



A Buddhist Based Model for Preventing Bullying Victimization in Modern Society

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Abstract

This research investigated the complex issue of bullying victimization in modern society through a Buddhist perspective, focusing on three objectives; 1) to investigate the problematic situations and impacts of bullying victimization in modern society; 2) to identify the causes and prevention methods according to contemporary and Buddhist principles; 3) to propose a conceptual model based on the integration of Buddhist principles for preventing bullying victimization. The research utilized a qualitative methodological approach. The process included examining psychological theories, Buddhist concepts, and subjective narratives, followed by thematic analysis and integration of findings to develop and propose a novel model.

Research findings showed that (1) bullying constituted a serious global problem affecting youth regardless of their background, with the rise of cyberbullying having exacerbated the issue. The repercussions of bullying extended beyond the victims, negatively affecting bullies, families, communities, and society as a whole. (2) Further examination of its causes and prevention methods suggested strong alignment between Buddhist strategies and contemporary methods. Rooted in Buddhist principles, the research identified twelve causal factors and proposed five preventive strategies. (3) Ultimately, the study presented a three-tiered approach model for preventing bullying victimization: social (community support), individual (resilience building), and holistic (breaking the cycle of kamma). This comprehensive framework provided actionable measures for effective prevention and long-term solutions.

Keywords: Buddhist Principles, Bullying Victimization, Prevention strategies, Cyberbullying, Prevention Model

Introduction

Bullying has emerged as a critical global challenge with far-reaching implications for youth worldwide. UNESCO's 2019 data reveal a staggering statistic: approximately one-third of the world's youth experiences bullying. The consequences of bullying extend far beyond immediate physical interactions with research documenting severe long-term psychological, social, and



academic impacts on victims. Far from being mere child's play, bullying represents a serious societal issue with devastating consequences that cost lives and damage communities.

Despite extensive scientific efforts to understand this type of aggression, existing prevention programs have struggled to provide comprehensive solutions. Existing psychological research has approached bullying through various theoretical frameworks, most notably Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1997). This model examines the complex interplay of social, cognitive, personality, and environmental factors that contribute to aggressive behaviors. However, current prevention programs have demonstrated limited effectiveness, with studies showing only a 20-23% decrease in bullying behavior and a 17-20% reduction in victimization (McCallion and Feder, 2013). This implies that approximately 80% of bullying cases remain unaddressed, highlighting a significant gap in existing intervention strategies.

The proposed research sought to bridge this critical gap by introducing an innovative approach that integrates Buddhist philosophical insights with contemporary psychological understanding. The research argues that existing models may be overlooking intrinsic mental and holistic processes that could be crucial in understanding and preventing bullying. Drawing from a diverse and carefully selected group of participants, the research encompasses a comprehensive examination of bullying victimization across multiple dimensions. The study involves an intricate network of stakeholders, including Buddhist scholars, mental health professionals, school administrators, student council members, and most critically, students who have directly experienced bullying. Primarily focused in Thailand where researcher residing, the research involves participants ranging from 13 to 18 years old, representing a critical age group where bullying experiences can have profound long-term psychological impacts. It examines not just contemporary experiences of bullying, but also explores historical narratives and philosophical perspectives that can provide deeper insights into human behavior, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence.

The target audience for this research is manifold, extending far beyond traditional academic boundaries. Academic researchers in Buddhist studies, social sciences, and interdisciplinary fields will find rich theoretical insights, while practical stakeholders such as educators, school administrators, and mental health professionals will discover potentially transformative intervention strategies. The research aims to provide a holistic framework that can be adapted by policymakers, community leaders, parents, and social workers seeking effective approaches to addressing bullying.

In summary, the study aimed to develop a novel conceptual model that goes beyond traditional psychological frameworks by offering a holistic approach to a global social challenge.



By analyzing historical aggression in Buddhist scriptures and identifying prevention measures, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of bullying that considers both external and intrinsic factors. This approach connects Buddhist philosophical insights with contemporary social science, promising a revolutionary perspective that offers transformative strategies for prevention of bullying victimization in modern society.

Research Objectives

1. To study the problematic situations and impacts of bullying victimization in modern society.
2. To identify the causes of bullying victimization and its prevention methods according to anti-bullying principles and the Buddhist doctrines.
3. To develop and propose a conceptual model based on the integration of Buddhist principles for preventing bullying victimization in modern society.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework exhibits significant research processes in the form of process flow diagram. Figure 1 illustrates methodology to answer three research questions. Accordingly, Group 1 is to answer; What are the problematic situations, causes and impacts of bullying victimization in modern society? Group 2 is for the question; How do Buddhist doctrines describe the characteristics of bullying victimization and suggest its prevention? Group 3 How can Buddhist principles be incorporated into conceptual models for understanding and preventing bullying victimization in modern society?

Research Methodology

The present dissertation employs a mixed methods approach, which incorporates documentary

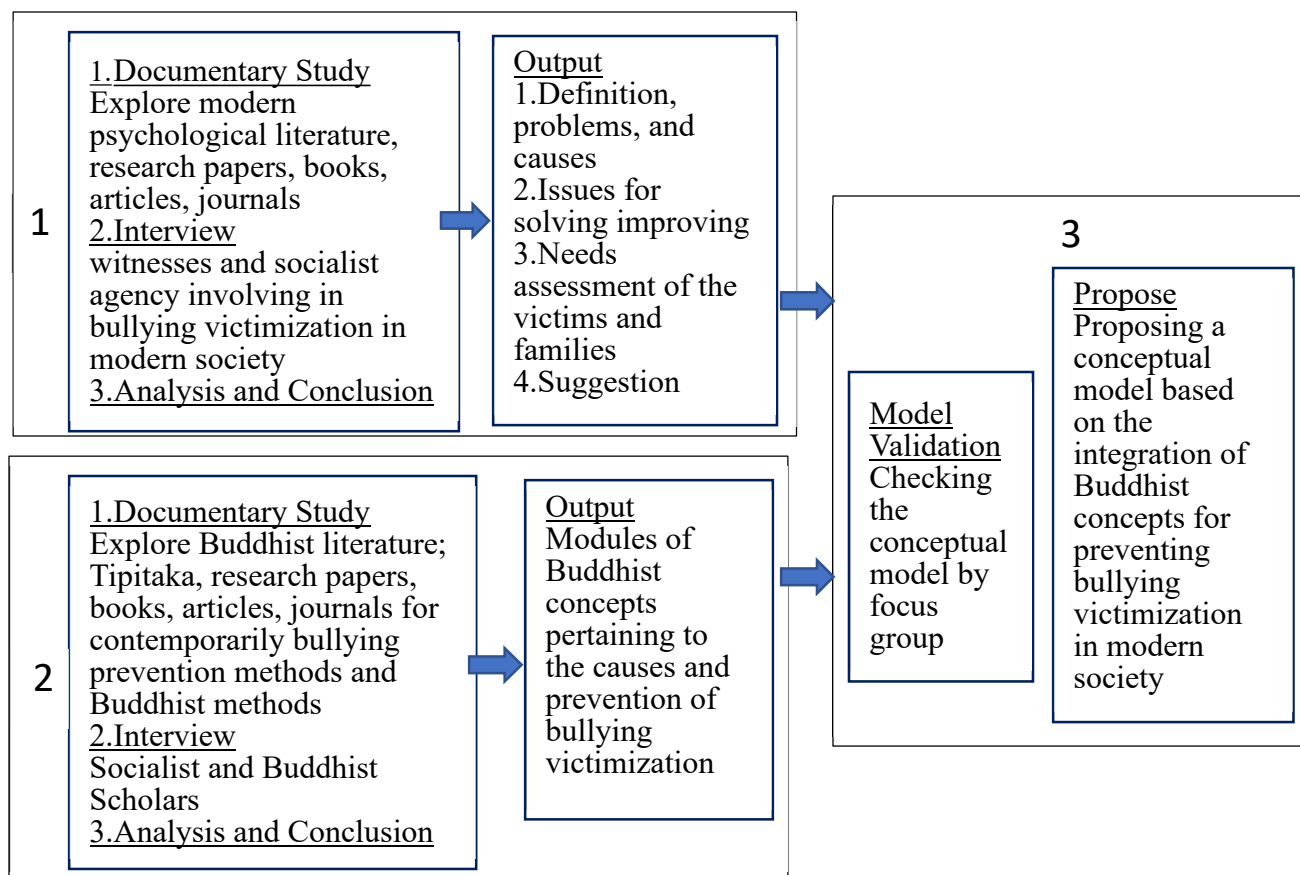


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework

research and qualitative methodology. This deductive research, creating a hypothesis based on previous theories, begins with examining psychological theories, Buddhist concepts and narratives as well as subjective experiences. The research methodology can be divided into five stages as follows.

1. Documentary Data Collection: The first section examines the nature of bullying victimization from contemporary studies. Material in this part is gathered from academic work such as dissertation and University's websites, peer reviewed articles and official publications. The second section revisits the narratives and doctrines that are compatible with the modern definition of bullying victimization. The primary sources are from the Theravāda Tipitaka, including the secondary source of commentaries, sub-commentaries, textbooks, research works, Buddhist journals and articles.

2. In-depth Interview and Questionnaire: Data was collected through in-depth interviews with seven individuals who had direct experience with victims and bullies, as well as through online surveys. The qualitative data from both sources revealed key challenges faced by underserved students and informed recommendations for improving prevention programs.



3. Data Analysis: Content analysis investigates collected data enabling us to find explicit and implicit content. The relevant Buddhist doctrines are selected and compare to existing models. The key aspects derived from content analysis serve as the basis for thematic analysis to identify patterns for model development.

4. Model Formation and Validation: This process relates and unifies all fully detailed modules into one correlated model. The final stage of model formation is model validation. By revisiting case studies and commendation from scholars, the final models are applied to describe the phenomenon and suggest prevention methods before proposing a conceptual model.

5. Conclusion, Discussion, and Suggestion: The last stage concludes the findings and suggests how the models can be applied to prevent the phenomena outside the narratives of literature. In addition, the chapter introduces guidance for further study.

Research Results

Objective 1. Bullying and victimization are serious and widespread problems affecting youth around the world, regardless of socioeconomic background. UNESCO estimates that one-third of students globally experience bullying. The problem's prevalence varies dramatically across different regions, affecting adolescents from diverse contexts - ranging from 7% in Tajikistan to 74% in Samoa, and spanning 44% of adolescents in Afghanistan to 35% in Canada (UNESCO, 2019). In Thailand alone, a survey found that nearly 92% of children aged 10 to 15 have been bullied (Paoon, 2024).

With the advancement of technological accessibility and widely usage of social media among youth, cyberbullying victimization gets more and more prevalence. This form of aggression inflicts deep psychological and physical wounds on victims, impacting their well-being in both the short and long term. Charoenwanit (2018) found that over one-third of Thai high school and vocational students experienced cyberbullying, with significant impacts on academic performance, higher risk of dropping out, health, and mental well-being. Recent studies show that victims of cyberbullying are at higher risk for depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and attempted suicide (Sjursø, 2021) (Campbell, Spears, Slee, Butler, and Kift, 2012) (Hinduja and Patchin, 2010). A. Ninklung (personal communication, May 20, 2024) shared a concerning story about his nephew, after participating in a summer ordination program. "He's in trauma. I saw bruises on his face, but he said 'nothing's happened' I knew that something's happened. He refused to go to the temple and withdrawn from society. Now he just stays home and plays game. My mom has to take care of him"



The negative consequences extend beyond victims. The incidences caused heart breaking distress to parents and loved ones leading to costly lawsuits against schools and community organizations with settlements reaching millions of US dollars, fundamentally acquired from taxpayers (CBS New York, 2023) (Charlesworth, 2018). Additionally, the damage cost of victimization is hidden in school absences and drop out, as well as the need for mental health services for victims. Furthermore, when bullying is tolerated by becoming a subculture, it creates a climate of fear and intimidation that can negatively impact and overshadow the overall well-being of the entire schools or communities.

Objective 2. Researchers find risk factors for both bullying victims and perpetrators across four levels: social, school, family, and individual. Socially, Fitriati and Tabroni (2023) noted that victims often lack close friends, face social disorganization, and have low school connectedness, while perpetrators are influenced by peer pressure and delinquent associations. At the school level, both groups are affected by unclear rules, inadequate supervision, and a culture that tolerates bullying (Fitriati and Tabroni, 2023). Family-related factors include poor supervision, dysfunctional family dynamics, low-income backgrounds, lack of parental warmth, and exposure to abuse or domestic violence (Fraga, Soares, Peres and Barros, 2022). Individually, victims tend to have poor social skills, low self-esteem, physical differences, chronic illnesses, or disabilities, whereas perpetrators commonly exhibit impulsivity, lack of empathy, poor academic performance, criminal behavior, and a history of trauma (Kaltiala-Heino, Fröjd and Marttunen, 2010).

While contemporary research primarily emphasizes observable, measurable factors, the Buddhist perspective, in contrast, offers complementary insights through holistic and internal dimensions. From a holistic perspective, Buddhism offers explanations for bullying victimization through the concept of action and its consequences (Kamma and Vipākā). According to Buddhist teachings, experiences of being bullied are attributed to the ripening effects of past negative actions (bad kamma).

It's when someone makes hurtful choices by way of body, speech, and mind. Having made these choices, they're reborn in a hurtful world, where hurtful contacts strike them. Touched by hurtful contacts, they experience hurtful feelings that are exclusively painful. (F.L. Woodward, 2001, p. 238)

At the social level, contributing factors include the absence of wise mentors and good friends (*Asappurisasaṃsevo*), inevitable exposure to harmful influences (*Bāla*), and lack of proper social rules (*Vinaya*). At the individual level, Buddhist philosophy highlights a series of causal factors leading to victimization: lack of proper education or not hearing the true teachings



(*Asaddhammassavanam*) and deficiencies in self-prevention mechanisms including lacking of faith (*Asaddhā*), improper attention (*Ayonisomanasikāra*), undeveloped mindfulness and situational awareness (*Asatāsampajaññan*), poor sensory restraint (*Indriyaasaṁvaro*), and committing harmful conduct (*Tīṇi duccharitānī*). The presence of five psychological hindrances (*Nīvaraṇā*), and fundamental Ignorance (*Avijja*) further compound these issues.

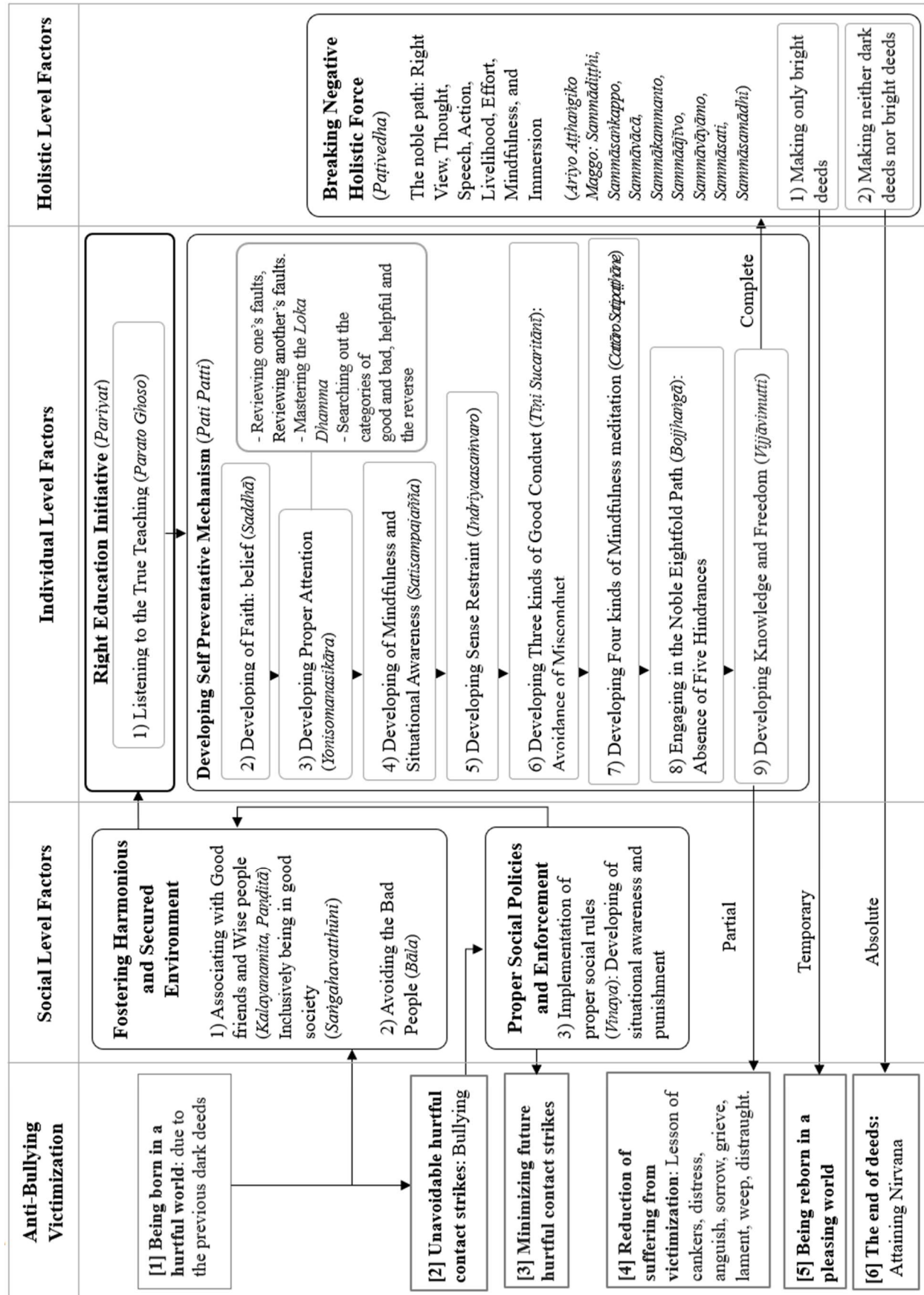
Consequently, Ignorance *Avijja* initiates the chain of Dependent Origination (*Paṭiccasamuppāda*, S II 1–2) with suffering as the final result. “With ignorance as condition, ..., sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of suffering. This, bhikkhus, is called dependent origination.” (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000, p. 533) Buddhadaśa Bhikkhu (2020) explained that *Paṭiccasamuppāda* can occur as a complete cycle in a single moment, rather than requiring three lifetimes to unfold.

Objective 3. Having analyzed the various causal factors identified, this research proposes a three-tiered framework for addressing bullying victimization. The framework encompasses social, individual, and holistic levels incorporating factors based on Buddhist principles that counter attack the causes and contribute to effective prevention methods.

Buddhist Principles for the prevention of bullying victimization at social level

1. Supportive Environment: A supportive environment creates social conditions that discourage bullying and provide resources for those who experience it. This includes first, community support networks embodying spiritual friendship (*Kalyāṇamittatā*) that provide emotional and practical assistance. The Maṅgala Sutta (Sn 259) listed the types of skillful behavior that give blessings and protection. “Not associating with the fools, but associating with the wise” (Norman, 2001, p. 32).

Creating a positive and supportive environment relies on the healthy relationships within the individual’s social circles. By fostering the qualities of a good friend in all students as norms, we can create a more harmonious school environment. The Saṅgahavatthu Sutta (A II 248) outlines the building blocks of good relationships. Buddha referred to a significant concept of gathering and sustaining community through *Saṅgahavatthūni* four ways of being inclusive: giving (*dānaṁ*), kindly words (*peyyavajjaṁ*), taking care (*atthacariyā*), and equality (*samānattatā*).





2. Secured Environment: A secured environment focuses on creating physical and emotional safety through clear boundaries about acceptable behavior, establishing proper social policies and enforcement (*Vinaya*). The principles of *Vinaya*, monastic code of conducts, can be applied to the modern setting in various ways.

First, the *Vinaya* outlines detail procedures for scrutinizing offenses, confession, making amends, and resolving not to repeat transgressions. In addition, *Vinaya* text contains sample cases and judgement for future reference.

Second, in matters concerning the community, the *Vinaya* establishes democratic decision-making processes and committee where important issues are discussed and resolved collectively. Third, for serious offenses, actions that undermine community harmony may be brought before a qualified committee for adjudication, potentially resulting in expulsion from community.

Buddhist Principles for the prevention of bullying victimization at individual level

1. Right Education Initiative: This aspect focuses on providing individuals with the knowledge and skills (*Pariyatti*) by listening from the wise mentors. In Buddhism, learning about and living in accordance with the reality of nature (Dhamma) are crucial components for avoiding misbehaviors and achieving wellbeing. In *Sukhumāla Sutta* (A I 146-147) and *Pātāla Sutta* (SN 36.4), Buddha cited that, on one hand, individuals who lack proper instruction is prone to committing immoral acts and experiencing distress. On the other hand, a well-instructed person, when faced with difficult circumstances, can experience it with equanimity, free from sorrow, grief, lamentation, or distress.

2. Developing Self-Preventive Mechanisms: This component based on the *Avijjā Sutta* (A V 113-116) focuses on building personal qualities and habits that serve as internal protection.

1) Developing of Faith or confidence (*Saddhā*) can help prevent victimization by building inner strength and resilience in individuals, empowering them against bullying.

2) Cultivating Proper attention (*Yonisomanasikāra*). *Dutiyakusala Sutta* (S V 91) describes the importance of Proper attention considering it as the foundation of developing the awakening factors and skillful living; mindfulness, investigation of principles, energy, rapture, tranquility, immersion, and equanimity.

3) Enhancing Mindfulness and Situational awareness (*Sati Sampajañña*). *Satisampajañña Sutta* (A IV 337) emphasizes the significance of mindfulness and situational awareness as internal factor for conscience and prudence, sense restraint, ethical conduct, right immersion, right knowledge and vision, disillusionment and dispassion, which are the vital condition for an individual to the liberation from bullying and victimization.



4) Practicing sense restraint (*Indriyaasaṁvaro*) through conscience and prudence helps us control our senses and guard against external temptations. On one hand, sense restraint (*Indriyaasaṁvaro*) combined with a sense of moral conscience and concern for the consequences (*Hiri Ottapa*) can lead to ethical conduct. This transformation can prevent bullying behavior and help the bully become a more positive person. On the other hand, sense restraint cultivated alongside mindfulness and situational awareness creates a strong foundation that allows individuals to navigate the world with greater awareness, reducing vulnerability to bullying. It also encourages prospective victim to be mindful of the negative words such as cyberbullying content, hateful comments, and negativity on social media platforms.

5) Developing three kinds of good conduct (*Tīṇi sucaritāṇī*): avoidance of misconduct. It is a universal logic that bad conduct poses problems for individuals and society, whereas the good conduct benefits all. According to the Cunda Sutta (A V 266-268), the three kinds of good conduct are: First, bodily purity: Abstaining from taking life, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Second, Verbal purity: Abandoning slanderous speech, harsh speech, idle babble. Instead, speaking words worth treasuring, that are timely, worth listening to and focused on beneficial aims. Third, mental purity: Being free from malice, having uncorrupted thoughts, and maintaining right view. This approach fosters a culture of kindness and respect. These qualities can promote positive behavior while discouraging wrongdoing, empowering individuals to manage their emotions and prevent bullying.

6) Practicing the four kinds of mindfulness meditation (*Cattāro Satipaṭṭhānā*). The description and importance of the four kinds of mindfulness meditation are in the latter part of Duccarita Sutta (S V 188).

... a bhikkhu dwells contemplating the body in the body ... feelings in feelings ... mind in mind ... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. When, bhikkhu, based upon virtue, established upon virtue, you develop these four establishments of mindfulness in such a way, then, whether night or day comes, you may expect only growth in wholesome states, not decline. (Bhikkhu Bodhi, 2000, p. 1663)

Through practice, focusing on present moment experience strengthens the mind's ability to concentrate and avoid distractions. This can foster strong self-esteem, inner peace, and confidence, making one less vulnerable to manipulation or emotional attacks.



7) Engaging in the seven factors of enlightenment (*Bojjhaṅgā*): absence of five hindrances. While the Seven Awakening Factors (*Bojjhaṅgā*) in Buddhism primarily focused on spiritual development, they can offer valuable insights and tools applicable to preventing bullying victimization. In the *Āvaraṇanīvaraṇa Sutta* (S V 95-96), the Buddha explain the five hindrances along with their antidote, the seven awakening factors which should be developed for the direct knowledge, complete understanding, and giving up of the emotional obstacles.

8) Developing knowledge and freedom (*Vijjāvimutti*). *Vijjāvimutti* signifies the ultimate goal in Buddhism. It represents the complete liberation from suffering achieved through the attainment of insight (*Vijjā*) and liberation (*Vimutti*). This state emerges from the consistent practices of the individual principles mentioned above.

While external social interventions are important, our positive or negative experiences primarily originate within the mind. Therefore, individual preventive factors, including mental practices and personality development, are responsible for mitigating suffering and fostering a harmonious culture.

Buddhist Principles for the prevention of bullying victimization at holistic level

From a Buddhist perspective, the law of *kamma* is the law that governs all of experiences. The Buddha stated this concept recorded in the *Vitthāra Sutta* (A V 244).

There is a dark deed with and dark result; a bright deed with and bright result; a deed that is both dark and bright, with a dark and bright result; and the deed that is neither dark nor bright, with a result neither dark nor bright, which being itself a deed conduces to the waning of deeds.? (Woodward, 2001, p. 240)

It is important to remember that *kamma* is not deterministic. Individuals always have the power to change our destiny through our thoughts, words, and actions. Holistic factors for preventing bullying victimization include:

1. Living a virtuous life: holistic factor no.1 is abstaining from wrongdoing and making only bright deeds in present existence. In *Mahācattāriṣaka Sutta* (M III 74-75) Buddha recommended individuals to abstain from the Wrong speech (*Micchāṇḍācā*) and only use the Right speech (*Sammāṇḍācā*) and to abstain from the Wrong action (*Micchākammanto*) and only do the Right action (*Sammākammanto*). This can potentially lead to a more favorable and secured rebirth, minimizing further occurrence of verbal and physical bullying.

2. Ending the cycle of living: This is achievable by completing the Noble Eightfold Path (*Ariyo Aṭṭhaṅgiko Maggo*). In the *Vibhaṅga Sutta* (SN 45.8), this core teaching in Buddhism represents the path to enlightenment encompassing the right doings; right view, right thought,



right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right immersion, right knowledge, and right freedom. This holistic factor addresses the deeper karmic patterns, ultimately leading to complete liberation from suffering by not returning to reborn again.

By implementing interventions across all three levels, this framework provides both immediate practical strategies and long-term transformative solutions aligned with Buddhist principles of *Pariyatti*, *Paṭipatti*, *Paṭivedha*.

Knowledge from research

This research makes significant theoretical contributions by expanding the traditional social-ecological framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) through the integration of Buddhist principles, offering a more comprehensive understanding of bullying victimization. While existing models primarily focus on observable social interactions and environmental factors, this study's incorporation of Buddhist philosophy adds essential spiritual and philosophical dimensions that deepen our understanding of the bullying phenomenon. The enhanced theoretical framework acknowledges not only the immediate social contexts but also the internal psychological processes, karmic influences, and aspects that influence bullying actions and consequences. This integration represents a novel approach that bridges the gap between contemporary psychological theories and ancient wisdom traditions.

Beyond its theoretical significance, this integrated approach offers practical advantages by providing culturally adaptable and sustainable intervention strategies, addressing critical gaps in current prevention programs that struggle with long-term effectiveness. The theoretical contribution becomes evident in how this approach expands upon Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which forms the basis of many contemporary prevention programs. While the ecological model effectively maps external influences through its macro, exo, meso, and microsystems, the Buddhist framework adds three crucial dimensions: social (through *Kalyāṇamitta* or wise friendship), individual (through mindfulness and ethical development), and holistic (through understanding of karmic consequences). This enhanced framework provides a more comprehensive foundation for prevention strategies, suggesting that effective interventions must address both external factors emphasized by contemporary programs and internal transformational processes highlighted in Buddhist teachings. By integrating these principles, the model goes beyond simply equipping tools to combat bullying—it aims to create better communities, fostering positive change for everyone involved.

At the social tier, the model incorporates modern community support concepts from programs like PBIS Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports. (n.d.) and KiVa Antibullying
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Program (n.d.), while adding Buddhist principles of wise companionship (Kalyāṇamitta) and harmonious relationships (Saṅgahavatthūni). This integration creates a more comprehensive approach than either system alone. While KiVa focuses on bystander intervention, the Buddhist perspective enriches this by emphasizing friendship quality and moral development, creating deeper foundations for sustainable change.

The individual tier synthesizes traditional Buddhist practices with modern psychological interventions. While programs like Olweus focus on behavioral modification, this model incorporates Buddhist concepts of mindfulness (Sati), proper attention (Yonisomanasikāra), and ethical conduct. Where PBIS implements behavioral expectations and reinforcement, Buddhist additions of self-awareness practices and understanding of life's nature (Lokadhamma) create deeper foundations for personal transformation. This combination offers more robust individual resilience-building than existing programs.

The framework's third tier addresses holistic factors, representing its most innovative contribution. This introduces long-term perspectives and spiritual dimensions absent from contemporary programs while maintaining cultural adaptability. The model can be implemented in secular settings by presenting Buddhist concepts universally—discussing kamma as cause-and-effect relationships or mindfulness as emotional regulation techniques. This adaptability maintains effectiveness across different contexts. The holistic approach focuses on long-term transformation rather than immediate behavior modification, distinguishing it from existing prevention models that primarily target short-term behavioral changes.

Conclusion

Bullying victimization represents a pervasive global crisis that has expanded into digital spaces through cyberbullying, causing significant psychological and physical harm to victims, bullies, families, schools, and communities. Contemporary frameworks for explaining and preventing focus exclusively on observable factors, present social environments, and current relationships. While there are some similarities at the social level and individual, the Buddhist based model incorporates a unique holistic factor addressing karma, past actions and future consequences across multiple lifetimes. This approach fosters a deeper understanding of the underlying issues associated with bullying victimization. By emphasizing self-development, Buddhist methods promote education on the realities of life, mindfulness and ethical cultivation, which potentially enhance the effectiveness of existing prevention programs.



Suggestions

The important contribution from this research is that the proposed model offers benefits collectively across three groups; the victims, the bullies, and the community. For victims, the model encourages supportive friendships while developing self-protective skills like mindfulness, ethical conduct and self-control. Understanding *kamma* helps victims reframe bullying experiences as opportunities for growth rather than simply suffering. For bullies, the model addresses root causes of aggressive behavior, promotes empathy, and offers alternative paths to positive social manners. For the community, it provides a framework for creating safe environments with clear expectations and emphasizes bystander responsibility. By fostering compassion and understanding as norms, it creates a more positive social climate that breaks cycles of negativity.

While this research provides a valuable foundation, further exploration is needed. First, the model requires real-world testing across diverse settings to validate its effectiveness and encourage wider adoption. Second, the current model lacks empirical support and was developed from a relatively small sample size. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples to enhance generalizability. Third, the model would benefit from an expanded research scope. Future studies should explore additional Buddhist traditions beyond Theravada, including Mahayana and Vajrayana perspectives, to create a more comprehensive approach.

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