

# The Current Situation and Prevention Strategies of School Bullying in Rural Primary Schools

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## Abstract

School bullying affects students' daily life, and has a negative impact on their physical and psychological development. Students are the future of the motherland, bullying should not be allowed to spread in school and harm students' healthy growth. This essay analyzes the current situation and causes of school bullying in rural primary schools in China through literature analysis, as well as the impact of school bullying on primary school students, and then tries to explore prevention strategies for school bullying. This article aims to encourage the government, schools, and parents to join forces, jointly attach importance to the education and guidance of rural primary school students, prevent the occurrence of school bullying, and promote the healthy growth of rural primary school students.

## Keywords

School Bullying, Rural Primary Schools, Current Situation, Prevention Strategies

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## 1. Introduction

School bullying has been a hot topic of concern in recent years. It affects students' daily life, has a negative impact on their physical and psychological development, and may even cause social chaos. Rural areas due to their special characteristics, like few educational resources, a small number of teachers, absence of parental companionship, and lack of educational guidance, and so on, these problems have led to bullying in rural primary and secondary schools. Some studies have shown that children in rural areas are at higher risk of being bullied and engaging in bullying than children in urban areas (Yang & Wang, 2021). Students who are

bullied not only suffer from academic decline, but also face depression, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, and other psychological health problems (She et al., 2021). And some violent bullying may cause harm to the child's body, seriously affect their physical and mental health. Therefore, it is important to know the current situation and causes of rural school bullying, and the government, schools, and parents must pay more attention to students' physical and psychological health development, strengthen education and guidance, and create a harmonious and healthy growth environment for all students.

## 2. Literature Search

To identify relevant studies, I searched the following databases: CNKI, Google Scholar. The search was limited to articles published between 2017 and 2024. I used a combination of keywords such as School bullying and Rural primary schools, Current situation, or Prevention strategies. Additional records were identified by reviewing reference lists of selected articles.

## 3. Current Situation of Bullying in Rural Primary Schools

At present, the phenomenon of school bullying is very common. According to the "School Security Risk Prevention and Control Research" conducted by the Ministry of Education, the incidence of school bullying in China is 33.36% (Guo & Cheng, 2017), which has not only become a hot issue of social concern, but also aroused the attention of the government. Documents issued by the Ministry of Education (*The Ministry of Education and 11 Other Departments, 2017*), such as "The Plan for Strengthening the Comprehensive Management of Bullying among Primary and Secondary School Students" (2017) and "The Work Plan for the Special Management Action against Bullying among Primary and Secondary School Students" (2021), are focus on the governance and prevention of school bullying. It mentioned strengthening education and guidance, and establishing a long-term working mechanism, etc. The promulgation of these documents has effectively promoted the prevention and control of school bullying and also achieved some positive results. However, in some areas, especially villages, have not achieved good governance results. After being bullied in rural areas, students will suffer a blow to their self-confidence, self-esteem, and so on, which will lead to even worse academic performance (Gaffney et al., 2021).

In rural areas, the number of left-behind children is very large. Left-behind children refer to minors under the age of 18 whose parents or one of them works outside and the other has no guardianship ability. The white Paper on the Mental Status of Left-behind Children in China in 2019 analyzed 2763 empirical data from Jiangxi, Anhui, and Yunnan provinces. According to the data, 91.3 percent of children in the surveyed areas suffered from mental violence, 65.1 percent from physical violence, 30.6 percent from sexual violence, and the incidence of neglect was 40.6 percent (*On the Road to School Foundation, 2019*). What deserves our attention is that these issues have a strong negative impact on the physical and

psychological development of children. The self-esteem, resilience, emotional, and social skills of the child victims have all declined, and the maximum decline can reach up to 10.6 percent (On the Road to school Foundation, 2019). School bullying has seriously affected students' daily lives and the development of their physical and psychological health.

## 4. Causes for Bullying in Rural Primary Schools

### 4.1. Students

Primary school students are in a gradual stage of physical and mental growth, and their cognition is still immature. For bullies, it is easy for them to imitate the violent behavior of their parents, the bad information from internet media, and even imitate the words and behaviors of bullying classmates. Bandura, an American social psychologist, found through experiments on children's aggressive behaviors that children often attack others for reasons such as imitation, showing off, and gaining others' recognition (Zhu, 2021). In addition, middle childhood is the stage of emotional and moral development, and their emotional management is imperfect. When arguing with others, they cannot control their emotions well and tend to magnify their emotions. For example, a girl was slapped in the face by her classmates because of a trivial argument at a primary school in Hunan province.

For the bullied, they are frightened by bullying and dare not tell their teachers or parents, and are afraid of being bullied again. And some left-behind children in rural areas lack parental company and are from poor families, they are introverted and have low self-esteem. When a bullying incident occurs, they cannot talk to their parents. These problems will promote the persistence of bullying. In addition, middle childhood has weak legal and moral concepts, and they have an inaccurate understanding of justice and punishment, which can easily lead to bullying among primary school students.

### 4.2. Parents

The education level of rural parents is generally not high, they lack effective guidance and positive education for their children. Because of rural parents' poor academic level, as well as no stable job, they are always busy with farm work, ignore their children's study and life at school, and lack active communication with their children. When children are bullied at school, they and their parents do not actively communicate with each other in time, which will lead to the neglect of the bullying problem, or some parents may think it is just a play between children, do not realize the seriousness of the problem, and they do not have a concept of bullying. On the other hand, parents also lack communication with school teachers, do not learn about their children's school situation, and they also fail to report their children's status at home to the teachers. All of these situations may further reinforce bullying and even lead to a vicious cycle. In addition, with industrial urbanization, more and more rural parents are leaving their hometowns to work in cities, resulting in a large number of left-behind children in rural areas. These

children lack parental companionship and are also short of family education.

### **4.3. Schools**

As an important part of the education system, rural primary schools lack regular training on bullying education. For instance, I interviewed a primary school in Zunyi City, Guizhou Province, which does not regularly organize internal teachers to learn about bullying governance so far, nor does it regularly conduct moral education training for students and their parents. The lack of moral and legal education will seriously affect the formation of the moral concepts of teachers, parents, and students. For teachers, it will minimize teachers' awareness and ability to prevent and address bullying. For students, the lack of relevant bullying education and training will impede the moral development of children. And because of the lack of teachers in rural areas, in some villages, a teacher has to teach more than one course at the same time. In this situation, the school only focuses on the core subjects, ignoring moral and legal education and psychological health education, and failing to guide students in developing good moral character and behavioral habits. For parents, rural parents have weak legal awareness, and a lack of educational guidance is not conducive to improving their moral and legal concepts and mastering scientific family education.

### **4.4. Society**

In this era of big data on the Internet, there is a wide variety of online information. There is good information and bad information on the Internet, and the spread of some violent and negative information can easily affect children. They will learn and imitate bad words and behaviors, which can also lead to bullying. For example, violent content in films, TV shows, games, and on the Internet may be imitated, forming a value system of "the strong bullying the weak". Moreover, at present, policies related to school bullying are still not perfect. Such as the punishment law for bullies and the protection law for bullies. If these policies and systems are not complete, when bullying occurs, there will be no rules to guide schools or parents on how to deal with it, and no laws to restrict students' behavior.

## **5. The Impact of School Bullying**

### **5.1. Academic Impact**

Bullying will affect primary students' academic performance, especially those who are bullied. They worry about being bullied again every day. Due to being in a long-term state of tension, the brain's cognitive resources are occupied by negative emotions, resulting in inattentiveness in class and low efficiency in homework. Some children may skip classes or refuse to go to school, resulting in a disconnection of knowledge points. They are not interested in learning, resulting in a decline in academic performance. Furthermore, it will affect their admission to good junior high schools.

## 5.2. Physical Harm

Some violent bullying will cause physical harm to students, such as robbing students' money with a knife, and fights triggered by trivial quarrels. For example, A first-grade boy in Qingyuan, Zhejiang province, was burned by cigarette ends, and in 2011, two students from a primary school in Kunming, Yunnan Province had a fight after a trivial quarrel, which caused the spleen of the victim to rupture. Because the primary child's body is growing and developing, there are some extremely violent behaviors that may cause damage to the child's body organs and cause permanent damage to the body. What's more, it endangers children's lives.

## 5.3. Psychological Health Harm

Furthermore, bullying can cause trauma to students' psychological health. Existing research shows that bullying can cause significant damage to student's psychological health, the extent of the impact is greatest for those who are bullied, and among the bullied, the obvious rate of symptoms of psychological health problems in descending order is depression, interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, hostility, horror, physical discomfort, psychosis, and paranoia (She et al., 2021). As for the top three psychological health problems, children who are bullied are often afraid and anxious, and they have painful experiences because of bullying. They are always worried about being bullied again, and even afraid of making new friends. They are very sensitive to interpersonal relationships. Depression fills their hearts and seriously affects their mental health. For example, a left-behind child in the country suffered from bullying by classmates at school for one year. He became silent and introverted, had insomnia at night, often felt anxious and irritable, and later developed depression and attempted suicide (Chen et al., 2021). Bullying in school seriously affects the development of children's psychological health, leaving a painful shadow in their hearts, and even more seriously, it may cause students to lose their lives.

So whether it's academic impact, physical harm, psychological health harm, these harms will not only hinder the healthy growth of children, but also affect their personality development after adulthood, and even affect the safety of life, and have a negative impact on the entire family and society.

## 6. Prevention Strategies

### 6.1. School

The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) is the earliest school bullying intervention campaign in the world. It was led by Professor Dan Olweus of the University of Bergen from 1983 to 1985 as a national investigation and research on school bullying and an anti-bullying campaign in Norway (Zhang, 2017). OBPP targets primary and secondary school students, aiming to reduce school bullying problems, prevent new bullying issues, and establish good peer relationships. It consists of strategies at three levels: school, class, and individual.

First, According to the OBPP, the rural primary school can establish a three-level joint defense system of “class - grade - school level”. At the class level, a “Sunshine Buddy” system can be established. Each class trains 3 to 5 observers, who are responsible for recording students’ abnormal behaviors. At the grade level, a mediation team can be established which is composed of psychological teachers and class advisors. They can hold regular weekly meetings to know and exchange students’ performance situations. At the school level, a prevention and control committee can be established which is led by the president. This committee can coordinate and handle the prevention and control work related to school bullying.

Second, the school can design anti-bullying courses that suit the characteristics of rural areas. For instance, in lower grades, teachers can adopt the performance form of skits. Common bullying scenes are transformed into situational stories, allowing primary school students to role-play and experience school bullying as if they were there. Senior students can carry out the “Simulated Village Committee” activity, they can simulate a small village committee to learn nonviolent communication skills and exercise their communication and exchange abilities.

Third, schools can implement a special capacity improvement plan for the prevention and control of school bullying. For example, all teachers are required to complete specialized anti-bullying training every year. The training content includes: identifying early signals (such as a student suddenly refusing to go to school), intervention techniques (nonviolent communication), and psychological counseling methods. In addition, personalized elective training can also be provided, such as learning about the psychological characteristics of left-behind children and educational strategies for special students. Through training, teachers can better educate primary school students and help them grow up healthy. Schools can prevent and control school bullying through these methods and create a harmonious and friendly campus environment for students.

## **6.2. Family**

First, Schools can hold an “Anti-bullying Theme Parents’ Meeting” once a month, inviting parents to participate in training and learning. The training content includes: identifying signs of bullying in children (such as nightmares, resistance to going to school), communication skills (avoiding interrogative conversations), coping methods (not encouraging “hitting back”), etc. Even for parents who work outside, the offline training content can be recorded as videos so that parents and grandparents can watch and learn at any time when they have free time, the “Anti-bullying Theme Parents’ Meeting” aims to guide parents to conduct good parent-child education.

Second, the school can establish a family connection system. For families with left-behind children in rural areas, opportunities can be provided for children to have a video call with their parents once a week, schools can send a letter (including anti-bullying reminder cards) once a month, and parent-child activity days once a semester to keep parents in touch with their children and understand their

daily situation.

Third, parents can establish mutual assistance groups among themselves. Each group can consist of 5 to 8 families. The parent mutual assistance group aims to enable parents to regularly exchange parenting experiences. When they need help, they can assist each other, especially in special families (such as single-parent families and those in poverty). These measures can help parents raise their children scientifically, detect any abnormalities in their children in a timely manner, and prevent the occurrence of bullying incidents.

### 6.3. Society

First, Government departments can formulate the “Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of School Bullying in Rural Areas”. The Guidelines clearly defines the criteria for identifying bullying (such as which specific behaviors fall under school bullying), hands procedures (investigation - hearing - correction), accountability mechanisms, etc., the Guidelines aims to improve the system for the prevention and control of school bullying in rural areas.

Second, Government departments can develop county-level bullying monitoring systems. This system integrates students’ academic records, behavioral records, and home visit data to establish a risk assessment model. And the system can be set with three-level warnings of red, yellow, and blue to achieve precise intervention. For instance, the Women’s Federation of Tongzi County, Zunyi City, Guizhou Province has developed a student monitoring system. This system establishes a ledger for each student and assigns them three color tags: red, yellow, and blue. Red indicates high-risk students. For instance, such students are highly likely to experience depression, violent tendencies, and mental health issues, and thus require close monitoring and attention. Yellow indicates intermediate-risk students, that is, students with a medium probability of abnormal behavior, who need to be constantly monitored. Blue indicates normal students. The student monitoring system can be simultaneously deployed to schools, enabling school teachers to promptly track and understand the students’ conditions. The student monitoring system developed in the pilot county of Tongzi, Guizhou Province, can effectively reduce the occurrence of bullying incidents and also provide a useful reference for other counties and townships.

Third, government departments should strengthen the supervision of online information. They should enhance the regulation of violent or negative online movies, games, public opinions, etc., to prevent them from having a negative impact on primary school students.

### 6.4. Students

First, school-family-society should strengthen students’ moral education together. They should cultivate children’s good moral character, so that the children will neither become bullies nor be bullied. Second, school-family-society should enhance students’ legal knowledge education, enabling them to know, understand,

abide by, and apply the law. They should be clear that bullying will be punished and sanctioned by law, and also know how to protect themselves with the law when they are bullied. Third, students form mutual assistance groups based on their interests. Senior and junior students pair up to help each other in their studies or life and make progress together. Fourth, AI tools can be utilized to enable AI to simulate campus conflict scenarios, allowing students to communicate with them and resolve conflicts. By these means, we can enhance students' knowledge about school bullying and reduce its occurrence.

## 7. Conclusion

Bullying in schools is a global issue that is of great concern to society. It seriously affects the development of students' physical and psychological health. So it is important to know the situation and the causes of school bullying. For primary students, they are at an important stage of physical and mental development. Among those who are bullies, they tend to imitate bad behavior and lack the ability to distinguish right from wrong. If their cognitive, emotional, and moral development is not properly guided, they can not correctly understand the bullying problem. While the bullied, are scared and afraid to tell others about the bullying, they lack psychological counseling from teachers. And a large number of rural students are left-behind children, they do not have the parental companionship and education. Parents, because of the poor academic level of rural parents, have unstable jobs, often ignore the school life of their children, and lack communication with their children and with the teachers. Schools, as an important part of education, often neglect bullying education and guidance, especially in rural areas. Due to the lack of teachers in villages, they often focus on the core courses while neglecting moral and legal education and psychological health education. For society, there is a lack of supervision of undesirable information on the Internet, as well as the improvement of punishment and protection of bullying policies. All these factors are not conducive to the development of students.

The occurrence of school bullying not only affects students' learning, but also seriously harms their physical and psychological health, especially negatively affecting the bullied. They are depressed, sensitive to interpersonal relationships, and lose confidence in life. While the bullies, such violent and aggressive behavior not only affects their personality development but also causes social chaos. Therefore, based on the current situation, the causes and the impacts of school bullying, the school, the family, and the government must pay more attention to bullying and take corresponding measures. Governments should consider improving policies on bullying and standardizing internet media information. Schools should strengthen moral and psychological education and guidance. As for parents, they should communicate with their children and the school teachers more, strengthen parent-and-school collaboration, and implement family members' responsibilities as guardians.

This study discussed the current situation and prevention strategies of school

bullying in rural primary schools in China, but there are several limitations that should be noted. First, my analysis primarily relies on secondary data from published literature and government reports, which may introduce biases inherent in the original datasets. Second, some of the supporting evidence is based on anecdotal cases, for example, the students' cause for bullying in rural primary schools, I used an example is a girl was slapped in the face by her classmates because of a trivial argument at a primary school in Hunan province which is based on anecdotal case. These cases may limit the generalizability of my findings. Most importantly, the prevention strategies proposed in this paper have not yet been empirically tested, future studies should validate these approaches through longitudinal field studies. Despite these limitations, this study provides a basic framework for further research on the prevention of school bullying in rural primary schools. I hope that schools, families, and society can join forces to care about children's growth, prevent the occurrence of school bullying and jointly create a harmonious growth environment for them.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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