The Relationship Between Bullying and Student Learning Outcomes in Basic Education Schools, Gjirokastër-Libohovë Local Education Office

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Abstract

Bullying is considered one of the most significant challenges that contemporary education systems must address, as it affects students' psychological, social, and emotional well-being, as well as their academic outcomes. Studies have shown that exposure to bullying negatively impacts students' motivation, school attendance, classroom engagement, and academic performance. Empirical evidence regarding the link between bullying and learning outcomes within the Albanian educational context—specifically at the lower secondary level—highlights these adverse effects. The aim of this study is to identify, analyze, and evaluate the relationship between bullying and student performance in basic education. The study seeks to determine the frequency and primary forms of bullying in basic education schools, examine the relationship between exposure to bullying and student learning outcomes, and assess the extent to which bullying may serve as an explanatory factor for low performance levels. This research employed a quantitative approach with a descriptive and correlational design. Data were collected via two structured questionnaires administered to 242 students and 70 teachers across nine basic education schools. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. The results showed that bullying is associated with several negative consequences, including a lack of readiness to learn, poor academic performance, sadness, anxiety, withdrawal, absenteeism, and, in some cases, school dropouts. Furthermore, the study identifies a significant relationship between bullying and learning outcomes, indicating that higher levels of bullying are linked to lower academic achievement. These findings contribute to a better understanding of bullying within the Albanian school system and provide evidence for the development of bullying prevention policies, interventions, and support mechanisms aimed at improving student well-being and enhancing academic performance.

Keywords: ***bullying, basic education, learning outcomes, educational process, exposure to bullying***

1. Introduction

Bullying represents one of the most significant social and educational challenges facing contemporary education systems. This phenomenon is characterized by repeated aggressive behavior—whether physical, verbal, social, or virtual—directed at individuals who have difficulty defending themselves (Olweus, 2013). Beyond its impact on students' psychological and social well-being, studies suggest that bullying can also affect the learning process and student motivation (Samara et al., 2021; Nakamoto & Schwartz, 2010). In this context, understanding the relationship between bullying and learning outcomes is a matter of particular importance for researchers and education policymakers.

This study is grounded in theoretical frameworks which view bullying as an influential factor for students' emotional, social, and academic development. Previous research indicates that exposure to bullying is associated with increased anxiety, lowered self-esteem, learning motivation, and poorer academic performance (Bauman, 2006; Saint-Georges & Vaillancourt, 2020). Empirical studies have also shown that bullying can directly or indirectly alter the school social climate, student engagement with learning, and interpersonal relationships among students. Bullying is considered a global phenomenon affecting a significant number of students worldwide. According to UNESCO (2019), approximately one-third of students report experiencing various forms of bullying. In Albania, international and national reports indicate that bullying remains prevalent in schools. Meanwhile, the performance of Albanian students in international assessments, such as PISA 2022, continues to raise concerns regarding the quality of education. Empirical evidence regarding the relationship between bullying and academic performance in the Albanian context remains limited, particularly at the basic education level.

The aim of this study is to identify, analyze, and interpret the relationship between bullying and learning outcomes in basic education within schools under the Gjirokastër-Libohovë Local Education Office by assessing the extent to which bullying can explain academic performance.

To achieve this goal, the study has the following specific objectives:

O1: To identify the frequency and main forms of bullying in basic education schools.

O2: To analyze the relationship between exposure to bullying and students' learning outcomes.

O3: To assess the extent to which bullying explains students' low learning outcomes.

In accordance with these objectives, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1: Can students' low results be explained by the role and impact of bullying?

2: If bullying is a contributing factor, to what extent does it affect students' results?

Based on the existing literature and the study objectives, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: There is a statistically significant relationship between the level of exposure to bullying and students' learning outcomes.

H2: Increased levels of bullying are associated with lower student learning outcomes.

2. Literature Review

Bullying has become one of the most serious problems facing educational systems globally. The phenomenon has attracted the attention of researchers, educational institutions, and international organizations due to its widespread prevalence and its impact on students' educational, social, and emotional outcomes (Cook et al., 2010; Rose et al., 2011). According to UNESCO (2019), approximately 32% of students worldwide report experiencing bullying at least once a month, while 10–15% experience this phenomenon two or more times during the same period. The phenomenon's extensive reach is also reflected in the fact that thousands of children miss school or drop out due to fear associated with bullying (Chaux et al., 2009).

Literature defines bullying as repeated aggressive behavior occurring within a context of power imbalance between the aggressor and the victim (Olweus, 2013). The phenomenon can manifest in various forms—including physical, verbal, and social bullying, as well as cyberbullying—which often coexist, thus reinforcing negative effects on the individual (Elamé, 2013; Maliki et al., 2009; Osterman, 2010). Consequently, researchers have focused their attention not only on the extent of the phenomenon but also on the mechanisms through which it manifests and its consequences on students' lives.

A substantial body of literature has documented how bullying is associated with various physical, psychological, and social consequences for students. Several studies have shown that victims of bullying experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, social isolation, and self-esteem issues, as well as difficulties in building relationships with peers (Copeland et al., 2013; Kelly et al., 2015; van Geel et al., 2018). Bullying has also been linked to mental health issues,

problematic behaviors, and long-term consequences that can affect the victim's personal and professional development (Eriksen et al., 2014; Malik & Mehta, 2016). In addition to psychosocial consequences, particular attention has been paid to the impact of bullying on students' learning outcomes. Darling et al. (2019), Ammermueller (2012), and Allen (2010) argue that bullying is a significant factor that can negatively affect student academic performance. However, the literature indicates uncertainty regarding the mechanisms through which bullying influences student performance, making this topic a subject of ongoing research (Samara et al., 2021; Osterman, 2010).

Previous research suggests that the impact of bullying on outcomes can be both direct and indirect. According to Bauman (2006), exposure to bullying affects students' motivation to learn, concentration during the learning process, and engagement in school activities. At the same time, the emotional and social consequences of bullying can influence factors that the literature considers essential for academic success, such as self-confidence, perceptions of school, relationships with teachers and peers, and students' cognitive and motivational habits (McMahon et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2016; Young-Jones et al., 2014; Rueger et al., 2010; Holt et al., 2007).

The strongest evidence regarding the relationship between bullying and academic performance comes from meta-analytic studies. Nakamoto and Schwartz (2010), based on an analysis of 33 empirical studies, found a consistent negative link between bullying and student achievement. Similarly, Samara et al. (2021), in a meta-analysis of 11 studies, reported that increased exposure to bullying is associated with lower performance outcomes. Comparable findings have been documented by Strøm et al. (2013), Juvonen et al. (2011), Holt et al. (2007), and Ammermueller (2012), all of whom reported that students involved in bullying—whether as victims or perpetrators—are more likely to achieve lower results than their peers.

One dimension less explored in the literature is the role of the teacher in the phenomenon of bullying. Most studies have focused on peer-to-peer bullying, while less attention has been paid to instances where bullying behaviors may stem from student-teacher relationships (Olweus, 2013). Research has shown that negative teacher behaviors—including intimidation, humiliation, and psychological mistreatment—can adversely affect students' motivation, self-esteem, class engagement, and academic achievement (Twemlow et al., 2006). Consequently, contemporary studies have begun to examine not only the presence of this phenomenon, but also the ways in which it impacts students' performance and school experience.

Although international literature offers substantial evidence regarding the relationship between bullying and student outcomes, research within the Albanian context remains relatively limited. In particular, there is a lack of empirical studies directly analyzing the significance of bullying in explaining Albanian student outcomes. This research gap underscores the need for further local studies aimed at identifying the role and impact of bullying on educational outcomes, as well as providing evidence to support policies and preventive interventions.

Despite the international literature on bullying and its impact on student performance, empirical evidence within the Albanian context—particularly regarding basic education—remains limited. Existing studies have primarily focused on the prevalence and psychosocial consequences of the phenomenon, while its impact on learning outcomes has received less attention. This study aims to address this gap by providing empirical evidence from basic education schools in the Gjirokastër–Libohovë district. Its contribution lies in analyzing the relationship between bullying and learning outcomes within an under-studied local context, thereby enriching the national literature and providing valuable data for research and evidence-based educational policy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study employed a quantitative research approach and utilized a descriptive and inferential design. The quantitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enabled the measurement of bullying levels in basic education and the analysis of the relationship between bullying practices and student outcomes. The study is cross-sectional in nature, as data were collected at a single point in time from the students and teachers participating in the research.

3.2 Population

The Gjirokastër-Libohovë Local Education Office has a total of 9 (nine) basic education schools, of which 6 (six) are in urban areas and 3 (three) are in rural areas.

There are 2,113 students in total: 1,699 attend urban schools, while 414 attend schools in rural areas. The student

population selected for the study comprises grades 5 through 9, totaling 1,328 students; the study sample itself included 242 students. Of these, 162 were from urban areas and 80 from rural areas. This sample was selected because peer relationships become increasingly important at this age, where the first signs of bullying begin to appear; students in this age group have a better understanding of the phenomenon of bullying and are able to answer questions more accurately; and psychologists and teachers agree that elements of bullying begin to emerge in the fifth grade.

There are 200 teachers in total, 145 of whom serve in urban schools and 55 in rural schools. The selected group of teachers consists of those teaching grades 5 through 9; while there are 110 such teachers in total, the study sample included 70 of them. Of these, 46 were from urban areas and 24 were from rural areas.

The sample included both genders across both participant groups. The sample size ensured sufficient statistical representation of the study population, with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error of 5.7% for students and 7% for teachers, based on calculations from the Raosoft Sample Size Calculator.

The field of study encompasses an examination of the relationship between bullying and student learning outcomes in basic education. The study includes students and teachers from the Gjirokastër-Libohovë Local Education Office (ZVA).

The study is limited to data collected via questionnaires during the designated research period and does not aim to establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

3.3 Research tools

Two structured questionnaires were used to collect data from students and teachers, with designs based on international literature and instruments used in previous studies on bullying. The student questionnaire comprised 20 questions organized into four sections: demographic data, learning outcomes, bullying as a phenomenon, and indicators of bullying. The teacher questionnaire consisted of 15 questions divided into three sections: demographic data, bullying as a phenomenon, and indicators of bullying. The instruments aimed to document perceptions of bullying, its forms, the frequency of occurrence, and potential impacts on learning outcomes.

For the design of the questionnaires, we relied on the studies of several authors:

Darmawan, D. (2010). *Bullying in school: A study of forms and motives of aggression in two secondary schools in the city of Palu, Indonesia*. University of Tromsø.

https://www.scribd.com/document/346577845/Bullying-Questionnaire

Olweus, D. (1996). *The Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire*. Research Center for Health Promotion, University of Bergen https://www.psy.lmu.de/mobbing/material/rbq_english.pdf

Cornell, D., & Sheras, P. (2003). *School Climate Bullying Survey*. University of Virginia. https://www.scribd.com /document/386081808/School-Climate-Bullying-Questionnare-pdf

To ensure the validity and clarity of the instruments, a pilot study was conducted with 15 students and 10 teachers. Based on participant feedback, the questionnaires were revised and improved prior to their final administration. Data collection took place in the basic education classes (grades 5–9) included in the study, adhering to the principles of voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality.

The study's dependent variable was student performance, while the independent variables included the frequency of major forms of bullying—such as physical, verbal, and cyberbullying—as well as bullying instigated by students and bullying perpetrated by teachers. The data were coded and analyzed using SPSS 21 software, employing both descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson correlation analysis was used to assess the relationship between bullying and academic performance, with a statistical significance level of $p < 0.05$.

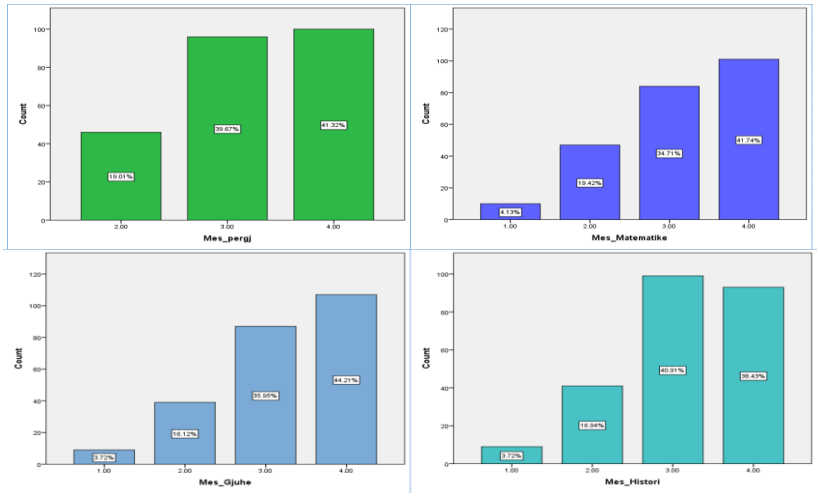
To minimize bias and subjectivity in the self-reported results, students' self-declarations were verified against school registers. This verification confirmed the consistency of the students' reported results. The survey was designed with self-declaration to allow students greater freedom and to foster trust in their responses.

The study was conducted in accordance with the principles of scientific research ethics, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and the use of data exclusively for academic and research purposes.

The validity and internal reliability of the data collected via the student instrument—and used in the multiple linear regression inferential model—were verified using Cronbach's Alpha.

4. Results and Discussion

To collect the data and draw conclusions, research questions were formulated for students and teachers; these were subsequently analyzed through the statistical processing of the collected data. The analysis focused on comparing the distribution of bullying phenomena based on various sample characteristics, utilizing descriptive comparative statistics and showcased in graphical presentations generated with SPSS 21. The results were analyzed according to the relevant sections of the questionnaires.

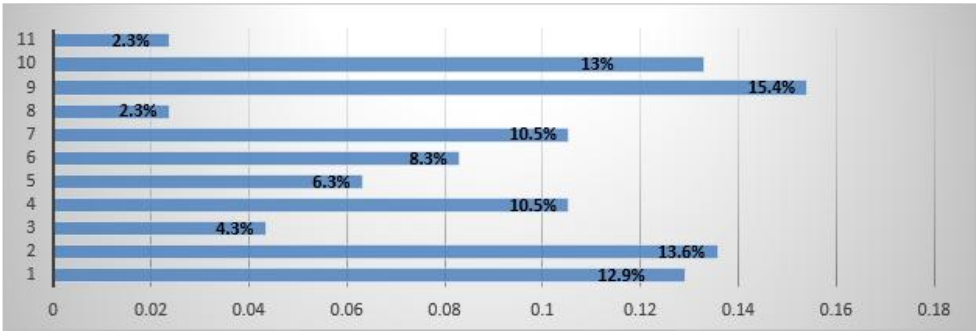


Graph 1. Percentage distribution of results (overall, mathematics, Albanian language, and history)

Graph 1 shows that 41.32% of students report an overall grade average of 9–10, 39.67% report an average of 7–8, and 19.01% report an average of 5–6, while no student reported an average grade below 5. A similar distribution is observed in mathematics, where 41.74% of students report grades of 9–10, 34.71% report 7–8, and 23.55% report 5–6. Similar result distributions are observed for Albanian Language and History. In Albanian language, 44.21% of students report very good results (9–10), 35.95% report average results (7–8), while approximately 20% report lower results (5–6). In History, the largest group consists of students with average results (40.91%), followed by those with very good results (38.43%), while about 21% of students report results in the 5–6 range.

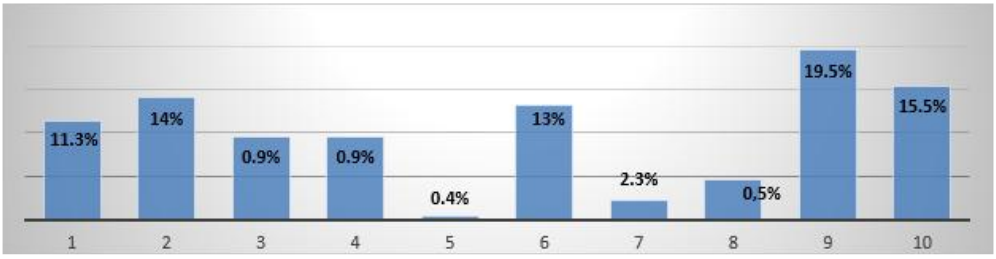
4.1 The phenomenon of bullying in the Gjirokastër school district

This section presents descriptive results regarding the perspectives of students and teachers on the phenomenon of bullying in school. The analysis focuses on the factors driving bullying, the individuals who engage in it, the settings where it most frequently occurs, the primary forms of bullying, and its consequences. The results are presented through percentage distributions of the relevant indicators for each study sample.



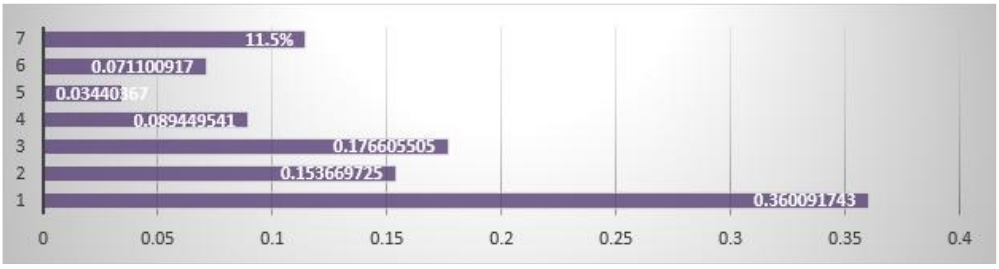
Graph 2. Distribution of causes of bullying according to students

According to Graph 2, the primary cause of bullying in Gjirokastër schools—as reported by the students themselves—is the behavior and temperament (15.4%) of the individuals involved, followed by physical appearance (13.6%) and communication style (13.3%). Additionally, there is a significant prevalence of bullying based on physical traits (12.9%), socioeconomic disparities (10.5%), and differences in abilities (10.5%). Learning style (2.4%) and age differences (4.3%) were identified less frequently as causes of bullying.



Graph 3. Distribution of causes of bullying according to teachers

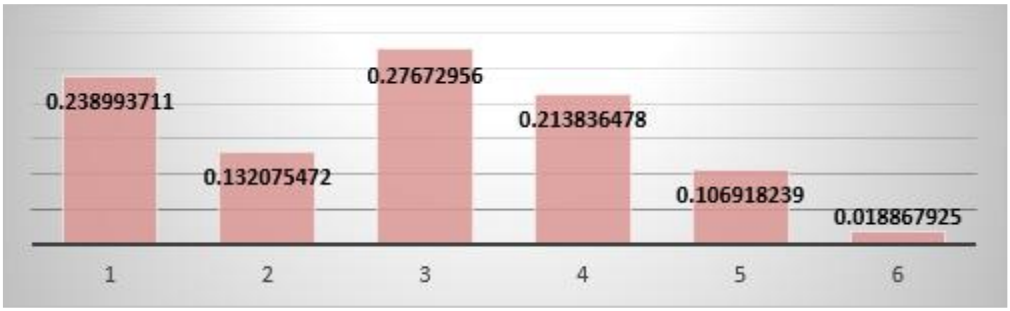
Like the students, teachers believe that behavior and temperament (19.5%) is among the primary causes of bullying in schools in the Gjirokastër district (Graph 3), followed by communication style (15.5%). Physical characteristics and appearance account for 25.5% combined, but unlike the students, teachers believe that social differences are also a notable cause of bullying (13.2%). According to the teachers, grades are the least significant cause of bullying (0.5%). Unlike the students, teachers believe that economic differences (2.3%) are not a significant cause of bullying.



Graph 4. Distribution of bully identities according to students

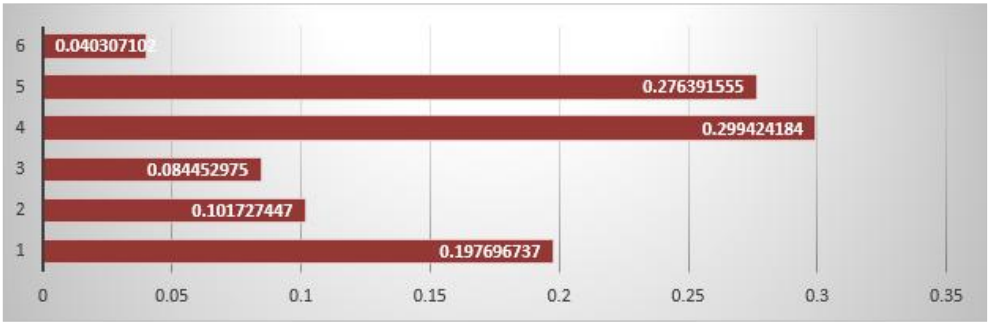
According to students (Graph 4), the individuals who perpetrate bullying most often are boys who are not their classmates (36%). The portion of cases involving male classmates as bullies remains significant (17.7%). Girls (whether classmates

or not) are the source of bullying in 24.3% of cases. According to students, "popular" students are the source of bullying in 11.5% of cases. Teachers represent the least common source of bullying (3.4%).



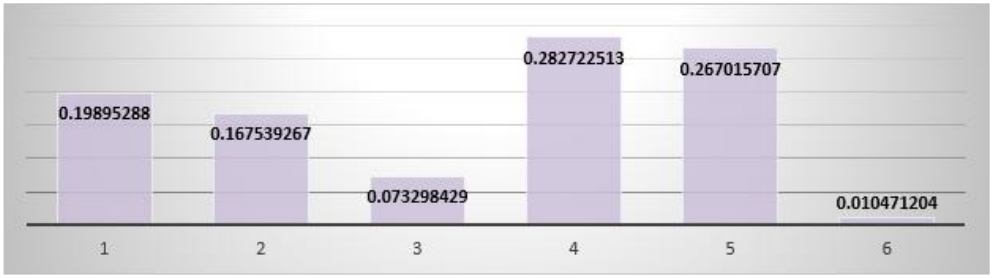
Graph 5. Distribution of bully identities according to teachers

Boys (51.6% in total) are also viewed by teachers as the primary source of bullying (Graph 5); however, unlike students, teachers believe that male classmates are responsible for the highest number of bullying incidents (27.7%). Furthermore, unlike the students, teachers consider girls (whether classmates or not) more likely overall to be the cause of bullying (34.6%). "Popular" students are seen as the cause of bullying in only 10.7% of cases. Unlike the students, teachers believe they themselves are the cause of bullying in only 1.9% of cases.



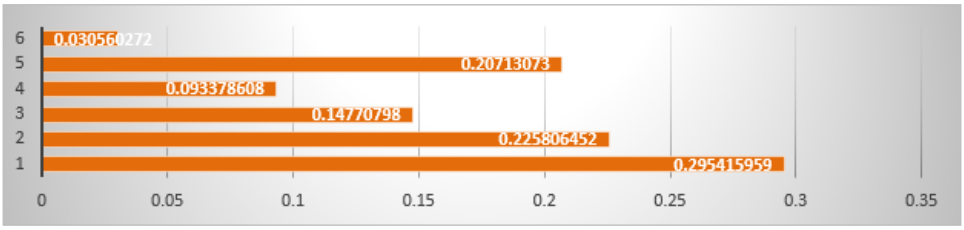
Graph 6. Distribution of places where bullying occurs according to students

Regarding bullying location (Graph 6), students believe that the schoolyard is the place with the highest concentration of bullying (29.9%), followed by areas outside of school (27.6%). The classroom is also a setting with a significant concentration of bullying (19.8%).



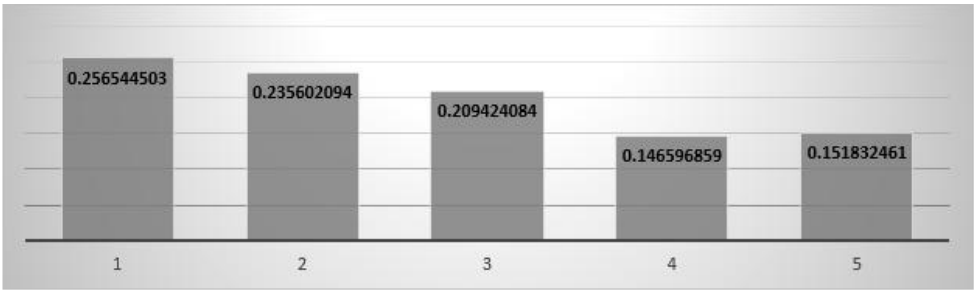
Graph 7. Distribution of places where bullying occurs according to teachers

The results from teachers about bullying locations are nearly identical to the student sample (Graph 7). For teachers, similarly, the places where bullying most frequently occurs are the schoolyard (28.3%) and areas outside the school (26.7%). The classroom (19.9%) and school corridors (16.8%) are also identified as high-concentration bullying locations from the teachers' perspective.



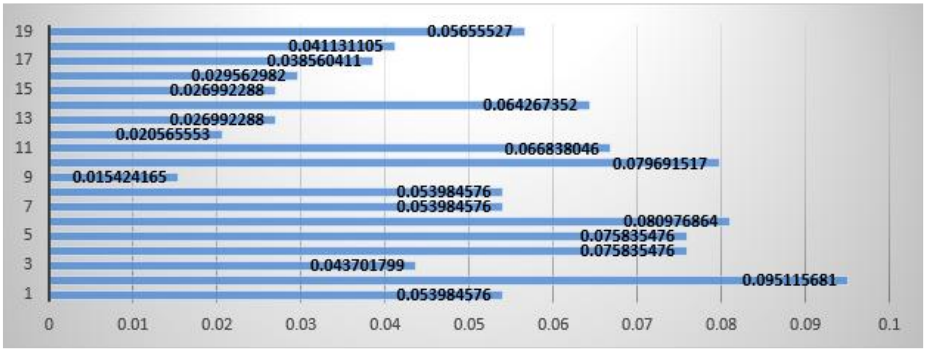
Graph 8. Distribution of forms of bullying according to students

The distribution of forms of bullying, according to students, is presented in Graph 8. The most common form is physical bullying (29.5%). According to the students, verbal exchanges (20.7%) and psychological pressure (22.6%) occur quite frequently. Social pressure accounts for 14.8% of cases, while cyberbullying is involved in 9.3% of bullying incidents.



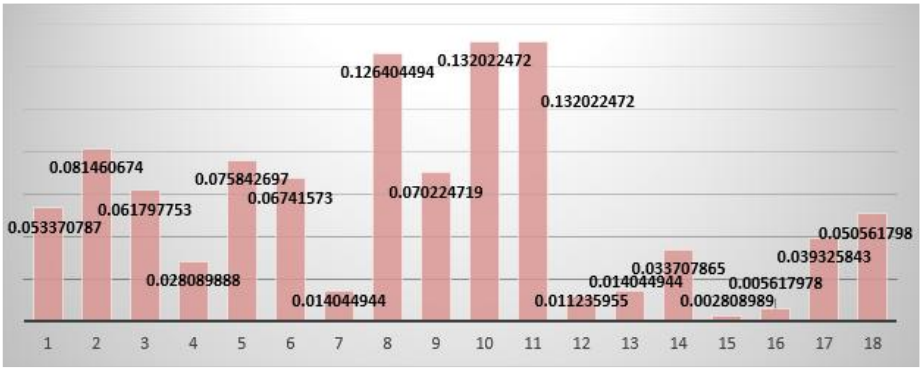
Graph 9. Distribution of forms of bullying according to teachers

Physical confrontation (25.7%) and verbal exchanges (23.6%) remain the primary forms of bullying according to teachers (Graph 9); however, unlike students, teachers believe that social dynamics (20.9%) manifest more frequently as in their schools. According to them, psychological pressure occurs less often (15.2%). Nevertheless, teachers perceive cyberbullying (14.7%) as a more prevalent form of bullying compared to the students' responses.



Graph 10. Distribution of consequences of bullying according to students

According to Graph 10, which presents the consequences of bullying identified by students, the most prevalent effects are anxiety, a reluctance to attend school, and a lack of motivation to learn. Additionally, low self-esteem and feelings of isolation are frequently cited by students, alongside the development of guilt and poor academic performance. Less frequently reported—though still significant—consequences include dropping out of school (4.1%), substance abuse (2.7%), and, most alarmingly, suicidal thoughts (2.1%).



Graph 11. Distribution of consequences of bullying by teachers

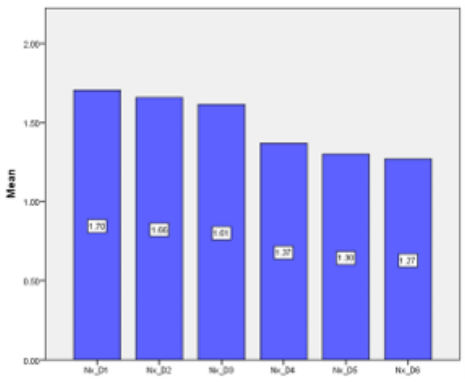
Based on teachers' responses (Graph 11), they believe the most prominent consequences of bullying are a lack of readiness to learn—resulting in poor grades (13.2%)—and student sadness (12.6%). Teachers also identify significant levels of anxiety (8.1%) resulting from bullying, as well as withdrawal (7.6%) and a reluctance to attend school (6.7%). They also note similar levels of reluctance to communicate with others. The desire to drop out of school accounts for 5.1% of teachers' reported consequences. Although at lower rates than reported by students themselves, teachers also believe that bullying leads to substance abuse and suicidal thoughts.

4.2 The frequency of bullying in Gjirokastër schools

Of interest to our study is the frequency of bullying in primary schools in the Gjirokastër district. The variables used for this study were constructed based on the mean values of reports from the students (Table 1) and teachers (Table 2) participating in the study, using specific indicators for each case that were assessed via Likert scales.

Table 1. Variables for cases of bullying according to students

Variabli	What does the variable represent	QUESTIONS ON THE INSTRUMENT
D1	Physical bullying	P15.01 – P15.15
D2	Verbal bullying	P16.01 – P16.15
D3	Bullying instigation	P17.01 – P17.09
D4	Virtual bullying	P18.01 – P18.09
D5	Physical bullying by teachers	P19.01 – P19.08
D6	Verbal bullying by teachers	P20.01-P20.16



Descriptive Statistics

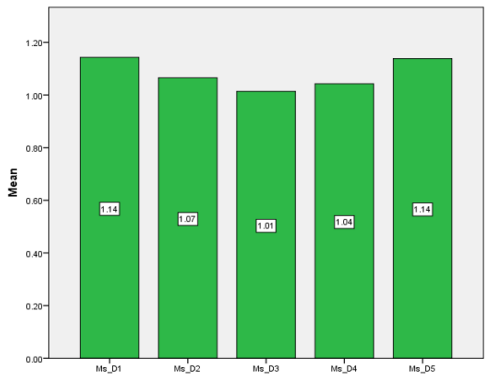
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Nx_D1	242	4.00	1.00	5.00	1.7029	.63108
Nx_D2	242	3.57	1.00	4.57	1.6575	.60007
Nx_D3	242	4.56	0.00	4.56	1.6133	.69100
Nx_D4	242	3.56	0.00	3.56	1.3681	.56540
Nx_D5	242	5.00	0.00	5.00	1.2992	.57909
Nx_D6	242	4.00	0.00	4.00	1.2691	.55518
Valid N (listwise)	242					

Graph 12. Distribution of students' average perception for each variable

According to Graph 12, students identified instances of bullying in all its forms—represented by variables D1–D6—on average. Physical bullying (Mean = 1.7) was identified most frequently, followed by verbal bullying (Mean = 1.66). With respective means of 1.3 and 1.27, students reported identifying physical and verbal bullying by their teachers more than once. Similarly, students reported having been involved as instigators or witnesses to bullying at their school on more than one occasion (Mean = 1.61). On average, students stated they had witnessed more than one instance of cyberbullying (1.37). The central tendency for the frequency of the various forms of bullying falls within the range of 1 to 4 occurrences.

Table 2. Variables for cases of bullying according to teachers

Variabli	What does the variable represent	QUESTIONS ON THE INSTRUMENT
D1	Physical bulling	P07.01 – P07.07
D2	Verbal bullying	P08.01 – P08.05
D3	Bullying instigation	P09.01 – P09.03
D4	Present in case of physical bullying	P10.01 – P10.09
D5	Present in case of verbal bullying	P11.01 – P11.08



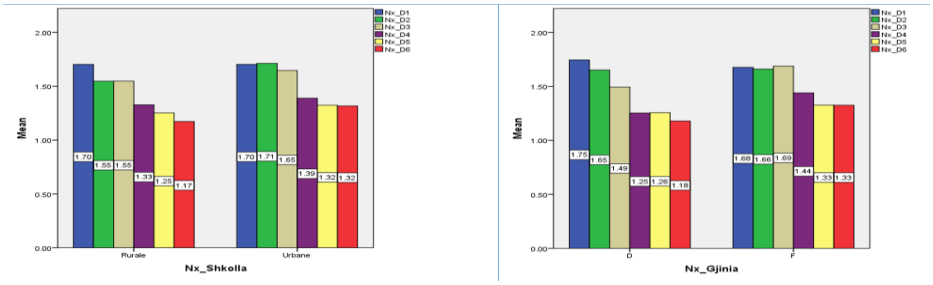
Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Ms_D1	70	.71	1.00	1.71	1.1431	.15105
Ms_D2	70	1.60	0.00	1.60	1.0657	.18248
Ms_D3	70	1.33	0.00	1.33	1.0140	.15415
Ms_D4	70	1.00	1.00	2.00	1.0429	.17010
Ms_D5	70	1.50	1.00	2.50	1.1384	.22979
Valid N (listwise)	70					

Graph 13. Distribution of teachers' average perception for each variable

According to diagram 13, the surveyed teachers typically have identified cases of bullying in all its forms, as represented by variables D1-D5. On average, physical bullying (Mean = 1.14) and verbal bullying (Mean = 1.14) were identified more often. Referring to the standard deviation values (table on the right), despite the fact that teachers may declare higher

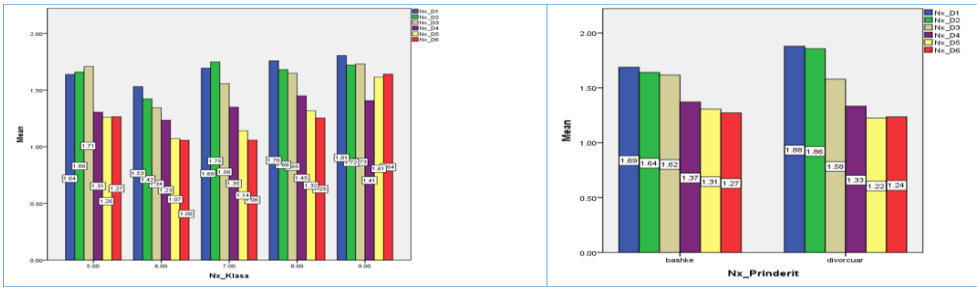
levels of frequency of bullying cases, they report that, in Gjirokastra schools, the typical frequency concentration of different forms of bullying ranges from 1 to 2 times.



Graph 14. Comparative distribution of the frequency of bullying incidents by school and gender of students

Graph 14 presents the comparative distribution of bullying incidents according to the school attended by students (chart on the left) and their gender (chart on the right). According to the chart, the frequency of physical bullying does not differ between urban and rural schools, remaining at the same level (Mean = 1.7), whereas the incidence of verbal bullying is higher in urban schools compared to rural ones (1.71 vs. 1.55). The same trend appears when comparing all other forms of bullying, indicating that bullying is more frequent in urban schools.

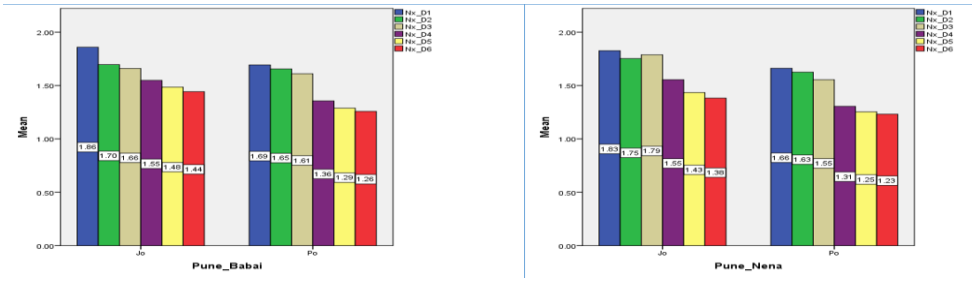
A comparison by gender shows that physical bullying is more frequent among male students (1.75 vs. 1.68), whereas verbal bullying occurs with almost equal frequency across genders. The comparison by gender for the other three forms of bullying is conclusive. Female students report a higher frequency of cyberbullying compared to males (1.44 vs. 1.25), as well as higher levels of physical (1.33 vs. 1.26) and verbal (1.33 vs. 1.18) bullying by teachers.



Graph 15. Comparative distribution of the frequency of bullying incidents by class and marital status of parents

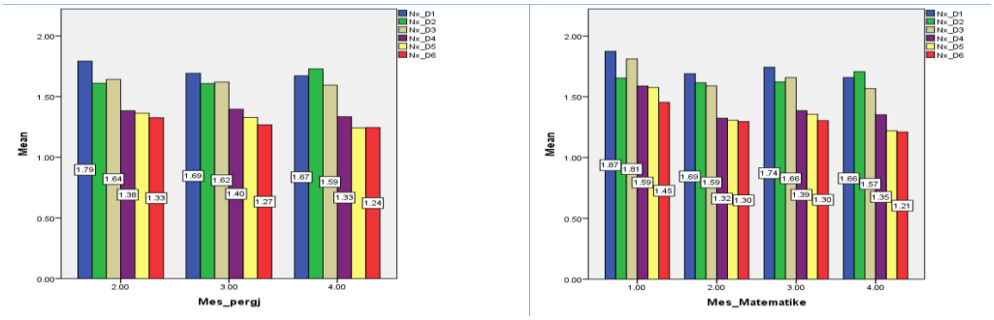
Graph 15 presents comparative distributions regarding students' grade levels (left chart) and parents' marital status (right chart). According to the graph, incidents of physical bullying increase as students' grade levels rise. With the exception of the fifth grade, the same pattern is observed regarding physical and verbal bullying by teachers, as well as instances of students instigating bullying. Cyberbullying does not follow a defined trend; however, the highest frequency of cyberbullying occurs in the eighth grade, while the lowest is found in the sixth grade.

A comparison based on parental marital status reveals notable differences in the frequency of physical and verbal bullying across the groups. Students with divorced parents reported being victims of physical and verbal bullying more frequently. Conversely, they reported a lower frequency of experiencing cyberbullying or being incited to bully others, though the differences were very slight. Regarding physical and verbal bullying by teachers, students with divorced parents reported being victimized less often.



Graph 16. Comparative distribution of the frequency of bullying incidents according to parents' employment

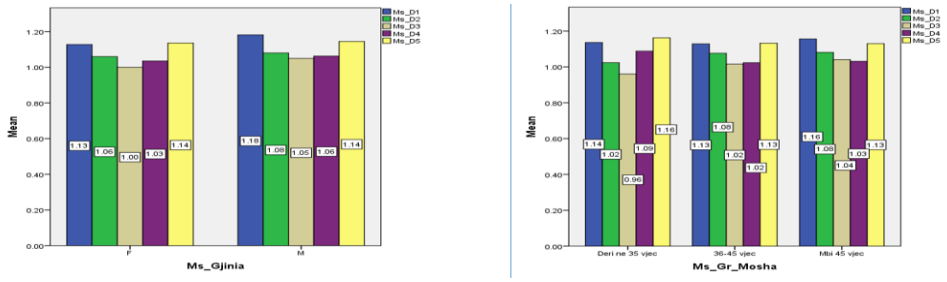
Differences are also observed regarding parental employment (Graph 16). Students whose fathers are unemployed (left graph) report being involved in all forms of bullying more frequently than those whose fathers are employed. A significant difference emerges in the frequency of physical bullying (1.48 vs. 1.29) and verbal bullying (1.44 vs. 1.26) perpetrated by teachers against these students. Similarly, cyberbullying occurs more often among students with unemployed fathers (1.55 vs. 1.36). A similar trend emerges from the survey results regarding the employment status of the students' mothers. Students with unemployed mothers report being bullied more frequently—both physically (1.43 vs. 1.25) and verbally (1.38 vs. 1.23)—by their teachers. Furthermore, the frequency of instances of bullying is higher among students with unemployed mothers (1.79 vs. 1.55). Cyberbullying is reported significantly more often by students with unemployed mothers (1.55) compared to those whose mothers are employed (1.31).



Graph 17. Comparative distribution of the frequency of bullying incidents and academic performance (Overall average, Mathematics)

Graph 17 illustrates the comparative distribution of bullying incident frequency against overall academic performance and performance in mathematics. Physical bullying demonstrates a negative correlation with overall academic results; according to the surveyed students, an increase in the average grade is associated with a decrease in the frequency of physical bullying.

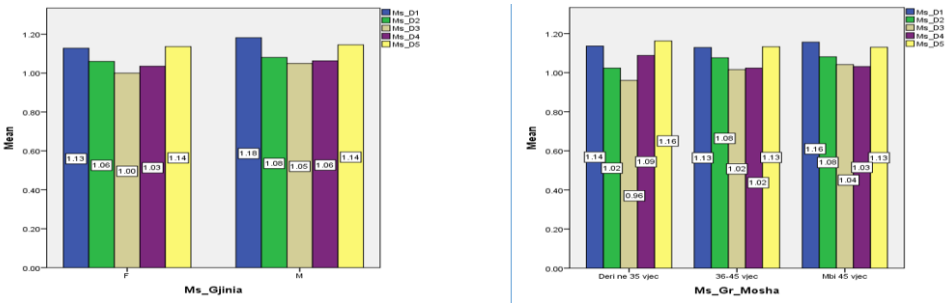
The opposite is true for verbal bullying, which correlates positively with performance. The frequency of instigating bullying correlates negatively, just as with physical bullying. Cyberbullying shows no statistically significant correlation trend with students' overall grade point average. Furthermore, the frequency of bullying by teachers decreases as students' grade point averages rise. This implies that teachers are inclined to bully students who do not demonstrate high academic achievement. The same conclusion emerges when comparing the frequency of teacher-perpetrated bullying with Mathematics grades: students who perform well in Mathematics report being bullied less by their teachers.



Graph 18. Comparative distribution of the frequency of bullying incidents and academic performance (Albanian language, History)

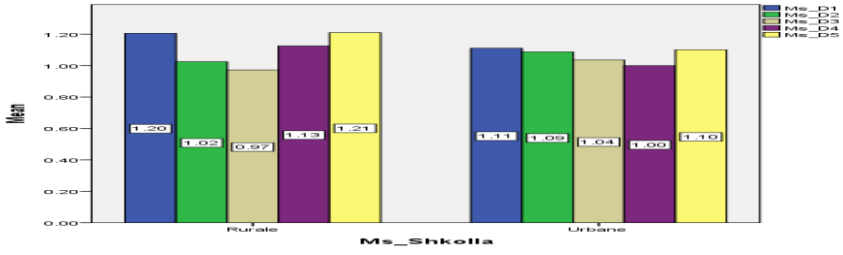
Physical bullying decreases as grades in Albanian language classes improve, but this trend does not hold for students who rate themselves as very proficient in the subject. An increase in the average grade—excluding students with very low academic performance—is associated with a rise in the frequency of cyberbullying.

Other forms of bullying do not show a statistically significant trend. When analyzing the correlation between bullying and history grades, a negative correlation is observed for the two lowest levels; however, this trend breaks down for students who rate their performance in history as good or very good. Interestingly, students with very high grade averages in this subject experience cyberbullying more frequently than the two groups with lower grade averages.



Graph 19. Comparative distribution of the frequency of bullying incidents by gender and age group according to teachers

Teachers' responses comparing forms of bullying by gender are presented in Graph 19 (left-hand chart). The chart shows that, with the exception of verbal bullying, the reported frequency of all forms of bullying is higher among male teachers than among female teachers. The comparison between the frequency of bullying forms and teachers' age groups reveals no consistent statistical trend; however, younger teachers report a higher frequency of cyberbullying incidents, whereas older teachers report a higher frequency of physical and verbal bullying.



Graph 20. Comparative distribution of the frequency of bullying incidents by school location according to teachers

Unlike the student sample, the teacher sample shows different trends when comparing forms of bullying in urban and rural schools (Graph 20). Teachers in rural schools reported a higher frequency of physical bullying directed at students and an increased prevalence of physical and verbal bullying incidents among students. However, compared to their urban counterparts, they report lower frequencies of verbal bullying directed at students and instances of inciting bullying.

4.3 Possible statistical relationships between variables.

This section addresses the results of inferential statistics regarding the relationships between the bullying-related factors and phenomena (variables) examined in this study. Table 3 presents the results of bivariate correlations calculated using Pearson coefficients, the significance of which was assessed using statistical confidence probabilities. The statistical methodology for interpreting correlation coefficients holds that when a pair of variables exhibits a positive correlation coefficient, their values move in the same direction; when the value of one increases, we expect—with at least 95% confidence—that the value of the other variable will also increase. Conversely, when the correlation coefficient is negative, the variables' values move in opposite directions; when the value of one variable increases, we expect—with at least 95% confidence—that the value of the other variable will decrease.

Table 3. Correlations between variables from student surveys

Correlations

		Nx_D1	Nx_D2	Nx_D3	Nx_D4	Nx_D5	Nx_D6	Nx_Mosha	Nr_Nx_Klasa
Nx_D1	Pearson Correlation	1							
	Sig. (2-tailed)								
Nx_D2	Pearson Correlation	.741**	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000							
Nx_D3	Pearson Correlation	.649**	.736**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000						
Nx_D4	Pearson Correlation	.597**	.680**	.769**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000					
Nx_D5	Pearson Correlation	.484**	.389**	.577**	.552**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000				
Nx_D6	Pearson Correlation	.427**	.485**	.572**	.530**	.777**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000			
Nx_Mosha	Pearson Correlation	.121	.079	.051	.105	.219**	.218**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.061	.222	.429	.104	.001	.001		
Nr_Nx_Klasa	Pearson Correlation	-.024	.013	.011	.052	.071	.116	-.037	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.708	.844	.870	.423	.272	.072	.564	

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3 presents the results of bivariate correlations between independent variables representing forms of bullying among the sample of students in Gjirokastër schools. The table shows that the frequency of physical bullying (D1) and verbal bullying (D2) are strongly positively correlated (PCC = 0.741). This indicates that an increase in the frequency of physical bullying is associated with an increase in the frequency of verbal bullying. Variables D2 and D3 (PCC = 0.736) and D1 and D3 (PCC = 0.649) are strongly and positively correlated, indicating that the frequency of physical and verbal bullying is also linked to the frequency of students instigating bullying. Cyberbullying shows a high level of positive statistical correlation with physical bullying, verbal bullying, and the instigation of bullying; this leads to the conclusion that any instance of bullying in Gjirokastër schools is associated with bullying on social media, and vice versa. Instances of cyberbullying give rise to physical and verbal bullying among students, as well as the instigation of bullying by the student body. Physical and verbal bullying perpetrated by teachers against students are two variables that are strongly and positively correlated, indicating that verbal bullying by teachers is associated with physical bullying by teachers, and vice versa. Both forms of bullying perpetrated by teachers against students correlate positively—and at levels considered strong—with the phenomenon of bullying incitement, as do the three forms of bullying addressed in this study.

Table 4. Correlations between variables from teacher surveys

Correlations							
		Ms_Mosha	Ms_D1	Ms_D2	Ms_D3	Ms_D4	Ms_D5
Ms_Mosha	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
Ms_D1	Pearson Correlation	.044	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.719					
Ms_D2	Pearson Correlation	.124	.270*	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.308	.024				
Ms_D3	Pearson Correlation	.222	.000	.516**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.065	.999	.000			
Ms_D4	Pearson Correlation	-.116	.261*	-.325**	-.576**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.337	.029	.006	.000		
Ms_D5	Pearson Correlation	-.035	.323**	-.321**	-.482**	.671**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.772	.006	.007	.000	.000	

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 presents the correlational relationships between the independent variables for the sample of teachers. According to the teachers, the phenomenon of bullying instigation and verbal bullying are strongly and positively linked, indicating that verbal bullying between two or more students is often instigated by peers or others. Results reported by teachers show negative correlations between teacher presence during physical bullying incidents and both verbal bullying and student-instigated bullying; this suggests that their presence mitigates the escalation of bullying situations, and vice versa. A similar correlational pattern appears regarding teacher presence during verbal bullying incidents and the phenomena of student-instigated bullying and verbal bullying itself. Conversely, a negative relationship exists between teacher presence during verbal bullying incidents and the frequency of physical bullying (and vice versa). This indicates that teachers fail to manage situations where verbal bullying escalates into physical bullying, whether within the school environment or outside of it.

One of the primary objectives of this study is to identify the impact that various forms of bullying have on students' learning outcomes. To assess the relationship between exposure to bullying and learning outcomes, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted using dimensions D1–D6 as independent variables. Among these variables, only D1, D2, and D4 met the statistical significance criteria for inclusion in the multiple linear regression model. The reliability and validity of the data for the variables included in the model—based on Cronbach's Alpha—were found to be excellent for scientific studies of this nature (Cronbach's Alpha = .816).

Table 5. Summary of the multiple linear regression model

Model Summary									
					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.232[a]	.054	.042	.72976	.054	4.510	3	238	.004

a. Predictors: (Constant), Nx_D4, Nx_D1, Nx_D2

The Model Summary results indicate that the multiple correlation coefficient is R = .232, while R^2 = .054. This means that D1, D2, and D4, taken together, explain approximately 5.4% of the variance in learning outcomes. The adjusted R^2 value of .042 shows that, after accounting for the number of predictors included in the model, approximately 4.2% of the variance in *Mes_pergj* (academic performance) is explained by these three independent variables. Thus, the model's explanatory power is relatively modest, suggesting that learning outcomes also depend on a number of other factors not included in this model.

Table 6. Results of the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.205	3	2.402	4.510	.004[b]
	Residual	126.746	238	.533		
	Total	133.950	241			

a. Dependent Variable: Mes_pergj
b. Predictors: (Constant), Nx_D4, Nx_D1, Nx_D2

However, the statistical significance of the model is not determined solely by the magnitude of R^2. The ANOVA results indicate that the regression model as a whole is statistically significant, with $F(3,238) = 4.510$ and $p = .004$. Since $p = .004 < .05$, the null hypothesis stating that the regression coefficients of the predictor variables are all simultaneously zero is rejected. This indicates that the bullying dimensions included in the model, when considered together, have a statistically significant relationship with learning outcomes.

Table 7. Results for multiple linear regression coefficients

Coefficients[a]								
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	3.226	.148		21.822	.000	2.934	3.517
	Nx_D1	-.300	.113	-.254	-2.657	.008	-.523	-.078
	Nx_D2	-.459	.130	-.370	-3.536	.000	-.715	-.203
	Nx_D4	-.185	.115	-.140	-1.600	.111	-.412	.043

a. Dependent Variable: Mes_pergj

The results in the coefficients table indicate that the forms of bullying do not possess equal predictive power. Nx_D1, representing physical bullying, shows a negative and statistically significant coefficient ($B = -.300$, $\beta = -.254$, $t = -2.657$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [−.523, −.078]). The B coefficient indicates that, holding D2 and D4 constant, a one-unit increase in the level of D1 is associated, on average, with a .300-unit decrease in Mes_pergj. The standardized coefficient $\beta = -.254$ confirms the existence of a negative relationship. Since $p = .008 < .05$ and the 95% confidence interval does not include zero, the effect of D1 is statistically significant. The effect of Nx_D2 (verbal bullying) proves to be even stronger ($B = -.459$, $\beta = -.370$, $t = -3.536$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [−.715, −.203]). The standardized coefficient $\beta = -.370$ confirms the existence of a negative relationship. Holding the values of D1 and D4 constant, a one-unit increase in D2 is associated with an average decrease of .459 units in Mes_pergj. The standardized value $\beta = -.370$ also indicates that D2 has the strongest relative effect among the three dimensions included in the model. In absolute terms, $|\beta|$ ...for D2 (.370) is greater than for D1 (.254) and D4 (.140). For this reason, D2 can be considered the strongest predictor of learning outcomes within this model. For Nx_D4 (cyberbullying), the results ($B = -.185$, $\beta = -.140$, $t = -1.600$, $p = .111$, 95% CI [−.412, .043]) indicate that D4 also shows a negative direction, meaning that an increase in this dimension tends to be associated with a decrease in learning outcomes. However, this relationship is not statistically significant, as $p = .111 > .05$. Similarly, the 95% confidence interval for B includes the value zero. Consequently, based on this model, it cannot be concluded that D4 exerts a statistically significant independent effect on Mes_pergj. Based on the unstandardized coefficients, the regression model equation takes the form $\boldsymbol{Mes_pergj = 3.226 - 0.300(D1) - 0.459(D2) - 0.185(D4) + \varepsilon}$
This equation reveals an important characteristic of the results: all three coefficients are negative. Thus, at the model level, increased exposure to each of these dimensions of bullying is associated with a tendency toward lower learning outcomes, although only the effects of D1 and D2 are statistically significant.

The regression results provide statistical support for H1. The overall model is statistically significant ($F(3,238) = 4.510$, $p = .004$). Furthermore, two of the three dimensions—D1 and D2—show statistically significant individual

coefficients. Thus, the results indicate a statistically significant relationship between the analyzed dimensions of exposure to bullying and learning outcomes. The results also support the theoretical direction of H2, as all three coefficients are negative. Specifically, increased exposure in dimensions D1 and D2 is associated with a statistically significant decrease in learning outcomes, while D4 shows the same negative trend but fails to reach statistical significance.

5. Conclusions

1. Teachers consider students' lack of desire to learn, poor grades (13.2%), and sadness (12.6%) to be the main consequences of bullying.

2. In addition, teachers identify anxiety (8.1%), self-imposed silence (7.6%), reluctance to attend school (6.7%), and the desire to drop out of school (5.1%) as consequences of bullying.

3. On average, students reported instances of bullying across all the forms studied, represented by the variables D1–D6. Physical bullying was the most frequent (Mean = 1.7), followed by verbal bullying (Mean = 1.66). Students also reported instances of physical and verbal bullying by teachers, with respective means of 1.3 and 1.27. Furthermore, students reported having been present as instigators or witnesses to bullying (Mean = 1.61) at their school.

4. Based on the standard deviation values, the reported frequency of the various forms of bullying ranges from 1 to 4 times.

5. Female students, compared to male students, report higher frequencies of cyberbullying (1.44 vs. 1.25), as well as physical bullying (1.33 vs. 1.26) and verbal bullying (1.33 vs. 1.18) by teachers.

6. Teachers report that cyberbullying occurs more frequently among students with unemployed fathers (1.55 vs. 1.36), whereas students with unemployed mothers are bullied more often physically (1.43 vs. 1.25) and verbally (1.38 vs. 1.23). Students with unemployed mothers are more likely to instigate bullying incidents (1.79 vs. 1.55). Cyberbullying occurs significantly more often among students with unemployed mothers (1.55) compared to those whose mothers are employed (1.31).

7. The frequency of bullying by teachers decreases as students' average grades rise. Students with high achievement in mathematics report less bullying by teachers.

8. Comparing students' average grades in Albanian language with reports of physical bullying reveals an inverse relationship, where students with higher grades experience less physical bullying. However, an increase in the average grade is associated with an increase in cyberbullying, except among students with very low grades. Other forms of bullying do not show a statistically significant trend.

9. When comparing history grades with forms of bullying, a negative correlation emerges for students in the two lowest grade categories; however, this trend shifts among students who rate themselves as good or very good at history. Interestingly, students with very high average grades in history encounter cyberbullying more frequently than the two groups with the lowest grades.

10. Teachers in rural schools report more physical bullying by teachers, as well as more physical and verbal bullying among students, compared to urban schools. However, teachers in rural areas report lower levels of verbal bullying by teachers and of instances where students instigate bullying.

11. The frequency of physical bullying is linked to the frequency of verbal bullying. Furthermore, variables D2 and D3 (PCC = 0.736) as well as D1 and D3 (PCC = 0.649) show a strong positive correlation, indicating that the frequency of physical and verbal bullying is associated with the frequency of incidents where students instigate bullying.

12. The frequency of cyberbullying is statistically significantly linked to physical bullying, verbal bullying, and the instigation of bullying by students; this indicates that every instance of bullying in Gjirokastër schools is accompanied by negative comments on social media, and vice versa.

13. Instances of cyberbullying lead to physical and verbal bullying among students, as well as incidents where students incite bullying.

14. Physical and verbal bullying by teachers towards students show a strong positive correlation with each other. Furthermore, these two forms are positively associated—at levels considered high—with the other three forms of bullying addressed in this study, as well as with the instigation of bullying by students.

15. Physical bullying has a significant negative impact on academic performance (B = -0.3). The variable representing cyberbullying also has a statistically significant impact (B = -0.185).

16. The presence of a teacher during instances of verbal bullying is negatively correlated with the frequency of physical bullying (and vice versa). This leads to the conclusion that teachers fail to manage situations where verbal bullying escalates into physical bullying, whether within the school environment or outside it.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the study, we offer the following recommendations:

- School leaders must pay attention to students involved in bullying by developing and implementing clear plans for its prevention and management. They must also focus on students who, alongside being involved in bullying situations, show a decline in academic performance, frequent absences, or withdrawal from school activities.
- Teachers should be trained in the early identification of signs of bullying, conflict management, and the creation of a safe and inclusive classroom climate. Teachers should monitor not only student behavior but also changes in participation, motivation, and academic performance.
- School psychologists and social workers should provide individualized assessment and support for students involved in bullying—whether as victims, perpetrators, or witnesses. Interventions must include counseling, social skills development, and ongoing collaboration with teachers and parents.
- Local Education Offices should periodically monitor the implementation of the Ministry of Education's guidelines on the prevention and handling of bullying.
- The Ministry of Education should strengthen psychosocial services in schools by ensuring sufficient and trained personnel for bullying prevention and conflict management.
- Regular communication among parents, teachers, and psychosocial services is necessary for early and coordinated intervention.
- Universities and research institutions should include lessons on bullying prevention, conflict management, and the impact of school climate on learning in teacher training programs.

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