1.4 Problem Statement**

School-aged bullying has been recognized as one of the potentially traumatic event. Extensive research provide evidence that, students who were involved in bullying were at risk of experiencing negative psychosocial outcomes such as trauma (Obrdalj et al., 2013), anxiety disorders (Mccabe et al., 2010), depression (Ttofi & Farrington, 2010; Uba et al.,
suicide ideation (Kim et al., 2004; Klomek, Sourander & Gould, 2010; Van Geel et al., 2014), problems in interpersonal relationship (Schafer et al., 2004; Ledley et al., 2006), higher risk to experience loneliness and difficulty in forming romantic relationships (Schafer et al, 2004; Dempsey & Storch, 2008) and engagement in negative behaviors such as criminal offending (Ttofi et al., 2011). The present study is needed to be conducted to see if the Malaysian population do share similar negative outcomes.

The recent bullying cases that leads to the death and serious physical injuries of those involved in bullying situation has driven major concern on bullying phenomena in Malaysia. This research will contribute to highlight the psychological injuries that has haunted those being victimized specifically victims and bully-victims. Being involved in various psychological disorder such as criminal offending or being send to juvenile center could be resulted from the negative effects of school bullying. In addition, it is also important to note that despite the negative experience of being involved in bully, some individuals might be able not to be dropped out of school and even being able to pursue their studies to the college or university. It is also important to note that some individuals might not experience or might be able to minimize the negative outcomes of school-aged bullying history. For instance, university students with the history of school-aged bullying reported significant levels of depression and/or posttraumatic stress disorder yet, they were able to finish schools without dropping out, even able to pursue higher education as well as function better than expected. Therefore, the present study recruited university students in order to gain more information in this aspect.

There are numbers of studies (Catterson & Hunter, 2010; Stoddard et al., 2015) found that resilience serve as a mediator of the negative outcomes of school-aged bullying. Yet these studies did not provide enough evidence on the significant difference between group
of bullies, victims, bully-victims and not-involved respective to their levels of resilience. For example, study conducted by Catterson and Hunter (2010) examining the mediating role of resilience on the reported feelings of loneliness among victims of school-aged bullying. Meanwhile Stoddard, Varela and Zimmerman (2015) examined the mediating role of resilience on the tendency to bully others among bullies. With that in mind, the present study attempted to examine the significant difference in the reported levels of resiliency and its relation with depression and PTSD symptoms among students with the history of bullying and no history of bullying who previously attended boarding and non-boarding schools. The present study also aimed to offer practical solution that can be used to minimize the negative effects of bullying which in turn contribute to the development of bullying intervention program. The focus of bullying intervention program should be focused on those suffered as a result of bullying specifically the victims and bully-victims since the psychological wound cannot be treated like a physical wound.

1.5 Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to determine the relationship between depression, PTSD symptoms, and resilience in relation to bullying history among university students who previously attended boarding and non-boarding schools in Malaysia.

Research Questions

1. What is the prevalence of bullying history, depressive and PTSD symptoms among university students in Sarawak?
2. Is there any significant difference in the prevalence of bullying history between university students who have previously attended boarding and non-boarding schools in Malaysia?

3. Is there any significant mean difference in depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms as it is related to bullying and schools?

4. Is there any significant mean difference in depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms and resilience as it is related to different types of bullying?

Objectives

1. To determine the prevalence of bullying history, depressive and PTSD symptoms among university students in Sarawak.
2. To examine the prevalence of bullying history between university students who have previously attended boarding and non-boarding schools.
3. To establish relationship between depressive symptoms and PTSD symptoms as it is related to types of bullying and types of school.
4. To determine the relationship between depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms and resilience as it is related to different types of bullying and types of school.

Hypotheses

Hₐ: There is significant mean difference in the prevalence of bullying history between university students who have previously attended boarding and non-boarding schools.
H_{0} : There is significant mean difference in depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms as it is related to types of bullying and types of school among university students in Sarawak.

H_{A} : There is significant mean difference in depressive symptoms, PTSD symptoms and resilience as it is related to different types of bullying and types of school among university students in Sarawak.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Prevalence of Bullying in School System

Internationally, the prevalence of bullying among school students varied across countries. Approximately 20.8% of the students aged 12-18 years reported being bullied while 33% reported that they have been bullied at least once or twice a month during school year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2016). Modecki et al. (2014) conducted a meta-analysis of 80 studies on the rates of bullying involvement (both bullying others and being bullied) found that 35% of the students aged 12-18 years were involved in a bullying situation. A comparison of bullying prevalence across 40 different European, North-American countries and Israel found that, on average, 26% of school students were involved in bullying, specifically 12.6% of them were victims and 10.7% of them were bullies (Craig et al., 2009).

Research conducted among sample from Asia and Africa found prevalence rates of school bullying of 40% in South Korea (Kim, Koh & Leventhal, 2004), 36.3% in South Africa (Liang, Flisher, & Lombard, 2007), 31.4% in India (Kshirsagar, Agarwal & Bavdekar, 2007) and 20.83% in Guangdong, China (Wang et al., 2012). The Global Health School Survey conducted across South East Asian countries among school students aged 13 to 15 years old by World Health Organization (WHO) reported slightly less statistics of school bullying: 21.9% in Malaysia (2012), 23.4% in Brunei (2014), 26.1% in Vietnam (2013), 27.2% in Thailand (2008), 47.9% in Philippines (2011) and 50% in Indonesia (2007).