

# Bullying Among School Students in the UAE Society

Ahmad Falah Alomosh, Salama Mohammad Alrahoomi

University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE

Moudi Mohamed Hamad Alshamsi, Omaira Daham Shaban Alani

Family Development Center/Government of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE

The purpose of this study is to research the bullying phenomenon among school students in the UAE society. This is done through showing the extent of prevalence of bullying, the rate of recurrence of bullying incidences, the most widespread forms of bullying among school children in the Emirati society, and finally, the variation with regards to the prevalence and forms of bullying as related to the student's gender. Therefore, this study aims to probe the prevalence of this phenomenon in schools, and the frequency of bullying cases as well as its forms. For this purpose, a questionnaire was designed and conducted on a sample size of 1,309 students of both genders. The data were later analyzed using descriptive statistical and analytical metrics that are appropriate for the variables' measurement level, and which achieve the objectives of the study. The study found that a third of the students (33.3%) were involved in bullying incidents. Furthermore, it was found that 14.2% were the party causing the bullying incident, while 19.1% were the party upon which bullying was inflicted. The study also revealed that within school premises the places where bullying was most likely to occur are corridors, and the places which students felt were the least safe are the closed spaces. As for the forms of bullying students are subjected to, offensive name calling or insults came in first place, followed by cyber/online bullying. The young age and smaller size of a student were among the most important motivators for students to bully him/her. It was also found that 32.8% of students who are exposed to bullying respond in a similar manner. The study showed that most of the bullied students (78.4%) know the person doing the bullying, the females being more cognizant of the perpetrator bullying them. Moreover, 40.7% of the students believe that the teachers and other employees are aware of the bullying taking place, female students to a greater extent than males in this regard. In the study sample, the students believe that strong and strict school administration would contribute to stopping the bullying phenomenon. The study additionally concluded a number of recommendations to reduce this phenomenon.

*Keywords:* UAE society, bullying, cyber bullying, offensive names, school administration

## Introduction

The subject of bullying has gained great theoretical and practical importance at the beginning of the 21st century through the increase of studies focusing on the phenomenon of bullying in schools (Aynsley-Green,

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Ahmad Falah Alomosh, Ph.D. in Sociology, Professor of Criminology, Department of Sociology, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE.

Salama Mohammad Alrahoomi, Ph.D. in Sociology, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE.

Moudi Mohamed Hamad Alshamsi, Director of Family Development Center/Government of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE.

Omaira Daham Shaban Alani, Master degree in Mathematical Statistics, Family Development Center/Government of Sharjah, Sharjah, UAE.

2006). These studies helped researchers understand, analyze, and explain the reasons behind students committing the act of bullying on their colleagues within the school environment, and the negative impacts this has on the bullied victims, manifesting in the deterioration in their academic performance, the anxiety, stress and withdrawal (Allison, Roeger, Smith, & Isherwood, 2014; Olweus, 1993; Agnew, 2004).

Worldwide studies indicate a global rise of the bullying phenomenon, which is coupled by the emergence of modern patterns of bullying, especially cyber bullying. This undoubtedly reflects negatively on the overall school environment as manifested by the increased anxiety, stress, and insecurity levels among students (Olweus, 1997; Rigby, 2007; Aalsma & Brown, 2008).

Tracking the studies conducted on the bullying phenomenon shows a scarcity of such studies with relation to the UAE society. These studies, as insufficient as they are, are also of a generalized nature, illuminating the school violence phenomenon, whether on the theoretical or applied level (Alomosh, 2011). Despite the fact that these studies revolve around school violence in the UAE community, they fail to address the level of students' awareness of this phenomenon. What distinguishes the current study is that it establishes as its basis the analysis and interpretation of bullying from the viewpoint of both the bullies and the victims, and focuses on the cognitive aspects (i.e., what the victims understand about bullying), and this perhaps is what adds a vital and explanatory aspect to this study thus helping to reach results that are more accurate and comprehensive on bullying (Olweus, 1978; Mishna, 2006).

The views of these scientists stem from the hypothesis that bullying is an aggressive behavior that involves inflicting harm and damage, and occurs regularly due to the power imbalance between the bullies and the victims (Olweus, 1997).

Pioneers of theories explaining bullying view it as a complex dynamic state, which can be explained through the use of a variety of theoretical frameworks, according to the theoretical and methodological foundations, most notably the theories of criminology (The General Theory of Crime and The Strain Theory) (Agnew, 1992; 2001; 2004).

### **Concept**

It is the impact and damage to the student (victim) as a result of exposure to any form of bullying (physical bullying, threats, neglect, exclusion, and damage) and this includes their awareness and cognizance of the seriousness of this behavioral damage.

### **Research Problem and Questions**

Bullying is a phenomenon that is directed from student onto another of a similar age or younger, in which case, the risk becomes greater. Bullying encompasses significant negative impact on the victims and bullies alike. Additionally, the effects of bullying are not limited to the present time, but rather extend to the future, involving a prospect of the victims themselves transforming into bullies, and the likelihood that current bullies develop patterns of criminal behavior in the future.

The study topics attempt to answer the following questions:

- How prevalent is bullying in the UAE society?
- What are the most predominant forms of bullying in the UAE society?
- Are there differences in the prevalence and forms of bullying related to the student's gender?

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to identify the following:

1. The prevalence of bullying in schools.
2. The frequency of bullying cases.
3. Forms and practices of bullying carried out by students.
4. Statistical significance of the differences in the number of bullying incidents according to gender.
5. Statistical significance of the differences in the forms of bullying according to gender.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study of bullying is one of the most important studies, and its significance stems from the following points:

- This study addresses an important topic which has yet to be sufficiently researched in the UAE society.
- It draws the attention of school principals, teachers, and educational counselors to this phenomenon.
- It draws parents' attention to this phenomenon, thus ensuring their cooperation with the school in order to reduce this phenomenon.

### **Previous Studies**

Recent studies on bullying have shown a considerable expansion of this phenomenon at a global level and highlighted its great risks to local communities. Several researchers have analyzed the nature of bullying and its causes, this phenomenon due to its societal severity. Many researchers have addressed the nature of the bullying phenomenon, as well as the causes and factors leading to bullying. International studies have clearly substantiated the growing bullying trend in all its forms and manifestations (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014).

International studies have focused on the victims of bullying, their characteristics, and the negative repercussions of bullying on their behavior, and how being exposed to any form of bullying impacts them. The results of these studies demonstrate that victims are always fearful and tense, tend to withdraw from the school environment, feel lonely and socially isolated, and have low academic performance levels (Olweus, 1978; Peterson & Ray, 2006; Fontaine, 2007; Kowalski & Limber, 2007).

The study (Alomosh, 2008a) aimed at assessing the level and quality of communication within the UAE family. The study indicated that the level of family communication in the UAE society is high. On a three-point scale used for evaluating communication in the UAE family, the outcome reached 2.54 (equivalent to 84.7% on the percentage scale). It is noteworthy that the males' evaluation for family communication was higher than that of the females, with the husbands gauging it as 86.7%, as opposed to 83% according to the wives.

Alomosh's study (Alomosh, 2011) also sought to identify the manifestations and forms of school violence in the UAE society. It revealed that the manifestations and forms of school violence were as follows, ranked in descending order according to the degree of intensity: violence by students targeting their fellow students, violence by teachers towards students, violence by students on school property, and finally violence by students directed at faculty.

The national study "Violence Against Children in the Jordanian Society 2009", prepared by UNICEF and the National Council for Family Affairs and the Ministry of Education, revealed that more than two-thirds of Jordan's children are subjected to verbal abuse by parents, teachers, and school administrators.

The study (Alomosh, 2008a) additionally presented the educational problems in the UAE society, demonstrated in a weak relationship between the school and the student's home resulting from the lack of interest and follow-up from the family's side with regards to their children's education, the low educational level in schools, and the accompanying high student dropout numbers. On the other side, a prevalence of private tutoring also poses one of the most important educational problems.

The study (Alomosh, 2008b) aimed to identify the perceptions of violence among children in the UAE society, taking into account the demographic, social, and economic characteristics of the study sample as study variables, with the purpose of identifying forms of violence (illustrations of violence) inflicted upon children (physical, emotional, neglect, and sexual), as well as pinpointing the individuals who commit violence against children in the home, represented by the father, the mother, the brother, the sister, and the wife of the father and grandmother. For the purposes of this study, a random sample of 193 children was used.

The results of the previous studies (local, Arab, and international) indicate a growing bullying phenomenon and its negative repercussions on the victims manifested in a decline of academic performance levels, anxiety, stress, and withdrawal.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The foundations for the study of "Bullying in the UAE Society" are Albert Bandura's "Social Learning Theory", as well as "The General Theory of Crime" and "The Strain Theory". These theories are instituted on theoretical and methodological dimensions that can be used to interpret and analyze the study's problem (The Social Learning Theory: Bullying, an acquired behavior, The General Theory of Crime: Bullying is due to low self-esteem, absence of deterrence, and parental and school supervision, The Strain Theory: Anxiety).

The General Theory of Crime is an important theory in modern criminology. In this theory, Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990 set out from the earlier works of Hirschi, namely "The Control Theory".

The study of "Bullying in the UAE society" is based on "The General Theory of Crime" (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), one of the important contemporary theories of criminology, in which Gottfredson and Hirschi build on Hirschi's "The Control Theory".

The results of the study of "Bullying in the UAE Society" are consistent with the hypothesis of "The General Theory of Crime" stating that deficient social upbringing leads to deviant behavior (bullying). The results of the study indicated that the majority of the sample complain from the school's failure to recognize and acknowledge the deviant behavior, in addition to the absence of an appropriate punishment stipulated for the deviant behavior of bullying.

### **Methodology and Analysis Procedures**

The Illinois Bully Scale and Quia survey were used which examine the nature and scale of school violence (Alomosh, 2011). The researcher has made some modifications to these tools to suit the study community.

The study population includes students in all Sharjah Educational District schools; this covers Sharjah City, the Central Region, and the Eastern Region.

A random sample (seven schools) was selected from among all Sharjah Educational District schools. The number of students surveyed reached a total of 1,309 students (of both genders).

## Results

The study revealed that 33.3% of the students were involved in bullying incidents. It further found that 14.2% were themselves the bullies in the incident, while 19.1% were the party upon which bullying was inflicted. The remaining 66.7% were not part of any bullying occurrences.

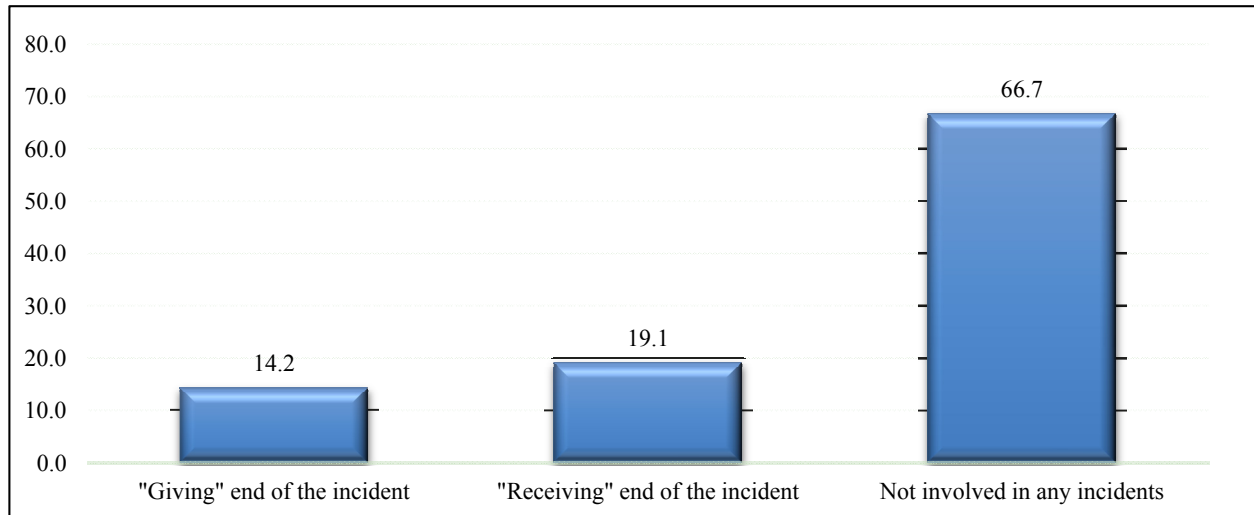


Figure 1. Distribution by percentage of the sample's responses on being involved in a bullying incident.

The study uncovered that the places where bullying is most likely to occur are as follows (in order of likelihood): the corridors, scoring as high as 41.6%; classrooms by 24.4%; cafeteria by 8.5%; car or bus ride area, by 4.7%; playgrounds, by 3.5%; inside buses or cars by 2.1%; other places, 4.1%.

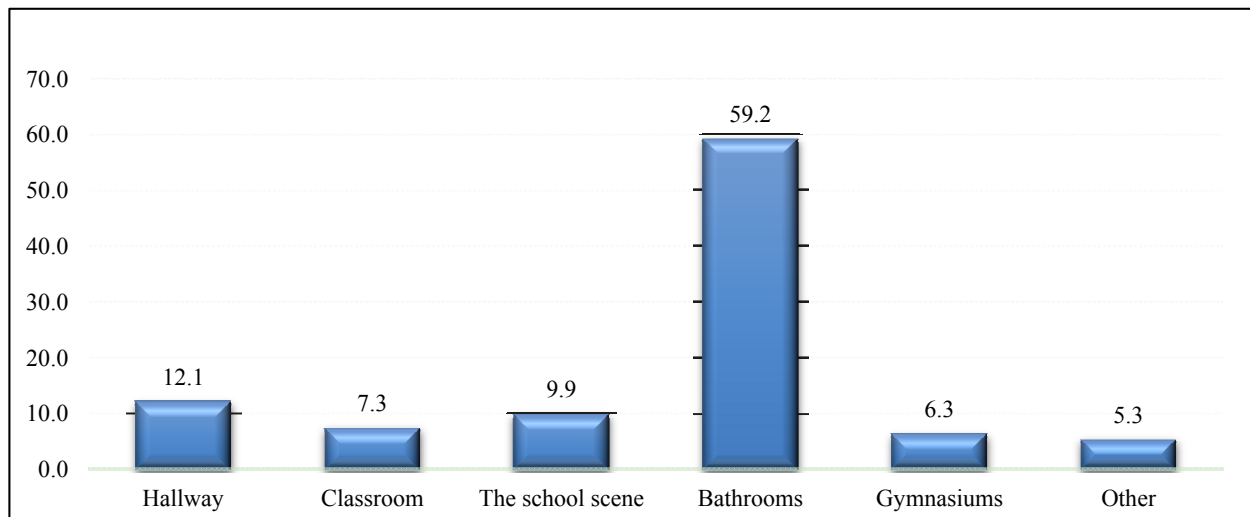


Figure 2. Distribution by percentage of the sample's responses to places students believe to be unsafe in school.

The bullying incident occurred between 1-4 times to 56.4% of students who were victims to a bullying incident, and occurred between 5-9 times to 10.8% of students who were victims to bullying; 9.2% of surveyed students experienced being bullied 10 times or more, while 23.6% of those who have been exposed to bullying are subjected to it daily.

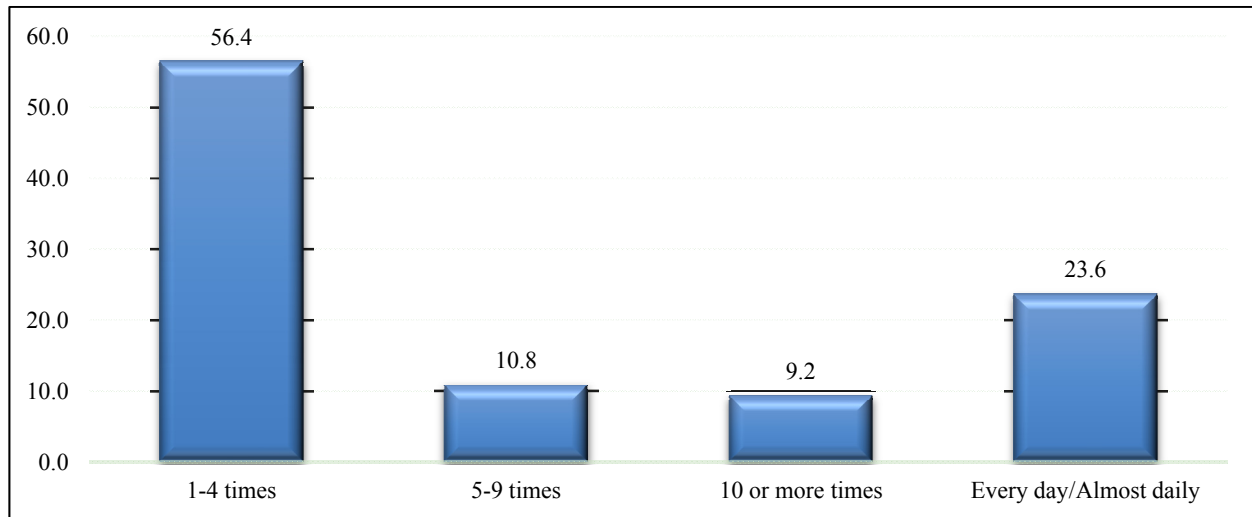


Figure 3. Distribution by percentage of the sample's responses to the number of bullying incidents they have been subjected to.

As for the forms of bullying students are subjected to, 54.0% suffer being insulted or called bad names, 9.6% get threatened, 4.0% get robbed, while 10% suffered being pushed and shoved, caused to stumble and fall or were kicked and beaten, 5.6% were subjected to being ignored or excluded, and 14.4% of students were exposed to cyber/online bullying. This finding on forms of bullying correlates with the outcomes from international studies, particularly the ones conducted by Camodeca and Goossens (2005).

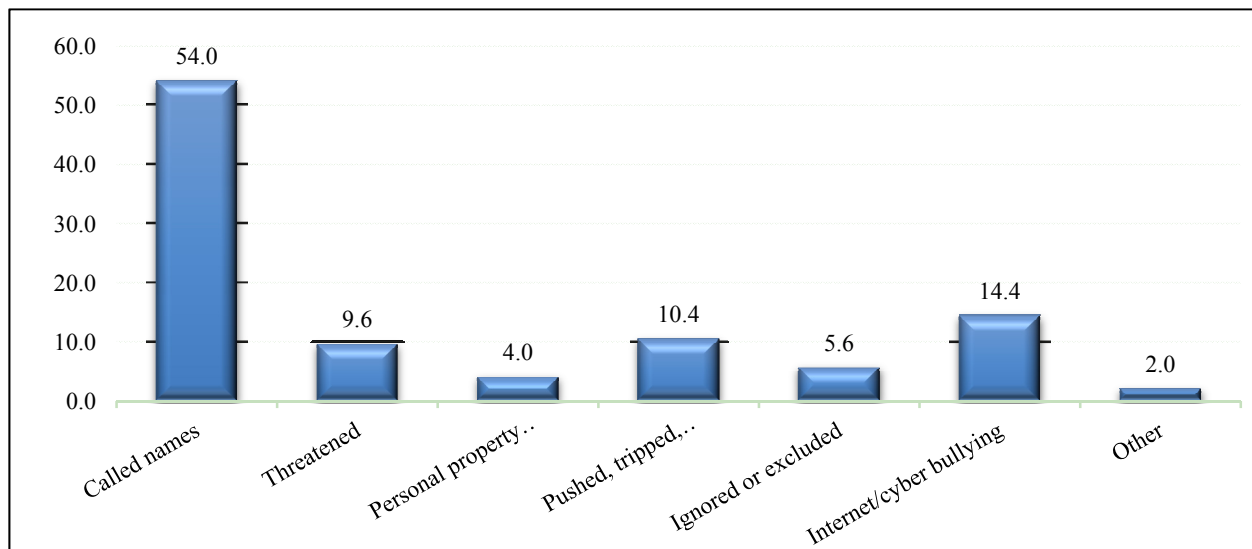


Figure 4. Distribution by percentage of the sample's responses to the forms of bullying they were subjected to.

Results showed that 28.0% of the males who were bullied said that their young age was the motivation behind being subjected to bullying, compared to 44.6% in the case of females. Survey also confirmed that low physical competency/disabilities resulted in bullying for 22.6% of males and 17.8% of females. Financial status was the motivation behind being subjected to bullying for 3.2% of the males in comparison with 0.6% of the females. The student's size led to bullying in 20.4% of males compared with 10.2% of females.

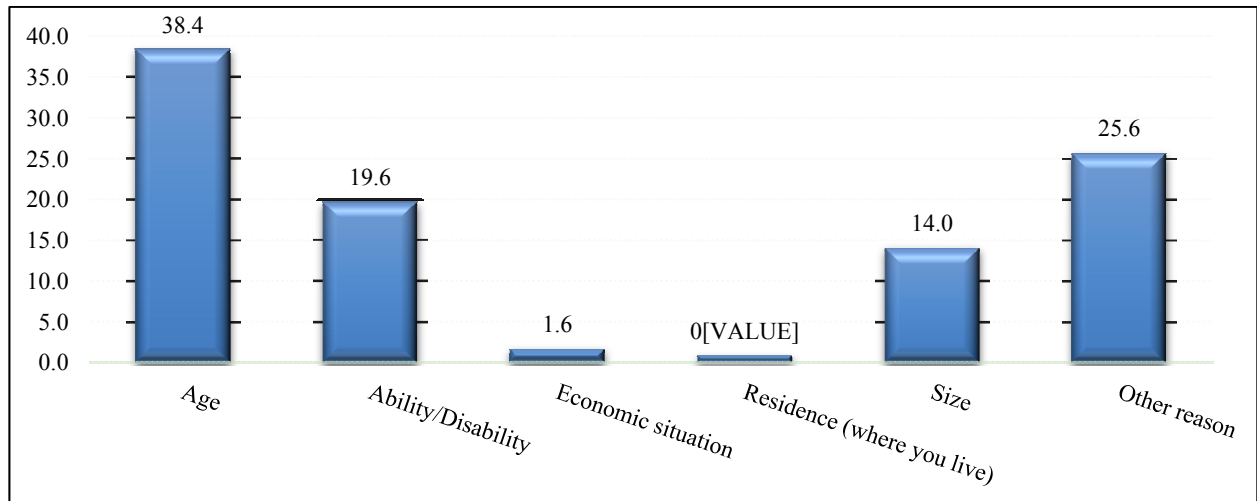


Figure 5. Distribution by percentage of the sample's responses on motivation in bullying cases they were subjected to.

This finding related to young age is consistent with the results of international studies, particularly those of Olweus (1978) and Peterson and Ray (2006).

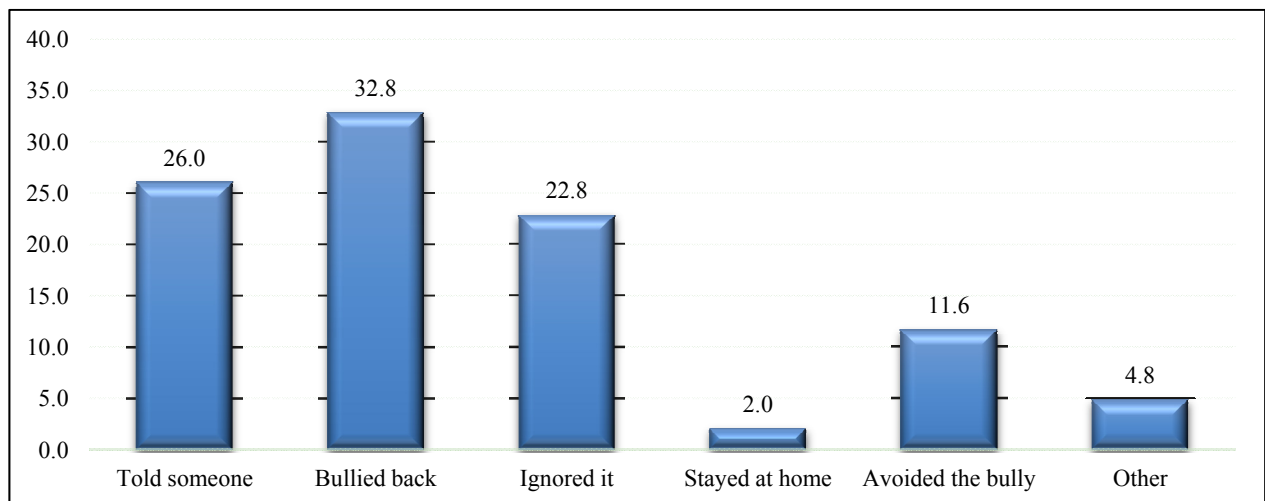


Figure 6. Distribution by percentage of the actions carried out by the students who have been bullied.

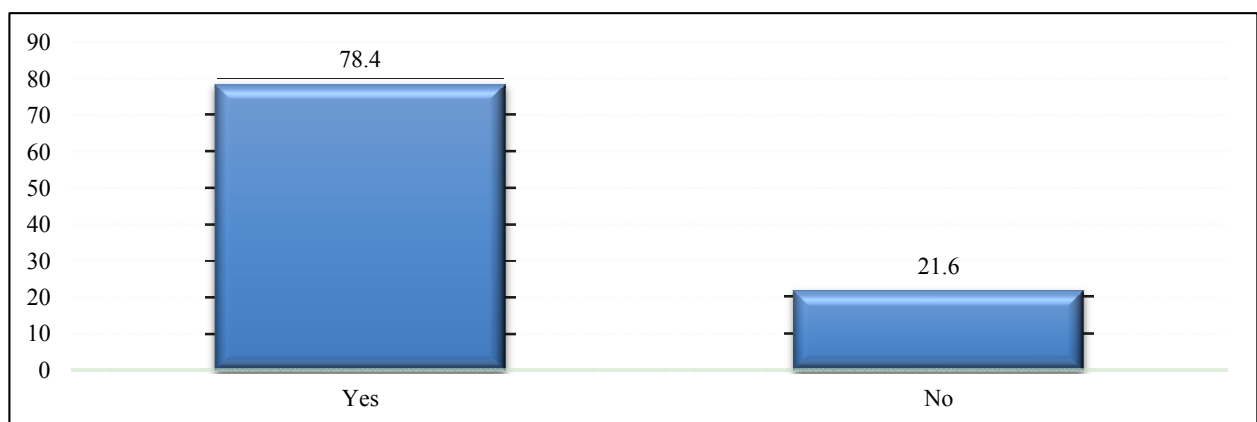


Figure 7. Distribution by percentages of the bullied students who know the identity of their bully.

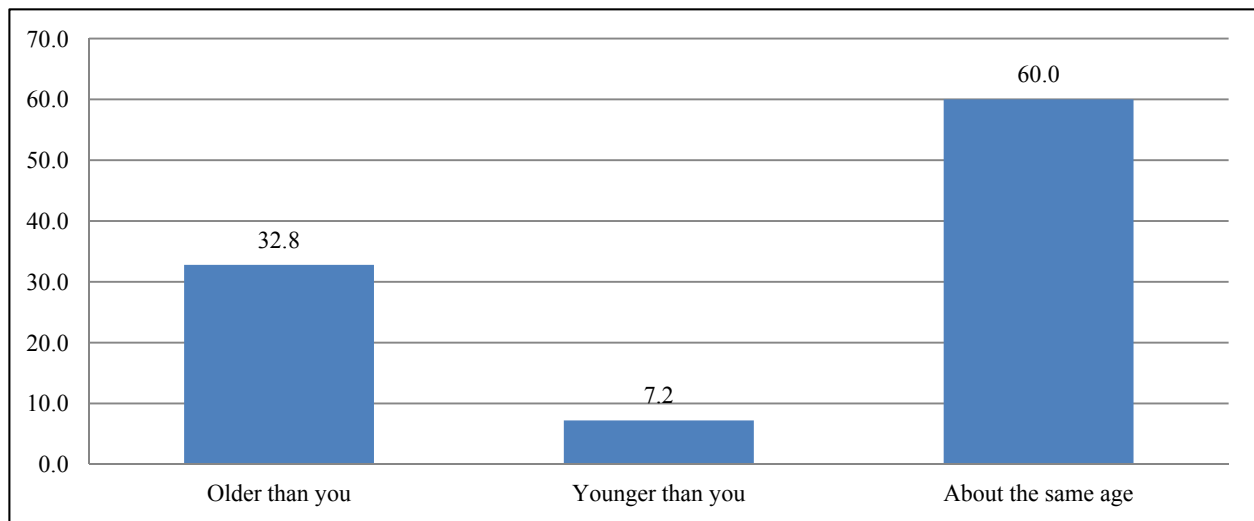


Figure 8. Distribution by percentages of the bullies' age group.

It was discovered that 78.4% of those exposed to bullying know the person who has bullied them, while 21.6% have no knowledge of the perpetrator. This finding related to knowing the identity of the bully is also consistent with the results of international studies, particularly those conducted by Monks and Smith (2006).

The results show that 71.0% of males subjected to bullying knew the person who bullied them, whereas the number rises to 82.3% in the case of females who knew the perpetrator (Branson & Cornell, 2009).

In comparison, looking at students who bullied others, it was revealed that 36.0% of them committed the act of bullying 1-4 times, while 13.4% bullied other students 5-9 times; 12.4% did it 10 or more times, while 38.2% bully other students daily.

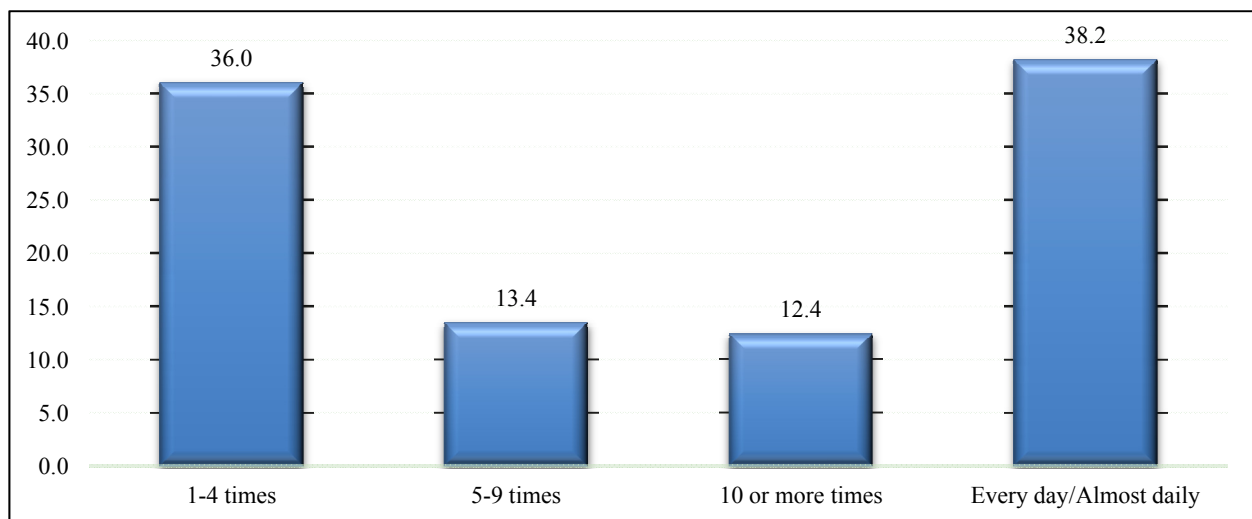


Figure 9. Distribution by percentage for those who committed bullying according to the number of times they did it.

Examining the 30 days preceding data collection, the study showed that 70.7% of students didn't harass other students at all during the 30 days prior to data collection, while 19.3% did so once or twice, 4.2% bullied others 3-4 times, 1.7% did it 5-6 times, while 4.1% committed bullying 7 or more times.



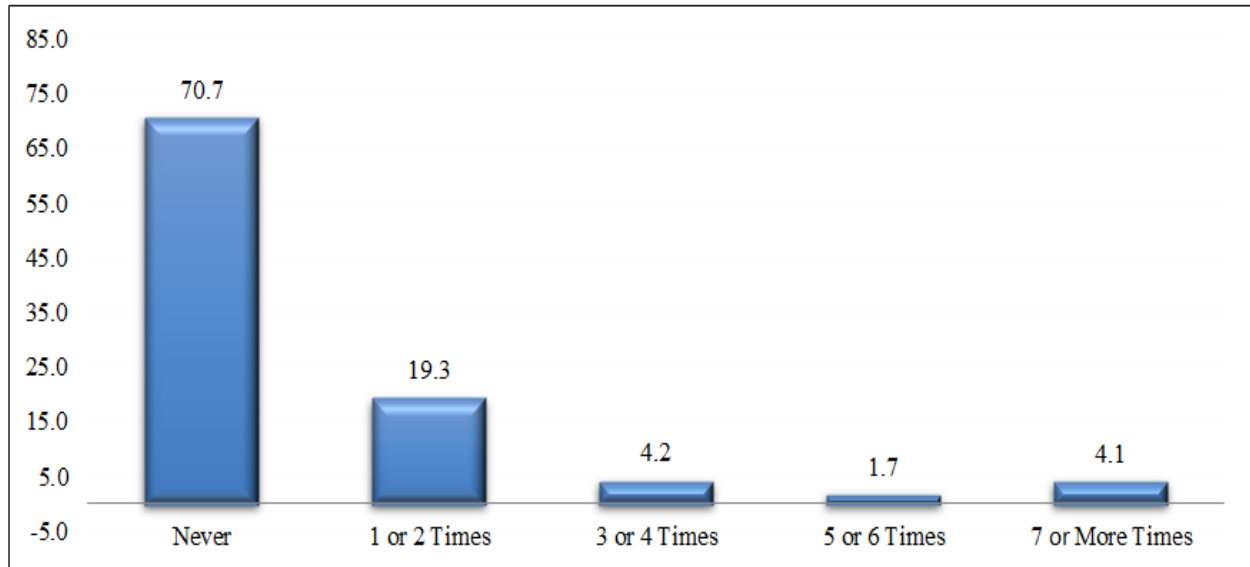


Figure 10. Distribution by percentage for the number of times students harassed others.

Looking again at the 30 days preceding data collection, with respect to whether students were subjected to any form of harassment, the study revealed that 46.8% didn't get bullied by other students, 30.5% were harassed once or twice, 11.5% suffered bullying 3-4 times, and 4.8% got bullied 5-6 times, while 6.4% were subjected to bullying 7 times or more. These results related to the actions of students is in line with the results reached by Alomosh (2011), Griffin and Gross (2004), Adams and Lawrence (2011), and Reynolds (2003).

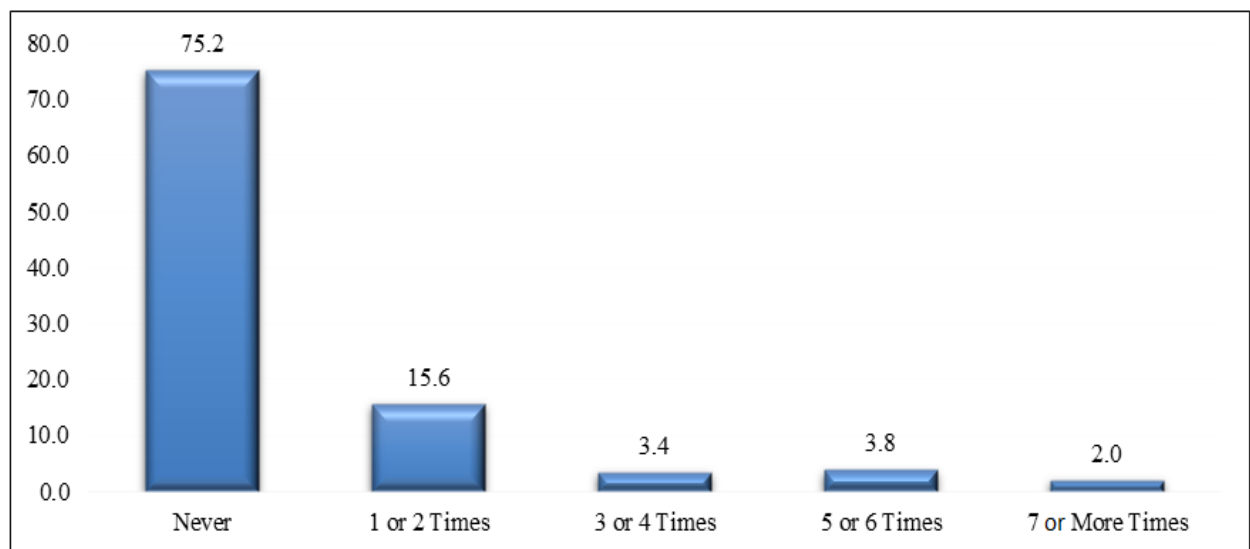


Figure 11. Distribution by percentage for the number of times students were exposed to harassment from other students.

### Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate bullying in the UAE society and concluded the following important results:

- One-third (33.3%) of the students were involved in a bullying incident; 14.2% were found to be the bullying party in the incident, while 19.1% were the party subjected to bullying in the concerned incident.

• The study revealed that the places where bullying was most likely to occur in, arranged in descending from the most likely to the least, were as follows:

- The corridors, 41.6% likelihood.
- Classrooms, by 24.4%.
- Bathrooms, by 11.2%.
- Cafeteria, by 8.5%.
- Car or bus ride area, by 4.7%.
- Playgrounds, by 3.5%.
- Inside buses or cars, by 2.1%.

• Places that students believe are unsafe in school are:

- Bathrooms, by 59.2%.
- Corridors, by 12.1%.
- The school courtyard, by 9.9%.
- Classrooms, by 7.3%.
- School gyms/sports' halls, by 6.3%.

• The study revealed that 23.6% of the students who were victims of bullying said that they are subjected to bullying on a daily basis.

• As for the forms of bullying they are exposed to, the most significant ones cited were as follows, arranged in descending from the most important to the least:

- Abusive name calling or insults 54.0%.
- Cyber/online bullying affected 14.4% of students.
- Pushing or causing to stumble and fall, kicking or beating 10.4%.
- Threats 9.6%.
- Ignoring or exclusion 5.6%.
- Property theft 4.0%.

• The results showed that more males than females were subjected to bullying in the form of: threats, property theft, pushing, kicking or beating, whereas more females than males were subjected to offensive name calling or insults.

• As for the aspects listed as the most important motives behind bullying, they were as follows:

- Young age (38.4%).
- Student's size (25.6%).
- Low physical competence/disability (19.6%).

• Students' reactions when the bullying incident took place were varied and are arranged below in descending order from the most occurring to the least as follows:

- Responding similarly (32.8%).
- Telling someone else about the incident (26.0%).
- Ignoring the matter (22.8%).
- Avoiding the bully (11.6%).
- Staying at home (2.0%).

• The majority of those subjected to bullying (78.4%) know the person who bullied them, with more females than males being aware of the identity of their bully, the percentages being 82.3% and 71.0%

respectively for females and males.

- More than a third of the bullies (38.2% to be exact) bully others on a daily basis. It was further found that committing bullying on a daily basis is evident in more males than females, with the percentages being 51.1% for males versus 26.5% for females.
- The study revealed that the percentage of males who bully younger students is greater than that of females bullying younger, where 48.9% of males bully younger students, while only 35.7% of females do that.
- Of the students' study sample, 40.7% believe that teachers and other school employees are aware of bullying incidents taking place, with a larger percentage of female students than male students believing that teachers and other school personnel are aware of this. This corresponds to 44.4% of the female students, compared with 36.6% of the males, believing this to be the case.
- The study has concluded several proposals that would reduce the bullying phenomenon from the students' viewpoint, the most important being the following:
  - A strong and strict school administration, according to 42.6% of the students.
  - Immediate reporting of bullying incidents, by 29.5% of the students.
  - Continuous parental supervision, by 22.7% of the students.

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