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Bullying victimization impact on mental health and attitude towards school among Kazakhstan's schoolchildren

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Introduction: Bullying in the school environment has been increasing in recent years. Bullying is referred to as repeated manifestations of aggressive behaviour towards persons of lower physical, social or psychological power. Such acts negatively affect mental health and behaviour, as well as the learning process of schoolchildren.

Purpose: In this study, we investigated the relationships between bullying victimization and depression, as well as the impact of school bullying on children's attitude towards school in a nationally representative sample of urban and rural adolescents.

Materials and Methods: The data were obtained from 2018 Health Behavior in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in Kazakhstan. A survey was conducted according to the HBSC international study protocol among adolescents aged 11–15 years ($n = 4\ 868$, 50.4% of boys, 54.7% of urban schoolchildren). Cross-sectional analysis from self-reported data on bullying at school, the 10-item CES-D (Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale; where depression used a cut of 10 or more), and liking school.

Results: One in five (20.1%) Kazakhstan adolescents (20.2% urban and 19.7% rural) reported being bullied at school at least once a month in the past couple of months and 20.4% of adolescents (21.1% urban and 19.6% rural) had depressive symptoms. Negative feelings about school (not liking it very much and not liking it at all) were reported by 13.3% of schoolchildren (17.7% urban and 7.9% rural). Significantly more adolescents who were bullied at school often had depressive symptoms than those who were not bullied: 30.2% vs. 18.1% ($p < 0.001$, $\chi^2 = 59.9$). Negative attitudes towards school were significantly more common among bullying victims compared to those who were not bullied at school: 35.4% vs. 17.7% ($p < 0.001$, $\chi^2 = 102.4$). Urban and rural schoolchildren showed the same patterns in relationships of bullying victimization with exhibiting depressive symptoms and not liking school.

Conclusions: Findings show that bullying in school environments is a serious public health issue that could lead to mental health problems for adolescents and negative impact on attitude towards school. There is a need for further development and implementation of school-based bullying prevention programs dedicated to the whole school community.

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