FEMALE ADOLESCENT'S UNDERSTANDING AND PERCEPTION OF RELATIONAL BULLYING BEHAVIOUR AMONG PEERS

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ABSTRACT

Relational bullying is a type of bullying that harm others by purposeful manipulation and damaging of their peer relationship. Although it is a type of bullying that is prevalent among adolescents, it has not been particularly studied in the context of Malaysian adolescents, despite growing number of empirical studies on bullying behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia. This qualitative study aims to understand the way female adolescents perceive and experience relational bullying among their peers. Five female students age between 13 to 15 years old was selected to participate in semi-structured interview individually. Five distinct themes were identified: a) defining relational bullying, b) normalisation of relational bullying, c) negative impacts of relational bullying, d) predisposed influenced to relational bullying behaviour and e) coping with relational bullying. Based on these themes, The Adolescent's Relational Bullying Model was developed to further explained its interconnectivity. This study contributes to understanding of relational bullying and offers deeper insights into bullying behaviour among school-going adolescents in Malaysia.

Keywords: bullying, relational bullying, adolescents, case study, secondary school

INTRODUCTION

Bullying in schools is a widespread problem that can negatively impact kids' wellbeing in significant and long-lasting ways. Bullying is defined as persistently hostile behaviour with the intention of causing harm to others. Essentially, the main defining criteria of bullying are: 1) an action that is done with the intention to harm others, 2) carried out constantly over time and 3) the existence of power imbalance such that the victim cannot easily defend themselves (Olweus, 1978). It can take many different forms, such as verbal, physical, and cyberbullying. While physical and verbal bullying are more overt, there is a less talked about form of bullying that is equally damaging, known as Relational Bullying or Relational Aggression. This form of bullying often goes unnoticed by adults but can be particularly damaging due to its covert nature and psychological impact. It is also not discussed much in context of adolescents in Malaysian's school. To date, there has not been any predominant research for relational bullying among Malaysian adolescents.

Scholastically, relational bullying is described as a form of aggression that destroy social standing and relationship between two or more persons through systematic manipulation such as spreading rumours, gossiping, exclusion, making mean comments of their peers, and threatening to leave a friendship (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). It is a phenomenon that is more apparent in female adolescents than male adolescent. In fact, relational bullying was at first studied because it was hypothesized that male and female aggress differently, with male exhibiting more physical and verbal

aggression while female prefer discreet methods. However, later studies on relational aggression found that male adolescents are just as relationally aggressive as female adolescents. Researchers have discovered, for instance, that females are rated as relationally aggressive by both instructors and classmates (Hart et al., 1998; Kupersmidt et al., 2000). Moreover, some studies even found that adolescents male are more prone to relational bullying than adolescents female (Hawley et al., 2008; Salmivalli et al., 2000). In a broader context, little gender differences were found in a meta-analysis of the larger phenomenon of aggressiveness, which concluded that "indirect aggression is not a 'female form' of aggression" (Card et al., 2008). Nevertheless, interpersonal factor such as self-perception social intelligence where it was found that females who reported higher levels of social intelligence tend to engage more frequently in relational aggression as compared to male and females with low levels of social intelligence (Loflin & Barry, 2016). Adolescent female also perceived friendships as important, hence the manipulation of friendships among adolescent female are more damaging (Coyne et al., 2006).

Additionally, a broader variable such as cultural principle should be considered in determining the prevalence of relational bullying among peers across different society. Relational bullying is likely to occur more in individualistic society as they value external success such as social recognition and power more than individual in collectivistic society (Feldman & Rosenthal, 1991). Adolescents from collectivist society place higher significant on social harmony thus conflict or aggressive actions that separate them from the group will likely be avoided. However, if conflict does happen, the use of social exclusion and hurting someone's image will be powerful enough to destroy the victim (Smith et al., 2016). It causes greater negative impacts in term of social well-being of the targeted adolescents.

There were 76 empirical studies on relational bullying conducted between 2010 and 2022. 71% of the studies were conducted in America and Europe (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2023). Consequently, these continents are also more advance in terms of interventions and anti-bullying policy for relational bullying at school (Leff et al., 2010). Thus, the students included in the studies and development of the policy are more aware of relational bullying behaviours as compared to their counterparts in collectivist counties. Studies that were done in Asian countries typically focused on East Asia (China, Japan and Korea), collectivist countries that adopt Confucian ethical philosophy at its core, which means these countries reflect strong social connections and harmony, a slightly different definition of collectivism south east Asia countries such as Malaysia.

Relational bullying behaviour is often viewed as a less severe form of bullying behaviour with little impact to both victim and the aggressor (Crothers et al., 2007). Regrettably, this notion deters the needed attention to consider it as a debilitating behaviour among adolescents. Various studies pointed out relational bullying as hidden behaviour to a more damaging phenomenon at home. Adolescents who are prone to engaging in relational bullying behaviour as the preparator have higher association with childhood psychological abuse (T. Li et al., 2023). Adolescents who perceive their parent's parenting style as authoritarian tend to get involve in relational bullying behaviour (Pirc et al., 2023). Parents who are extremely strict and distant in their parenting style can contribute to low emotional regulation among adolescents. Low emotional regulation is associated with low moral disengagement (Riaz et al., 2019) and low cognitive empathy (Platt et al., 2022), thus higher probability to engage in relational bullying behaviour. Perpetrators of relational bullying among adolescents will rationalise their bullying behaviour to fit their definition of normal behaviour. Additionally, relational bullying behaviour may also predict disturbing personality within the perpetrator such as high narcissism and high psychopathy (Riaz et al., 2019, 2021).

There is an immense need to study and understand relational bullying among adolescents because of its short-term and long-term effects on the mental, emotional and social wellbeing of adolescents. Victims of relational bullying was predicted to have an increase of social anxiety and heightened if the relational bullying is not resolved over time, especially in early adolescence (Zhou et al., 2024). Anxiety has also been strongly associated with being a bullying victim at school among Malaysian students (Hafizuddin Taufik Ramli et al., 2022). With the lack of understanding and knowledge of relational bullying, victim of relational bullying chose to stay silent and suppress their emotional turmoil, for fear of being called dramatic and weak. Overtime, as they become adult, this will cause avoidant and paranoid personality disorders (Fernández-Martínez et al., 2022). Furthermore, relational bullying may also be the hindering factor for bullying bystander effect

because of peer pressure. A study done by Nik Sarina et al., (2024) found that some students felt pressured to engage in bullying within their friendship groups to feel included and demonstrate fidelity to the group. It inadvertently prevents bullying bystanders to stand up for the victims, consequently adding layers to the bullying incidents.

Historically, the study of phenomenon among adolescents were typically concluded from the point of view of adults surrounding the adolescents, such as their caregivers and teachers. However, it is essential to study phenomenon among adolescents through their perspectives because it usually offer a contradicting perception than what is generalized by adults. For example, adults tend to express less negative view of relational bullying as compared to physical bullying (Swit, 2021) because relational bullying causes concealed harm whilst physical bullying is overt in nature. Furthermore, relational bullying is a term Malaysian student almost never heard of throughout their adolescence life even though they most probably have experience it. Thus, it is important that we understand the way adolescents perceive relational bullying to gauge the way they response to such behaviour. It is also imperative to considers adolescent's insight to assemble a more inclusive and effective intervention in dealing with bullying behaviour among adolescent at school. As such, the main objective of this study is to comprehend the understanding and perception of relational bullying at school among female adolescents. Specifically, this study aims to investigate the female adolescent define relational bulling, identifying factors that hinder the way relational bulling is addressed and recognizing factors that may help female adolescents to cope with relational bullying behaviour among peers. Going forward, it is hope that this study will extend a new branch into research of bullying among adolescent in Malaysia.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research method with a case study approach is adopted to achieve the objectives of this study. Case study approach allows the researcher to understand and find deeper meaning to a certain phenomenon and experience in its real-life context. The current study used a semi-structured interviewing technique, with an interview schedule consisting of several prompt questions that followed research questions. Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher flexibility in terms of how and when to ask questions, as well as the freedom to deviate from the prearranged topic and explore unanticipated themes (McIntosh & Morse, 2015).

Present research utilised purposive sampling to recruit participants. The participants are between the ages of 13 to 15 years all female students. They were recruited based on their experience of witnessing or involvement in relational bullying behaviour among peers in their school. The researcher did not solely focus only on students who experienced the relational aggression behaviour 1st hand (as victim or perpetrator) in order to develop a comprehensive picture of student's understandings of relational bullying. The researcher also decided to recruit participants with various ethnicity, academic achievements and roles in school to develop a thorough understanding of student's perception.

All participants were recruited from one all-girls school in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Permission was requested from the Education Policy Planning and Research Division of Malaysian Ministry of Education through a website called Eras 2.0 (Education Research Application System). Upon receiving the permission, the researcher informed school's principal of the intention to invite students as participants in the study. Each targeted students were invited and asked beforehand of their willingness to participate in the study. Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity and confidentiality. The participants consist of students between the age of 13 to 15 years old and different

The researcher prepared a thorough consent form for each participant. As an added precaution, the researcher also provided an information letter to participant's legal guardian that is to be signed by the guardian. Guardian's acknowledgement is important to aid in supporting participant's mental wellbeing in the duration of partaking in the study. Signed consent letter is returned on the day of the scheduled interview. The researcher and the participants again discussed the essence of the inform consent form to ensure thorough understanding of their rights and sought

final decision to participate. As the topic discussed in the interview may be a sensitive topic for some of the participants, the researcher made sure each participant is guaranteed of their confidentiality. The researcher also took the time in building rapport with each to participant to eliminate the sense of power imbalance between participants and researcher which is a crucial component of qualitative research (Prior, 2018).

As a novice researcher in qualitative research, developing a refined interview protocol require extensive amount of time, commitment, and experiences. Therefore, to enhance the development and refinement of interview protocols in the new era of research fields, it is suggested for a beginner researcher to use Large Language Model tools (J. Parker et al., 2023) in the process of refining interview protocol. Considering participants who came from different cultural and language background, the researcher utilises in inquiry-based conversation in interview protocol refinement framework developed by Castillo-Montoya (2016). Inquiry-based conversation considers the researcher's understanding of the usual behaviour, societal standard, and routines of participants to word the interview questions.

Nevertheless, interview protocol and interview questions suggested by LLM tools lack human intuition and insight. Thus, discussion with academic advisors and advisors from Education Policy Planning and Research Division Ministry of Education Malaysia was needed in the final stage of constructing interview protocol. Thereafter, interview questions are finalised with consideration to adolescent's sensitivity and mental capacity. Final interview questions answer the following research question: *What do female students understand about relational aggression at school?*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is analyse using reflexive thematic analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis is an approach by (Braun & Clarke, 2019) that identify and analyse a whole set of data with emphasis on the researcher's knowledge and intepretation. In a way, reflexive thematic analysis require the researcher to engage their thoughts throughout the data set. The process involved repeated reading of the interview transcirpts. Then, finding, labelling, groupping, and finalizing the codes into themes. Upon accumulating relevant themes, the researcher will define and name each theme accordingly. Following thematic analysis, five themes were identified: defining relational bullying, normalisation of relational bullying, negative impact of relational bullying, predisposed influneced of relational bullying behaviour and coping with relational bullying. These themes then forme a multi-layered framework model titled The Adolescent's Relational Bullying Model. erstanding and perception of relational bullying among peers. The model is built in such a way that the themes are interconnected and within each other's.
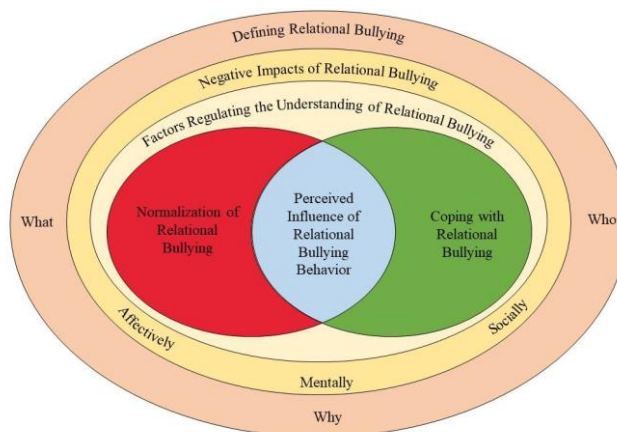
Figure 3.1: The Adolescent's Relational Bullying Model

Defining Relational Bullying

In general term, bullying is defined as repeated and intentional aggressive acts upon someone who has less or no power to defend themselves (Olweus, 1978). While this definition has been utilized widely in academia, laws, and anti-bullying policy worldwide, the criteria did not always correspond with the realities of adolescents' experience in bullying.

In this study, female adolescents steadily describe bullying as an action that causes harm to others and has an element of power imbalance between victims and perpetrators. However, the element of repetitive was not explicitly mentioned. In fact, it was a concept that was rarely included in participant's recount of their experiences or perception. This supported study done by Naylor et al., (2006) that found only 9% of adolescents include the element of repetition while defining bullying. As a matter of fact, a study done to analyzed teenager's perception of bullying based on their role as victim, aggressor or bystander found that none of the teenagers consider repetition to be important in defining bullying (Cuadrado-Gordillo, 2012). Additionally in Malaysia, the lack of profound criteria in defining bullying is not limited to adolescents alone. In a study done by (Junainah Mohd Isa et al., 2019), it was found that the majority of teachers perceived bullying as an act that involved imbalance of power. Furthermore, Ministry of Education Malaysia's anti-bullying guidelines defined bullying only as a purposeful act of damage against another person, leaving out any reference to other factors like power imbalance and repetition of aggressive actions. These discrepancies in describing bullying between adults and adolescents in Malaysia contribute to the lack of acknowledgement to relational bullying among adolescents. There is a massive lack of acknowledgement and research of relational bullying among adolescents in Malaysia thus far although a few studies have shown highest prevalence of verbal bullying among adolescents in Malaysia (Hassan et al., 2016; Hj. Yahya & Ahmad, 2012).

The prevalence of relational bullying among female adolescent were also highlighted among the participants. The study of relational aggression was initially to identify the type of aggression happening between females because it was assumed that female prefers more indirect form of aggression (Björkqvist et al., 1992). Later studies on relational bullying, however, revealed that gender-based prevalence is inconclusive. Some studies suggested that female are more relationally aggressive compared to female (Loflin & Barry, 2016), while other studies found that relational bullying is not a female form of aggression (Card et al., 2008). Current study found that female adolescents put higher emphasis on female as the group of adolescents that will most likely be engaged in relational bullying behaviour. It goes against a study by (Voulgaridou & Kokkinos, 2023) that found male adolescent are more relationally aggressive as compared to female adolescents. Nevertheless, current study employed qualitative method to gauge deeper understanding of relational bullying among female students by interviewing only female adolescents that studied in all-girls school. Girls perceived relational bullying as particularly harmful because the dynamic of friendships are more intimate and emphasise loyalty (Caravita et al., 2014). Thus, female adolescents tend to assume relational bullying as a threatening behaviour.

There are two types of relational aggression or relational bullying behaviour, owing its description to definition of aggression generally, known as proactive relational aggression or and reactive relational aggression. (Dodge & Coie, 1987). Both relational aggression types are found within experiences and perception of the participants. Jealousy, specifically friendship jealousy is highlighted as the main reason for their peers to engage in relational bullying behaviour. This coincides with studies associating jealousy with relational bullying behaviour among girls. The higher the level of friendship jealousy, the more relational bullying behaviour is exhibited between those peers (Kraft & Mayeux, 2018). Friendship jealousy describes unfavourable emotional, mental, and behavioural reactions brought on by one partner's actual or perceived interest in friendship with another person (J. G. Parker et al., 2016). The basic characteristic of friendship jealousy is the participation of a third peer, who is seen as a threat. Thus, relational bullying behaviours such as gossiping, social exclusion and spreading rumours are linked to friendship jealousy. It can be classified as reactive relational aggression because the preparator felt threatened by the perceived fragility of their friendships.

Jealousy can also originate from a perceived threat to their social standings amongst peers. Peer acceptance is crucial to adolescents' social life because it gives them a feeling of acceptance, and being popular plays a big role in the individual-group social process. Being popular and accepted has an important role in peer interaction, hence these two criteria are being actively pursued and guarded by adolescents (Bukowski, 2011).

Consequently, the popularity goal and social status insecurity were highly associated with proactive relational bullying behaviour (Košir et al., 2022; Y. Li & Wright, 2014). As exemplified, the motives behind relational bullying behaviour among female adolescents as perceived by female adolescents is friendship jealousy and social status insecurity.

Incongruity Between Normalisation and Impact of Relational Bullying

Participants are aware that relational bullying can cause distress to mental, emotional, and social well-being. They were able to use language that describe emotional and social anguish. it supports prior research that has emphasized the harmful impact of relational bullying on the mental health and overall well-being of its victims (Arseneault et al., 2010). However, it was also contrasted by their perception of relational bullying behaviour as being normal behaviour among teenagers. This perception seems to be emphasized by the way their parents and teachers view relational bullying behaviour as less harmful form of aggression.

Contrary to popular assumption, relational bullying behaviour is more detrimental to adolescents as compared to physical bullying (Baldry & Winkel, 2004). Adolescents that are victimized in relational bullying suffered higher levels of psychological distress and emotional well-being (Thomas et al., 2016). On top of that, relational bullying is particularly more damaging because it intimidates adolescent's friendships and relation with their peers. The increased demand for close relationships among adolescents throughout adolescence phase makes friendships more significant during this time and the most important developmental change during this phase is an increasing emphasis on trust in relations (Darling et al., 2008). Consequently, when trust is compromised through relational bullying behaviour between friends or peers, it also jeopardized adolescent's self-esteem (Sugiarti et al., 2022). In the long run, adolescent will choose to withdraw themselves from social activities. This is in line with participant's description of the way friendships factor may aggravate the emotional, mental and social anguish of relational bullying as compared to relational bullying behaviour done by mere peers.

Conventionally, relational bullying has been associated with increase in anxiety manifestation (Zhou et al., 2024), especially if the victim has been exposed to relational bullying behaviour for long periods of time. Other than that, relational bullying can cause substance abuse, negative emotional regulations, declining academic achievements, and poorer health related quality of life to both victim and perpetrator in relational bullying phenomenon. (Chester et al., n.d.; Espelage et al., 2018; Marshall et al., 2015).

Despite numerous negative impacts of relational bullying experienced and perceived by participants, they expressed an indication of normative perception toward the behaviour too. Oftentimes, the way they describe relational bullying behaviour minimised its negative outcome. It was further normalised by their interpretation of adult's attitude toward relational bullying behaviour, regard it as 'normal friend problem' and does not deserve more attention. This is in line with a study done to investigate teacher's and parent's perception of relational aggression by Swit et al (2018) and Boulton et al (2014). Parents and teachers perceive any kind of concealed bullying as less harmful to adolescent, therefor, less intervention is needed.

The normalisation of relational bullying despite its negative impacts is a factor that hinder the way relational bullying is handle among adolescents, predominantly when it involves nonchalant attitude by teachers at school. When teachers are not acknowledging relational bullying as harmful bullying behaviour, it deters help-seeking behaviour among students (Blomqvist et al., 2020), inevitably perpetuate the bullying behaviour among adolescent students.

Mitigating Relational Bullying

Generally, relational bullying, similar to any kind of aggression is learned through social processes, as proposed by Albert Bandura in social learning theory (Huesmann, 2018). Aggressive behaviours are learned by individuals through reinforcement, imitation, and observation of other individuals in social activities. The theory suggest that aggressive behaviour is not only learn directly, but also pick up upon social cues related to aggressive behaviour such as interactions in a group of peers, familial interactions and behaviour and media. Aggressive behaviour that is acceptable and even rewarded will be perceived as behaviour that bring them closer to being accepted in social settings. Nevertheless, this theory is also an important element to help adolescents learned positive attributed behaviour in combating relational behaviour.

Participants noted down peers and friends as the factor that they perceive as an influence on reasons adolescents engaged in relational bullying behaviour. It is also apparent in the way they describe experiences of relational bullying behaviour in their friendship group. Actions such as social exclusion and controlling friendship relation is common among friends' group with at least one individual that has the power to influence social activities. This in line with a study done by (Correia et al., 2022), which state highly relationally aggressive girls can easily adapt to social context in peers' interaction. Moreover, relational bullying has been associated with building and maintaining friendship among adolescents (Thornberg, 2015).

Another factor of influence highlighted by participants was family's attitude towards their friendship problems. Participants indicate apathetic advice and dismissal of issues by parents regarding friendship as the way adolescents learn to behave in peer relationships. Familial relationships provide a core foundation in which social attitudes and abilities evolve. Attachment to parents shapes the way adolescents experience and perceive interpersonal relationships outside of family context (Bowlby, 1979). Explicitly, adolescents who learn maladaptive communication skills from their family members, either directly or indirectly, lack the skills and tools to cope with friendship problems healthily, thus exhibiting relationally aggressive behaviour among their peers.

Expanding on social learning theory, Albert Bandura developed social cognitive theory in 1986. Social cognitive theory posits the possibilities for individual to learn behaviour through various direct and indirect means other than observation. It also acknowledges the importance of environmental factor such as mass communication as the factor that influence the way individual learn behaviours (Bandura, 1998). Participants note social media and mass communication as means for learning relationally aggressive behaviour among peers. The animosity of social media worsens relational bullying outside of school compound and strengthened the reinforcements of the behaviour because of the lack of consequences to preparators. Relational bullying, overlapping with cyberbullying behaviour becomes a convenient way for adolescents to socially exclude, tarnish and spread rumours. Additionally, these behaviours are normalised and learned from media modelling means. For example, television shows and movies that depict mean interactions between adolescents and bring connotations that is harmless.

Social and environment influences play an enormous role in shaping negative social interactions and behaviours among adolescents. However, it is also an indispensable component in helping adolescent to mitigate relational bullying among their peers. When asked how each participant would cope to being relationally bullied, most participant indicate their desire to rebuild and repair their friendships with perpetrator, either by confronting them or initially distancing themselves before confronting. However, if repairing friendships does not work, most participants mentioned that they will move on and find other friends. This was a common choice of course of action among participants that were never explicitly relationally bullied and evidently self-reliant.

Nevertheless, all participants agree that parents' positive attitude towards their experience with relational bullying will help them cope with the negative impact. Family relationships that are characterised as warm, affectionate, embrace open communications and support lowers the levels of bullying victimisation (Nocentini et al., 2019). In a broader context, familial interaction is the foundation to social interaction in a wider social context. Parents that practice authoritative parenting styles stimulate more proactive behaviour in their children. They are more confident and can develop growth mindset (Nie et al., 2022). These traits are important in building and maintaining healthy social interactions and coping with stressful events. As mentioned, adolescents rarely inform their

parents of relational bullying incidents because it is often regard as normal adolescents' phenomenon. Thus, parents support requires as little as awareness and acknowledgment of relational bullying phenomenon and its harmful consequences.

RESEARCH IMPLICATION

As school counsellor, one of their core responsibilities is to ensure good mental and emotional well-being of students in their respective school. In order to perform that responsibility reliably, school counsellor must be aware of issues happening within adolescents in current time. Various interventions have been laid out, localised to Malaysia's students at school. However, this study highlighted diverging perceptions and understanding of bullying between students and teachers. Students are more aware of the socially and emotionally distressing situation happening among students, while teachers lack awareness of the behaviour. This led to anti-bullying policies and guidelines that will not cater to adolescent's experience. Various studies highlighted the important of understanding phenomenon that is happening to adolescents based on their level of perception, (Canty et al., 2016; Ey et al., 2019; Hellström et al., 2015; Ryan & Hurst, 2021) because their insights possibly provide more nuanced and overlooked factors that might improve the anti-bullying policies and guidelines to be more inclusive.

Relational bullying is not a new phenomenon happening to adolescent at school. However, due to the lack of acknowledgement and covert nature of this form of bullying, victims have little chance to express their emotional and mental anguish. Subsequently, trust issues among peers become one of the most prevalent negative effects of relational bullying. They may have been dismissed because their issues were deemed 'not harmful', resulting in them ruminating in their reclusiveness and further damaging their social skills.

Alternatively, if school counsellors are able to provide safe space for victims of relational bullying to open up, it may help them to improve their self-esteem. One of the principles for counselling is beneficence. This principle state that counsellor must contribute to the welfare of the client by executing good counselling, be proactive and prevent as much harm as possible. One of the way school counsellors can be proactive in mitigating relational bullying issues at school is by raising awareness and psychoeducation of relational bullying among students for teachers and school administration. This will ensure unified understanding and perception of relational bullying behaviour at school and lessen the difficulty in implementing effective interventions for relational bullying. Current guideline for anti-bullying in education institutes in Malaysia lacking inclusivity of relational form of bullying. By considering adolescent's voice in the development of anti-bullying guideline, it would ensure thorough interventions of bullying behaviour including the perpetrators, victims, bully-victim and bystanders.

Whole school approach in countering bullying that extend its effort to involve parents and caregiver have the potential to be more successful. The advocation and education about relational bullying should be spread to parents and caregivers too as it may facilitate better parental style. Parental style plays an important role in influencing adolescent's emotional, mental, and social well-being.

Considering a collectivist culture of Malaysia, relational bullying is often rampant and much more covert as compared to recognition of relational bullying in individualist culture (Long & Li, 2020; Smith & Robinson, 2019). By challenging the normative notion of relational bullying behaviour among adolescent, it will jumpstart a deeper conversation of factors affecting relational bullying and its influence on social overall. Relational bullying behaviour is not limited to adolescents only. It is a known phenomenon that is happening among adults too, in romantic relationships and among colleagues. By understanding and intervening factors prompting relational bullying in adolescent, it will facilitate in raising a mentally and socially esteemed adult.

LIMITATION

This study aims to understand female students' perception of relational bullying behaviour at one all-girls school in urban city of Kuala Lumpur. Hence, the findings from this study generally represent the view from a group of adolescents in urban city. It may reflect less on the opinion about relational bullying of adolescents from rural area. The participants only consist of female students from the age of 13 to 15 years old. Additionally, this study only utilizes five participants for data collection through semi-structured interview. Participants are chosen through purposive sampling, where participants were chosen based on their proximity to relational bullying behaviour and age group. Therefore, the embodiment of the findings only represent understanding from female adolescent from a limited age of group. Therefore, the findings from this study depend highly on transparency of inputs willingly shared by the participants. In conclusion, this study does not generally represent over-all population of adolescents facing relational bullying at school in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

Despite its prevalent among adolescents in Malaysia, relational bullying is still lacking in nationwide recognition. Although there has been an increase in research of bullying behaviour among adolescents in Malaysia, there is barely a mention of relation al bullying behaviour and its harmful consequences. Efforts in the form anti bullying policy and guidelines are not explicit in combating this form of bullying. Furthermore, this study highlights the diverging definition of bullying, specifically relational bullying between adolescents and adult that may affect the effectiveness of current guideline. This study also accentuates factors that hinder the acknowledgment of relational bullying as harmful phenomenon among adolescents, such as the normalisation of relational bullying behaviour and parent and teacher's perception of relational bullying as a whole. Nevertheless, it provides insights into initiatives to navigate relational bullying behaviour at school, either as a deterrent or as an intervention. Consequently, it will help facilitate good physical, mental and social wellbeing of adolescents in Malaysia.

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