

# ***Analysis of the Causes and Countermeasures of Gender Bullying on Campus***

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**Abstract:** In recent years, school bullying has occurred frequently all over the world, which has attracted widespread attention from all walks of life due to its seriously adverse effect on the growth of teenagers. Among these school bullying incidents, gender bullying accounts for a large proportion. However, there are great challenges to the prevention and intervention of gender bullying on campus because the causes, methods and impacts related to it are unique. This article analyzes the causes of gender bullying in schools in depth, and attempts to put forward some countermeasures. It emphasizes that society, schools, and families should give full play to their roles in avoiding and reducing the occurrence of gender bullying in schools so as to jointly promote the healthy development of teenagers.

## **1. Introduction**

In recent years, school bullying has repeatedly appeared on the Internet or in the newspapers, which has received widespread attention in society due to its negative impact on the growth of adolescents. School bullying not only seriously damages the physical and mental health of teenagers, but also causes some students to suffer from severe depression and even lose their lives. The impact is so severe and the harm is so huge that there has even appeared “violence against violence”. As a result, there is an increasing number of new victims, which develops into a vicious circle.

School bullying has great harm to the physical and mental growth of young people, adversely affecting the formation of teenagers’ outlook on life, world outlook, values, and physical health. Studies have revealed that the majority of those involved in school bullying hope to show themselves in front of others and release potential aggression by bullying those with weak personalities, thereby gaining pleasure after bullying others. In the United States, a survey of children in grades 6-10 found that 31.2 % of the students were victims of bullying, and 37.3% of them had bullied others. [1] Among these school bullying incidents, gender bullying accounts for a large proportion. However, due to their unique causes, methods and impacts, there are great challenges to the prevention and intervention of gender bullying. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to gender bullying on campus and find proper solutions to reduce and avoid it.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Definition of school bullying

School bullying refers to the violent behaviors committed by some students against other students and cause great psychological or physical harm and pain to the victims. It is generally believed that school bullies (bullying, intimidating, isolating others) belong to the group related to campus activities [1]. Olweus points out that a student is bullied or victimized if he suffers from one or more other students' negative behavior repeatedly or for a long time.[4] The methods of bullying are complex and diverse, including the direct harm of the bully's physical attack and verbal bullying on the bullied, as well as the indirect harm such as slandering others behind the scenes, spreading rumors and social exclusion. In campus life, bullying among students often refers to the situation in which one party deliberately or maliciously uses physical, language, and Internet methods to commit bullying and insults and thus causes personal injury, property loss, or mental damage of the other party. China's Law on Protection of Minors (Second Reading Draft in 2020) clearly states that school bullying occurs among students, where one party deliberately or maliciously causes personal injury, property or mental damage to others through physical, language, or Internet methods.

### 2.2. Causes of school bullying

The occurrence of school bullying is a unilateral offensive behavior between students regardless of time and place, which is characterized by bullying the weak. The whole world is facing this problem and managing to find proper solutions. Generally, there are many reasons for school bullying, such as the influence of family environment, the inadequacy of school education and the influence of society. Studies have shown that academic performance, peer relationships, teacher-student relationships, and parental participation play an important role in verbal bullying suffered by primary school boys and girls.

Gender stereotypes are also one of the reasons for school bullying, which, in essence, are fixed ideas about men's and women's traits and capabilities and how people should behave, based on their gender. Meanwhile, gender stereotypes have an unignorable impact on the school life of male and female students. Since the differences between men and women themselves are caused by the physiological differences between male and female students, people think that women are more delicate in emotional expression, while men are more aggressive in behavior. Some scholars believe that differences in gender construction between male and female students may lead to gender differences in school bullying. While school bullying among boys is mainly physical behavior, school bullying among girls is dominated by relational bullying and verbal bullying. [10] As a result, school bullying caused by gender stereotypes is very common. Research has shown that school bullying caused by gender stereotypes is specifically manifested in the use of gender stereotyped titles between boys and girls, such as "you boys" and "you girls", and the use of vulgar sex jokes to classmates of the opposite sex, such as boys putting ambiguous labels like "bad girls" on female classmates. This gender cognition affects the mental health of teenagers and easily leads to gender prejudice and inequality, which may exert a negative impact on adolescents' future career planning. School bullying triggered by gender stereotypes makes it impossible for boys and girls who are bullied to socialize freely, which is extremely harmful to the growth of adolescents. Therefore, it is necessary to pay more attention to school bullying based on gender stereotypes and find proper solutions.

### **3. Analysis of the Causes of Gender Bullying on Campus**

#### **3.1. The legal system is not sound, and social media does not play a correct guiding role**

From a social perspective, there are many causes of school bullying. First of all, according to China's Criminal Law, the perpetrators of school bullying shall not bear criminal responsibility if they are under the age of 14, no matter what serious consequences they cause; those who have reached the age of 14 but have not yet reached the age of 16 shall bear corresponding criminal responsibility only if they constitute eight crimes including intentional homicide. It can be seen that the Criminal Law is of low deterrence. Secondly, China's traditional culture has the tendency to choose boys over girls, which makes people more or less have gender stereotypes from birth. Gender stereotypes are widely accepted fixed views of men and women, which will invisibly affect our perception and evaluation of others. To a certain extent, gender stereotypes reflect, rationalize and fix the unreasonable reality of the social roles of men and women. In addition, gender stereotypes have a certain negative impact on primary and secondary education. Parents will treat their children in different ways according to their gender from the birth of their children. For instance, they distinguish between men and women in terms of clothing and values; they regard that men should become outstanding when growing up while for women marrying well is better than studying well.

Secondly, in addition to gender stereotypes, gender discrimination in society is also one of the important factors causing school bullying. As for gender discrimination, some scholars believe that it refers to all gender-based discrimination, exclusion and restriction with the aim to hinder women's cognition, enjoyment and exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms or make them invalid on the basis of equality between men and women in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or other fields. Moreover, gender discrimination is also an unequal treatment of different gender groups in society, which is manifested in gender stereotypes that are unfavorable to women. The harm caused by gender discrimination cannot be ignored, including sexual harassment, domestic violence, school bullying, gender-based employment difficulties, etc. These behaviors can damage the dignity of the victims in some way, and may cause physical and psychological harm or pain, thus being extremely harmful to the growth and future development of teenagers.

Thirdly, as an important means of cultural dissemination, social media play a significant role in society. If the media do not respect the victim's personal dignity when reporting on school bullying incidents, such bullying incidents will not be taken seriously and counterproductive effects may appear. Research has shown that in reports on school bullying, reporters would intentionally or unintentionally emphasize the victim's "greed for petty gains" and so on. Besides, some sexual assault cases were not reported as violence against the victims. Instead, the sexual feature of those cases was highlighted. There were even reports using the title that was apparently ambiguous and extremely irresponsible, such as A Teacher of Shaanxi Middle School Molested the Whole Class of Girls, Kissing them, Watch Porn Movies, and Undressing His Own Shirt in Class, to attract public attention. Such frivolous attitude prevented this kind of case from being reported as a serious incident. In addition, although both boys and girls may be victims of school bullying, some reports emphasized the need to educate girls and conveyed the distorted educational purpose of "making girls behave more appropriately". Some media suggested "girls' classrooms" for violence against girls, and even published comments that discriminate against women, such as "Boys use violence out of philanthropy, while girls are cruel because they dislike someone or someone is saying bad things about her". This kind of sex discrimination is one of the root causes of school bullying. Therefore, it is urgent to change this situation and eliminate sex discrimination to a certain extent.

### 3.2. Gender stereotypes and sexual harassment exacerbate school bullying

As the main place where school bullying occurs, the campus itself has many factors that cause school bullying, including gender stereotypes and sexual harassment. Under the influence of gender stereotypes, school bullying happens frequently. For example, teachers usually deliberately or unintentionally adopt different education methods for boys and girls when educating students. Although men and women have equal opportunities to receive education, current textbooks intentionally or unintentionally strengthen the sexist views of men and women and devalue the value of women's experience. Meanwhile, the words and deeds of teachers will also affect students' campus life. As a result, students will say mantras like "you boys" and "you girls" on campus. Girls may repeat a teacher's pet phrase and use gender stereotypes to attack each other; while boys may tell bad taste jokes to girls and complain that girls can't take a joke. Usually, girls respond to such verbal attacks by hitting the bully, which deepens the impression on boys that girls can't take a joke. Although boys are the bullies in school bullying most of the time, they are also counterattacked by the bullied while they are committing bullying. This counterattack includes physical and verbal attacks. Therefore, it can be seen that the gender stereotypes of the opposite sex will be deepened when boys and girls attack each other and get hurt, which may deteriorate the tense relationship.

Sexual harassment is also one of the culprits of school bullying, which can be roughly divided into three types. First is to force the other party to accept a certain behavior as a condition for attending school or employment; second is that the other party accepts a certain behavior which will affect his promotion and study; third is the kind of behavior that may interfere with the other party's work and studies and disturb the other party's studying and working environments. The sexual harassment that occurs on campus includes the following six situations: sexual harassment of students by teachers; sexual harassment of teachers by students; sexual harassment of teachers by teachers; sexual harassment of students by students; sexual harassment of outsiders by teachers or students; and sexual harassment of teachers or students by outsiders. The subject and object of sexual harassment can be male or female; and both adults and minors may become victims of sexual harassment. Since the students on campus are in their puberty, in addition to changes in their physical appearance, their internal functions have developed soundly. Meanwhile, they have undergone tremendous psychological changes, awakening their self-awareness and sexual awareness. With physical growth and sexual awakening and maturity, teenagers may face psychological problems such as sexual dreams and sexual masturbation under the influence of curiosity about the opposite sex. However, young girls and boys are prone to sexual harassment between students because they know little about sex and are affected by their longing for the opposite sex and their mental immaturity. Consequently, school bullying takes place. More seriously, due to the evasive attitude towards sex in traditional Chinese culture, many teenagers would not tell others after being sexually harassed, making such incidents undetectable. Besides, the school will adopt a concealed attitude when an incident is exposed. All this has made it difficult to eradicate school bullying.

### 3.3. Improper family education and parent-child communication

The family is the first classroom in the process of individual socialization. Surveys have shown that bullying is more likely to occur among students growing up in problematic family environment. A scholar's questionnaire survey of 497 parents, 505 teachers, 124 principals and 501 students found that 64.0% of parents, 80.8% of teachers and 75.0% of principals chose the item "students with incomplete family structure" when answering the question of "which students are likely to be bullies". At the same time, the gender stereotypes held by parents have a certain influence on the growth of adolescents. The recognition of the distinction between men and women begins with parents' behavior. For example, parents give boys, cars, robots, etc., but give girls dolls, cosmetics, etc.; they

encourage boys to do big muscle exercises, but organize girls to run and jump, etc. Since boys and girls have the same potential, different treatment will affect their growth and the formation of gender perspectives, which indirectly leads to the occurrence of gender bullying on campus.

Secondly, poor parent-child communication is also one of the factors leading to school bullying among teenagers. Parent-child communication refers to the transmission of information and emotional communication between parents and children through language and actions. Personal communication can help realize family education. Studies have shown that poor parent-child communication can cause emotional distress or cognitive confusion among teenagers, thus affecting their mental health on campus. Disagreements in parenting will lead to more violations and attacks among teenagers, and inconsistent parenting methods will also exert a negative impact on the psychological growth of teenagers. Compared with girls, boys experience less physical and mental changes and stress after entering puberty, who have stronger anti-interference ability and are not easily affected by negative emotions. But for girls who are also adolescents, self-evaluation and initiative may be reduced, making communicating with parents more necessary. Problematic communication will result in negative reactions. It can be seen that problems in parent-child communication will have a negative impact on teenagers' academic, social adjustment and mental health. In consequence, teenagers vent their bad emotions in the campus, leading to the occurrence of bullying.

#### **4. Analysis of the Countermeasures for Gender Bullying on Campus**

##### **4.1. To improve legislative supervision and guide the media to play a correct role in communication**

Currently, China has not formulated a special law to regulate school bullying. According to the provisions of China's Criminal Law that, there is difficulty in terms of age when dealing with juvenile perpetrators in campus bullying. As a result, we have mainly relied on educational methods for long. When entering the campus, especially the middle school campus, teenagers already have the ability to think independently. After bullying others on campus, they will realize that this is a wrong thing even if they have not considered the consequences. However, many teenagers hold the attitude that "I am still a child, and the law cannot punish me" to bully other students to get pleasure. In contrast, Japan has introduced a set of special laws against school bullying. Article 3 of Japan's Juvenile Law stipulates that juveniles under the age of 14 who have violated the criminal law ordinances or who are considered to be likely to violate the criminal law in the future or who engage in school bullying can also be punished according to the specific circumstances of different cases, thus having an obvious deterrent effect. Japanese law imposes penalties on perpetrators regardless of age, which is more effective than China's means of education and criticism. Therefore, China's Criminal Law can also appropriately learn from the relevant laws of Japan, breaking the age limit and increasing the punishment to form a deterrent to the perpetrators of school bullying, which will be conducive to the reduction of school bullying.

Meanwhile, besides the law, the media must also respond positively if we want to deal with school bullying from the social aspect. Since teenagers' outlook on life has not yet formed and they are vulnerable to social media, media such as radio, film and television should play a positive role in dissemination. Considering the fact that some media are biased in their reports on school bullying, which disrespect the victims while also spreading gender stereotypes, social media should take the following actions. First, social media should raise the awareness of gender differences, guiding media workers to learn more about gender stereotypes and understand the harm caused by such stereotypes through internal training and other channels. Second, the media should adopt strict censorship, improving the competence of the examiners and strictly controlling the programs and copywriting



broadcast by the media so as to ensure that the appropriate values and concepts are presented to the public. Third, social media should set an example when inheriting and carrying forward traditional culture, taking the essence and discarding the dross, and avoiding the dissemination of words and information containing gender inequality so as to curb the spread of the adverse effects of school bullying.

#### **4.2. Schools should attach importance to gender equality education and abandon gender stereotypes**

Schools are the most important place for teenagers to grow up and receive education, whose educational methods and teaching quality will affect teenagers' physical and mental development. At present, schools have the following problems in gender education. First is the about the misunderstanding of gender education. Current education often promotes a moral education that requires everyone to behave by training gender roles and inculcating sexual concepts, which is full of gender stereotypes and cannot be regarded as proper gender equality education. Second, sexual harassment and sexual violence on campus are also very common, which are mainly caused by the inequality of rights between teachers and students and the inequality between men and women. At the same time, when schools face bullying behaviors that have not produced serious consequences, they often use internal methods to downplay them. Even bullying behaviors that cause serious consequences are often "concealed if possible" and "delayed if possible" to escape responsibility, which has contributed to the occurrence of school bullying to a certain extent. [26] It can be seen from the above problems that firstly we should pay attention to gender equality education on campus. Teachers should take the initiative to abandon stereotyped educational methods and educational concepts, educate students with correct gender concepts, and pay attention to teaching materials containing gender stereotypes when teaching and make corrections in time. In addition, schools should put emphasis on establishing an equal relationship between teachers and students. Teachers should actively communicate with students as friends, actively listen to their worries, abandon gender prejudice, and treat all students equally. Finally, schools had better actively carry out professional training for teachers to increase their knowledge reserves and eliminate the influence of traditional gender concepts. When encountering related gender issues, teachers should choose to face them rather than avoid them. Besides, educators should deal with sexual issues in a calm and rational manner, trying not to criticize the students harshly. After all, extreme education is often counterproductive.

#### **4.3. Families should pay attention to parent-child communication and avoid extreme education**

The family is also the most important place for adolescents to grow up; and parents, as the guardians of young people, have a certain influence on their physical and mental development. Studies have shown that teenagers who are often beaten and scolded by their parents are more likely to commit bullying than other students. These teenagers bully others on campus due to the immature mentality and the experience of being victimized. It can be seen that educating children too harshly sometimes can be counterproductive rather than encouraging. Therefore, parents should hold a rational attitude towards rewards and punishments when educating their children, neither spoiling nor being too harsh. Only in this way can parents help children's physical and mental development, thereby preventing negative impacts on the governance of school bullying.

Besides improper parental education methods, the lack of communication is also one of the indirect causes of school bullying among teenagers. Boys and girls in adolescence need different communication methods. Usually boys are more eager to be independent than girls and do not want to communicate too much with their parents; while girls are relatively sensitive, whose parents are

the best listeners for them at this time. However, many parents are unable to adopt the correct way of communication since they do not pay enough attention to this aspect, thus hindering the mental health of teenagers. In order to prevent adolescents from venting bad emotions on campus and committing school bullying, parents should attach more importance to parent-child communication, and adopt different communication methods according to the children's gender. In short, better communication can effectively prevent bad thoughts and thus guard against school bullying.

Moreover, under the influence of traditional Chinese culture, people have gender stereotypes more or less. Parents affected by gender stereotypes will naturally educate their children with gender stereotypes. For instance, they think that boys are certain to study science while girls must study liberal arts. This kind of education that does not consider the subjective willingness of teenagers also has a negative impact on their physical and mental development. Meanwhile, due to the lack of social experience independent thinking, adolescents may be easily influenced by others and blindly follow the choices made by parents instead of by themselves, who will be easily manipulated by others on campus and cannot protect themselves well. Therefore, parents should abandon their improper inherent educational thinking, treat and educate the children with an equal perspective, and prevent the adverse effect of gender stereotypes on the growth of adolescents and the governance of school bullying.

To sum up, the harm of gender bullying on campus is so great that it hinders teenagers' physical and mental development and exerts a huge negative impact on family harmony and social development. Therefore, while society, schools, and families are paying more attention to school bullying, they must also attach more importance to improving the original education methods, and put more emphasis on teenagers' education and their physical and mental health. Only in this way can we help students establish correct gender concepts and values and effectively reduce the incidence of gender bullying on campus.

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