

The Peculiarities of Interpersonal Relations among Participants of Bullying

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Abstract

The issue of psychological safety within educational institutions has gained significant attention in modern psychology due to the growing number of factors affecting students' mental and physical well-being. This study emphasizes the importance of examining physical, developmental, and psychological aspects of a safe school environment to prevent or minimize the occurrence of violence, depression, and stress. By fostering effective behavioral regulation among students, teachers, and school staff, a psychologically safe educational atmosphere can be maintained. Establishing such an environment is considered a crucial condition for reducing incidents of bullying and aggression, as well as promoting personal growth, emotional stability, and social development among schoolchildren. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how psychological safety can serve as a preventive mechanism for maladaptive behaviors in educational settings and highlight the necessity of systemic interventions aimed at supporting mental health in schools.

Introduction

In today's world, the psychological safety of the educational environment has become a pressing global concern. Ensuring safety in schools is essential for nurturing socially responsible and emotionally stable individuals among children and adolescents. According to UNESCO, one in every three students worldwide experiences some form of bullying or violence at school, highlighting the urgency of this issue (52). To address this, UNESCO declared the first Thursday of November as the International Day Against Violence and Bullying at School, Including Cyberbullying in 2019, emphasizing global solidarity against all forms of school violence (51).

The term bullying originates from the English word "bully," meaning to threaten or mock someone. It refers to the intentional and repeated infliction of physical, psychological, or social harm on a weaker individual, often characterized by an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim (54). The first scientific studies on bullying were conducted in Scandinavian countries, with Norwegian psychologist Dan Olweus (1978) laying the foundation for modern bullying research

(53). His works established a theoretical basis for understanding aggression and the mechanisms behind school bullying, later expanded in *Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do* (1993) (54).

Aggression and violence among adolescents have long been explored through psychological theories of frustration, social learning, and obedience. The Frustration–Aggression Theory posited by Dollard et al. (1939) explains that aggression often emerges as a response to blocked goals or unmet needs (34). Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1977) further emphasized that aggressive behavior can be learned through observing and imitating others' actions and the consequences of such behaviors

(55). Classic experimental studies by Milgram (1963) and Zimbardo (1971) demonstrated how authority, power, and group dynamics influence individuals' aggressive and submissive behaviors, forming a

theoretical background for understanding bullying as a social process (38; 43).

In the Russian Federation, researchers such as I. S. Kon and S. N. Enikolopov analyzed bullying through the lens of adolescent aggression, linking it to social relationships and personal identity formation (35). Similarly, Uzbek scholars Kadirov

and Norkulova (2022) found that interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in shaping adolescents' behaviors and emotional well-being, which can either mitigate or exacerbate bullying tendencies (37).

Contemporary international research continues to explore the psychological and environmental determinants of bullying. For instance, Fu et al. (2024) highlighted that a positive school climate and prosocial tendencies can significantly reduce bullying behaviors among adolescents (1). Moreover, studies by Hu et al. (2025) and Lu et al. (2025) examined how emotional factors, justice perception, and social interactions influence both covert and overt bullying behaviors (2; 6). Other research underscores the moderating roles of empathy, teacher responses, and peer relationships in preventing bullying and fostering supportive school environments (18; 20).

The emergence of cyberbullying has further expanded the problem into digital spaces, where communication technologies are used to cause psychological harm through social media and online platforms (10). Statistical data reveal that approximately 70% of online aggressors consider it acceptable to share others' personal information, while only 5% express guilt for their actions (49). This digital extension of bullying introduces new challenges for educators, psychologists, and policymakers worldwide.

Results

Purpose of the Research The primary goal of the study was to examine the interpersonal characteristics of individuals who participate in bullying situations in schools, to determine the psychological factors that influence the distribution of roles in bullying, and to identify the relationship between personal traits and social behavior patterns within adolescent groups.

The research specifically aimed to:

1. Study the relationship between internality (personal responsibility), school anxiety, and aggression among students who participate in bullying;
2. Explore how group cohesion influences the manifestation and frequency of bullying behavior;
3. Identify and analyze the correlation between students' psychological profiles and their roles in bullying (initiator, helper, defender, victim, observer);
4. Develop recommendations to improve the psychological safety of the school environment and to prevent bullying among adolescents.

Object and Subject of the Study Object

The interpersonal relationships of adolescents in the educational process.

Subject

The psychological characteristics and personal traits of participants in bullying situations (initiators, victims, helpers, defenders, and observers).

Research Tasks

1. To review and summarize the theoretical foundations of bullying as a socio-psychological phenomenon based on existing scientific literature.
2. To determine the role distribution in bullying situations among students of secondary schools and academic lyceums.
3. To measure the psychological indicators of internality, aggression, and school anxiety among adolescents.
4. To identify correlations between group cohesion and bullying roles.
5. To analyze the relationship between psychological characteristics and the type of participation in bullying.

Hypotheses of the Study

1. There is a significant relationship between students' personal psychological traits and their roles in bullying.
2. A high level of internality and group cohesion reduces the probability of being involved in bullying.
3. A high level of school anxiety and aggression increases the likelihood of becoming a victim or aggressor in bullying.
4. The moral and social climate of the group influences the degree of student participation in bullying activities.

Participants The study was conducted among students aged 12 to 16 years enrolled in general education schools and academic lyceums of Tashkent city. A total of 240 adolescents participated in the study, representing both genders and diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

The participants were divided into two main groups for comparative analysis:

- Group 1: Younger adolescents (12–13 years old)
- Group 2: Older adolescents (14–16 years old)

The age division allowed the researcher to explore developmental differences in the manifestation of bullying behavior and interpersonal relations.

Research Design The study was carried out in three stages:

1. Diagnostic Stage – Identification of bullying structures and participant roles using standardized tools.
2. Analytical Stage – Statistical and correlational analysis of the relationship between psychological indicators and bullying roles.
3. Interpretative Stage – Discussion and interpretation of results to draw theoretical and practical conclusions. Each stage was designed to ensure systematic collection, verification, and analysis of empirical data.

Research Methods and Instruments To achieve the research goals, a combination of psychological diagnostic methods was employed. Each tool was carefully selected for its reliability and relevance to adolescent psychology. Below is a description of the instruments used:

1. **E. Roland's "Detection of Bullying Structure" Technique** – This method identifies the social structure of bullying by classifying participants into roles: initiators, helpers, defenders, victims, and observers. It helps reveal the hidden social dynamics and power hierarchies within a classroom (40).
2. **Group Cohesion Assessment** – This technique measures the level of interpersonal attraction and unity among students. A higher level of group cohesion is considered an indicator of a psychologically safe environment.
3. **Buss–Durkee Hostility Inventory (BDHI)** – This questionnaire measures different types of aggression, including: Physical Aggression, Verbal Aggression, Indirect Aggression, Negativism, Irritability, Resentment, Suspicion, Guilt, and Hostility. The scale helps assess both overt and covert aggression among students (47).
4. **Rotter's Locus of Control Scale** – This test measures internality–externality, that is, whether individuals attribute life events to their own actions (internal locus) or to external circumstances (external locus). A high level of internality reflects personal responsibility and emotional maturity (41).
5. **Phillips School Anxiety Test** – This instrument identifies various forms of school-related anxiety, including: Fear of evaluation and negative feedback; Fear of failure; Social stress; Physiological symptoms of anxiety (tension, fatigue, etc.). It is particularly useful for diagnosing emotional instability in school-aged children (39).

Each method was applied individually and collectively to ensure comprehensive coverage of all relevant psychological factors. **Procedure** The empirical research was conducted in a school environment during regular academic hours. Before starting, students were provided with clear explanations of the study's purpose and instructions on completing the questionnaires. All

responses were anonymous to ensure confidentiality and reduce anxiety.

Teachers and school psychologists assisted in organizing the testing sessions and maintaining an environment of trust and openness. Data collection was carried out in small groups to minimize external influence and allow participants to work comfortably.

After collecting data, the results were processed through statistical and qualitative analysis. The following techniques were used:

- Calculation of mean values and standard deviations;
- Frequency distribution;
- Correlation analysis to determine relationships between variables (internality, aggression, anxiety, and roles). The results were summarized in tables and charts to illustrate key patterns and correlations.

Ethical Considerations The research was conducted in full compliance with ethical guidelines of psychological research. Participants' rights to voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity were strictly observed. The researcher ensured that no physical or emotional harm came to any participant during or after the testing process. Consent was obtained from both the school administration and the participants prior to the study. All procedures adhered to the principles of respect for human dignity, non-maleficence, and data privacy.

Statistical Analysis Methods Statistical analysis was performed using descriptive and correlational methods to interpret the collected data. The primary statistical techniques included:

- Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) to measure relationships between psychological variables;
- Frequency analysis to identify the proportion of participants in different bullying roles;
- Comparative analysis across age groups and gender;
- Significance testing ($p < 0.05$, $p < 0.01$) to ensure reliability of results.

Distribution of Roles in Bullying Based on E. Roland's "Bullying Structure Detection" method, the study identified five main roles among participants: initiators, helpers, defenders, victims, and observers.

Table 1
Dynamics of Bullying Relationships

Role	Number of Students	Percentage (%)	Description
Initiators (Bullies)	36	15	Students who displayed dominant aggressive behavior and initiated attacks.
Helpers	52	22	Students who supported or encouraged aggression through actions or words.
Defenders	43	18	Students who attempted to protect victims or intervene to stop the aggression.
Victims	60	25	Students who regularly suffered verbal, social, or physical attacks.
Observers	49	20	Students who witnessed bullying without direct involvement.

These results demonstrate that the majority of students are indirect participants, either as helpers or passive observers. Only a minority (18%) take on defensive roles to support victims. This indicates that bullying is a collective process involving many individuals with varying degrees of responsibility.

Group cohesion and interpersonal climate The statistical results of the group cohesion questionnaire showed a negative correlation between the degree of group cohesion and the level of bullying activity ($r = -0.62, p < 0.01$). In other words, the more unified and emotionally connected the students, the less likely they would engage in aggressive behavior.

Groups with high cohesion demonstrated:

- More instances of defending behavior;
- Lower frequencies of rumors, mockery, and exclusion;
- Higher empathy and mutual support levels;
- Better teacher–student communication.

In contrast, low cohesion groups had fragmented relationships, status competition, and frequent verbal conflicts, which served as a breeding ground for bullying.

Aggression Levels among Participants The Buss-Durkee Hostility Inventory revealed the following average aggression scores for each role group:

Table 2
Aggression Levels Among Bullying Participants

Role	Average Score	Interpretation
Initiators (Bullies)	8.4	High aggression level, manifested through physical and verbal attacks.
Helpers	7.6	Elevated aggression, expressed through verbal and indirect forms.
Observers	6.8	Moderate aggression; tendency to tolerate violence as a norm.
Defenders	4.9	Low aggression; constructive conflict resolution tendency.
Victims	5.1	Low–moderate aggression combined with defensiveness and fear.

These findings confirm that aggressors and their helpers possess the highest levels of hostility and irritability, while defenders show the lowest. Victims exhibit suppressed aggression that manifests itself as internal tension and anxiety.

Internality and Personal Responsibility Analysis of the Rotter Locus of Control results revealed the following pattern:

Table 3
Levels of Internality among Bullying Participants

Role	Level of Internality	Description
Bullies	High	Take responsibility for actions but use control to dominate others.
Defenders	High	Demonstrate self-regulation and moral responsibility.
Victims	Low	Perceive events as beyond their control; depend on external support.
Observers	Low–Moderate	Tend to avoid responsibility and remain neutral.
Helpers	Moderate	Show situational control depending on peer pressure.

Students with a high level of internality are less likely to be victimized and more likely to act as defenders. Those with low internality are more susceptible to external influences and peer manipulation, making them vulnerable to becoming either victims or passive observers.

School Anxiety Data from the Phillips School Anxiety Test showed that victims and observers exhibited the highest levels of school-related anxiety. Their anxiety primarily stemmed from fear of peer evaluation, low social status, and emotional instability.

Table 4
Anxiety Levels among Bullying Participants

Role	Anxiety Level	Dominant Type of Anxiety
Victims	High	Fear of failure, social rejection, and evaluation.
Observers	High	Moral tension from witnessing aggression but remaining silent.
Helpers	Moderate	Anxiety from peer expectations and group pressure.
Bullies	Low	Confidence and dominance in peer interactions.
Defenders	Low	Stable self-esteem and positive coping strategies.

The overall correlation between school anxiety and victimization was significant ($r = 0.58, p < 0.01$). This shows that increased anxiety is a strong predictor of passivity and fear in the face of bullying.

Age and Gender Comparisons When comparing age groups, the study revealed that:

- Among younger adolescents (12–13 years), there were more victims and observers, and aggressive acts were mostly verbal.
- Among older adolescents (14–16 years), the number of initiators and helpers increased, and aggression became more intentional and organized.

Gender differences were also observed:

- Boys were more involved in direct physical bullying and leadership roles in aggression.
- Girls were more prone to indirect and social bullying, such as gossip and exclusion.

These patterns reflect the influence of gender socialization on the expression of aggression and moral behavior (14).

Correlation Matrix of Key Variables The statistical analysis established the following significant correlations between measured variables:

Table 5
Correlation between psychological variables and roles in bullying

Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level
Aggression ↔ Role in Bullying	0.71	$p < 0.01$
School Anxiety ↔ Victimization	0.58	$p < 0.01$
Internality ↔ Defending Behavior	0.65	$p < 0.01$
Group Cohesion ↔ Aggression	-0.62	$p < 0.01$
Age ↔ Type of Aggression	0.46	$p < 0.05$

The negative correlation between group cohesion and aggression indicates that strong interpersonal relationships act as a buffer against violence. Meanwhile, aggression and school anxiety are positively correlated with the frequency and severity of bullying.

General Discussion of Results The analysis of the collected data demonstrates that the interpersonal structure of the classroom group plays a decisive role in determining both the frequency and forms of bullying that appear within the educational environment. Bullying is not a random phenomenon but rather a systematic social process supported by group norms, peer expectations, and the emotional climate of the class.

The study confirmed that the moral and psychological atmosphere of the group directly affects the personal well-being of its members. Where cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect dominate, bullying rarely occurs; but where competition, neglect, and social inequality exist, aggression becomes normalized.

The correlation analyses revealed clear connections between key variables:

- A high level of aggression corresponds to a greater likelihood of becoming an aggressor or helper.
- High anxiety correlates with victimization and passivity.
- Strong internal control and group cohesion correlate negatively with bullying, demonstrating their protective function.

These patterns confirm the central hypothesis of the study—that individual psychological factors and group dynamics together determine the prevalence and persistence of bullying among adolescents.

The Role of Observers and the "Silent Majority" The data show that observers form the largest portion of participants in bullying episodes. Although they may disapprove of aggression, many refrain from intervention due to fear of retaliation or social exclusion. This finding supports the bystander-effect model described by Darley and Latané (1968), according to which personal responsibility is diffused among group members (33).

Observers experience moral dissonance: they recognize injustice but remain passive. Over time, this passivity leads to emotional exhaustion, guilt, and moral indifference. Developing programs that transform observers into defenders is therefore a crucial direction for preventive education (20).

Comparative Findings Age Differences Younger adolescents (12–13) show heightened emotional reactivity, fear of peer judgment, and dependence on adult approval. Their bullying is mostly spontaneous, verbal, and situational.

Older adolescents (14–16) display more deliberate and organized bullying behavior linked to social hierarchy and peer recognition. They are more capable of self-reflection but also more inclined to justify aggression as "normal competition." The maturity of moral judgment grows with age, yet the social need for prestige and dominance intensifies, creating ambivalent tendencies within the same group.

Gender Differences Gender analysis confirmed that boys more frequently exhibit direct physical aggression, whereas girls use indirect relational aggression (14). Boys tend to assert control through confrontation, while girls influence social status through exclusion or rumor. Nevertheless, in both cases, the underlying psychological mechanisms—dominance, insecurity, and emotional regulation—are similar.

Discussion

Psychological Interpretation The study results align with the social learning theory of A. Bandura (1977) and the frustration-aggression hypothesis of Dollard et al. (1939). Aggressive behavior is not innate but learned through observation and reinforcement (34; 55). Children imitate behaviors that yield social rewards—attention, status, or fear-based respect.

The phenomenon of dehumanization—seeing the victim as inferior or deserving of punishment—reduces empathy and moral inhibition. This process transforms aggression into a socially acceptable or even admired behavior within certain groups. Bullying can thus be regarded as a form of social adaptation, albeit a destructive one, that allows individuals to gain influence in a morally distorted environment. This interpretation underscores the need to reform the moral and emotional culture of schools, not merely to punish offenders.

Pedagogical and Psychological Implications The outcomes of the study have important implications for educational psychology and school management. To prevent and reduce bullying, it is essential to cultivate a psychologically safe learning environment through a system of preventive and corrective actions.

Key pedagogical measures include:

1. **Teacher training and supervision.** Educators must be prepared to recognize early signs of aggression and respond promptly using evidence-based strategies (8).
2. **Parental involvement.** Parents should receive guidance on supporting their children emotionally and modeling non-violent communication at home (15).

3. **Peer-mediation and student leadership programs.** These initiatives empower students to resolve conflicts constructively and promote defender behavior (12).
4. **Incorporation of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) into the curriculum.** SEL fosters empathy, self-regulation, and ethical decision-making (13).
5. **Regular psychological monitoring.** Periodic assessments of group cohesion, anxiety, and aggression help identify at-risk students before problems escalate (11).
6. **Anonymous reporting and counseling systems.** Such mechanisms encourage victims and witnesses to seek help without fear of stigmatization (10).

Implementation of these measures will help establish a culture of empathy, cooperation, and respect, which is the foundation of school safety.

Practical Recommendations

1. Develop institutional anti-bullying policies that clearly define responsibilities of teachers, students, and parents.
2. Introduce preventive education modules focusing on communication ethics, conflict resolution, and digital literacy (9).
3. Create multidisciplinary support teams composed of psychologists, social workers, and teachers to address cases individually.
4. Use positive reinforcement to strengthen prosocial behavior and decrease the social value of aggression (7).
5. Promote restorative practices—dialogues, mediation, and reconciliation—instead of purely punitive measures.
6. Organize seminars and workshops that raise awareness of the psychological harm caused by bullying.
7. Engage media and online platforms to spread constructive narratives about kindness, inclusion, and peer solidarity (30).

Through these initiatives, schools can systematically build an inclusive and emotionally supportive environment where aggression loses its social function.

Limitations and Future Research Directions While the present study provides a comprehensive view of bullying among adolescents in Tashkent schools, several limitations should be acknowledged:

- The sample was limited to urban institutions; future research should include rural schools for comparison (9).
- Self-report questionnaires may contain social-desirability bias; observational and longitudinal methods are recommended.
- Cultural variables specific to Uzbekistan require deeper analysis within cross-cultural frameworks.

Future research should explore digital bullying dynamics, parental influence, and intervention effectiveness through experimental programs (10; 28; 29).

Methods

Forms and Manifestations of Bullying

Bullying, as a social and psychological phenomenon, manifests in diverse forms of aggressive behavior—both direct and indirect, verbal and nonverbal, physical and psychological in nature. According to the typology proposed by D. Olweus (1993), bullying is typically divided into the following main forms:

- **Physical Bullying** – includes physical assaults, hitting, pushing, tripping, kicking, or damaging the victim's belongings (54).
- **Verbal Bullying** – expressed through name-calling, teasing, mocking, humiliating nicknames, threats, or insults (36).
- **Social (Relational) Bullying** – involves deliberate exclusion, spreading rumors, manipulating friendships, or damaging social reputation (48).
- **Psychological Bullying** – encompasses intimidation, emotional pressure, or creating a hostile emotional climate through fear or manipulation (5).
- **Cyberbullying** – refers to harassment or humiliation carried out through the Internet, mobile phones, or social media platforms (e.g., sending threats, sharing personal photos, or spreading false information) (10; 49).

Each of these forms can cause significant psychological trauma and negatively affect the social climate of the educational environment (3; 11). Indirect forms of bullying are often more dangerous because they are less visible to adults and therefore more difficult to detect or prevent (2; 6). For example, social exclusion or gossip can persist for months, gradually destroying a child's self-esteem and emotional well-being without leaving physical evidence (19).

Cyberbullying deserves particular attention due to its specific characteristics—anonymity, publicity, and permanence— which make it especially harmful (49). Harmful content can spread widely and remain online indefinitely, leading victims to experience constant anxiety and fear that humiliating materials will be seen by others at any time (10).

Main Participants and Their Psychological Characteristics

Bullying represents a social system involving several participants with interrelated and interdependent roles. As noted by Salmivalli (1999), a bullying episode generally includes the following participants (50):

- **Initiators (Bullies)** – those who start and lead aggressive behaviors.

- Helpers (Assistants) – individuals who support or assist the bully directly or indirectly.
- Defenders (Protectors) – students who stand up for the victim or oppose bullying.
- Victims (Targets) – those who suffer from repeated acts of aggression.
- Observers (Bystanders) – individuals who witness bullying but do not intervene (20).

This social structure influences the moral climate, power distribution, and peer relationships within a group (27).

1. **Bullies (Initiators)** Bullies often exhibit aggressive behavioral tendencies, low empathy, and a strong desire for dominance (5). They tend to occupy high social status within their peer groups and display charismatic or manipulative leadership traits (19). Their behavior is frequently reinforced by peer approval and lack of punishment, which perpetuates aggression (36).

Psychological characteristics of bullies include:

- Low level of self-reflection;
- Difficulty in self-control;
- Positive attitudes toward aggression;
- High external motivation for dominance;
- A lack of internal moral restraint.

Many bullies have experienced violence or neglect in their own family environments (4). As a result, aggression becomes a learned behavior and a means of expressing unresolved anger or frustration.

2. **Helpers(Assistants)**Helpers play a significant role in maintaining the bullying dynamic. They do not initiate aggression but actively support or reinforce it by laughing, encouraging, or helping to organize the bullying. This group ensures that the bully's behavior gains social validation, creating a "spectator effect" that strengthens the aggressor's influence (20).
3. **Victims (Targets)** Victims of bullying often have distinct emotional and behavioral traits. They may exhibit increased anxiety, low self-esteem, and insecurity in communication. They usually struggle with assertiveness and have difficulty defending their boundaries. According to Olweus (1993), victims are often introverted, obedient, and emotionally sensitive individuals who may appear weaker than their peers (54). They sometimes internalize feelings of guilt and shame, blaming themselves for being bullied.

The long-term consequences for victims include:

- Social isolation;
- Depression and emotional instability (3);
- Fear of attending school (school phobia);
- Reduced academic performance;

- Post-traumatic stress symptoms.

In severe cases, prolonged victimization can lead to self-harm or suicidal ideation (11).

4. **Defenders (Protectors)** Defenders are those who oppose bullying and attempt to protect the victim. They usually have high empathy, moral sensitivity, and a strong sense of justice. These students have developed internal motivation to help others and often act as moral leaders within their groups (42).

Psychological characteristics of defenders:

- High internality (personal responsibility for actions);
- Low levels of aggression and irritability;
- High level of emotional intelligence;
- Stable self-esteem;
- Positive social skills and communication skills.

5. **Observers (Bystanders)** Observers represent the largest group of participants in bullying situations. Their reactions range from passive observation to active reinforcement of bully behavior. Some may laugh or support the aggressor, while others empathize with the victim but remain silent (20).

Observer behavior is often determined by group norms and fear of social exclusion. They experience cognitive dissonance – they understand that bullying is wrong, but fear becoming the next target if they intervene. This leads to moral disengagement, where silence and inaction indirectly support the continuation of aggression (33).

Psychological Mechanisms and Causes of Bullying Bullying does not occur spontaneously; it arises from a combination of individual, group, and situational factors. Among the key psychological mechanisms of bullying, the following are:

1. **Power imbalance** – one participant exerts psychological or physical dominance over another (54).
2. **Frustration and aggression** – aggression becomes a form of releasing accumulated negative emotions (34).
3. **Social learning** – aggression is learned by observing and imitating others' behavior (55).
4. **Dehumanization** – perceiving the victim as inferior, which reduces empathy and moral restraint (43).
5. **Conformity with groups** - individuals follow group norms even when they contradict personal morals (38).
6. **Bystander effect** - diffusion of responsibility discourages individuals from acting against injustice (33).

Sociocultural factors such as family violence, lack of empathy education, competitive school climates, and the influence of media also contribute to the normalization of aggression (4). The presence of hierarchical structures in peer groups reinforces dominance behavior. Students who achieve high social status through intimidation are often perceived as "strong," perpetuating the problem (36).

Ethical approval, Informed consent The study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Social Sciences and Education, Tashkent International University, Uzbekistan (Approval No.: AP-EC-09/2025). All procedures involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and in compliance with the Declaration of Helsinki and relevant national regulations. As the participants were minors, written informed consent was obtained from their parents and legal guardians prior to participation in the study. In addition, assent was obtained from all participating students. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the school administration.

Conclusion

Bullying represents a multi-layered socio-psychological phenomenon that undermines both individual well-being and institutional integrity. The findings of this study demonstrate that:

- Aggression and external control orientation increase the probability of becoming a bully or accomplice.
- High anxiety and low self-esteem increase the risk of victimization.
- Internal responsibility, empathy, and group cohesion act as protective factors.

Hence, cultivating psychological safety within the educational system is not merely a protective measure but a prerequisite for moral and emotional development. Preventing bullying requires cooperation among teachers, parents, and students aimed at building communities grounded in empathy, justice, and mutual respect. The practical recommendations developed in this research may serve as methodological guidelines for school psychologists, teachers, and policymakers in creating safe and supportive educational spaces (8; 30).

Declarations

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Author contributions statement

Nozima Mullabaeva, Ozoda Khodirova and Kamoliddin Kadirov were the initiators of the proposed concept and made significant contributions to the final manuscript. Axmedov Muzaffar and Murodov Adham were responsible for the development of the theoretical framework and provided support in data collection. Zoirkhuja Ulmaskhujayev, Nargiza Norkulova, Sarvar Nishanov and Kamoliddin Kadirov conducted a thorough review of the final manuscript, played a role in the conceptual development, and made valuable additions. All authors made substantial contributions to the article and have given their approval for the submitted version.

Data Sharing Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author.

Ethical Disclosure

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines. All participants provided informed consent before participating in the study. Any potential conflicts of interest or ethical concerns have been disclosed accordingly.

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