FROM CONCEPT TO MEASUREMENT: A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO DEVELOP SCALE FOR ASSESSING BULLYING VICTIMIZATION IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

Bullying victimization is widespread and considered a significant factor influencing mental health, academic performance, and social interactions among university students. The purpose of this study is to develop an indigenous scale for assessing the expression of bullying victimization among Pakistani university students. Initially, 37 items were elicited using open-ended interviews with 20 randomly selected university students (10 male and 10 female) aged 18 - 25 years. 10 professionals, including clinical psychologists, campus counselors, and research experts with at least five years of experience, validated the scale by evaluating item relevance and cultural appropriateness to ensure content validity. Based on their feedback, the scale was adjusted to a 32-item measure. A pilot study of 20 participants (10 male and 10 female) confirmed the viability of this self-report measure. The scale was further administered to 300 private university students (50% male, 50% female) between 18 and 25 of age (M= 22.41, SD= 2.81) to evaluate its psychometric properties. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) identified three components in the Bullying Victimization Scale (BVS): dominance and control, mocking, and aggression. The Bullying Victimization Scale (BVS) had high internal consistency (α=.93), split-half reliability (r= .86), and good construct validity, revealing a significant positive relationship between bullying victimization and perceived maternal over-protection (r =.12, p <.05). This study sheds light on cultural parenting practices in a collectivistic society by highlighting the connection between bullying victimization among Pakistani university students and parental over-protection. The Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU) is a useful tool for recognizing bullying victimization behaviors, which was created specifically for the Pakistani context.

INTRODUCTION

University life is a crucial period of development during which individuals manage newfound freedom, learn essential life skills, and adjust to constant shifts in their academic, social, and personal lives (Majoka et al., 2022). This period is often spent developing a distinct personality, building meaningful relationships, and preparing for future commitments within cultural and societal norms (Peel & Ward, 2022). Most students start their university life in their young adulthood, the period of life between the ages

range of 18 to 29 years and it signifies the transition from childhood to adulthood with a variety of biological, psychological, cognitive, and social changes (Berger et al., 2024). Individuals' workloads and responsibilities increase as they mature and enter adulthood, including education (from school and college to university), career, marriage, and family commitments (Higley, 2019). The conflict in adulthood, according to Erick Erikson's 1950 theory of psychosocial development, is "intimacy versus isolation." At this stage, the primary focus is on developing personal and intimate relationships with others.

In our culture, university students face a variety of hurdles, including academic pressures such as heavy coursework, severe deadlines, and competitive grading, as well as social difficulties such as peer pressure, a lack of social support, and adjusting to an independent lifestyle. These variables have a substantial impact on their mental health, and therefore as a result frequently resulting in mental health issues such as stress, anxiety, and depression (Irfan, 2021; Jibeen, 2015). Therefore, the need for students to receive counseling services for various developmental and mental health difficulties has become increasingly evident over time, as reported by many university counseling facilities (Negash et al., 2021). So, bullying victimization which is a serious issue in academic institutes increases these issues, resulting in increased stress, low self-esteem, and academic disengagement among university students. Victims frequently experience social anxiety, trouble building peer relationships, and feelings of isolation, emphasizing the critical importance of counseling services in offering support and interventions (Arseneault, 2017).

Bullying victimization is most commonly defined as being subjected to negative actions from one or more people repeatedly and over time, with a power imbalance between the perpetrator(s) and the victim (Moore et al., 2017). Bullying is an increasing concern in Pakistan, as well as in other countries, particularly among university students and young people, according to recent studies (Javed et al., 2023). Bullying can take several forms, including physical, verbal, relational and cyberbullying etc, and each affects people differently (Khalf, 2020). Physical bullying includes hostile activities including beating, shoving, or destroying someone's belongings (Casper, 2020). Taunting, name-calling, insults, and threats are all forms of verbal bullying that can cause mental distress (Hamidsyukrie et al., 2022). Cyberbullying is on the rise around the world and happens when people abuse others on social media, post harmful content, or send abusive communications and it is intimately linked to social media use such as sending inappropriate content or images and videos. (Mitsu & Dawood, 2022).

Problematic use increases both victimization and perpetration risks. Moreover, gender disparities in cyberbullying show that women are frequently more targeted of it, adding to stress and anxiety in them (Foody et al., 2019). Thus, any sort of bullying can have a major effect on university students and young adults, resulting in greater isolation, low self-esteem, and increased mental and emotional well-being (Stephen & Soni, 2023). As bullying remains a global problem that affects people of all ages, with differences between cultures and countries. It presents differently across genders and is most common among children, teenagers, and university students. Boys are frequently claimed to experience more physical types of bullying, such as striking or pushing, whereas girls are more likely to experience relational or verbal bullying, such as exclusion and rumor-spreading (Parveen al., 2023).

Another study also reveal that males are more likely to encounter physical bullying, but girls are more likely to experience relational and cyberbully, typically via social media (Gomes et al., 2022). Furthermore, while cyberbully affects both boys and girls, some research suggests that girls may be more sensitive to online harassment due to the relational nature of bullying strategies utilized online and electronic mediums (Campbell & Bouman, 2018). According to research, both offline and online forms of bullying are common, with cyberbully increasing as internet availability grows. Social bullying, including rumors and exclusion, is prevalent in university settings and can negatively impact mental health, including despair, anxiety, and even suicide ideation (Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz, 2023).. Furthermore, a poll in Pakistan reveals that adults and young people are increasingly victims of online harassment and cyberbullying, with impacts that continue beyond university years (Metin & Erbiçer, 2023).

Moreover, bullying has a strong, detrimental influence on students' mental health and academic performance, impairing their capacity to focus and excel in their studies (Nadeem & Usman, 2022). eyond academic failure; it can seriously harm students' self-esteem and cause anxiety and depression. University students who are bullied are more likely to suffer from emotional discomfort, which can lead to long-term mental health problems (Ibrahim et al., 2024). Furthermore, Parental over-protection, a type of parenting in which caregivers impose too much control and limit personal freedom, is especially prevalent in collectivist nations such as Pakistan.

Therefore, children who experience overcontrolling parenting style may find it more difficult to become independent and assertive, which increases their susceptibility to bullying victimization. After they grow up, overprotected individuals may find it difficult to defend themselves, set limits, or communicate with others, which makes them more likely to become the target of bullies (Mansab & Mohsin, 2012). Additionally, in Pakistan and other Asian collectivistic cultures, mothers tend to be more overprotective due to their central role in caregiving and upholding family honor. They closely monitor their children's social interactions, academic choices, and daily activities to ensure adherence to cultural and moral expectations. This heightened control often stems from concerns about societal judgment, safety, and maintaining the family's reputation. However, excessive maternal overprotection may unintentionally hinder children's independence and coping skills, making them more vulnerable to bullying victimization, as they may struggle with assertiveness and peer interactions (Siddiqui et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, where deep family ties and the concept of family honor impact parenting techniques, parents frequently intervene heavily in their children's lives, notably in friendships, academic pursuits, and lifestyle choices (Batool & Bond, 2014). This type of parenting seeks to safeguard children from perceived hazards while upholding family values. However, it may unintentionally impede children from learning important social and problem-solving abilities and necessary social skills, resulting in dependency and lowered self-esteem (Zulfiqar et al., 2024). In terms of

bullying victimization, parental over-protection may make young adults, particularly university students, more vulnerable. Overprotected individuals may lack the social boldness required to face bullying situations, making them easy targets for bullies (Nocentini et al., 2019). In Pakistan, where university students experience demands from both their families and the academic environment, overprotected students may struggle with boundaries, making them more prone to bullying, especially in highly competitive or group-dominated situations. This sensitivity, combined with inadequate exposure to independent problem-solving, increases the chance of being bullied (Javed et al., 2023).

Due to Pakistan's increasing sociolect-demographic circumstances, university students are more exposed to social and emotional issues that have an impact on their mental health and academic experiences (Lin et al., 2022). Existing scales from other countries do not adequately reflect the cultural complexity of bullying within Pakistani universities. This highlights the necessity for a culturally relevant assessment tool that incorporates these specific dynamics (Ashfaq et al., 2018; Saleem et al., 2017). Furthermore, there is little local research on bullying victimization in university settings, as much of the previous research focuses on aggression or stressors rather than what causes bullying or what leads to a person becoming a victim of bullying or the university population (Gardella et al., 2019). This study addresses the contextual gap in bullying research for Pakistani university students, focusing on its academic, psychological, social, and familial dimensions. It examines links between bullying victimization, parental over-protection. The primary aim of this study is to develop a valid and reliable indigenous scale (BVS) for measuring bullying victimization among university students.

Method
Research Design
A cross-sectional study was used to evaluate the link between perceived parental over-protection and bullying victimization among university students.

Sample & Participants
The study included 300 university students (50% males and 50% females) ages 18 to 25 (M = 22.41, SD = 2.81), selected from different departments at a

public institution in Pakistan. The sample consisted of Undergraduate (BA/BS) and Graduate (MA/MS) academic backgrounds.

Phase 1: Item Generation

The first phase was to examine the nature, experience, and manifestations of bullying victimization among university students in Pakistan. An open-ended approach was utilized to collect detailed narratives of individuals' experiences with bullying. Following university permission, private institutions in Lahore university students were interviewed. Hostelite university students were additionally approached to make the scale and data more applicable to the full population of Pakistani university students. All of them were given an outline of the study's goals and objectives.

After obtaining permission, a random sample of 20 university students (10 males and 10 females) aged 18 to 25 years was chosen for open-ended interviews. Participants were undergraduate and graduate students. PhD students and participants with physical disability and people taking medication for psychiatric issues i.e. anxiety were excluded from the study. The operational definition of bullying victimization was given, and participants were asked to describe particular features and situations they had encountered and ways through which they were bullied. Additional open-ended questions were used to explain uncertainties, and each interview lasted about 20-25 minutes.

Following the interviews, responses were transcribed and condensed into phrases that captured common themes and merged. The list of 37 items was revised by deleting confusing, ambiguous, and overlapping elements. Any ambiguous or redundant pieces were combined or altered to preserve their original meanings, and slang was excluded. This final collection of 37 questions was named Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU) and was ready for expert validation.

Phase II: Expert Validation

This phase focuses on acquiring expert validation for the initial item set's content validity. 10 experts, including campus counselors and clinical psychologists with at least five years of experience, ranked the items' significance on a scale of 0 (not relevant) to 3 (very important). Based on their results, the 32 items with better relevance scores were kept.

Phase III: Pilot Study

After expert validation, a pilot study was conducted before the main study to find out and evaluate the layout and user-friendliness of the developed scale. For the pilot study, a random sample of 20 university students (10 males and 10 females) aged 18 to 25 years were taken to administer the scale. First and foremost, consent was obtained from the participants. Participants reported no difficulties with any part of the scale. The easy-to-read and user-friendly layout of the scale was retained with the final tested list of 32 items for the Bullying Victimization Scale.

Phase IV: Psychometric Properties

The purpose of this phase was to determine the psychometric properties of the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU). The BVSU scale showed strong internal consistency (α =.93) and split-half reliability (r =.86). Furthermore, it demonstrated strong construct validity, with a significant positive connection between bullying victimization and perceived mother over-protection.

Main Study

Participants

The Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU), created during phase I, was used to assess bullying victimization among university students. The G3 method was used to select the sample from undergraduate and graduate students from the private universities of Lahore. Furthermore, a stratified sampling technique was used to divide the sample into multiple different groups such as gender, age, academic program (BA/BA & MA/MS), academic year, family system, number of siblings, birth order, and living status. The final sample comprised 300 students, with an equal ratio of 50% males and 50% females. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to 25 years (M = 22.41, SD = 2.81), providing distribution across the desired age range.

Measures

Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (Khan & Khurshid, 2023).

This culturally focused measure was designed to capture the particular experiences and contextual elements associated with bullying in Pakistani higher education university settings, on a four-point rating scale (0= Never, 1= Often, 2= Mostly, and 3= Always) containing 32 items in Urdu. The scale has three subscales/factors: dominance and control (F1), mocking (F2), and aggressiveness (F3). The study showed high internal consistency (α =.93), good split-half reliability (r=.86), and a strong positive association between perceived parental overprotection and bullying victimization, indicating strong construct validity. The scores ranged from 0 to 96, with higher scores suggesting increased bullying victimization.

Egna Minnen Betraffande Uppfostran (EMBU-A, Perris, Jacobsson, Lindström, von Knorring, and Perris, 1980).

This test was first created in Spanish to evaluate recollections of the ways parents raised their children. Senior authors and a competent translator further translated it into English with the name "Early Memories of Upbringing". Three subscales comprise its 27 items: Over-protection (6 items), Rejection (6 items), and Emotional Warmth (15 items). The Cronbach's alpha of the three subscales for EMBU-A are (Over Protection α =.79; Rejection α =.76; Emotional Warmth α =.81). The current study used only the Mother Parental Overprotection (6 items) subscale. This subscale consisted of four response options: 0 (never), 1 (sometimes), 2 (often), and 3 (always).

Procedure

After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher sought private universities in Lahore to discuss the study's objectives with university authorities and gain their permission. After receiving institutional consent, university officials were promised that the acquired data would be kept secure and anonymous. The researcher introduced herself to the participants and described the aim and objective of the study. Participants who agreed to participate were given the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVS) and Early Memories of Upbringing Scale - Adult Version (EMBU-A). Participants were ensured confidentiality and autonomy throughout. Each participant took about 20-25 minutes and was administered either alone or in small groups. After finishing the protocol, participants were debriefed about the objectives of the study and were allowed to ask questions and provide feedback.

Result

Demographic variables such as gender, age, academic program, academic year, family system, number of siblings, living status, and parents' education were utilized to examine how these characteristics influence bullying victimization. These characteristics contributed to the scale's cultural relevance and a more comprehensive knowledge of bullying in the Pakistani setting. This study aimed to examine the underlying factor structure of the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU) by Principal Axis Factor (PFA) analysis with Promax rotation. The data was found to be suitable for factor analysis, as indicated by a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) score of.91 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (p <.001). The number of factors was calculated using an Eigenvalue threshold greater than one and factor loading of.4 or higher (Tavakol & Wetzel, 2020). Figure 1 shows a scree plot of the Eigenvalues. After testing many factor solutions, the three-factor method proved to be the most interpretable and stable. The factors were determined using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Promax rotation

Establishing Psychometric Properties of Scales

This section discusses the psychometric features of the indigenous constructed bullying victimization scale. Psychometric qualities were assessed using factor analysis, scree plots, Eigen values, factor computation, and Cronbach's alpha to determine the test's internal consistency.

Figure 1: *Scree Plot Showing Extraction of Factors of Bullying Victimization Scale*
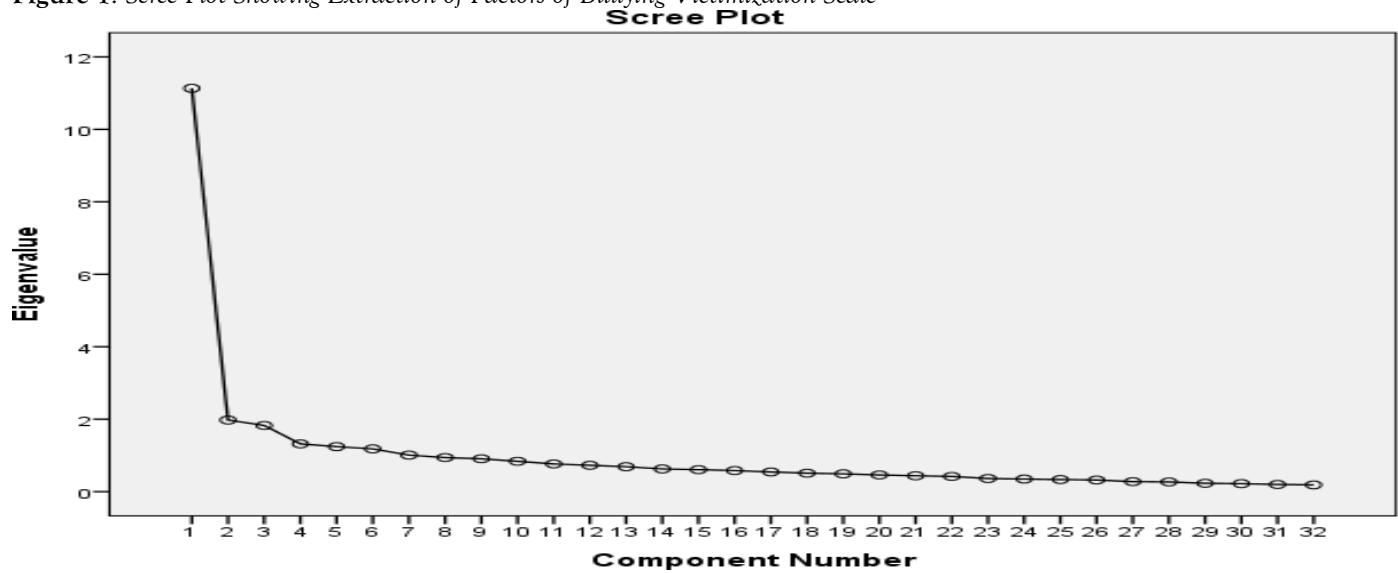
Table 1: *Factor Structure of 32 Items of BVSU through Varimax Rotation (N= 300)*

S. No	No. of items	F1	F2	F3
1	17	**.71**	-.02	.26
2	28	**.63**	.05	.34
3	11	**.63**	.24	.12
4	14	**.62**	-.07	.18
5	9	**.62**	.49	.08
6	10	**.60**	.44	.20
7	32	**.59**	.19	.01
8	23	**.54**	.09	.18
9	31	**.52**	.25	.13
10	12	**.50**	.47	.31
11	27	**.50**	.27	.43
12	16	**.47**	.26	.38
13	18	**.44**	.28	.27
14	13	**.43**	.12	.29
15	20	**.36**	.23	.29
16	1	-.01	**.74**	.28
17	2	.50	**.72**	-.05
18	3	.07	**.67**	.37
19	4	.02	**.59**	.22
20	5	.29	**.57**	.17
21	6	.35	**.54**	.00
22	7	.51	**.54**	.22
23	8	.47	**.53**	.16
24	30	.15	.15	**.72**
25	24	.12	-.08	**.72**
26	26	.09	.24	**.64**
27	21	.19	.42	**.61**
28	29	.37	.18	**.51**

29	25	.26	.06	**.48**
30	15	.45	.23	**.45**
31	22	.35	3.1	**.44**
32	19	.13	.18	**.32**
33	Eigen Values	6.12	4.62	4.19
34	% of Variance	19.17	14.42	13.07
35	Cumulative %	19.17	33.59	46.67

Note. Boldface items belonging to the factor > .40.

Factor Description of Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students

Based on commonalities in items, the label was given to each factor. Details about all factors are given below.

Factor 1: Dominance and Control

The first factor included 15 items that described different facets of bullying victimization caused by bullies' dominant and controlling behaviors. For instance, hiding personal belongings, criticizing for being less social, criticizing walking style, not letting anyone befriend you, making fun of poor academic performance, spreading rumors, making false complaints to teachers, snatching money, making fun of being weak in English, criticizing the style of speaking, making fun of the tone of speech, inappropriate touch, making fun of good academic performance, following commands, along with laughing and joking together in a group.

Factor 2: Mocking

The second factor on this scale consists of 8 items. This factor was termed mocking because the items described a similar situation of bullies ridiculing one another. If the sub scale scores indicate an individual's likelihood of being subjected to mocking behavior by others regarding bullying victimization, such as to beat, mock physical appearance, taunt for being poor, name-calling, make fun of body structure, to abuse, catcalling, and say bad stuff.

Factor 3: Aggression

Aggression was identified as the third factor on the scale. This sub-scale includes a total of 9 items. It reflects being a victim of bullies' aggressive behaviors such as snatching mobiles, making you feel isolated from others, sending vulgar pictures and videos on mobile phones, doing character assassination, making fun of having fewer friends, ruining clothes, to intimidate, by asking personal questions, and to tease during presentations.

Psychometric Properties of Construct Validity

Construct validity was determined by using The Early Memories of Upbringing Scale Adult Version with the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU). The construct validity of the BVSU was supported by the significant positive correlation between bullying victimization and perceived parental over-protection (maternal) (r =.12, p <.001), suggesting good construct validity.

Table 2: *Summary of Inter-correlations, Internal Consistency Means, and Standard Deviations for BVSU (N = 300)*

Factors	1	2	3	4
1. F1: Dominance & Control	-	.70***	.70***	.95***
2. F2: Mocking	-	-	.58***	.84***
3. F3: Aggression	-	-	-	.84***
4. BVSU Total	-	-	-	-
M	6.51	3.44	2.63	12.57
SD	7.29	4.12	3.84	13.60
Cronbach's alpha	.89	.85	.80	.93

*Note. BV =Bullying Victimization, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation *p<.05.*

Table 2 demonstrates that Dominance and Control have a significantly positive relationship with Mocking ($r = .70$, $p < .001$) and Aggression ($r = .70$, $p < .001$). The Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU) was tested for correlation with the overall BVSU total score, correlations between each item and the BVSU total score range from .19 to .95 ($p < .001$), indicating consistency and strong correlations among items on the scale.

Split Half Reliability of BVSU

The split-half reliability of the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU) was determined using the Odd-Even method. This involved dividing the scale into two halves, one with all 16 odd-numbered items and the other with all 16 even-numbered. The correlation coefficient between the two halves was substantial ($r = .91$, $p < .001$), indicating high reliability. The split-half reliability coefficients for the odd and even halves were .87 and .88, respectively, while the Guttman split-half reliability was .86, indicating that the BVSU items had good internal consistency.

Discussion

The current study aimed to develop a valid and reliable tool for bullying victimization for university students. The major goal of this study was to create a culturally relevant bullying victimization scale for university students, which generated three recognized factors: dominance and control, mocking, and aggression. The Exploratory Therefore, the goal of the current study was to study the experience, manifestation, and expression of emotional neglect in university students from Pakistani collectivistic societies, taking into account the negative impacts of bullying victimization among university students as well as cross-cultural variances. In the current study, the Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU), a 4-point rating scale of 32 items, was created by collecting culturally unique expressions and manifestations of bullying victimization. Factor Analysis of BVSU revealed three BV factors: dominance and control, mocking, and aggression.

The dominance and control subscale underlines bullies' motivation for social dominance, which commonly involves targeting weak groups to maintain superiority (Jonkmann et al., 2009; Pratto & Stewart, 2011). Bullying is frequently used to humiliate individuals and assert positions in collectivist cultures such as Pakistan (Javed et al., 2023; Siddiqui & Schultze-Krumbholz, 2023). Mocking, defined as ridiculing or imitating others, increases bullies' social power in group contexts (Haugh, 2010; Robson, 2022; Mushtaq, 2020). Aggression indicates enmity, is associated with developmental stages and mental health, and might stem from insecurity or a desire to look dominant (Liu et al., 2012; Russo, 2021). The findings also revealed substantial differences between genders in bullying victimization, with males ($M = 14.62$, $SD = 14.46$) reporting higher levels of victimization than female university students. It depicted that male student had higher bullying victimization rates than female university students in Pakistani culture. This shows that male students might experience more frequent or severe bullying, emphasizing the need for specific programs to address and prevent bullying among male university students. The results of this study focused on how bullying victimization manifests itself among university students in Pakistan's cultural context, providing a better knowledge of bullying in collectivistic societies. Using the Bullying Victimization Scale, we can figure out which characteristics enhance or decrease the likelihood of being bullied. By addressing these issues, we can assist reduce bullying rates and safeguard students from its negative consequences. We can also offer workshops for parents to help them understand how neglecting their child's emotional needs can lead to negative results and encourage them to provide better care for their children.

Implications

The study sheds light on how bullying victimization differs between cultures, allowing for a more in-depth knowledge of these experiences among university students and young adults. The culturally sensitive scale can help guide the development of focused interventions and prevention methods that address bullying behaviors specific to a given cultural setting. Moreover, the scale provides a consistent and valid measure for assessing bullying victimization within culturally appropriate contexts, hence filling the gap in current research methods. Additionally, the study's findings can be used to inform policies and

educational programs that highlight culturally relevant approaches to bullying prevention in university settings. Furthermore, the size and study can open the way for additional studiesinto cultural differences in bullying practices, increasing cross-cultural comparisons and broadening global understanding of the problem.

Limitations and Suggestions

Despite its useful implications, the current study has a few limitations. First, research was only conducted on university students in Lahore, which limits the generalization of the findings, though hostel residents were added to broaden the sample. Future research should also undertake comparative analyses on the construct of bullying victims across different cultural groups in Pakistan to acquire a more comprehensive perspective. Furthermore, because this study was designed as a preliminary validation of the newly constructed Bullying Victimization Scale for University Students (BVSU), only construct validity was determined. Future research should investigate discriminant and concurrent validity to improve the scale's reliability and usability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of addressing specific cultural manifestations and the scale of bullying victimization among university students and young adults. The study's development of a culturally sensitive scale provides a dependable instrument for assessing and understanding the distinctive experiences of bullying in many cultural situations. Furthermore, the data highlight the importance of parental overprotection in determining bullying victimization, implying that family dynamics must be considered while addressing this issue. These findings highlight the significance of developing targeted interventions and policies that consider cultural nuances and familial effects, resulting in a more inclusive and successful approach to addressing bullying in universities. This work provides a foundation for future research and initiatives to combat bullying on a global level.

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