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Social Media, Family Relationships and Bullying Behaviour in School Children: A Cross-Sectional Study in Galle, Sri Lanka

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Background: School bullying has been identified as a major public health problem worldwide. Bullying can have negative consequences on both the bullies and bully victims. School bullying still remains as a hidden public health issue in Sri Lanka.

Objectives: To assess the relationships between bullying behavior, family relationship and usage of social media among early adolescent school children in Galle municipality area

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in six selected schools in Galle municipal area with 576 students from grade 7, grade 8 and grade 9 classes. Adolescent Peer Relationship Scale which was validated in Sri Lanka was used to assess bullying behavior and victimization. Data were analyzed by SPSS version 25.

Results: Mean (\pm SD) age of the study participants was 12.9 (\pm 0.84) years. Overall prevalence of bullies and bully victims were 3.8% and 92.3% respectively. Percentage of males and females who exposed to bullying were 96.7% and 93.8% respectively. Although the majority ($n = 304$) were not exposed to usage of any type of social media, all the students who used social media on daily basis had been involved in some form of bullying behavior. Higher the frequency of the use of social media higher the verbal and physical bullying involvements ($p < 0.05$). Majority of children ($n = 545$) had good relationship with family members, but 96.3% of them were bullies whereas children who have poor and moderate relationship with family were more likely to be bully victims ($p < 0.05$).

Conclusions: The usage of social media positively associated with bullying behavior in adolescent school children. Good family relationships does not seem to prevent bullying behavior of children. Hence, it is essential to find in-depth personal and psycho-social reasons why bullying behavior is common in children.

Keywords: *Bullying, Family relationship, Frequency, Usage, Social media*