International Journal of Innovative Research and Scientific Studies, 8(1) 2025, pages: 1622-1630

IJIRSS
International Journal of Innovative Research & Scientific Studies

ISSN: 2617-6548

URL: www.ijirss.com

Exploring bullying and cyberbullying behaviors among adolescents in Kosovo: Gender differences, victimization, and fear predictors

Jetmira Millaku[1,2], Daniela Tasevska[1], Denis Celcima[3*], Eglantina Kraja-Bardhi[3]

[1]*Department of Psychology, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria.*
[2]*Department of Psychology, AAB College, Fushe Kosove, 10000, Kosovo*
[3]*Department of Psychology, UBT Higher Education Institution, Kalabria, Street Rexhep Krasniqi Nr. 56, 10000 Pristina, Kosovo*

Corresponding author: Denis Celcima (*Email: deniz.celcima@ubt-uni.net*)

Abstract

This study examines bullying and cyberbullying behaviors among adolescents in six cities across Kosovo, with a particular focus on gender differences, the factors influencing fear of being bullied, and the impact of cultural and demographic variables. The research involved a survey of 646 adolescents aged 14–19, utilizing the Bullying and Cyberbullying Behaviors Questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-tests, and multiple regression analyses to assess the prevalence of bullying, gender disparities, and key predictors of fear. The study found that verbal bullying, including name-calling and teasing, was the most frequently reported form of aggression. Males exhibited higher involvement in physical ($p < 0.001$) and cyber aggression ($p < 0.001$) than females. Additionally, males were significantly more likely to engage in behaviors such as sharing unauthorized images ($p = 0.013$), making sexually inappropriate remarks ($p < 0.001$), and damaging property ($p = 0.005$). These findings align with traditional gender expectations in Kosovo, where expressions of dominance and aggression are more commonly associated with masculinity. No substantial gender differences were observed in indirect forms of bullying, such as social exclusion ($p = 0.305$). Regression analysis identified bullying victimization as the most significant predictor of fear ($p < 0.001$), accounting for 81% of the variance. While gender had a minor influence ($p = 0.052$), with females reporting slightly higher fear levels, age ($p = 0.182$) and overall bullying experiences ($p = 0.715$) did not significantly contribute to fear predictions. The findings highlight the psychological burden of bullying victimization and emphasize the role of cultural influences in shaping aggressive behaviors among adolescents. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions that consider the social context of bullying. The study underscores the necessity for culturally responsive prevention strategies that promote emotional regulation, empathy, and responsible digital engagement. Implementing gender-sensitive approaches can help challenge social norms that perpetuate aggressive behavior and empower victims to seek support. Further research should explore the long-term impact of cultural and developmental factors on bullying tendencies to foster safer and more inclusive school environments.

Keywords: Adolescents, Bullying, Cyberbullying, Victimization.

DOI: 10.53894/ijirss.v8i1.4710
Funding: This study received no specific financial support.
History: Received: 23 December 2024/**Revised:** 31 January 2025/**Accepted:** 10 February 2025/**Published:** 14 February 2025
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Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.
Transparency: The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.
Publisher: Innovative Research Publishing

1. Introduction

Bullying is a well-documented issue that negatively impacts adolescents' well-being, social development, and academic performance. It is characterized as intentional, repeated aggression involving a power imbalance between the perpetrator and the victim [1, 2]. Traditional bullying manifests in direct physical forms such as hitting, kicking, or pushing, as well as indirect forms like social exclusion and rumor-spreading [3, 4]. In recent years, the digital era has introduced cyberbullying, where aggression is carried out through electronic means, often causing severe psychological harm to victims [5, 6]. Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying operates through digital anonymity, where power imbalances stem from technological proficiency and online influence rather than physical dominance [7, 8]. With the increasing use of social media and digital platforms, adolescents are exposed to both the benefits and risks of online engagement. Social networks facilitate communication, identity formation, and learning; yet, they also provide opportunities for harmful behaviors, including cyberbullying [9]. Research suggests that bullying and cyberbullying frequently overlap, with many victims experiencing both forms of aggression. However, some individuals engage in cyberbullying independently due to the perceived anonymity and detachment from real-world consequences [10].

While bullying and cyberbullying have been widely studied globally, research in Kosovo remains limited. A large-scale study involving 12,040 students across 13 municipalities in Kosovo found that 77% had experienced some form of victimization, including verbal aggression (61%), physical violence (45%), and threats involving weapons (2.2%) [11]. Another study on cyberbullying among high school students in Kosovo revealed that digital harassment was a prevalent issue; yet, there is little research on its connection with traditional bullying [12]. Additionally, interventions such as short-term anti-bullying programs have shown promising results in Kosovo, demonstrating that even brief initiatives can positively impact students' behaviors and attitudes toward bullying [13]. However, further investigation is needed to understand the effectiveness of long-term strategies.

1.1. Research Problem and Significance

Despite existing research on bullying prevalence in Kosovo, little attention has been given to the factors influencing adolescents' fear of being bullied and how gender differences shape these experiences. Fear of victimization can have long-term psychological consequences, including anxiety, reduced academic engagement, and social withdrawal. Furthermore, traditional gender norms in Kosovo may contribute to differences in how males and females experience and respond to bullying. Understanding these patterns is crucial for designing effective interventions that address both the psychological and social aspects of bullying.

This study aims to examine bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents in Kosovo by focusing on gender disparities and fear of victimization. By investigating these aspects, the research seeks to provide valuable insights that can guide educational policies, anti-bullying initiatives, and mental health support programs. Addressing these challenges is essential for fostering safer learning environments and promoting adolescent well-being in Kosovo.

2. Literature Review

Bullying and cyberbullying have been extensively studied across various contexts, with research highlighting their prevalence, risk factors, and psychological consequences. However, there are inconsistencies in findings regarding gender differences, victimization patterns, and the role of fear in bullying experiences. Understanding these variations is essential for developing targeted interventions.

2.1. Gender Differences in Bullying and Cyberbullying

Several studies have investigated how bullying behaviors differ by gender. A study on cyberbullying among 264 adolescents found that nearly half of the students had been victims of bullying, and one in four had experienced cyberbullying. Male students were more likely to be perpetrators of both traditional bullying and cyberbullying compared to females [14]. However, another large-scale study with 3,867 high school students found that while cyberbullying victimization was more common among females, physical bullying was significantly higher among males [15]. These contrasting findings suggest that while males tend to engage in more direct aggression, females may be more vulnerable to online harassment. Similarly, a study in Indonesia involving 435 students highlighted the role of peer and parental relationships in shaping bullying

behavior. The research suggested that strengthening positive attitudes toward bullying prevention can help reduce both perpetration and victimization [16]. Another study examining 486 Chinese adolescents found that while gender differences in victimization were not statistically significant, depressive symptoms mediated the link between traditional bullying and psychological distress, but not for cyberbullying [17]. These findings emphasize the need to explore not just prevalence but also the emotional and psychological impact of bullying across genders.

2.2. Trends in Bullying and Victimization Over Time

Longitudinal research provides insight into how bullying patterns evolve. A study conducted in Brazil from 2019 to 2022 found that bullying victimization rates declined from 46% to 30% over three years, suggesting that anti-bullying initiatives and increased awareness may be influencing behavior over time [18]. However, such declines are not universally observed, and regional or cultural factors may shape bullying dynamics differently. One form of cyberbullying that is particularly concerning is sharing explicit media without consent. A study conducted in Spain with 1,027 adolescents found that 14% of participants had shared private photos or videos without permission, with males engaging in this behavior more frequently than females [19]. This underscores the need to address online privacy and digital ethics as part of anti-bullying efforts.

2.3. Victimization and Its Consequences

Research suggests that being bullied is linked to other high-risk behaviors among adolescents. A study in China found that school bullying victimization was significantly associated with smoking e-cigarettes, with higher levels of physical victimization correlating with increased tobacco use, particularly among female students [20]. Additionally, studies have explored the psychological effects of cyberbullying, with research on 2,171 adolescents (aged 11–18) indicating that cyber-victimization had a direct impact on emotional distress and psychological inflexibility, making victims more vulnerable to mental health issues [21]. Another large-scale study analyzing data from 345,506 adolescents examined factors contributing to bullying and victimization. The findings revealed that feeling socially excluded, experiencing family conflicts (such as arguments, insults, or parental substance abuse), and lacking peer support were strongly associated with an increased likelihood of victimization—both online and offline [22]. This highlights the importance of family dynamics and social belonging in understanding the root causes of bullying.

2.4. Moral and Ethical Influences on Bullying

Beyond external factors, moral reasoning and ethical awareness also play a role in shaping bullying behaviors. A study involving 7,837 adolescents examined cyber moral literacy, moral disengagement, and guilt, and found that adolescents with higher cyber moral literacy were less likely to engage in cyberbullying, while those with lower levels of guilt were more prone to perpetrating online aggression [23]. These findings emphasize the importance of moral education and ethical reasoning in preventing bullying.

2.5. Research Gap and Justification

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into bullying and cyberbullying, several gaps remain unaddressed, particularly in the context of Kosovo. First, research on bullying in Kosovo has primarily focused on prevalence rates, with limited attention given to psychological impacts and fear of victimization. Second, while some studies have examined gender differences in bullying, the extent to which fear varies between males and females remains unclear. Lastly, few studies have explored how different forms of bullying (verbal, physical, and cyberbullying) uniquely contribute to adolescents' fear of being bullied.

This study aims to address these gaps by investigating the relationship between victimization and the fear of being bullied among adolescents in Kosovo, with a specific focus on gender differences. By identifying these patterns, the research seeks to contribute to more effective prevention strategies and policy recommendations.

2.6. Hypotheses

Based on the existing literature and the identified research gaps, this study proposes the following hypotheses:

H_1: The Impact of Bullying Victimization on Fear

Adolescents who experience higher levels of bullying victimization will report significantly higher levels of fear of being bullied, as victimization leads to increased anxiety and heightened awareness of potential threats.

H_2: The Role of Gender in Fear of Bullying

Female adolescents will exhibit higher levels of fear of being bullied compared to male adolescents, reflecting gender-based differences in emotional responses and coping mechanisms.

H_3: The Effect of Cyberbullying on Fear

Adolescents who receive threatening or offensive messages via the internet or mobile phones will report significantly higher levels of fear of being bullied, as cyberbullying is persistent, invasive, and often anonymous.

H_4: The Association Between Physical Bullying and Fear

Adolescents who experience physical aggression (e.g., being hit, kicked, or pushed) will demonstrate significantly higher levels of fear of being bullied, as direct physical threats are immediate and intimidating.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Participants and Sampling

The study involved a sample of 646 adolescents aged 14–19 years, selected randomly from schools in both rural and urban areas of Kosovo. The sample included 388 females (60.1%) and 258 males (39.9%), representative of the demographic distribution. Data collection took place between January and May 2024 in the regions of Prishtina, Peja, Mitrovica, Gjakova, Gjilan, Prizren, and Ferizaj.

3.2. Data Collection

Participants were chosen from randomly selected classes, with no prior knowledge of gender composition, to ensure an unbiased sampling process. Data were gathered during school hours in a classroom setting, under the supervision of trained researchers. To facilitate accurate and clear responses, researchers provided instructions and addressed any questions about the questionnaire. The questionnaires, which took approximately 30 minutes to complete, were distributed and collected directly by the researchers to ensure data reliability and minimize potential biases. Ethical standards were rigorously upheld throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research, confidentiality was ensured, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation.

3.3. Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 21). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic characteristics of the participants and the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying behaviors. Independent samples t-tests were conducted to explore gender differences in bullying behaviors, including physical, verbal, and cyber aggression. Multiple linear regression analysis was performed to examine the predictors of fear of being bullied, with variables such as bullying victimization, bullying experiences, gender, and age included as predictors. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ for all tests, and the results were reported with corresponding confidence intervals to ensure clarity and reliability.

Figure 1 visually represents the multiple regression model used in the study, illustrating the relationship between independent variables (predictors) and the dependent variable (outcome). The multiple regression approach enables an assessment of the unique contribution of each predictor while controlling for the effects of the others. This model differs from prior studies by integrating multiple factors into a single analysis rather than examining them in isolation. The statistical significance of these predictors provides insights into which variables play a critical role in shaping students' fear of bullying, informing future interventions and policy recommendations.

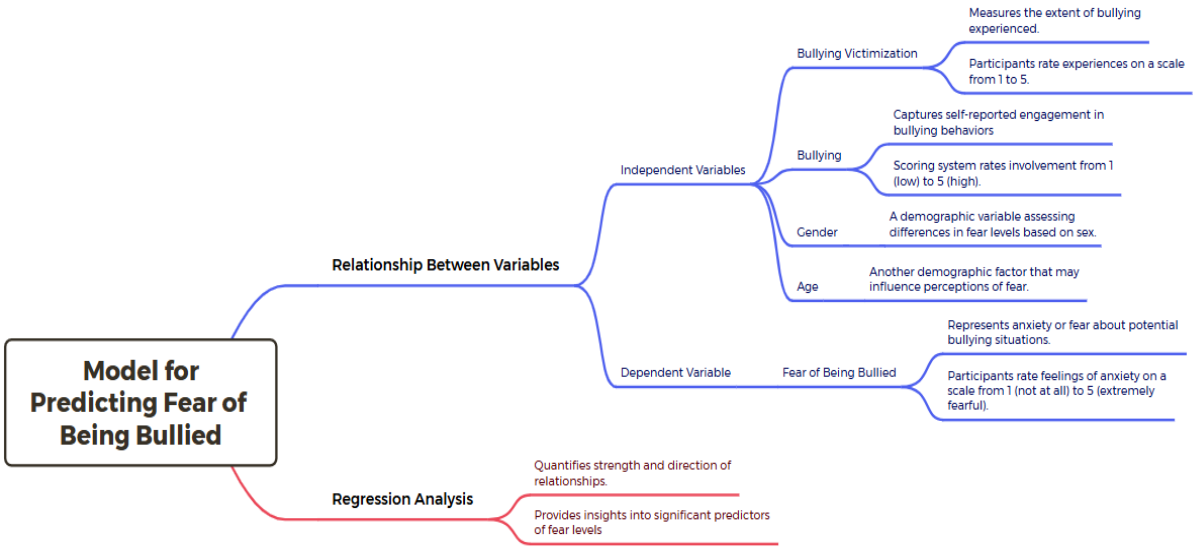

Figure 1.
Multiple regression model for predicting fear of being bullied.

The sample size for this study was determined using [18] formula for finite populations:

$$N = \frac{N}{1+N(e^2)} \quad (1)$$

Where N=81,000 (population size) and e=0.05 (margin of error at 95% confidence level). Substituting these values:

$$N = \frac{81.000}{1+81,000(0.05^2)} = 398 \quad (2)$$

The sample size of 646 participants in this study exceeds the minimum requirement, ensuring higher precision and representativeness.

Instrument used:

3.4. Bullying and Cyberbullying Behaviors Questionnaire

The Bullying and Cyberbullying Behaviors Questionnaire was developed by Coelho and Sousa [19]. The questionnaire consists of 22 items on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (almost always). The minimum score is 22 points, while the maximum score is 110. The Cronbach's alpha ranges between 0.77 and 0.81.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics of Bullying and Cyberbullying

From the descriptive statistics of bullying and cyberbullying behaviors in 646 participants (Table 1), it can be observed that respondents generally disagreed with statements suggesting they engaged in bullying behaviors in the context of bullying and cyberbullying. The item "I threatened or forced another into doing something unwanted" had a low mean (M = 1.50, SD = 1.05) and low variance (1.11), indicating strong disagreement with this behavior and more consistency in responses. Similarly, "I sent threatening or rude messages via the internet" (M = 1.83, SD = 1.20) and "I sent threatening or rude messages by mobile phone" (M = 1.81, SD = 1.19) had low to moderate means, reflecting occasional involvement in cyberbullying. The highest mean in the category of bullying and cyberbullying was for "I called them mean names, made fun of, or teased them" (Mean = 1.91, SD = 1.21, variance = 1.48).

In the part on victims of bullying, the item "They spread rumors or lies about me" had the highest mean (M = 2.49, SD = 1.41, Variance = 2.00), suggesting some variation in the frequency of this behavior. On the victimization side, other items such as "I was called mean names, made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way" (M = 2.12, SD = 1.27, Variance = 1.62) show that participants reported being victims of bullying with moderate frequency. Other items like "I was called mean names, made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way" (M = 1.73, SD = 1.16, Variance = 1.36) and the item "I was hit, kicked, or pushed hard" (M = 1.73, SD = 1.15, Variance = 1.32) had the same means, which indicates that verbal and physical bullying occur simultaneously.

Items related to the fear of bullying, such as "They sent me threatening or rude messages via the internet" had the highest mean in this category (M = 1.83, SD = 1.21), while "They sent me threatening or rude messages by mobile phone" (M = 1.75, SD = 1.21) had moderate means, indicating some level of concern about being bullied. Overall, participants exhibited low to moderate involvement in bullying behaviors, moderate experiences of victimization, and some anxiety regarding the possibility of being bullied.

Table 1.
Descriptive statistics for bullying and cyberbullying behaviors questionnaire.

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean± standard deviation (SD)	Variance
Bullying and cyberbullying					
I threatened or forced another into doing something unwanted.	646	1.00	5.00	1.50 ±1.05	1.11
I sent threatening or rude messages via Internet.	646	1.00	5.00	1.83 ±1.20	1.45
I sent threatening or rude messages by mobile phone	646	1.00	5.00	1.81 ±1.19	1.42
I took money or other thing, damaged their clothes	646	1.00	5.00	1.49 ±1.05	1.04
I spread rumors or doubtful stories	646	1.00	5.00	1.81 ±1.24	1.54
I placed photos or videos of other students online without permission	646	1.00	5.00	1.62±1.14	1.31
I made offensive comments regarding ethnicity	646	1.00	5.00	1.61 ±1.19	1.43
I hit, kicked or pushed in violent way	646	1.00	5.00	1.78±1.23	1.51
I kept them out of things ignored excluded from activities	646	1.00	5.00	1.63±1.12	1.26
I groped, made sexually offensive gestures or comments	646	1.00	5.00	1.55±1.113	1.28
I called them mean names, made fun or teased them	646	1.00	5.00	1.91±1.21	1.48
Victim of bullying					
I was threatened or forced to do something unwanted	646	1.00	5.00	1.73± 1.16	1.36
I was called mean names, made fun of or teased in hurtful way	646	1.00	5.00	2.12± 1.27	1.62
I was put aside, excluded or ignored	646	1.00	5.00	2.01 ±1.25	1.56
They spread rumors or lies about me	646	1.00	5.00	2.49± 1.41	2.00
I was hit, kicked or pushed hard	646	1.00	5.00	1.73± 1.15	1.32
They put unwanted photos or videos of me online	646	1.00	5.00	1.66± 1.14	1.32
Fear of being bullied					

Item	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean± standard deviation (SD)	Variance
They sent me threatening or rude messages via internet	646	1.00	5.00	1.83± 1.21	1.48
They sent me threatening or rude messages by mobile phone	646	1.00	5.00	1.75±1.21	1.47
They groped me, made sexually offensive comments	646	1.00	5.00	1.61± 1.15	1.33
I had money or other things taken from me or destroyed	646	1.00	5.00	1.46±1.05	1.11
They made offensive comments about my ethnicity	646	1.00	5.00	1.59±1.16	1.35

4.2. Gender Differences in Bullying and Cyberbullying

The results revealed statistically significant gender differences in several aggressive behaviors (Table 2). For the item *"I threatened or forced someone to do something undesirable"*, males reported higher frequencies than females (*t(480.760) = -3.227, p = 0.001, Mean Difference = -0.281, 95% CI: [-0.453, -0.110]). A similar pattern was observed in digital aggression. Males were significantly more likely than females to report engaging in *"I threatened or sent offensive messages online"* (*t(483.562) = -6.319, p < 0.001, Mean Difference = -0.615, 95% CI: [-0.807, -0.424]) and *"I threatened or sent offensive messages via phone"* (*t(486.633) = -5.520, p < 0.001, Mean Difference = -0.535, 95% CI: [-0.726, -0.345]).

In terms of property-related aggression, males were more likely to engage in *"I took money or damaged someone's property"* than females (*t(481.637) = -2.838, p = 0.005, Mean Difference = -0.248, 95% CI: [-0.419, -0.076]). Males also reported higher levels of sharing unauthorized media (*"I shared photos or videos without their consent"*) compared to females (*t(533.184) = -2.489, p = 0.013, Mean Difference = -0.230, 95% CI: [-0.412, -0.048]). A statistically significant gender difference was also noted in *"I made offensive comments about their ethnicity"*, with males more frequently engaging in this behavior (*t(491.826) = -2.578, p = 0.010, Mean Difference = -0.255, 95% CI: [-0.449, -0.061]).

Physical aggression was similarly more common among males. For *"I hit, kicked, or pushed violently"*, males reported higher frequencies than females (*t(478.576) = -5.272, p < 0.001, Mean Difference = -0.530, 95% CI: [-0.727, -0.332]). Males also reported higher involvement in *"I excluded someone from activities"* (*t(480.752) = -3.443, p = 0.001, Mean Difference = -0.319, 95% CI: [-0.501, -0.137]) and *"I made offensive sexual comments"* (*t(434.243) = -5.091, p < 0.001, Mean Difference = -0.483, 95% CI: [-0.669, -0.296]).

Verbal aggression was likewise significantly higher among males for *"I mocked someone with insulting names"* (*t(519.734) = -2.921, p = 0.004, Mean Difference = -0.289, 95% CI: [-0.483, -0.095]). However, other measures did not show significant differences. For example, *"I was threatened or forced to do something I didn't want to"* yielded no significant gender difference (*t(644) = -0.130, p = 0.897, Mean Difference = -0.012, 95% CI: [-0.197, 0.172]). Similarly, there were no gender differences in *"I was called insulting names or bullied by others"* (*t(644) = 1.208, p = 0.227, Mean Difference = 0.124, 95% CI: [-0.077, 0.324]) or *"I was ignored and excluded from various activities"* (*t(644) = 1.027, p = 0.305, Mean Difference = 0.103, 95% CI: [-0.094, 0.301]).

The variable *"Rumors were spread about me"* was borderline significant, with males reporting slightly higher engagement, although the result did not reach conventional thresholds for statistical significance (*t(644) = 1.897, p = 0.058, Mean Difference = 0.216, 95% CI: [-0.008, 0.440]). For *"I was hit and pushed"*, no significant gender differences were found (*t(644) = -1.500, p = 0.134, Mean Difference = -0.139, 95% CI: [-0.320, 0.043]). Additionally, *"Offensive comments were made about my ethnicity"* did not show significant gender differences (*t(644) = -1.121, p = 0.263, Mean Difference = -0.105, 95% CI: [-0.288, 0.079]).

Table 2.
Gender differences on bullying and cyberbullying.

Behavior	Male mean (SD)	Female mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Mean difference	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
I threatened or forced someone to do something undesirable	1.67 (1.16)	1.39 (0.96)	-3.227	0.001	-0.281	-0.453	-0.11
I threatened or sent offensive messages online	2.21 (1.29)	1.59 (1.08)	-6.319	0	-0.615	-0.807	-0.424
I threatened or sent offensive messages via phone	2.14 (1.28)	1.60 (1.08)	-5.52	0	-0.535	-0.726	-0.345
I took money or damaged someone's property	1.64 (1.16)	1.39 (0.97)	-2.838	0.005	-0.248	-0.419	-0.076
I spread rumors	1.73 (1.16)	1.87 (1.29)	1.408	0.16	0.137	-0.054	0.329
I shared photos or videos without their consent	1.76 (1.17)	1.53 (1.12)	-2.489	0.013	-0.23	-0.412	-0.048

Behavior	Male mean (SD)	Female mean (SD)	t-value	p-value	Mean difference	95% CI lower	95% CI upper
I made offensive comments about their ethnicity	1.77 (1.30)	1.51 (1.11)	-2.578	0.01	-0.255	-0.449	-0.061
I hit, kicked, or pushed violently	2.10 (1.34)	1.57 (1.11)	-5.272	0	-0.53	-0.727	-0.332
I excluded someone from activities	1.82 (1.23)	1.50 (1.03)	-3.443	0.001	-0.319	-0.501	-0.137
I made offensive sexual comments	1.85 (1.31)	1.37 (0.95)	-5.091	0	-0.483	-0.669	-0.296
I mocked someone with insulting names	2.09 (1.27)	1.80 (1.17)	-2.921	0.004	-0.289	-0.483	-0.095
I was threatened or forced to do something I did not want to	1.74 (1.14)	1.73 (1.19)	-0.131	0.896	-0.012	-0.195	0.171
I was called insulting names or bullied by others	2.05 (1.26)	2.18 (1.28)	1.212	0.226	0.124	-0.077	0.324
I was ignored and excluded from various activities	1.95 (1.27)	2.06 (1.24)	1.023	0.307	0.103	-0.095	0.301
Rumors were spread about me	2.36 (1.38)	2.58 (1.44)	1.914	0.056	0.216	-0.005	0.437
I was hit and pushed	1.82 (1.22)	1.68 (1.11)	-1.472	0.142	-0.139	-0.324	0.046
Offensive comments were made about my ethnicity	1.66 (1.19)	1.55 (1.11)	-1.111	0.267	-0.105	-0.29	0.08

4.3. Predictors of Fear of Bullying

The study employed a multiple linear regression analysis (Table 3) to examine the relationship between fear of being bullied and the predictors: bullying victimization, bullying experiences, gender and age. The analysis included 646 participants, with complete data for all variables.

The regression model was statistically significant, F (4,641) =688.22, p<0.001, and explained 81.1% of the variance in fear of being bullied (R^2=0.811, adjusted R^2=0.810). This indicates that the predictors collectively accounted for a substantial proportion of the variation in the dependent variable. Among the predictors, bullying victimization emerged as the strongest and most significant predictor (B=0.284, β=0.890, p<0.001), indicating that higher levels of victimization were strongly associated with increased fear of being bullied. Gender (B=0.215, β=0.034, p=0.052) showed a marginally significant effect, with females reporting slightly higher levels of fear than males. Conversely, neither bullying experiences (B=0.003, β=0.009, p=0.715) and age (B=0.063, β=0.024, p=0.182) were significant predictors, suggesting these variables do not independently contribute to fear of being bullied when controlling for other factors.

Table 3.
Regression model for predicting fear of bullying.

Predictor fear of being bullied	B (Unstandardized)	SE	Beta (Standardized)	T	p-value
Intercept	-1.716	0.759	-	-2.261	0.024
Bullying Victimization	0.284	0.007	0.890	38.938	<0.001
Bullying	0.003	0.007	0.009	0.365	0.715
Gender	0.215	0.111	0.034	1.944	0.052
Age	0.063	0.047	0.024	1.337	0.182

Note: R^2=0.811, Adjusted R^2=0.810; F(4,641)=688.22,p<0.001.

These findings underscore the central role of victimization in shaping the fear of being bullied, while gender differences warrant further exploration. The lack of significant effects for bullying experiences and age highlights the importance of focusing interventions on victimization experiences rather than general bullying or demographic factors.

5. Discussion

This research investigated bullying and cyberbullying behaviors, gender differences, and the relationship between the fear of being bullied and predictors such as bullying victimization, bullying experiences, gender, and age. The findings provide significant insights into the dynamics of aggression among adolescents, the role of gender in shaping these behaviors, and the predictors of fear related to bullying.

The results of the current study indicate that males exhibit significantly higher levels of bullying behaviors, including verbal and physical aggression, compared to females. These findings align with studies conducted in Spain and Germany, where male adolescents were found to use more physical and verbal aggression than their female counterparts [20, 21].

Similarly, research in Australia also identified higher rates of physical aggression among males, with females exhibiting more indirect aggression [22]. However, in our study, indirect aggression, as measured by the item "I was ignored and excluded from various activities," did not reveal significant gender differences.

Males also demonstrated more property-related aggression and were more likely to engage in cyberbullying behaviors, such as sharing unauthorized photos online and making sexually offensive comments. These findings are consistent with prior research showing that males are more often cyber perpetrators, while females are more frequently cyber victims [23]. Similarly, Smith and Gross [24] reported higher rates of aggressive behaviors among males. These patterns of behavior may be attributed to cultural norms and expectations. In Kosovo, traditional gender roles often encourage males to display stereotypical masculine traits, such as dominance and aggression, while females are expected to exhibit submissiveness and avoid confrontation. These cultural influences may explain why males in this study reported higher levels of bullying and cyberbullying behaviors.

The regression analysis revealed that 81% of the variance in fear of being bullied could be explained by the predictors of bullying victimization, bullying experiences, gender, and age. Among these factors, bullying victimization emerged as the strongest predictor. Participants who reported higher levels of victimization also experienced higher levels of fear related to bullying. This finding is consistent with research by Baek, et al. [25] which found that adolescents with greater exposure to victimization reported higher levels of fear of bullying and victimization. Further, Randa, et al. [26] observed that adolescents subjected to persistent bullying were more likely to experience elevated fear of bullying compared to those who experienced occasional or low levels of bullying. These results highlight the profound psychological impact of victimization and underscore the need for targeted interventions to address this issue. In addition, findings from Navarro, et al. [27] in Spain suggest that stereotypical masculine characteristics are strongly associated with bullying and aggression, whereas feminine traits are inversely related to persistent bullying behaviors. This cultural lens may provide insight into the observed gender differences in our study, as Kosovo continues to perpetuate traditional gender norms that reinforce masculine behaviors such as aggression and dominance.

The findings underscore the importance of addressing gendered norms that may perpetuate aggressive behaviors among males. Educational interventions should focus on fostering emotional regulation, empathy, and respect for others, particularly targeting male adolescents who may be socialized to view aggression as a culturally acceptable trait. Furthermore, efforts to reduce bullying victimization are essential, as this factor strongly predicts the fear of being bullied. Schools should implement comprehensive anti-bullying programs that prioritize prevention, early detection, and support for victims.

For cyberbullying, integrating digital literacy education into school curricula can help students understand the consequences of online aggression and promote responsible online behavior. Gender-sensitive strategies should also be employed to address the unique ways in which males and females engage in and experience cyberbullying.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the complex dynamics of bullying and cyberbullying, particularly in relation to gender differences and cultural norms. Findings indicate that males exhibit higher levels of physical and digital aggression, which may be shaped by societal expectations and traditional gender roles. Additionally, bullying victimization emerged as the strongest predictor of fear of being bullied, underscoring the psychological impact of victimization and the urgent need for targeted interventions. The findings emphasize the importance of developing prevention strategies that address both traditional and online bullying. Educational institutions and policymakers should prioritize anti-bullying programs that focus on social-emotional learning, empathy building, and digital literacy. Additionally, given the high prevalence of cyberbullying, it is essential to promote online safety measures and educate adolescents on responsible digital behavior.

This study relies on self-reported data, which may introduce biases such as social desirability and recall errors, potentially affecting the accuracy of responses. Additionally, its cross-sectional design limits the ability to assess long-term effects and behavioral changes over time. The study sample is also geographically limited, which may impact the generalizability of the findings to broader adolescent populations.

Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to examine the long-term effects of bullying on mental health and social outcomes. Further exploration is needed to differentiate the unique impacts of cyberbullying and traditional bullying. Additionally, research should assess the role of bystanders and the effectiveness of school-based interventions, particularly those emphasizing peer support and emotional regulation. Expanding research to diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts will also help develop more inclusive prevention strategies.

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