



Exposure to Bullying among Autistic Children in Jordan: Children's Parent Perspectives

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التعرض للتنمر لدى الأطفال المصابين بالتوحد في الأردن: وجهات نظر أولياء أمور الأطفال

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الملخص

هدفت الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على ظاهرة التنمر التي تمارس ضد الأطفال المصابين بالتوحد في الأردن كما يدركها أولياء أمورهم. وقد تم استخدام المنهج الوصفي الكمي، حيث تم استخدام مقياس يتكون من ٢٩ فقرة حول سلوك وأنماط التنمر. وقد تكونت عينة الدراسة من ٥٠ والداً ووالدة لأطفال مصابين بالتوحد في الأردن. وتراوحت أعمار الأطفال بين ٥ إلى ٤ سنوات. وقد أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن أولياء أمور الأطفال المصابين بالتوحد كانوا على دراية كاملة بأن أطفالهم معرضون لخطر التنمر بشكل كبير. كما أظهرت النتائج أن الآباء أفادوا بأن أكثر أنواع التنمر شيوعاً التي تعرض لها أطفالهم كانت التنمر الجسدي، إلا أن التنمر اللفظي كان يحدث عادة مع بعض سوء المعاملة المتكررة والاستخفاف بأطفالهم. كما أفاد الآباء أيضاً بأن أطفالهم أكثر عرضة للتنمر الاجتماعي في المجتمعات الاجتماعية والأماكن العامة. وعلاوة على ذلك، أظهرت الدراسة وجود فروق كبيرة في معدل الآباء لاحتلال تعرض أطفالهم للتنمر بسبب جنسهم لصالح الذكور. الكلمات المفتاحية: الأطفال المصابون بالتوحد، اضطراب طيف التوحد، التنمر، الآباء.



Exposure to Bullying among Autistic Children in Jordan: Children's Parent Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to shed light on the bullying phenomenon practiced against Jordanian autistic children as perceived by their parents. A descriptive quantitative approach was based on scale of 29 items on bullying conduct and patterns. The study sample consisted of 50 Jordanian parents of autistic children. The children's ages ranged between 5 to 4 years old. The results of the study revealed that the parents of autistic children were fully aware that their children were exposed to a high potential of the bullying risk. The results also showed that the parents reported that the most common type of bullying that their children were exposed to was physical, however, the verbal bullying occurred usually with some frequent maltreatment and underestimation of their children. The parents further reported more likely exposure of their children to social bullying in social communities and public places. Furthermore, the study showed a significant difference in the parents' rate of the likelihood of the bullying their children were exposed to due to their gender in favor of males.

Keywords: Autistic children, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Bullying, Parents.

Introduction

Recently, societies have been exposed to rapid exchanges that bring new phenomena irritating individuals and societies. Bullying is one of these pervasive phenomena, which is predominantly documented in societies, schools, and universities, and even among siblings in one family. Moreover, cyberbullying is the modern form of bullying that utilizes the social platform for bullying others.

Bullying is a term of deliberate pervasive behaviors among children and adults who perpetrate abuse and aggression against others, usually, these behaviors are portrayed in school, at home, and in public places against bullying victims. Bullying behaviors underneath undesirable behaviors such as offense, abuse, threat, spreading rumors, and ruining reputations. It has numerous definitions that vary among researchers and authors. The definition of Olweus et al. in 1970 is the most common definition, which stipulated that "Expose to negative action and threats repeatedly over time and for a long time exhibited by one person or more which harm an individual, these negative actions could be verbal or physical violence or any other ways publicly or in private." (Olweus, 1991).

Barash (2020) defines bullying as directly attacking other individuals verbally or physically. Addyar (2012) summarized all bullying definitions in power abuse among students in schools persistently and repetitively with intentions to control others using negative aggressive and harmful actions, which one student or more perpetrate these actions against other students and it is a catastrophic behavior based on the unbalanced power.

A high portion of individuals are exposed to bullying daily, but women, children, and individuals with disabilities are one of the most social strata at risk of being bullied. Having a child with a disability increases the family burden. In that, the families need the support more than others, particularly those who have autistic children in kindergarten or school because children with autism disorder are exposed to a higher risk of being bullied compared to others with different special needs. Autistic children can be bullied by their siblings, peers, and outsiders (Cuesta, 2010; Cappadocia et al., 2012; Hebron et al., 2017) and exhibit abnormal behavior patterns, which explains the high likelihood of being bullied (Hwang et al., 2018).



According to (Saigh & Bagadood, 2022; Park et al., 2020) bullying has tremendous patterns such as physical Bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying, school bullying, sexual bullying, and cyber-bullying. Technology, conversely, reaches out to all individuals and facilities in society. For example, children at schools use their technology and social media accounts to bully others freely, intimidate, threaten, assault, blackmail, thwart, propagate scandals, and send images and videos; yielding adverse harm to victims and feeling fear and insecurity even at home.

Bullying is a persistent problem in school. It affects all students, whether they are bullies, victims, or witnesses to violence. Bullying can comprise verbal and physical assaults, threats, jokes, ridicule, criticism, and maltreatment behavior (Jan & Husain, 2015). According to (Al-Subayhin & Al-Qudah, 2013), the causes of bullying might be personal, psychological, Social, or school causes.

Statement of the Problem

According to Zablotzky et al. (2012), children with autism disorder are more likely to be bullied than their normal peers due to their social interaction dysfunction and challenge to sustain friendships. Nevertheless, little concern and interest are paid to investigating practices of bullying behaviors on autistic children in Arabic societies and in Jordan, particularly. Thus, the current study aims to shed light on the bullying phenomenon exercised on autistic children as perceived by their families. Therefore, the current study questions are formulated as follows:

1. What is the bullying exposure level practiced on autistic children in Jordan as their families perceive?
2. What are the most common bullying patterns to which children with autism spectrum disorder in Jordan are exposed as their families perceive?
3. Are there statistically significant differences in the bullying level to which children with autism in Jordan are exposed according to their families' perspectives at the significance level of 0.05 attributed to the children's gender?

Objectives

The study aims to reveal the bullying level and patterns to which children with autism in Jordan are exposed. It also aims to shed light on the parents' perspectives towards the bullying their children are exposed to. It further aims to identify whether there are any differences in bullying levels due to the gender of children.

Significance of the Study

The existence of the high level of bullying towards autistic children is an important phenomenon that must be discussed. Moreover, this study is significant due to the lack of Arabian studies and research on this matter. Furthermore, the study's significance relies on the expected findings and its contribution to identifying how to prevent or avoid these bullying behaviors to which autistic children are exposed.

In practice, the study contributes to validating bullying level assessment tools among children with autism population, drives evidence to establish the remedial programs and prevention strategies of bullying to which children with autism are exposed, and provides a solid background and knowledge base to those working in the special education field to increase awareness about bullying level that children with autism are exposed and how to cope and deal with these behaviors.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have been conducted focusing on the bullying of children on the autism spectrum. A study was undertaken in Saudi Arabia by Saigh and Bagadood (2022) to understand the level of bullying experienced by children with autism spectrum from their mother's perspective, and the strategies these mothers employ to address bullying incidents. To achieve the study's objectives, a scale was used to identify instances and types of bullying, as well as strategies for dealing with bullying. An open-ended question was added to the survey to enable parents to write about their child's experiences with bullying and how they supported their child. The results revealed that the children were subjected to all forms of bullying, most notably violence, rejection by others, and being labeled with inappropriate names (spreading rumors about them). The findings highlighted that the mothers' methods of dealing with bullying



incidents involved engaging teachers and peers in preventing the occurrence of bullying. The results also showed that the mothers did not encourage their children to stand up to the bullies.

Falcão, Stelko-Pereira, and Alves (2021) conducted a study in Brazil aimed at understanding the extent of bullying involvement among students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), according to their perspectives, their parents, and their physical education teachers. The study sample consisted of 133 individuals, including 63 parents of students, 51 teachers, and 19 students diagnosed with ASD. To achieve the study's objectives, the researchers conducted structured interviews with each category of the study sample. The study found that physical education teachers had a greater understanding of bullying compared to the student's parents, with only five teachers acknowledging the occurrence of harsh treatment. Concerning the parents, the results indicated that 30 parents, constituting approximately 47.6%, were unaware of whether their children had experienced bullying, while 33 parents (52.4%) knew that their children had been victims of bullying. They considered 76% as victims, 21% as aggressors/victims, and 3% as bullies. The teachers noted that 53% of the students with ASD did not partake in bullying, while another 47% identified them as victims. In contrast, 63% of the students themselves indicated that they were victims.

Zhang and Chen conducted a study in China in 2021, which aimed to understand the perspectives of parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder about their children's experiences of bullying at school. The sample for the study was made up of 16 parents of students aged between 7 and 15 years. To achieve the objectives of the study, interviews were conducted with the parents. The study results showed that the parents reported their children experiencing severe bullying at school. The findings also indicated that bullying was a source of concern for the children and their families, with the parents often becoming victims of bullying themselves. They reported dealing with the bullying independently, and their perspective was largely pessimistic due to the frequent instances of them, and their children being subjected to bullying.

Ashburner et al. (2019) conducted a study aimed at understanding the emotional impact and level of anxiety reported by students and families of autistic students to determine if there is a

difference in the impact of the bullying incidents they experience, and to explore the correlations between student characteristics (understanding of bullying, age, and common circumstances) and their experiences and fears related to bullying. The study sample consisted of 89 students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder without intellectual disabilities, aged between 11 and 16 years and their parents. Surveys were used to explore experiences of bullying and levels of anxiety about bullying. Parents' perceptions of how bullying affects their children were also explored through semi-structured interviews with nine parents. The study concluded that students suffering from clinical anxiety disorders were more likely to report face-to-face harm and were more distressed by both face-to-face and online bullying. Conversely, students with depression were more likely to report harm via the Internet. The results also highlighted parents' concerns about the impact of harm on school attendance, self-esteem, mental health, social participation, academic performance, and behavior. The results indicated that anxiety about bullying and high levels of reported harm were increased in students suffering from internal symptoms, who were more susceptible to psychological harm.

Campbell et al. (2017) conducted a study to understand the experiences of individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) with various forms of bullying (physical, verbal, social, and electronic) and examine their roles as either perpetrators or victims of bullying. The study sample consisted of 104 individuals with ASD. The results concluded that individuals with ASD are more frequently subjected to physical, verbal, and social bullying than their peers.

Maiano et al., (2016) aimed to analyze studies that addressed bullying and autistic children. The goal was to ascertain the proportion of individuals with ASD and their experiences with bullying as either perpetrators victims, or both, and to determine whether estimates varied depending on participant characteristics or methods. To achieve this, the researchers reviewed the literature and conducted a search that included 17 studies addressing bullying and individuals with ASD. The results found that the rates of bullying, victimization, or both were 10%, 44%, and 16% respectively. The aggregated prevalence estimates for physical, verbal, and social harm at school were 33%, 50%, and 31% respectively. Subgroup analyses showed significant variations in prevalence depending on geographic location, school numbers, information source, type of measures, bullying recurrence



criteria, and the timeframe of evaluation. It was found that school-aged individuals with autism were more susceptible to the risk of school victimization in general, as well as verbal bullying from their peers.

Zeedyk et al. (2014), conducted a study aimed at understanding the experiences of a sample of individuals with ASD, intellectual disabilities, and normal students aged 13, in terms of exposure to bullying and harm, its type, and its impact. The researchers conducted interviews with the students themselves as well as with the children's mothers to carry out the results. The results concluded that individuals with ASD experience more bullying than intellectually disabled students, according to both students and their mothers. According to the results, there is an increase in problems of comprehension and conflict in friendships among individuals with ASD, indicating predictors of exposure to bullying and harm according to student and mother reports.

Zablotsky et al. (2012) conducted a study aimed at understanding bullying behaviors experienced by autistic children from their families' perspectives. The study sample consisted of 1221 parents of children diagnosed with ASD, who were selected from a national online registry. The parents completed a survey to understand instances of bullying their children experienced at school. The study results indicated that children with Asperger's syndrome or those attending mainstream schools were more susceptible to bullying. Children with high levels of autism traits were most likely to be victims, perpetrators, or victim perpetrators. Children in full inclusion classes were more likely to be harmed than those spending most of their time in special education settings.

Roekel et al. (2010) conducted a study aimed at understanding the prevalence of bullying among teenagers with ASD their perception of bullying and harm instances and whether the Theory of Mind correlates with their perception of bullying. The data was collected from 230 teenagers with ASD attending special education schools. The study results concluded that bullying and harm prevalence rates ranged from 6% to 46%. The study found that teachers and students themselves perceive bullying to be more widespread than their peers do. The study found that instances of bullying and harm are often misinterpreted by individuals with ASD as not being bullied. The study also concluded that the less developed their Theory of Mind is,

the more likely they are to misinterpret bullying situations as not being bullied.

Talab and Sulayman (2019), on the other hand, conducted a study in Egypt aimed at identifying differences between students with special needs and typical students in terms of their exposure to school bullying. The study sample consisted of 263 students, including 61 with intellectual disabilities, 52 with autism spectrum disorder, 70 with learning difficulties, and 80 typical students. A school bullying victimization scale was used to collect data. The study results concluded that there were statistically significant differences in favor of students with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder compared to typical students in terms of their exposure to school bullying. The results indicated no differences between typical students and students with learning difficulties in terms of exposure to bullying according to the overall scale score. The results also showed statistically significant differences in exposure to bullying in favor of males, and middle school stage.

This study is distinguished from the previous related studies in that it attempted to identify the patterns of bullying experienced by children with autism in Jordan in particular in addition to understanding the level of bullying they face from their parents' perspective. It also aimed to determine if there are statistically significant gender differences in the Jordanian society. In addition, there is a scarcity of studies that have examined the forms of bullying experienced by children with autism in the Arab environment in general, and there is a lack of research specifically focusing on bullying among children with autism in Jordan within the limits of the researchers' knowledge.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study aims to explore the bullying Level to which children with autism spectrum disorder were exposed from their parents' perspectives in Jordan. The study adopted a quantitative-descriptive approach and the results of the survey were analyzed and compared to find if there were any statistically significant differences attributed to gender. The study used the quantitative-descriptive method because it is the most appropriate method for the study problem and its



objectives, and it is one of the scientific research methods concerned with studying the phenomenon on the ground.

Population and Participants

The population of the study comprised all Jordanian families who have children with autism spectrum disorder in Amman city. To achieve the goals of the study, the total participants who were selected and agreed to participate in the study were 50 Jordanian parents of children. Those children's ages ranged between 5 to 14 years old and were diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The participants were the parents of (36) males and (14) females, see Table 1. The participants were selected randomly using the simple random method and those who agreed to participate in the study.

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample according to Gender

Independent Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender of children	Male	36	72.0
	Female	14	28.0
	Total	50	100

Measures

Bullying against Children scale

The study used a 29-item bullying measure built by the researchers after reviewing the educational literature and previous studies that dealt with bullying against children e.g. Abu Azzal, 2009, Al-Desouki, 2016, Zhang, Chen.2021, and Zablotsky, Bradshaw, Anderson, Law.2012 with the modification of some paragraphs to be suitable for families to answer.

The 3-point Likert scale was used in the survey, Options will include: Always apply, sometimes apply, and never apply. The survey was judged by 6 professors at Jordan Universities, and it was modified taking all the professors' modifications into account. Also, the Survey was presented to a sample pilot of the study, before distributing the survey, to see if the survey was easy, clear, and understandable to them or not. Finally, the survey was prepared and distributed in person on a sample study, to collect the required information and answers. The scale has satisfactory psychometric properties, Cronbach's alphas

in the total sample were 0.92, and the three dimensions scored a high internal consistency, Cronbach's alphas were 0.82, 0.86, and 0.89 for the (Physical bullying, verbal bullying, and Social bullying) dimensions, respectively.

The study used the 29-item bullying against children distributed in three dimensions, namely, the physical bullying subscale (11 items), verbal bullying subscale (8 items), and Social bullying subscale (10 items). Each subscale assesses the Bullying Level of children with autism spectrum disorder. Families are supposed to respond to 29 items on a scale, where they circle one score from the three rating categories, 1 rating for items that never apply, 2 for items that sometimes apply, and 3 for items that always apply. The three subscales have satisfactory psychometric properties.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

The study questions were designed based on previous studies related to the subject of the current study, and the ascertained validity of the tool was determined by presenting the initial copy of the measure to a group of specialists based on their opinions. Phrases have been modified and reformulated to get the final copy to distribute to the study sample, and we have used Cronbach's alphas coefficient to ensure reliability. The bullying instrument has an internal consistency from .80 to .88 and Cronbach's alpha of .92.

Data Analysis

The statistical analysis results of the data were obtained using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 28.0. The reliability of the scale was evaluated by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficient, and internal consistency using Pearson's correlation coefficients between the three dimensions (Physical bullying, verbal bullying, and social bullying). Subsequently, the frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations of all variables were described using descriptive statistics. Lastly, to measure differences among genders on the questions about bullying, independent t-test analyses were conducted.



5. RESULTS

Descriptive characteristic of bullying Level

Q1: What is the bullying exposure level that autistic children are exposed to in Jordan as their families perceive? To answer the question, descriptive statistics were used to find bullying levels among children with autism spectrum disorder.

Physical bullying dimension

Table 2: *Percentage, Means, and Standard Deviations of Level Physical Bullying for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

Item	Answer (%)			Mean	Std Dev.
	Never	sometimes	Always		
My son is being beaten by others	46.0	16.0	38.0	1.9200	.92229
My son is being kicked by others	48.0	26.0	26.0	1.7800	.84007
My son gets his hair pulled by other children	44.0	18.0	38.0	1.9400	.91272
My son is being pushed by others	42.0	20.0	38.0	1.9600	.90260
My son is being harassed by others	40.0	28.0	32.0	1.9200	.85332
My child is being forcibly prevented from doing his assignments	52.0	30.0	18.0	1.6600	.77222
My child's belongings are being taken by force	38.0	34.0	28.0	1.9000	.81441
My child is being assaulted using tools (stick,...)	56.0	30.0	14.0	1.5800	.73095
My son gets kicked for no reason	28.0	40.0	32.0	2.0400	.78142
My child's things are being stolen	82.0	16.0	2.0	1.2000	.45175
My son gets bitten and pinched	34.0	38.0	28.0	1.9400	.79308

According to the table above, the families of children with autism spectrum disorder rate all items of Physical bullying at the high importance level. The higher mean was given to the child who was kicked for no reason, followed by the child who was pushed by others with a mean of (1.96). Then, the child had his hair pulled by other children, and the child was bitten and pinched.

Verbal bullying dimension

Table 3: Percentage, Means, and Standard Deviations of Level Verbal Bullying for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Item	Answer			Mean	Std Dev.
	Never	sometimes	Always		
My son is exposed to funny phrases from others	62.0	24.0	14.0	1.5200	.73512
I feel like my son is being ridiculed	80.0	12.0	8.0	1.2800	.60744
Others give my son bad nicknames	50.0	36.0	14.0	1.6400	.72168
I feel that others underestimate my son	58.0	12.0	30.0	1.7200	.90441
Others call my son a strange person	82.0	14.0	4.0	1.2200	.50669
My son is labeled as having autism	50.0	34.0	16.0	1.6600	.74533
Comments are made that are inappropriate regarding the abilities of autistic children to communicate with others	82.0	16.0	2.0	1.2000	.45175
The students imitate my son in the way he speaks	54.0	34.0	12.0	1.5800	.70247

As shown in Table 3, children with autism spectrum disorder are sometimes exposed to verbal bullying, as parents feel that others underestimate their child having a mean of 1.72 since percentages are 58%, 12%, and 30% for Never, sometimes, and always, respectively. The lowest means was 1.2 for item (7) "Comments are made that are inappropriate regarding the abilities of autistic children to communicate with others" since the percentages are 82%, 16%, and 2% for Never, sometimes, and Always, respectively.

Social Bullying Dimension

Table 4: Percentage, Means, and Standard Deviations of Level Social Bullying for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Item	Answer			Mean	Std Dev.
	Never	sometimes	Always		
My son faces bullying almost daily from his schoolmates	46.0	38.0	16.0	1.7000	.73540
My son faces bullying when going to public places	38.0	26.0	36.0	1.9800	.86873
I feel like the kids are constantly laughing at my son	48.0	40.0	12.0	1.6400	.69282
Children refuse to be friends with my son because he has autism	40.0	40.0	20.0	1.8000	.75593
My son is harassed when he	70.0	22.0	8.0	1.3800	.63535



Item	Answer			Mean	Std Dev.
	Never	sometimes	Always		
performs tasks at school					
My son is not included in activities by others	52.0	34.0	14.0	1.6200	.72534
Rumors are spread about my son constantly	36.0	56.0	8.0	1.7200	.60744
My child is exposed to rejection from others and being described as different	40.0	38.0	22.0	1.8200	.77433
My child is being criticized for failing to develop friendships	38.0	46.0	16.0	1.7800	.70826
I am worried and afraid that my son will be exposed to bullying in social gatherings	32.0	34.0	34.0	2.0200	.82040

According to the table above, the families of children with autism spectrum disorder rate all items of social bullying in the high importance level. The higher mean was given to Parents who feel anxious and fearful that their son will be exposed to bullying in social gatherings, followed by the child facing bullying when going to public places with a mean of (1.98). Next, the child was rejected by others and described as different. Finally, the child is harassed when performing tasks at school.

Q2: What are the most common forms of Bullying to children with autism spectrum disorder: their families' Perspectives at Jordan?
 To reveal the most common forms of Bullying to children with autism spectrum disorder. The descriptive analysis was applied, computing the mean and standard deviation as shown in the table below.

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations of Forms Bullying

Forms Bullying	Mean	Std Dev.	Level	Rank
Physical bullying	1.7460	.28871	Sometime	2
verbal bullying	1.4775	.31409	Never	3
Social bullying	1.8036	.39748	Sometime	1

According to Table 5. The families of autistic children rate the forms of bullying as follows social bullying with the highest mean of (1.804) reflected in the child with a disability's feeling of fear, that he

is not wanted, and that his classmates do not love him. This results in repeated absences from school and dropping out of education. followed by Physical bullying with a mean of (1.746) includes mistreatment by peers and lack of ability to deal with him, as a result of their harassment, such as directly assaulting the child or the child's property, insulting him, belittling him, or ignoring him., and then verbal bullying with a mean of (1.478) includes verbally assaulting the child with insults, describing the child with inappropriate descriptions, mocking him, and intimidating the child. This may be due to a lack of awareness among peers and their lack of preparation to deal with a child who is different from them. This results in the necessity of continuous peer preparation to deal with colleagues with disabilities, and this task falls to teachers, psychologists, and social workers in school. However, all Forms of Bullying are evaluated as high importance level.

Differences in the level of bullying towards autistic children considering their gender

Finally, an independent t-test was applied to investigate the different levels of bullying towards female and male children. The independent t-test is a parametric test since the data is normally distributed. The test examines the variables in measure according to gender. Table 6. Results from the independent t-test test indicated gender differences in Physical bullying ($M_{\text{female}} = 1.546$, $S.D_{\text{female}} = .3005$; $M_{\text{male}} = 1.904$, $S.D_{\text{male}} = .3881$, $t\text{-test} = 3.107$, $p = .003$). Similarly, there were gender differences in verbal bullying ($M_{\text{female}} = 1.268$, $S.D_{\text{female}} = .2444$; $M_{\text{male}} = 1.559$, $S.D_{\text{male}} = .3025$, $t\text{-test} = 3.211$, $p = .002$), and Social bullying ($M_{\text{female}} = 1.614$, $S.D_{\text{female}} = .2932$; $M_{\text{male}} = 1.797$, $S.D_{\text{male}} = .2741$, $t\text{-test} = 2.079$, $p = .043$). Due to there being more physical interaction between males than females, males also tend to use physical force during interactions, and even to express feelings of joy or enthusiasm, especially during puberty and early adolescence, and females tend more to express themselves verbally during communication with others.



Table 6: *Independent Sample T. Test Result Variables according to Gender*

variables	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t-test	Sig.
Physical bullying	Female	14	1.5455	.30046	.08030	3.107	.003
	Male	36	1.9040	.38810	.06468		
verbal bullying	Female	14	1.2679	.24444	.06533	3.211	.002
	Male	36	1.5590	.30250	.05042		
Social bullying	Female	14	1.6143	.29315	.07835	2.079	.043
	Male	36	1.7972	.27411	.04568		

6. DISCUSSION

The discussion is presented following the study objectives and questions including the level of bullying to which autistic children are exposed from their parents' perceptions, the common and most common bullying pattern of bullying to which autistic children is exposed as their parents perceive, and the difference in the bullying exposure level between female and male autistic children as reported by their parents.

The analysis in the current study identified parents of autistic children perceive a high potential of bullying risk for their children. The parents reported a high exposure level of physical bullying to which their autistic children are exposed, they explicitly disclosed a high frequency of kicking without reason, being pushed without any surroundings implications, and hair pulling by others as common physical bullying behaviors that their children are exposed. Concerning verbal bullying, parents reported verbal bullying with sometimes frequent maltreatment and underestimation of their children. Parents further reported that their children were also exposed to social bullying in social communities and public places. Consistent with the study's theoretical background, autistic children are more likely subjected to various bullying patterns but the physically is the most common type including exercise violence against them as reported by Saigh and Bagdood (2022), Zeedyke et al. (2014). Furthermore, children with ASD are more likely to be bullied,

perpetrators, or victim-perpetrators, particularly those at the inclusive program in public mainstream schools. Exposure to bullying among autistic children ranged between 6% and 46%, as reported by Roekel et al. (2010), which approximated the frequent bullying patterns reported in the current study. Likewise, the result reported by parents of autistic children in the current study is similar to the prevalence percentages reported by Maiano et al. (2016) for verbal, physical, and social bullying, prospectively. However, these results are associated with autistic children's characteristics, their behavioral challenges, and their challenge to establish relationships with their peers and be accepted in their communities. Further, the exposure to bullying is associated with school factors, in which autistic children enrolling in inclusive programs are more likely to be bullied by normal peers compared to those in special treatment centers. However, the protection factor in the public mainstream is also absent compared to the special care provided in a special school. Furthermore, authors can explain this prevalence as a lack of awareness among peers and their lack of preparation to deal with a child who is different from them

The current study demonstrates parents perceive social bullying as the most likely pattern to which their autistic children can be subjected, with a sometimes frequent rank. They also ranked physical bullying in the second place with a sometimes frequent. Meanwhile, verbal bullying with never frequent level. These results are associated with Saigh and Bagadood (2022) who reported that exposure to violence is the most common behavior of bullying in which autistic children are exposed. This contradicts Maiano et al. (2016), where verbal bullying was reported as the first pattern with a 50% prevalence compared to 33% and 31% for both physical and social bullying patterns, prospectively. Authors contribute this contradiction in results due to the age group of the target sample. However, they also interpreted these results to the school environment that increases the movement and physical activities limits due to curriculum or extracurricular activities since most learning and teaching strategy in this age group relies on physical activities and stimulus sensations, which increase the physical aggression against autistic children. Furthermore, children with autism exhibit a lower mental and intellectual development compared to their normal peers, which results to exploiting physical aggression toward them by their normal peers rather than verbal and social bullying behavior.



The current study also revealed that boys with autism are more likely to be bullied compared to their gender peers (girls) in the same age group, which explained by being more physical interaction between males than females, males also tend to use physical force during interactions, and even to express feelings of joy or enthusiasm, especially during puberty and early adolescence, and females tend more to express themselves verbally during communication with others. Aligned with a study conducted by Talab and Sulayman (2019) , which found that males are more likely to be bullied.

7. Conclusion

Children with autism disorder are more likely to be bullied than their normal peers due to their social interaction dysfunction and challenge to sustain friendships. Thus, the current study is carried out to shed light on the bullying phenomenon practiced on autistic children as perceived by their parents. The study sample comprised of the parents of autistic children, where most of them were parents of male autistic children (36), and (14) of them were parents of female autistic children. The autistic children aged between 5 to 14 years old group. The study found that Jordanian autistic children are exposed to various bullying patterns, including but not limited to, physical, verbal, and social bullying. However, the results showed that the most frequently used type of bullying was the physical type unlike the verbal and social types which occurred less frequently. Moreover, male children were more likely to be bullied than their gender peers.

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