The International Journal of Indian Psychology
ISSN 2348-5396 (Online) | ISSN: 2349-3429 (Print)
Volume 13, Issue 3, July- September, 2025
DIP: 18.01.267.20251303, DOI: 10.25215/1303.267
https://www.ijip.in

Research Paper

Bullying and Psychological Responses: An Analysis of Coping and Defence Mechanisms Among Victims and Non-Victims

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ABSTRACT

This study explores perceived bullying victimisation by adolescents, focusing on coping strategies and defense mechanisms most commonly utilized by both non-victims and victims of bullying. An online survey was distributed using convenience sampling among adolescents aged 13–17. The survey consisted of standardized scales such as Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire, Short Version of the Defense mechanisms Inventory, and Brief Coping Styles Questionnaire. Significant differences were found between bullied and non-bullied adolescents in both victimisation experiences and coping strategies. No prominent gender differences were observed in either bullying experience or coping strategies among male and female adolescents. For different conflict situations, the most commonly observed defense mechanisms were Reversal (REV) and Principalisation (PRN).

Keywords: *Bullying, Defence Mechanism, Victimisation, Coping, Adolescent, Bully-Victim*

Generally defined as repeated, intentional, aggressive behavior by an individual or group toward another person, Bullying is marked by a power advantage held by the aggressor. This power imbalance stems from factors such as physical size, social status, or other attributes. It involves the systematic abuse of power and can manifest as physical actions (e.g., hitting, kicking, or punching) which is physical bullying, verbal hostility (e.g., saying hurtful or nasty things) which is verbal bullying, or psychological oppression which is relational bullying (Olweus, 1996; O'connell et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001; Naylor et al., 2001; Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Bullying in Spain remains a significant issue. While the prevalence of reported bullying remained stable at 4.3%, observed bullying showed a notable growth, rising from 17.1% in 2006 to 21.5% in 2014 (Sánchez-Queija et al., 2017). As for the Indian context, bullying perpetration ranges from 7% to 31%, while victimization rates span from 9% to an alarming 80%, depending on the context and location (Thakkar et al., 2020). In the U.K., approximately 75% of children aged 11-16 reported experiencing some form of physical bullying in a school year, with 7% encountering severe forms like repeated verbal or physical abuse, property damage, or social exclusion. U.S. data indicate that 76% of children in grades 4-6 experienced verbal bullying, while 66% faced physical bullying during the previous week (Smith & Gross, 2006). Furthermore, a significant number of individuals find themselves in the unique position of being both bullies and victims. (Jadambaa et al., 2019).

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Received: June 14, 2025; Revision Received: August 30, 2025; Accepted: September 03, 2025

Bullying has pervasive impacts on victims, bullies, and bystanders. These include poorer psychosocial adjustment, health issues, and emotional and social challenges. Particularly, victims often face augmented rates of depression, psychosomatic symptoms, medication use, and suicidality, with long-term effects such as psychosis, anxiety disorders, abusive relationships, and low self-esteem. Bullies, particularly those who acknowledge their behavior, report greater psychological distress and depression, along with increased aggression, social difficulties, and risky behaviors like substance abuse. They are at higher risk for psychiatric conditions such as antisocial personality disorder as well as anxiety disorders. Furthermore, bullies are at a higher risk of leaving school early, getting involved in crime, and facing difficulties in maintaining steady jobs and healthy relationships in the future (Vanderbilt & Augustyn, 2010). Furthermore, bullying victims are at an increased risk of developing depression, anxiety disorders, and psychotic symptoms in adolescence and adulthood, with a dose-response relationship where more frequent or severe victimization leads to worse outcomes. Victims also experience poorer physical health, including chronic inflammation marked by elevated C-reactive protein (CRP) levels, as well as slower recovery from illness (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). As a result of directly impacting adolescents' health, bullying also affects other aspects of their academic life. Bullying during middle school significantly predicts decreased academic performance, increased behavioral incidents, and more frequent absences from school, with these effects persisting into high school. For example, students involved in bullying incidents exhibited a decline in GPA and an increase in disciplinary issues over time (Feldman et al., 2014). Notably, these outcomes were particularly pronounced for girls, who experienced steeper declines in academic performance and more substantial increases in disciplinary referrals compared to boys. From an economic standpoint, bullying victims often attain lower levels of education and earn less income, and they face difficulties in securing stable employment. Meanwhile socially, they struggle to form and maintain relationships, often living without a partner and lacking social support into middle adulthood (Wolke & Lereya, 2015).

Understanding the role of coping

Richard Lazarus (1987) describes coping as an "integral feature of the emotion process", defining coping as an individual's attempts to handle external stressors and the emotions they trigger. The Transactional Model of Coping states coping fulfills two main purposes. Problem-focused coping aims to alter the situation itself, such as by seeking solutions or planning actions to address the stressor. Emotion-focused coping, in contrast, is directed at regulating emotional distress, often through strategies like distancing, acceptance, or cognitive reappraisal. Importantly, the model acknowledges that coping is not static but evolves in response to ongoing appraisals and changes in the environment (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Furthermore, the Approach-Avoidance Model presents two fundamental strategies for coping with stress: approach and avoidance. These strategies reflect different cognitive and emotional orientations toward a stressful situation. Approach involves confronting the stressor directly, seeking solutions, or accepting the emotional distress to facilitate adaptation. Conversely, avoidance strategies involve distancing oneself from the threat (bully), either by ignoring it, distracting oneself, or employing defensive mechanisms to avoid experiencing the stressor's emotional impact (Roth & Cohen, 1986). Lam et al. (2014) explain that Self-Determination Theory (SDT) emphasizes the need to satisfy three core psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In this context, autonomy refers to a person's sense of control over their actions and decisions in response to bullying.

Competence is the confidence in one's ability to handle such challenges effectively. Relatedness is the need to feel supported and connected to others.

Moreover, Peer Support-Based Coping Models, as discussed by Naylor and Cowie (1999), emphasize the importance of structured peer support systems in addressing bullying. Claiming peer support creates a caring school climate, forms empathy and encourages active listening, researchers recognise peer support as a valuable resource for providing emotional and practical assistance to those facing bullying.

Problem-focused coping, particularly externalizing and seeking social support, is commonly used by school-age victims (Tenenbaum et al., 2011). Gender differences are observed, with boys more likely to use externalizing strategies and girls favoring seeking social support (Kristensen & Smith, 2003). Coping strategies can be grouped into assertive responses, help-seeking, avoidance, and inaction. The strategy chosen may depend on how severe or prolonged the bullying is (Jóhannsdóttir & Ólafsson, 2004). Perceptions of control, threat, and challenge shape the choice of coping strategies, and uncertainty in interpreting a situation as a challenge can impact whether individuals rely on wishful thinking, seek social support, or use problem-focused coping (Hunter & Boyle, 2004). However, victims often perceive their coping strategies as ineffective in resolving bullying situations (Tenenbaum et al., 2011).

The underlying defense mechanisms

Defence mechanisms, originally conceptualized by Freud, are psychological processes that distort reality to manage threatening stimuli (Lindstrøm, 1989). These mechanisms can be classified based on their impact on information processing systems: input (e.g., denial, projection), internal processing (e.g., repression, rationalization), and output (e.g., acting out, sublimation) (Leigh & Reiser, 1982). Giovazolias et al. (2017) found a link between defense mechanisms and bullying involvement. With regard to bullying victims, moral disengagement contributes to the justification and continuation of bullying behavior, specifically victim attribution and moral justification (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013; Runions et al., 2019). Boys are generally more likely than girls to show higher levels of moral disengagement (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).

Some common defense mechanisms include denial, a primitive defence mechanism where the ego refuses to acknowledge external or internal reality, especially facts that cause emotional pain or anxiety. Denial can block the emotional impact of an event or the recognition of internal drives by treating them as external threats. In the case of repression, the ego pushes instinctual desires or thoughts into the unconscious by creating a strong counter cathexis (ego energy keeping unwanted impulses out of awareness) (Jacobson, 1957).

Aggression can be utilized by bullying victims as a defence mechanism. Aggressive victims are a group of victims that engage in socialization experiences more similar to bullies (Unnever, 2005). These aggressive victims can be further bifurcated into subtypes, such as those due to stress accumulation or contagion (Del Moral et al., 2014). Bully-victims are identified as the most aggressive group, displaying high levels of both reactive and proactive aggression, whereas victims exhibit increased reactive aggression only, when compared to non-involved peers (Salmivalli & Nieminen, 2002).

METHODOLOGY

Aim: This study aims to explore the psychological and social mechanisms that influence how adolescents cope with bullying, with a particular focus on defense mechanisms and coping strategies. It seeks to evaluate the prevalence of coping strategies among victims of bullying and identify commonly used defense mechanisms among bullying victims. It also aims to assess the perception of coping and defense mechanisms for non-victims.

Objectives:

- To understand the prevalence of bullying among school going adolescents and their utilisation of coping mechanisms in dealing with the same.
- To understand the gender differences among the respondents on bullying victimisation and coping mechanisms incorporated.
- To identify the most used defense mechanisms among adolescent victims of bullying.

Hypothesis:

- **H1:** There will be a significant difference between male and female respondents on the dependent variable of bullying victim scale.
- **H2:** There will be a significant difference between male and female respondents on the dependent variable of coping scale.
- **H3:** There will be a significant difference between bullied and non-bullied respondents on the dependent variable of bullying victim scale.
- **H4:** There will be a significant difference between bullied and non-bullied respondents on the dependent variable of coping scale.

Sampling:

For the present study, convenience sampling was employed. The final sample consisted of adolescents aged between 13 and 17 years. Regarding gender identity, 44.7% of participants identified as male, 53.7% as female, while 0.8% preferred not to disclose their gender and another 0.8% identified as pansexual. When asked about their experiences with bullying, 32.5% of participants reported having been bullied, whereas 67.5% indicated they had not.

Instrumentation

1. Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) (Olweus, 1996): The questionnaire includes statements for both bullies and victims, however for the present study only victim questions were taken into consideration. 20 victim statements were scored on a 5-point Likert scale with 1= “I have not been bullied during last couple of months”, 2 = “Once or twice in the last couple of months”, 3 = “2 or 3 times a month”, 4 = “About once a week”, and 5 = “Several times a week.” The internal consistency of the scale was reported to be .80 - .90.

2. Short Version of the Defense mechanisms Inventory (Abraham and George, 1999): The Short Version of the Defense Mechanisms Inventory was developed by selecting one vignette for each of the five conflict areas from the original ten-vignette version by Recklitis, Yap, and Noam (1995).

Conflict areas:

a) Situational threats to safety from unpredictable events.

b) Authority conflicts where asserting oneself could lead to punishment.
c) Independence conflicts where expressing personal needs may cause deprivation.
d) Competitive conflicts involving fear of failure or humiliation when pursuing success.
e) Sexual identity conflicts tied to fears of rejection.

After each vignette, participants answered four questions reflecting different levels of defense: Actual Behavior (AB): What would you physically do?, Fantasy Behavior (FB): What impulsive or imagined action would you take?, and Thought (T): What thoughts come to mind?, and Affect (A): How would you feel and why? Each response was categorized into one of five defense styles:

- Turning Against Object (TAO)
- Projection (PRO)
- Principalization (PRN)
- Turning Against Self (TAS)
- Reversal (REV)

This version includes 5 story vignettes, each addressing a distinct type of conflict. For every vignette, participants respond to four questions, resulting in 20 defensive responses per vignette. In total, the short version contains 100 defensive responses.

Vignette I – Situational Conflict
A student waits by the roadside after a rainy night when a car suddenly drives through a puddle, splashing mud all over them. This unexpected event disrupts their sense of safety and control, placing them in a moment of public discomfort and embarrassment.

Vignette II – Authority Conflict
As the Science Club Secretary, the student diligently works to organize a school exhibition but is unable to meet deadlines. When they begin exploring new ideas, the Headmaster steps in, criticizes their performance, and assigns the responsibility to someone else, undermining their authority and sense of responsibility.

Vignette III – Independence Conflict
Living under the care of relatives due to absent parents, the student plans to meet a friend despite worsening weather. Just as they are about to leave, their uncle firmly forbids them, asserting control over their decision. The student is caught between the urge for independence and the obligation to obey.

Vignette IV – Competitive Conflict
Eager to prove their capability in front of peers and a teacher, the student volunteers to install a new classroom gadget but is rejected due to classmates' objections. An expert fails at the task, and the teacher finally turns to the student, placing them in a high-stakes moment of performance anxiety and self-doubt.

Vignette V – Conflict Around Self-Esteem / Sexual Identity (Social Rejection)
The student attends a party where they are ignored by both strangers and their own friend. Although they have talent in performing arts, no one encourages them to participate. When their friend casually asks why they aren't dancing, the student is left feeling excluded, undervalued, and emotionally exposed.

3. Brief Coping Styles Questionnaire (Saxena, 2016): The questionnaire includes 28 statements reflecting coping mechanisms. Participants were required to select one of four options from the Likert scale with 1= I usually don't do this at all, 2= I usually do this a little bit, 3= I usually do this a medium amount, and 4 =I usually do this a lot. The coping strategies are divided into 14 categories: Self distraction, active coping, denial substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioural disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, self-blame.

Data collection procedure: An online survey, administered in English, was distributed to participants. The survey collected demographic information, including participants' full names, ages, and genders. Additionally, it asked whether they felt safe at school and if they had ever experienced bullying. The respondents were between the age range of 13 to 17 years. Two items from the bullying scale—*"I bullied him or her with the use of mobile phones"* and *"I bullied him or her with the use of computers"* were combined into a single, broader category: *"I was bullied in an online medium."* This adjustment was made to encompass various forms of cyberbullying, including those occurring via soci*al media platforms, e*nsuring a more inclusive understanding of online bullying experiences.

Ethical considerations: Informed consent was taken from all participants. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were clearly informed that their data would be used for research purposes. All responses were kept confidential, and the data was anonymized to protect participant identities and ensure privacy.

Findings

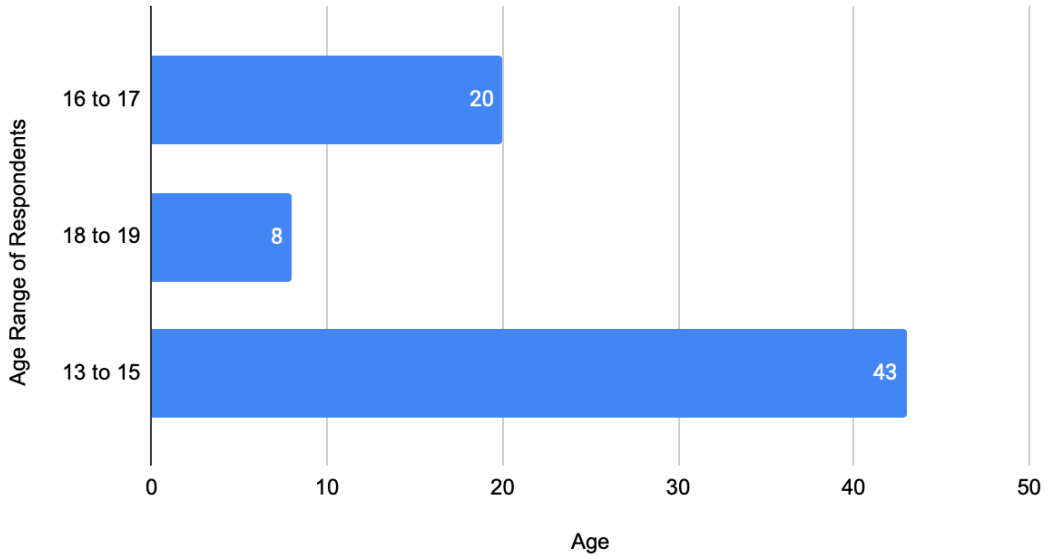

Figure 1 shows age groups of respondents.

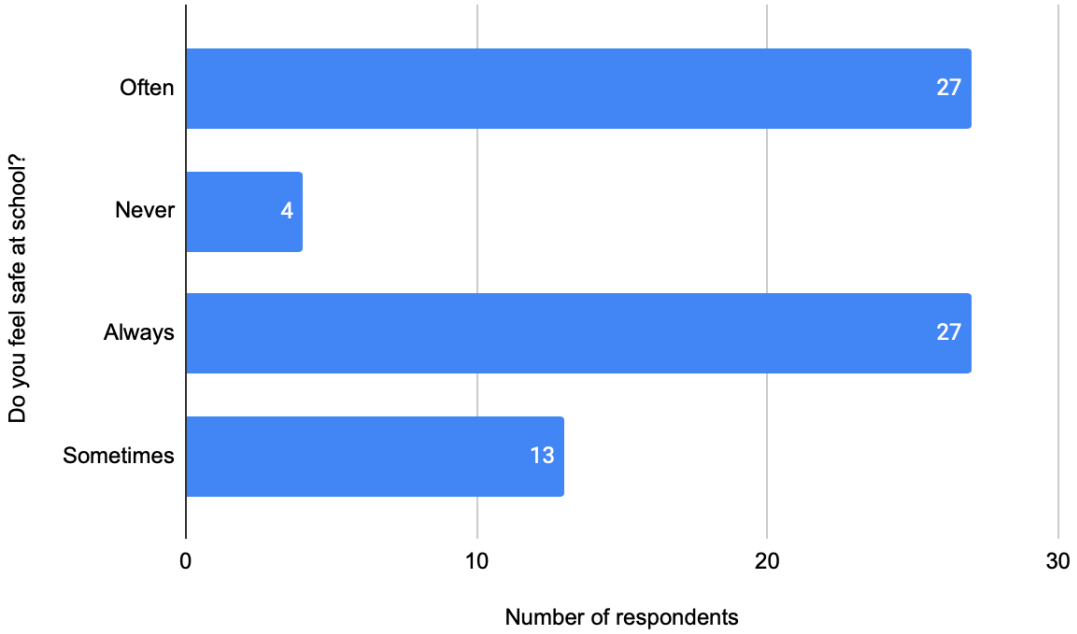

Figure 2 shows a graphical representation of how safe respondents feel at school

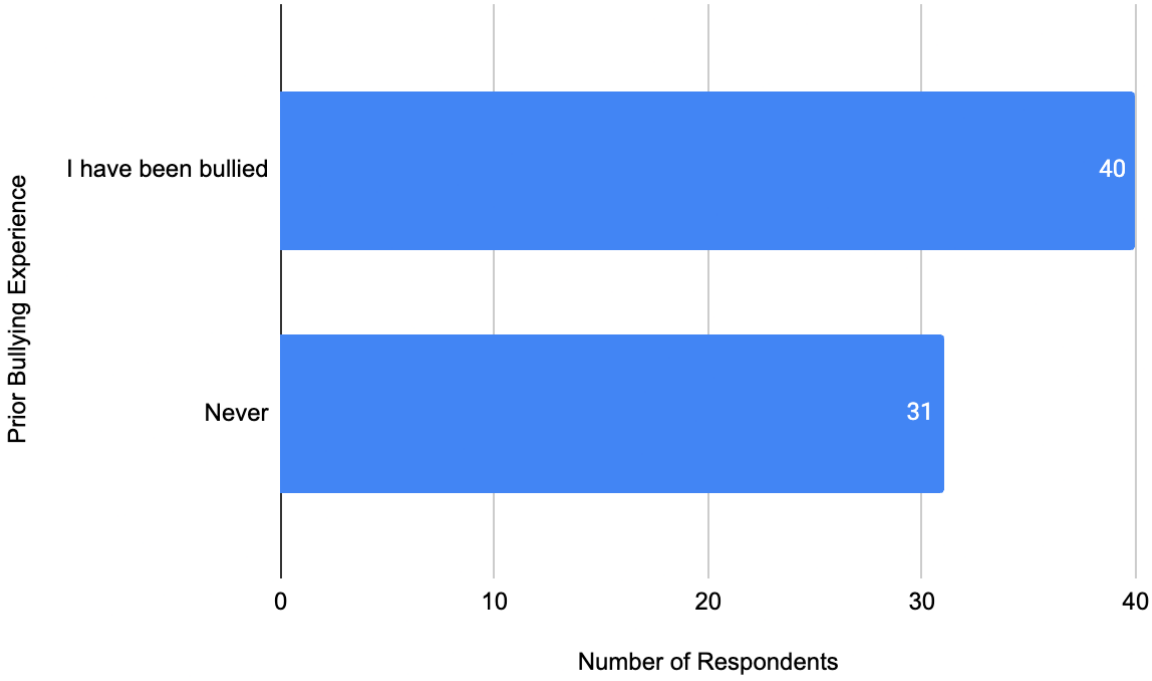

Figure 3 shows a graphical representation of respondents' bullying experiences.

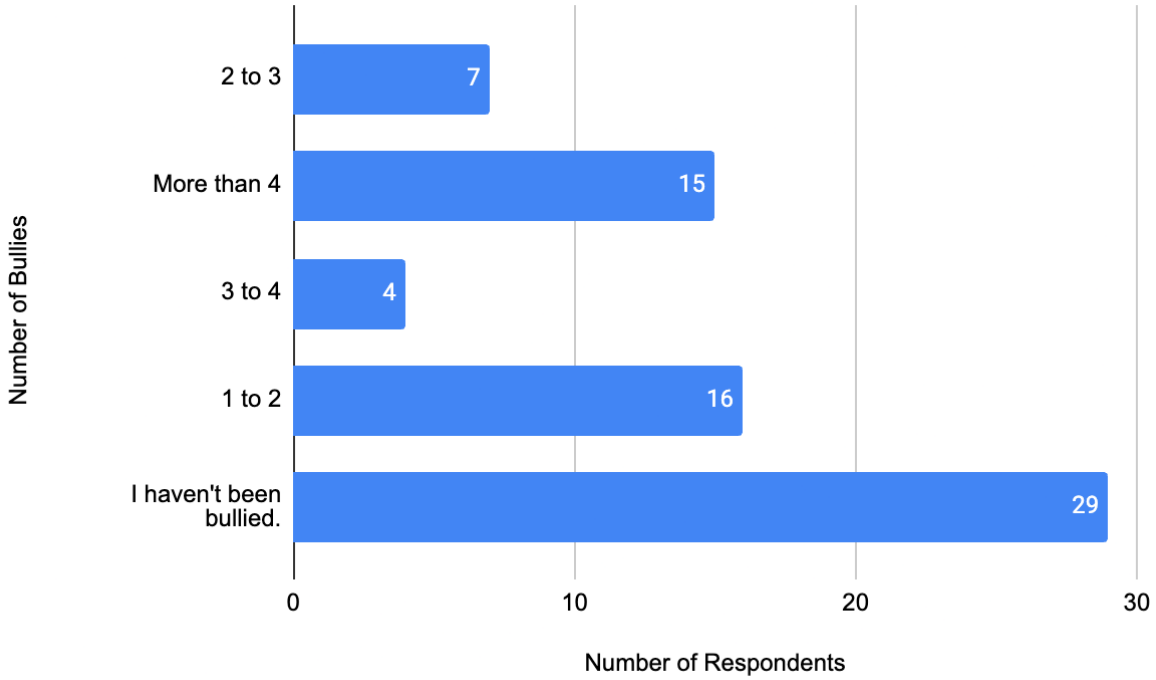

Figure 4 shows a graphical representation of how many bullies were involved in respondents' incidents.

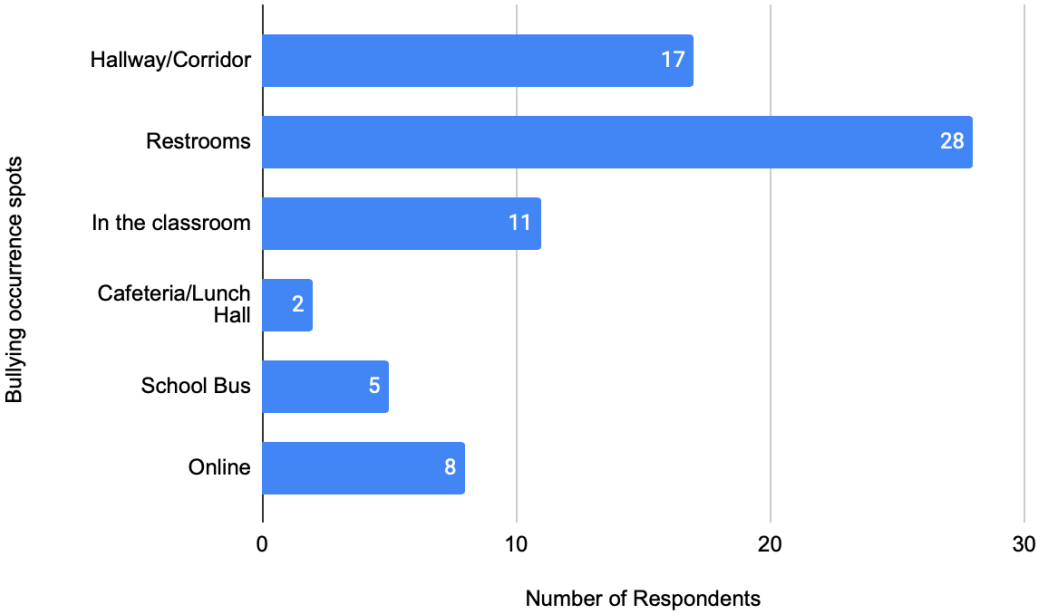

Figure 5 shows a graphical representation of where respondents reported bullying incidents occurring

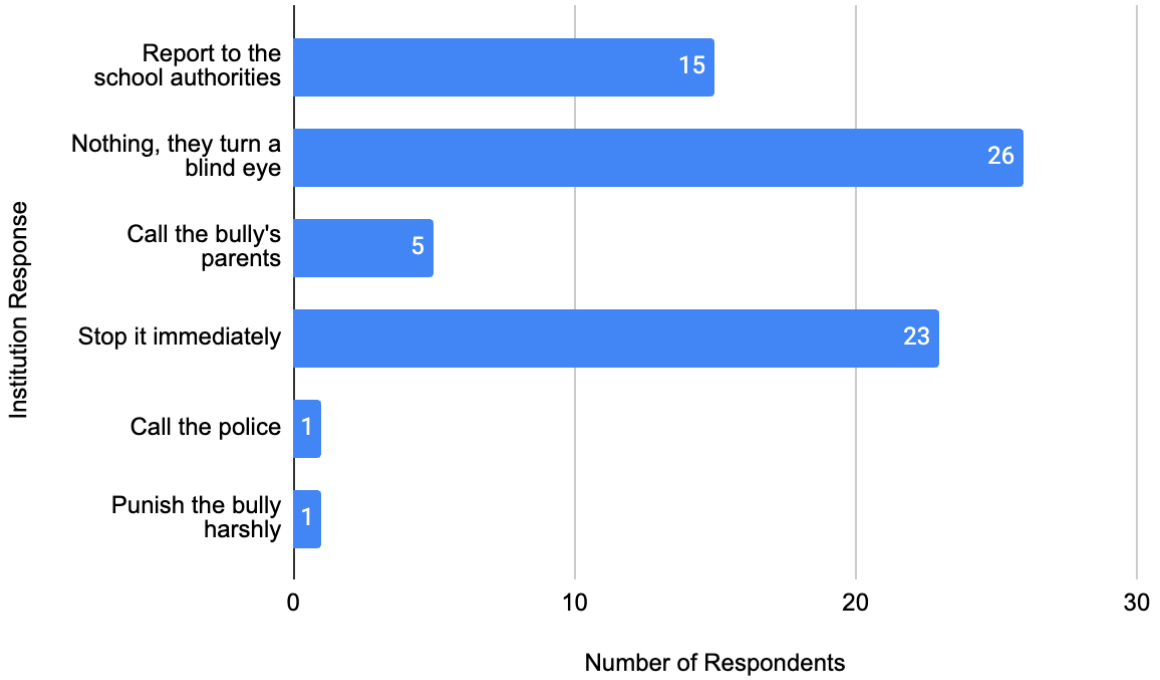

Figure 6 shows a graphical representation of respondents' impression of their respective institution's response to bullying.

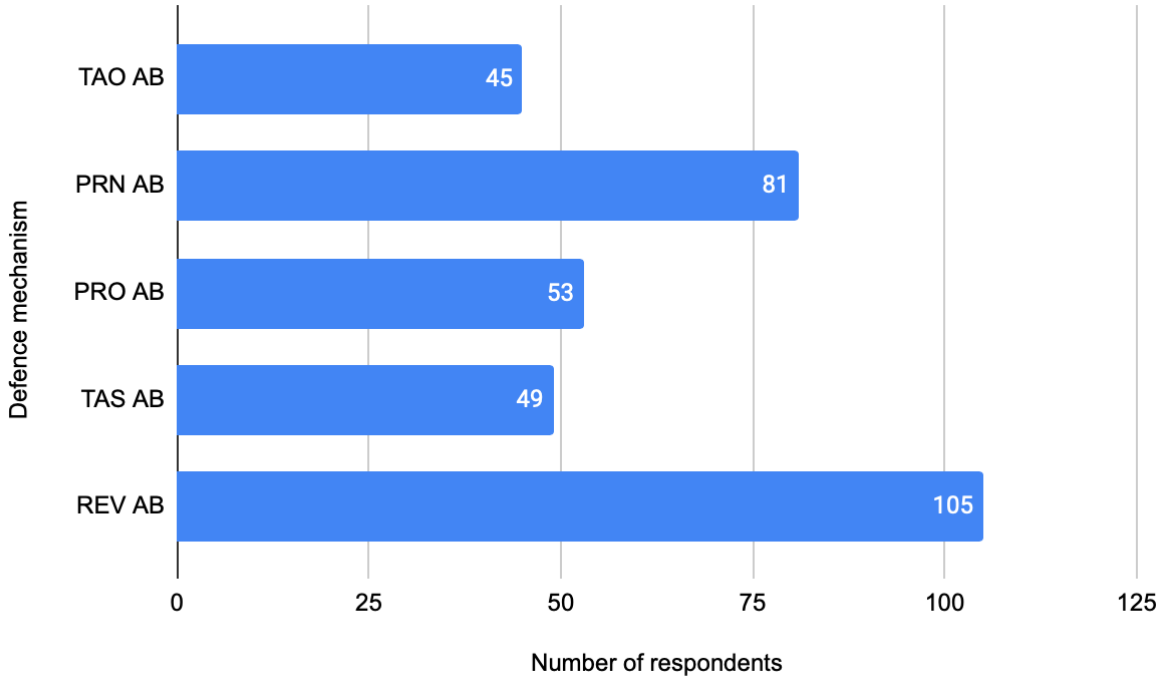

Figure 7 shows the graphical representation of respondents' most likely defence mechanism style in actual behaviour context.

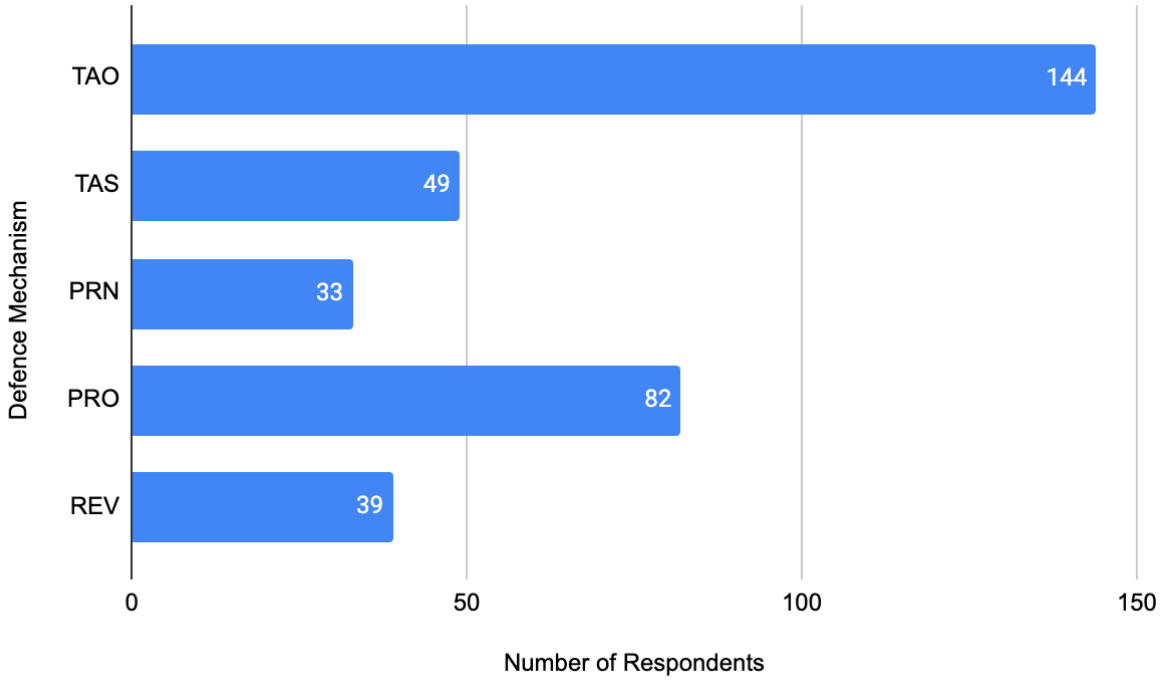

Figure 8 shows the graphical representation of respondents' least likely defence mechanism style in actual behaviour context.

According to figure 7 which represents the most likely reaction/actual behaviour of respondents to the various vignettes based on conflicts provided to them, REV (Reversal) was the most common response to conflict situations. REV refers to a defense style where individuals respond to internal or external threats by minimizing their severity and fail to acknowledge the existence of obvious dangers. Expressed in "sweet-lemonism", defences such as denial, negation, or repression fall under this category. Accordingly, when it came to the preferred least likely actual response to conflict (Figure 8), REV was the second least selected response. This shows that with regard to actual behavior the respondents will carry out in conflict-based situations, they are more likely to resort to REV. For the most likely actual behavior, TAO (turning against object) - which involves expressing direct or indirect aggression to handle perceived threats or avoid confronting painful inner conflicts - was chosen the least (Figure 7). Conversely, for the least likely actual behaviour in Figure 8, TAO was chosen the most by participants. This illustrates their reluctance to resort to TAO with regard to actual behavior in conflict-based situations. TAS (Turning against self) - which refers to a defense mechanism wherein reality is distorted through self-directed blame and pain to protect self-esteem - often showing up as harsh self-criticism, hopelessness, and sadness - was the third most likely actual response to conflict situations (Figure 7). However, when it came to the preferred least likely response to conflict (Figure 8), TAS was selected by the majority of the participants. This shows that with regard to the actual behaviour the respondents will carry out in conflict-based situations, they are less likely to resort to TAS. According to Figure 7, representing most representative actual behavior, PRN (Principalization), which detaches emotion from threatening ideas by using abstract reasoning, clichés, or rationalizations to avoid personal distress, was the second most chosen defence mechanism. Whereas in figure 8, showing least representative actual behavior, it is the least chosen defence mechanism. This shows participants are likely to resort to PRN in situations of conflict when it comes to their actual behavior. PRO - (Projection) which

involves attributing negative intent or traits to others without clear evidence, to justify hostile thoughts, feelings, or behaviors - was the third-least chosen defence mechanism for most likely actual behaviour (Figure 7). PRO was the second least chosen defence mechanism for least likely actual behaviour (Figure 8). This suggests that participants neither readily identify with this defense mechanism nor consider it a behavior they would strongly reject.

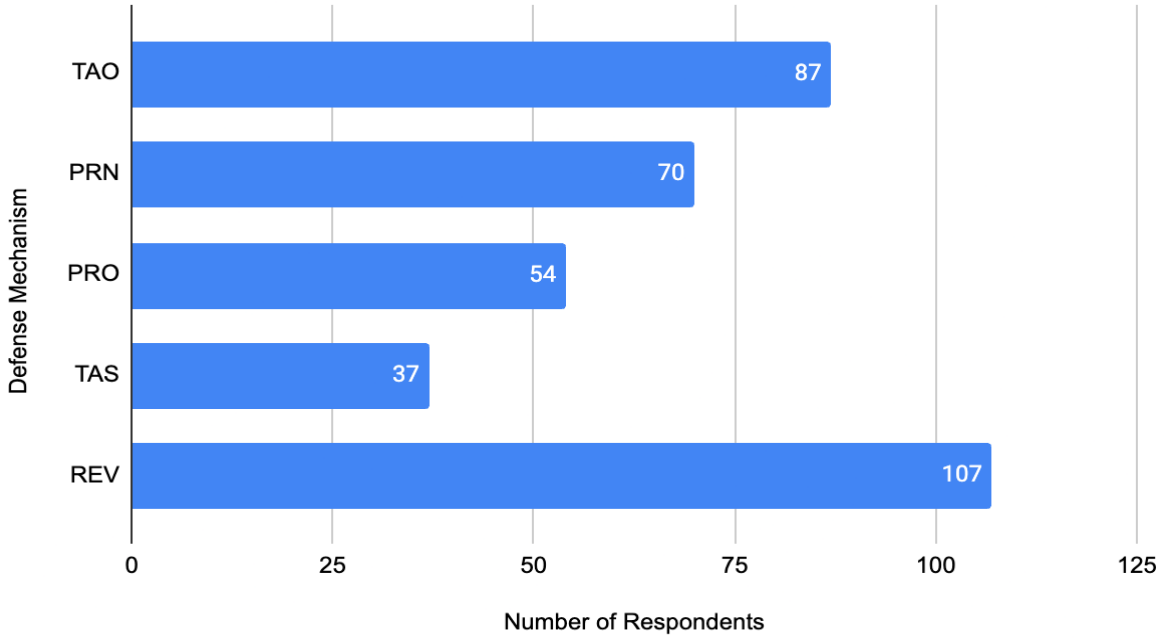

Figure 9 shows the graphical representation of respondents' most likely defence mechanism style in fantasy/impulsive behaviour context.

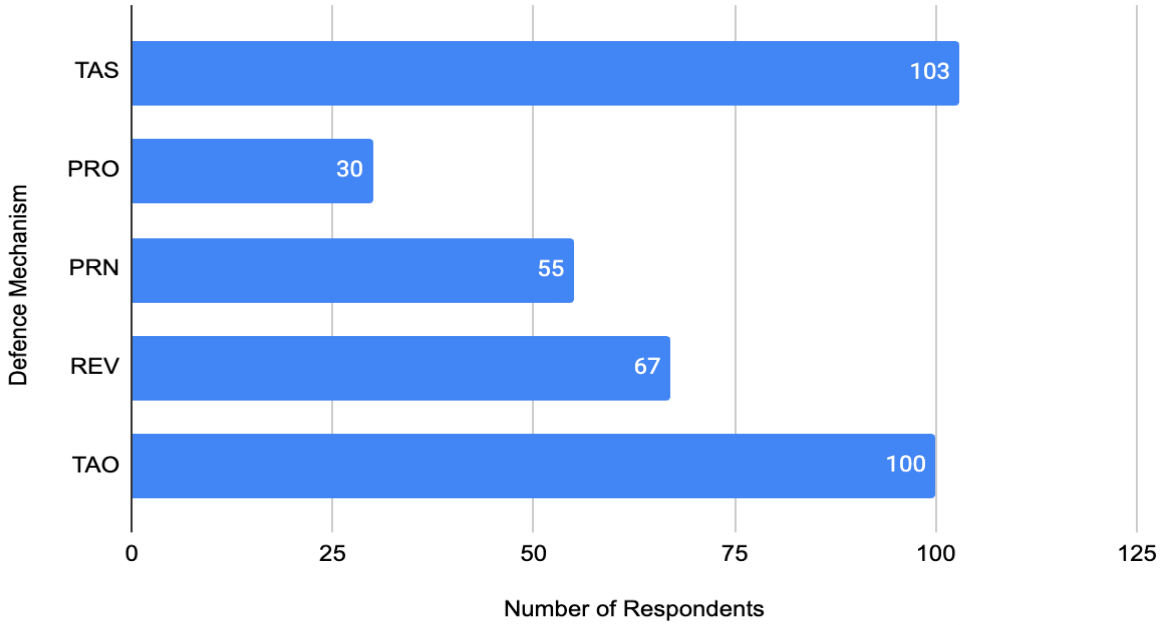

Figure 10 shows the graphical representation of respondents' least likely defence mechanism style in fantasy/impulsive behaviour context.

According to figure 9 which represents the most likely fantasy behaviour of respondents to the various vignettes based on conflicts provided to them, REV (Reversal) was the most common response. When it came to the preferred least likely fantasy response to conflict (Figure 10), REV was the median response. This shows that with regard to fantasy behaviour the respondents will carry out in conflict-based situations, they are more likely to resort to REV. For the most likely fantasy behaviour, TAO (turning against object) was the second most common option (Figure 9). Similarly, for the least likely fantasy behaviour in Figure 10, TAO was the second chosen the most by participants. This illustrates a polarized response among participants. TAS (Turning against self) was the least common response for most likely fantasy behaviour in conflict situations (Figure 9). However, when it came to the preferred least likely fantasy behaviour (Figure 10), TAS was the most common response. This shows that with regard to fantasy behaviour the respondents will carry out in conflict-based situations, they are less likely to resort to TAS. According to Figure 9, representing most likely fantasy behavior, PRN (Principalization) was the median option. In figure 10, showing least representative fantasy behavior, it is the second least chosen defence mechanism. This shows participants are more likely to resort to PRN in situations of conflict when it comes to their fantasy behaviour. PRO - (Projection) was the second-least chosen defence mechanism for most likely fantasy behaviour (Figure 9). PRO was the least chosen defence mechanism for least likely fantasy behaviour (Figure 10). This suggests a very weak inclination of participants to employ projection in their fantasy behaviour.

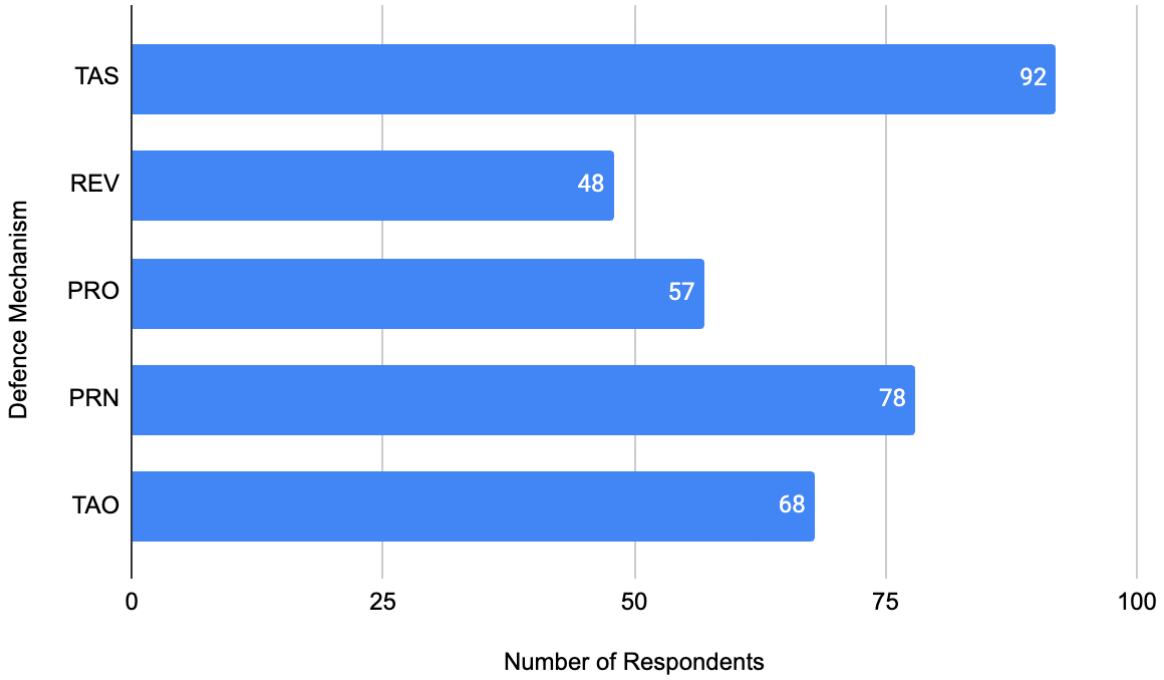

Figure 11 shows the graphical representation of respondents' most likely defence mechanism style in terms of the thought that occurred to them.

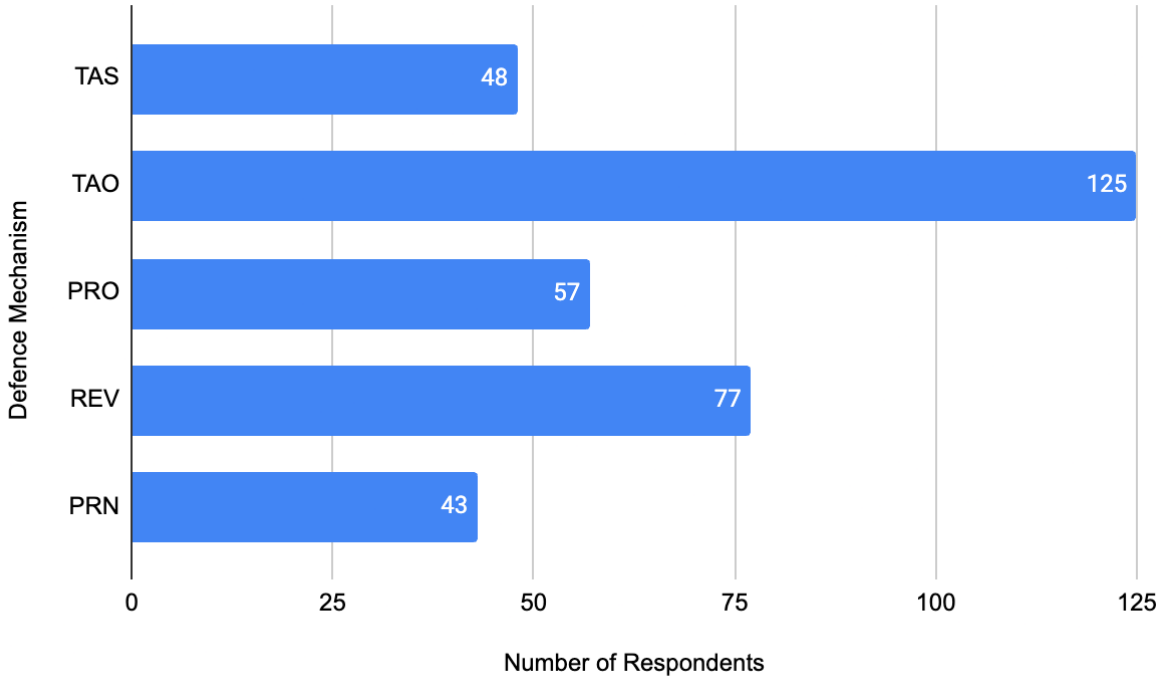

Figure 12 shows the graphical representation of respondents' least likely defence mechanism style in terms of the thought that occurred to them.

According to figure 11 which represents the most likely thought occurring to respondents based on conflicts provided to them, REV (Reversal) was the least common response. When it came to the least likely thought (Figure 12), REV was the second most common response. This shows that with regard to thought occurring to the respondents, they are less likely to resort to REV. For the most representative thought, TAO (turning against object) was the median option (Figure 11). However, for the least representative thought (Figure 12), TAO was the most common response. This suggests that participants are generally reluctant to engage in TAO (Turning Against Object) as a way of thinking when facing conflict. TAS (Turning against self) was the most common for most representative thought (Figure 11). It was the second least chosen option for the least representative thought (Figure 12). This shows participants' inclination to resort to TAS as a way of thinking in conflict. According to Figure 11, representing the most representative thought, PRN (Principalization) was the second most chosen defence mechanism. It was also the least common selection for least representative thought, which shows participants' inclination to resort to PRN as a way of thinking in conflict. PRO (Projection) was the second least chosen defence mechanism for most representative thought (Figure 11). Similarly, PRO was the second least chosen defence mechanism for least representative thought (Figure 12). This suggests participants do not strongly associate projection with their thought patterns, either positively or negatively.

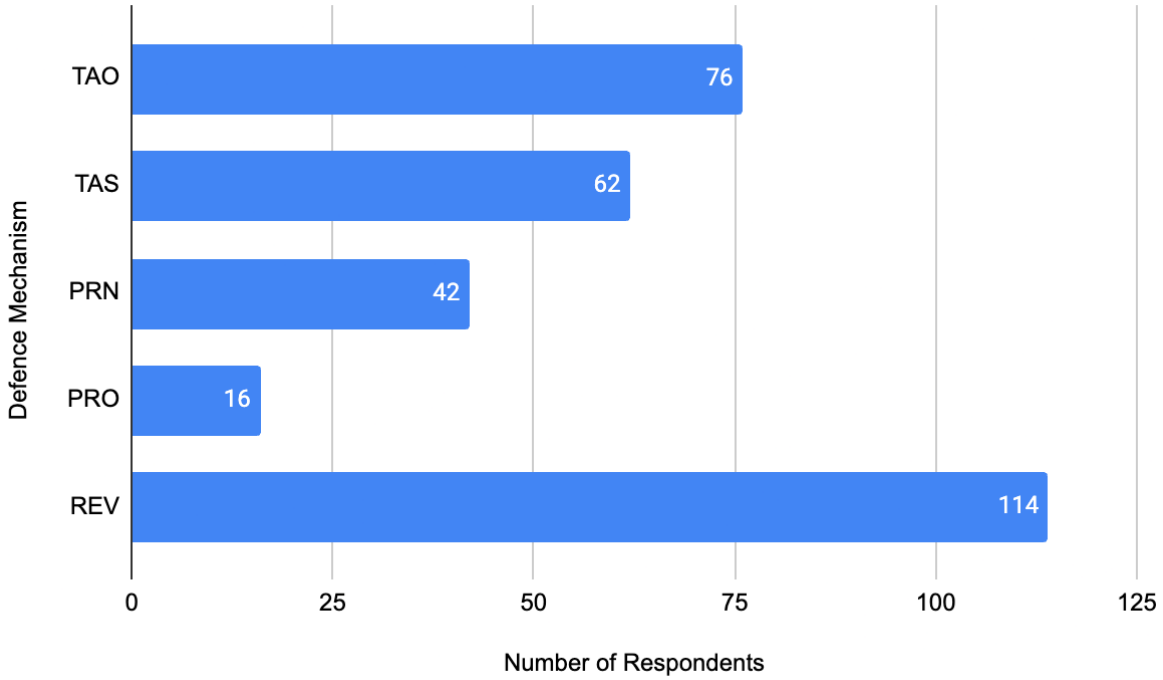

Figure 13 shows the graphical representation of respondents' most likely defence mechanism style in terms of their feeling in the vignette.

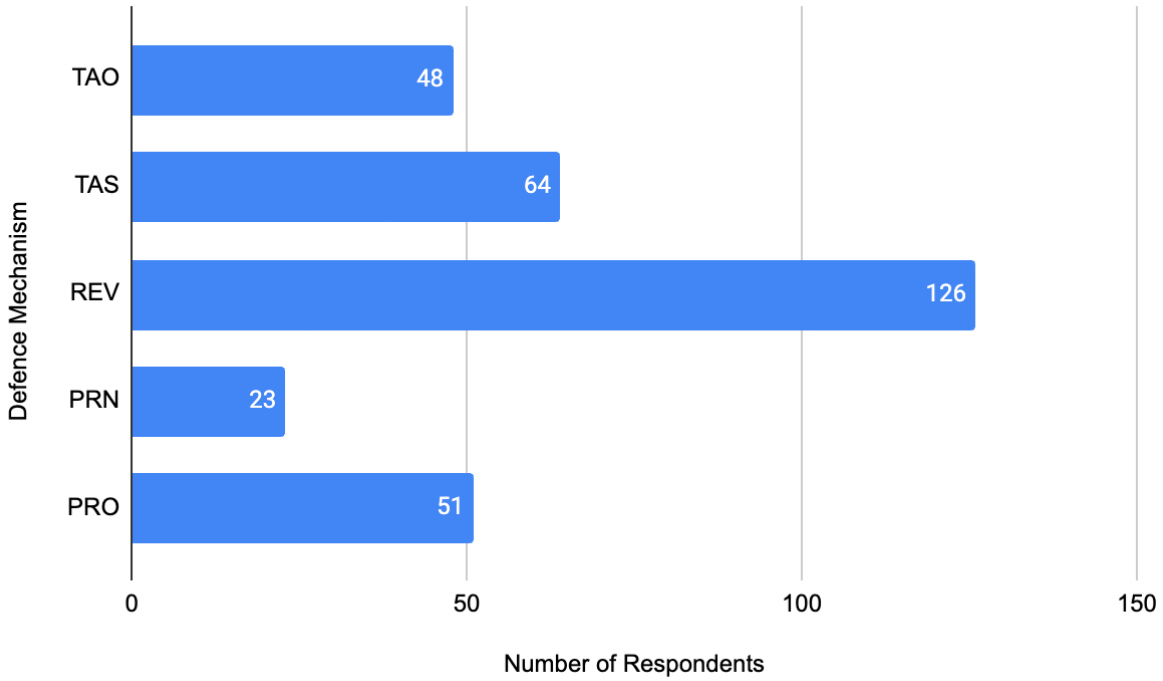

Figure 14 shows the graphical representation of respondents' least likely defence mechanism style in terms of their feeling in the vignette.

According to figure 13, which represents the most likely defence mechanism style in terms of their feeling, REV was the most common response. When it came to the least likely

thought (Figure 14), REV was also the most common response. This suggests a polarised view towards REV in the context of feeling. For the most representative feeling, TAO (turning against object) was the second most common option (Figure 13). However, for the least representative feeling, TAO was the second least common option. This suggests respondents are likely to use TAO in terms of their feelings in situations of conflict (Figure 14). TAS (Turning against self) was the median response for most representative feelings (Figure 13). TAS was the second most common response for least representative feeling (Figure 14). This shows participants generally don't incorporate TAS in their feelings during situations of conflict. According to Figure 13, representing the most representative feeling, PRN (Principalization) was the second least chosen defence mechanism. It was also the least common selection for least representative thought, which shows participants' slight inclination to resort to PRN as a way of thinking in conflict. PRO (Projection) was the least chosen defense mechanism for most representative feeling (Figure 13). Similarly, it was the median choice for least representative feeling (Figure 14). As a result, participants do not strongly associate projection with their thought patterns, either positively or negatively.

Table 1 shows the t-test values for gender and bullying victim scale

		n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
BVS	Female	31	19.1	9.06	-0.96	67	.34	0.23
	Male	38	21.29	9.7				

**BVS = Bullying Victim Scale*

According to Table 1, there was no significant mean difference across female (*M= 19.1, SD= 9.06)* and male *(M= 21.29, SD = 9.7*) respondents on the dependent variable of bullying victim scale with $t = -0.96$, $p = .34$ $(p > 0.05)$. The Cohen's d value of *0.23* indicates a small effect size. Thus, hypothesis 1 is *rejected*.

Table 2 shows t-test values for gender and coping scale

		n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
CS	Female	31	49.84	18.23	0.46	67	.646	0.11
	Male	38	47.76	18.83				

**CS = Coping Scale*

According to Table 2, there was no significant mean difference across female ($M = 49.84$, $SD = 18.23$) *and male* ($M = 47.76$, $SD = 18.83$) respondents on the dependent variable of coping scale with $t = 0.46$, $p = 0.646$ $(p > 0.05)$. The Cohen's d value of 0.11 indicates a very small effect size. Thus, hypothesis 2 is rejected.

Table 3 shows the t-test values for incidence of bullying and bullying victim scale

		n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
BVS	I have been bullied	40	25.25	10.55	5.53	69	<.001	1.32
	Never	31	14.45	2.95				

**BVS = Bullying Victim Scale*

According to Table 3, there was a significant mean difference across bullied (*M = 25.25, SD = 10.55)* and not bullied (*M = 14.45, SD = 2.95)* respondents on the dependent variable of bullying scale with t = 5.53, p <.001. The Cohen's d value of 1.32 indicates a very large effect size. Thus, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Table 4 shows the t-test values for incidence of bullying and coping scale

		n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
CS	I have been bullied	40	59.33	15.56	7.26	69	<.001	1.74
	Never	31	35.16	11.41				

**CS = Coping Scale*

According to Table 4, there was a significant mean difference across bullied (*M = 59.33, SD = 15.56)* and not bullied (*M = 35.16, SD = 11.41)* respondents on the dependent variable of coping scale with t = 7.26, p <.001. The Cohen's d value of 1.74 indicates a very large effect size. Thus, hypothesis 4 is accepted.

DISCUSSION

The present study found that there is no significant difference between gender groups of male and female adolescents when it comes to prior bullying experience. This finding is contradicted by Cosma et al. (2022) who reported that boys tend to be perpetrators and victims of traditional and cyberbullying both. Boys generally report higher rates of bullying perpetration than girls (Craig et al., 2009; Isernhagen & Harris, 2003). That being said, Beldean-Galea et al. (2010) reports that girls tend to engage in bullying behaviors more often.

The present study found that there is no significant difference between gender groups of male and female adolescents when it comes to coping. This finding was contradicted by Li et al. (2006) and Malooly et al. (2017) which found that girls tend to use more emotion-focused and ruminative coping strategies compared to boys, which is associated with higher levels of depressive symptoms. Rath & Nanda (2012) reported that boys, on the other hand, are more likely to employ problem-focused coping strategies.

The present study found a significant difference across bullied and non-bullied participants when it came to victimisation in victims and non-victims of school bullying. This finding was supported by Karatzias et al. (2002) and Velderman et al. (2008) which found that victims report lower peer self-esteem, more negative moods and emotions, and less positive perceptions of school. They also have fewer friends in school, miss school more often, and score higher on problem scales (Smith et al., 2004).

The present study found a significant difference in coping strategies between bullied and non-bullied participants. This finding aligns with prior research by Potard et al. (2021), which reported that bullied adolescents, including both pure victims and bully-victims, are more likely to engage in avoidance coping strategies compared to their non-involved peers. Additionally, emotional coping was found to be more prevalent among both bullied and aggressive adolescents. Undheim et al. (2016) further support this by showing that

emotional coping partially mediates the relationship between bullying victimization and depressive symptoms.

The most prevalent defence mechanisms employed by respondents in this study were Reversal (REV) and Principalisation. According to Perry & Perry (1974), denial of suffering by victims can escalate aggression in highly aggressive boys. Denial falls under the Reversal category of defense mechanisms. Furthermore, Perren et al. (2012) concludes that victims demonstrated greater emotional empathy in their reasoning but relied less on rigid moral principles, indicating a justification style that contrasts with principalisation.

CONCLUSION

Bullying is a repeated, intentional abuse of power (physical, verbal, or relational) that is linked to long-term mental, physical, academic, and social harm for both bullies and victims. For the same, victims employ coping strategies like problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, or approach-avoidance styles. Defense mechanisms such as denial, repression, and aggression (especially in bully-victims) help manage distress.

This study aimed to explore how adolescents cope with bullying, with a specific focus on coping strategies and defense mechanisms. Using an online self-report survey distributed among adolescents aged 13 to 17, the research examined the prevalence of different coping methods, as well as the defense mechanisms most commonly used by bullying victims. The study also investigated whether gender and age group of participants played a role in bullying experiences or coping behaviors.

Limitations

1. The study used convenience sampling, which limited the representativeness of the sample, and reduced the generalizability of the findings.
2. The reliance on self-reported data introduced the possibility of social desirability bias.
3. Defence mechanisms could have been studied via qualitative methods to draw conclusions based on a richer breadth of data.
4. The study could have benefitted from gathering more data from victims of school bullying.

Future Recommendations

1. Future research can investigate the role that defence mechanism and coping style plays in actual victims of school bullying within the Indian context. Within this, the research can be carried out from different regions of the country and even look at a difference between public and private schools.
2. Future research could examine differences in coping strategies and defense mechanisms among victims, bullies, and bully-victims, children who are both bullies and victims of bullying (Haynie et al., 2001), could provide a more nuanced understanding of each group.
3. Future research could also distinguish between responses to online versus in-person bullying, identifying unique defenses styles and strategies associated with each.
4. Further, studies could delve into the impact of school environments, such as the presence of anti-bullying policies and peer dynamics, on adolescents' coping choices

5. Lastly, future research might explore the relationship between coping strategies and academic performance, examining whether certain mechanisms correlate with increased or decreased academic engagement following bullying experiences.

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Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Jolly, A. (2025). Bullying and Psychological Responses: An Analysis of Coping and Defence Mechanisms Among Victims and Non-Victims. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, *13*(3), 2940-2960. DIP:18.01.267.20251303, DOI:10.25215/1303.267