

Psychological and Social Determinants of School Bullying Among Grade-Repeating Adolescents: Evidence from Algerian Middle Schools

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Keywords

school bullying; grade repetition; adolescent aggression; academic failure; middle school students; psychological motives; school violence; educational psychology; Algeria; behavioural maladjustment

Abstract

School bullying has emerged as one of the most critical psychosocial and educational challenges affecting adolescent development and school adjustment worldwide. Students experiencing academic failure and grade repetition are particularly vulnerable to aggressive and maladaptive behavioural patterns due to academic frustration, low self-esteem, social exclusion, and emotional instability. Despite the increasing prevalence of bullying in educational settings, limited empirical attention has been devoted to the relationship between grade repetition and bullying behaviour in North African school contexts. This study therefore aimed to examine the dominant forms of school bullying practiced by grade-repeating middle school students and to identify the psychological and social motives underlying such behaviour. The study adopted a descriptive-analytical research design and was conducted among 60 grade-repeating students enrolled in Algerian middle schools during the 2023–2024 academic year. Data were collected using a structured bullying questionnaire covering physical, verbal, and psychological bullying dimensions, as well as motives related to dominance, self-assertion, jealousy, and extortion. Descriptive statistics, percentages, mean ranks, and Friedman's test were used to analyze the collected data. The findings revealed that grade-repeating students engage in multiple forms of bullying behaviour, including physical, verbal, and psychological bullying, with no statistically significant differences observed among these dimensions. The results further demonstrated that bullying behaviour is strongly associated with psychological motives, particularly the desire for dominance, control, humiliation, and self-affirmation. Academic failure, emotional frustration, weak family supervision, and insufficient psychological support within schools were identified as major contributing factors. The study highlights the importance of integrating psychological counselling, school-based intervention programs, and family-oriented preventive strategies into educational systems to reduce bullying behaviour among academically vulnerable adolescents. The findings contribute to the growing literature on adolescent aggression, educational maladjustment, and school violence by providing empirical evidence from the Algerian educational context.

Citation

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INTRODUCTION

School bullying has emerged as one of the most significant psychosocial and educational challenges affecting adolescents worldwide. Contemporary educational and psychological research increasingly recognizes bullying as a multidimensional form of aggressive behaviour characterized by intentional harm, repetition, and an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims. Beyond its immediate behavioral manifestations, bullying negatively influences students' emotional well-being, academic achievement, peer relationships, and long-term psychological adjustment. As a result, bullying is no longer interpreted solely as an individual disciplinary issue but rather as a complex public health and educational concern requiring multidisciplinary attention from psychology, sociology, education, and social policy scholars.

International evidence demonstrates that bullying behaviour occurs across diverse educational and cultural contexts and may take several interconnected forms, including physical aggression, verbal harassment, psychological intimidation, social exclusion, and cyberbullying. Recent technological and social transformations associated with globalization, digital communication, family instability, and academic competition have further intensified aggressive interaction patterns among adolescents. Middle school students are particularly vulnerable because adolescence represents a sensitive developmental period characterized by emotional instability, identity formation, peer pressure, and difficulties related to self-regulation and social adaptation. Under such conditions, aggressive and bullying-related behaviours may emerge as maladaptive coping mechanisms through which adolescents attempt to assert dominance, gain peer recognition, or compensate for emotional insecurity.

Within educational psychology, academically vulnerable students constitute one of the most psychologically exposed groups within school environments. In particular, grade repetition is frequently associated with emotional distress, low self-esteem, frustration, social marginalization, and diminished academic self-confidence. Students who repeatedly experience academic failure may perceive themselves as socially inferior or educationally unsuccessful, thereby increasing their vulnerability to maladaptive behavioural patterns. Several psychological perspectives suggest that bullying behaviour among academically unsuccessful adolescents may function as a compensatory mechanism aimed at restoring personal control, social status, or emotional self-worth. Consequently, grade-repeating students may be more likely to externalize frustration through aggressive interactions directed toward peers perceived as weaker or more vulnerable.

Previous empirical studies have consistently demonstrated that bullying behaviour is associated with multiple psychological, familial, educational, and social determinants. Researchers have identified emotional insecurity, weak school attachment, poor academic performance, family dysfunction, authoritarian parenting styles, peer conflict, and limited psychological support as major contributing factors influencing adolescent aggression and bullying behaviour. Furthermore, adolescents involved in bullying frequently display strong tendencies toward dominance, self-assertion, social control, and coercive interpersonal behaviour. Educational systems that emphasize academic achievement while neglecting students' emotional and psychosocial development may unintentionally intensify frustration, school maladjustment, and behavioural instability among vulnerable learners.

The Algerian educational context presents additional structural and psychosocial challenges that may contribute to the emergence of bullying behaviour among adolescents. Overcrowded classrooms, academic pressure, insufficient psychological counselling services, limited behavioral intervention programs, and inadequate emotional support mechanisms may reinforce students' feelings of frustration and social exclusion. In many schools, educational priorities continue to focus predominantly on examination performance and academic achievement, whereas students' psychological well-being and emotional development receive comparatively limited institutional attention. Such conditions may increase the likelihood of aggression, peer conflict, and bullying behaviour among academically vulnerable adolescents, particularly grade-repeating students who frequently experience educational stigma and social marginalization.

Despite the growing international literature on school bullying, relatively limited empirical attention has been devoted to the relationship between grade repetition and bullying behaviour within North African and Algerian educational settings. Existing regional studies have primarily examined the prevalence of school violence in general terms without sufficiently investigating the psychological motives, emotional experiences, and behavioural dynamics of academically unsuccessful adolescents. This gap highlights the need for further empirical research exploring how academic failure, emotional maladjustment, and social frustration contribute to bullying behaviour among grade-repeating students.

Against this background, the present study seeks to investigate the dominant forms of school bullying practiced by grade-repeating middle school students and to identify the psychological and social motives underlying such behaviour within the Algerian educational context. The study further aims to contribute to the broader literature on adolescent aggression, school violence, educational maladjustment, and student mental health by providing empirical evidence from middle school environments. Understanding the behavioural experiences of academically vulnerable adolescents may assist educators, school psychologists, and policymakers in developing more effective preventive and intervention strategies aimed at promoting safer, more inclusive, and psychologically supportive educational environments.

LITERATURE REVIEW

School bullying has become one of the most widely studied psychosocial and educational problems affecting children and adolescents worldwide. Contemporary literature conceptualizes bullying as intentional, repetitive aggressive behavior involving an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims (Olweus, 1993). Bullying behavior may manifest through physical aggression, verbal harassment, psychological intimidation, social exclusion, and increasingly through cyberbullying facilitated by digital communication technologies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2022). Researchers emphasize that bullying negatively affects students' emotional well-being, academic achievement, school adjustment, and long-term psychological development.

Early theoretical contributions to bullying research focused primarily on aggressive behavior and peer victimization within school settings. Olweus (1993) established one of the foundational frameworks for understanding school bullying by identifying repetition, intentional harm, and power imbalance as central defining characteristics. Subsequent psychological theories expanded this perspective by linking bullying behavior to emotional maladjustment, frustration, low self-esteem, and social dominance motives. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory further explained aggressive behavior through observational

learning, environmental reinforcement, and self-efficacy mechanisms, suggesting that adolescents may adopt bullying behaviors after exposure to aggressive social models within families, schools, or media environments.

International empirical research consistently demonstrates that bullying is associated with significant psychological and educational consequences. Hymel and Swearer (2020) highlighted that bullying contributes to anxiety, depression, social withdrawal, academic disengagement, and reduced school satisfaction among adolescents. Similarly, Varela et al. (2021) found strong associations between bullying victimization, low life satisfaction, and poor psychological well-being among school-aged students. Global reports published by UNESCO and UNICEF further confirm that school violence and bullying remain widespread international educational challenges affecting millions of students annually.

Several scholars have emphasized the multidimensional nature of bullying behavior. Espelage and Swearer (2021) argued that bullying should be understood within broader ecological and social contexts involving peer relations, family dynamics, school climate, and community influences. Research by Salmivalli (2021) similarly demonstrated that bullying behavior is strongly shaped by peer group dynamics, social status competition, and adolescents' desire for dominance and recognition within social environments. These findings support the argument that bullying cannot be interpreted solely as individual misconduct but rather as a complex social and psychological phenomenon.

Recent literature has increasingly focused on cyberbullying and technologically mediated aggression. Hinduja and Patchin (2022) emphasized that social media platforms and digital communication technologies have expanded the forms and consequences of bullying among adolescents. Kowalski et al. (2019) further demonstrated that cyberbullying shares many psychological characteristics with traditional bullying while also introducing additional risks related to anonymity, social exposure, and continuous victimization beyond school environments. These developments indicate that bullying behavior has evolved alongside broader technological and social transformations affecting adolescent interaction patterns.

Meta-analytic and systematic review studies provide additional evidence regarding the prevalence and determinants of bullying behavior. Cook et al. (2020) identified emotional insecurity, poor academic performance, weak social attachment, and family dysfunction as major predictors of bullying involvement among adolescents. Likewise, Modecki et al. (2020) reported high prevalence rates of both traditional and cyberbullying across educational contexts, emphasizing the global nature of the phenomenon. Zych et al. (2019) further highlighted that protective factors such as family support, positive peer relationships, emotional regulation, and school connectedness may significantly reduce bullying behavior among students.

Educational and family-related variables have also received considerable attention within the bullying literature. Previous studies suggest that adolescents experiencing academic failure, educational frustration, or weak school attachment are more vulnerable to aggressive and maladaptive behaviors. Badra (2005) argued that psychological disorders and emotional instability during adolescence may intensify aggressive reactions, particularly in environments characterized by weak emotional support and social pressure. Similarly, Al-Subhain (2013) emphasized that bullying behavior among adolescents is frequently linked to family conflict, ineffective parenting practices, and poor emotional communication within households.

The role of school climate and institutional support systems has also been extensively discussed in previous research. Gaffney et al. (2021) demonstrated through meta-analytic evidence that school-based anti-bullying intervention programs can significantly reduce aggressive behavior when they incorporate psychological counselling, emotional support, peer mediation, and family involvement. OECD (2022) reports similarly emphasize that supportive educational environments and positive school climates contribute substantially to students' psychological well-being and reduction of school violence (Djeddou, 2025).

Within the Arab and North African context, research on bullying has increased in recent years, although empirical literature remains comparatively limited. Hamitouche (2022) identified significant levels of bullying behavior among middle school students in the Tizi Ouzou region of Algeria, highlighting the influence of social pressure and peer conflict on aggressive student behavior. Saïhi (2018) similarly emphasized that bullying within Arab educational contexts is shaped by psychological frustration, weak behavioral supervision, and social instability. However, despite the growing regional interest in school violence, relatively limited studies have specifically examined bullying behavior among grade-repeating students and academically vulnerable adolescents (Djeddou, 2025).

Grade repetition represents a particularly important factor within educational psychology because repeated academic failure often generates frustration, inferiority, emotional insecurity, and low self-esteem among adolescents. Existing theoretical and empirical literature suggests that students experiencing academic marginalization may engage in bullying behavior as a compensatory mechanism aimed at restoring social power, dominance, and peer recognition. Nevertheless, few studies have directly investigated the relationship between grade repetition and multidimensional bullying behavior within Algerian middle schools.

Overall, the existing literature demonstrates that bullying behavior is a complex psychosocial phenomenon influenced by interconnected psychological, educational, familial, and social factors. While substantial international evidence exists regarding bullying prevalence, forms, and consequences, important gaps remain concerning academically vulnerable adolescents, particularly within developing educational contexts. The present study therefore contributes to the literature by examining the psychological and social determinants of bullying behavior among grade-repeating middle school students in Algeria, thereby expanding understanding of adolescent aggression within underexplored educational environments.

Research Questions

1. What are the dominant forms of school bullying practiced by grade-repeating middle school students?
2. What psychological and social motives drive grade-repeating students to engage in bullying behavior?

Research Hypotheses

1. Grade-repeating middle school students engage in multiple forms of bullying behavior, with physical bullying representing the most dominant form.
2. Psychological motives related to dominance, self-assertion, and humiliation constitute the primary drivers of bullying behavior among grade-repeating students.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study derives from both its theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, the study contributes to the growing body of research on adolescent aggression, school violence, and educational psychology by examining bullying behavior within the specific context of grade repetition and academic failure. It expands understanding of how psychological frustration, social exclusion, and educational maladjustment influence aggressive behavior among adolescents.

Practically, the findings may assist educators, school psychologists, parents, and policymakers in developing evidence-based intervention programs aimed at reducing bullying behavior in schools. The study also highlights the importance of integrating psychological counselling, behavioral support systems, and preventive educational strategies within middle school environments. Furthermore, focusing on grade-repeating students contributes to identifying the emotional and social needs of academically vulnerable learners who are often neglected within traditional educational systems.

Study Objectives

1. To identify the most common forms of school bullying among grade-repeating middle school students.
2. To examine the psychological and social motives underlying bullying behavior among grade-repeating students.

Operational Definitions

School Bullying

School bullying refers to repeated intentional aggressive behavior carried out by grade-repeating students to inflict physical, verbal, psychological, or social harm upon other students. In this study, bullying behavior is measured through scores obtained on the school bullying questionnaire.

Grade-Repeating Student

A grade-repeating student refers to a middle school student who failed to achieve the required academic passing score and consequently repeated the academic year within the Algerian educational system.

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive-analytical research design to investigate the forms and motives of school bullying among grade-repeating middle school students. This approach was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic description, analysis, and interpretation of behavioral and psychological phenomena as they exist within real educational settings.

Research Population

The target population consisted of grade-repeating middle school students enrolled in the following Algerian middle schools during the 2023-2024 academic year:

- Aït Mohand Mohand Middle School in Friha
- Maleki Muqran wa Abna'ihi Middle School in Meklaa
- Si Abdallah Middle School in Djemaa Saharidj

The study specifically focused on students identified as engaging in bullying-related behavior within these educational institutions.

Sample

The study sample consisted of 60 grade-repeating middle school students selected using purposive sampling techniques. The participants included first-, second-, and third-year middle school students. Fourth-year repeaters were excluded because they were preparing for the national Middle School Certificate Examination (BEM). The purposive sampling method was adopted to ensure the inclusion of participants directly relevant to the objectives of the study.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study sample consisted of 60 grade-repeating middle school students selected using purposive sampling techniques. Participants were recruited from first-, second-, and third-year middle school classes. Fourth-year repeaters were excluded from the study because they were preparing for the national Middle School Certificate Examination (BEM). The purposive sampling approach was considered appropriate because the study specifically targeted students identified as academically vulnerable and involved in bullying-related behaviors.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of the Study Sample by Gender

Total Sample	Male Students	Percentage	Female Students	Percentage
60	39	65%	21	35%

As shown in Table 1, male students constituted the majority of the study sample (65%), whereas female students represented 35% of the participants.

Table 2. Distribution of the Study Sample by Grade Level

Grade Level	Frequency	Percentage
First Year	23	38.33%
Second Year	18	30.00%
Third Year	19	31.66%
Total	60	100%

Table 2 indicates that first-year middle school students represented the largest proportion of the sample (38.33%), followed by third-year students (31.66%) and second-year students (30.00%).

Table 3. Distribution of the Study Sample by School

Middle School	Frequency	Percentage
Maleki Muqran wa Abna'ih Middle School	18	30.00%
Si Abdallah Middle School	22	36.66%
Ait Mohand Mohand El Qahra Middle School	20	33.33%
Total	60	100%

As presented in Table 3, the highest proportion of participants came from Si Abdallah Middle School (36.66%), followed by Ait Mohand Mohand El Qahra Middle School (33.33%) and Maleki Muqran wa Abna'ih Middle School (30.00%).

Fields of the Study

Spatial Field

The field study was conducted in three Algerian middle schools located in the Tizi Ouzou region: Ait Mohand Mohand El Qahra Middle School in Friha, Maleki Muqran wa Abna'ih Middle School in Meklaa, and Si Abdallah Middle School in Djemaa Saharidj.

Temporal Field

The data collection process was carried out during the 2023–2024 academic year.

Human Field

The human field of the study consisted of grade-repeating middle school students identified as engaging in bullying-related behaviors.

Research Instrument

To achieve the objectives of the study, a structured questionnaire was developed following a comprehensive review of previous literature related to school bullying and adolescent aggression. Several questionnaire items were adapted from previously validated instruments developed by Ali Boutaf and Chatbi Fatima Ezzahra, while additional items were formulated based on the findings of a preliminary pilot study.

Description of the Questionnaire

The final questionnaire consisted of 33 items organized into three major sections:

Section I: Demographic Information

This section collected participants' personal and educational information.

Section II: Forms of School Bullying

This section assessed the dominant forms of bullying behavior across three dimensions:

- Physical bullying (7 items)
- Verbal bullying (7 items)
- Psychological bullying (6 items)

Section III: Motives Behind School Bullying

This section examined the psychological and social motives underlying bullying behavior across four dimensions:

- Control and humiliation (4 items)
- Self-affirmation (4 items)
- Jealousy (3 items)
- Blackmail/extortion (2 items)

Responses were measured using a three-point Likert-type scale:

- Often = 3 points
- Sometimes = 2 points
- Rarely = 1 point

Psychometric Properties of the Instrument

Content Validity

The questionnaire was evaluated for content validity through expert review. A panel of university professors specializing in psychology and educational sciences assessed the instrument regarding item relevance, clarity of wording, linguistic accuracy, and consistency with the targeted dimensions. Based on their recommendations, several items were revised, modified, or removed to improve the final structure of the questionnaire.

Reliability Analysis

Instrument reliability was assessed using the split-half reliability method on a pilot sample of 30 students. Internal consistency was further examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient through SPSS statistical software. The obtained reliability coefficient was 0.75, indicating acceptable internal consistency and satisfactory reliability for the purposes of the study.

Statistical Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to analyze the collected data. Descriptive statistics included percentages, frequencies, arithmetic means, and mean ranks to summarize participant responses. Inferential analysis was conducted using Friedman's test to examine the significance of differences among the different forms of bullying behavior.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first research hypothesis proposed that grade-repeating middle school students engage in multiple forms of school bullying, with physical bullying representing the most dominant form.

Table 4. Mean Ranks of Different Forms of School Bullying

Forms of School Bullying	Mean Rank
Physical bullying	2.48
Verbal bullying	2.44
Psychological bullying	2.37

Friedman Test: $\chi^2 = 1.45, p > .05$

As shown in Table 4, physical bullying obtained the highest mean rank ($M = 2.48$), followed closely by verbal bullying ($M = 2.44$) and psychological bullying ($M = 2.37$). However, the differences among the three bullying dimensions were relatively small. The Friedman test revealed no statistically significant differences among the forms of bullying, $\chi^2(2) = 1.45, p > .05$. Therefore, the first hypothesis was not supported.

Structural Equation Model of Bullying Behaviour Among Grade-Repeating Adolescents

Generalized SEM framework derived from the study variables and empirical interpretation

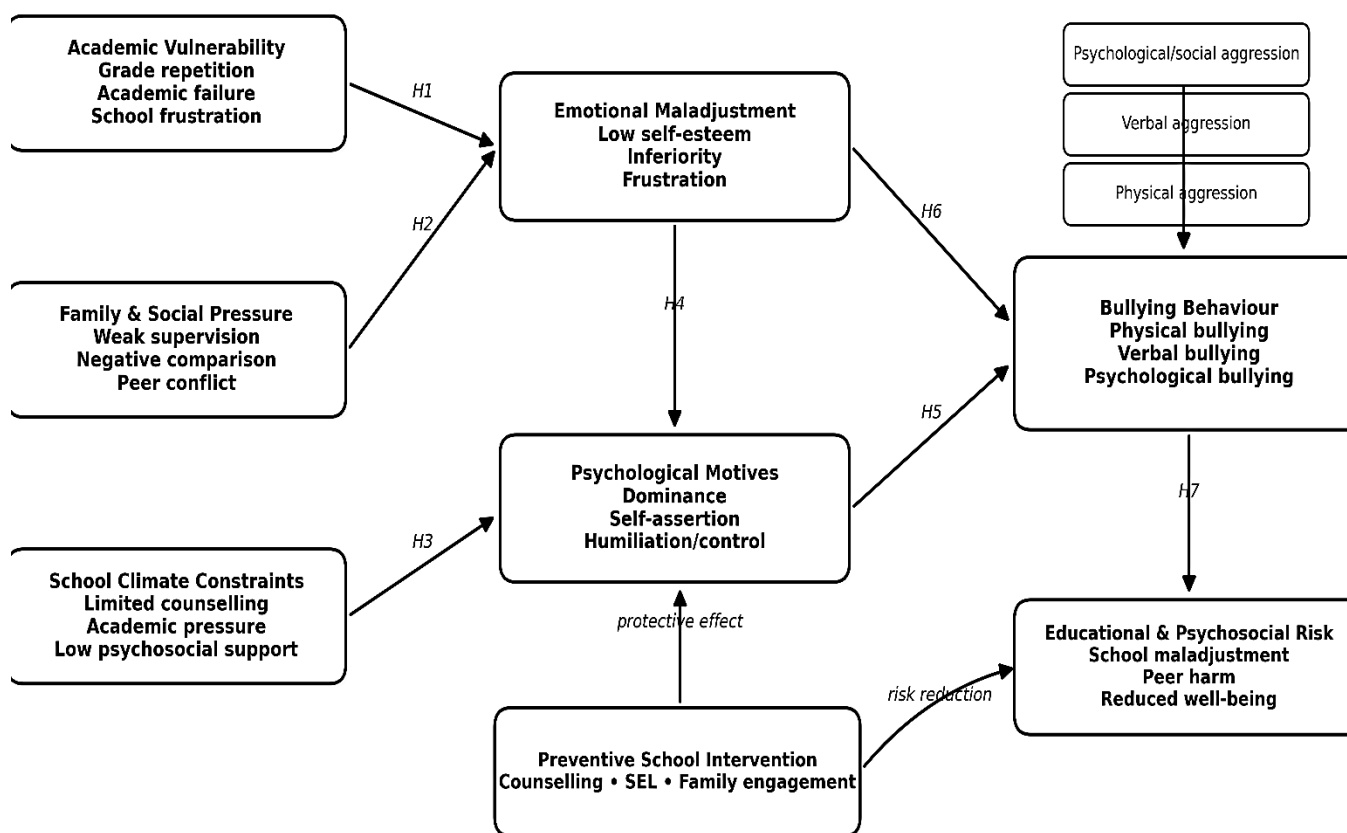


Figure 1. Structural Equation Model of Psychological, Social, and Educational Determinants of Bullying Behaviour Among Grade-Repeating Middle School Students. **Source:** Developed by the author based on the conceptual framework and empirical findings of the present study

The findings suggest that grade-repeating middle school students engage in bullying behavior across multiple dimensions rather than relying predominantly on a single form of aggression. This pattern may reflect the psychological instability, emotional frustration, and social maladjustment commonly experienced during adolescence, particularly among students facing repeated academic failure and school-related stress.

Discussion of the First Hypothesis

The findings of the first hypothesis indicate that grade-repeating middle school students engage in multiple forms of bullying behavior, including physical, verbal, and psychological bullying, without significant dominance of a single form. This suggests that bullying among academically vulnerable adolescents represents a multidimensional behavioral phenomenon shaped by complex psychological, social, and educational factors. The coexistence of different bullying forms may reflect the emotional instability and maladaptive coping strategies commonly associated with adolescence, particularly among students experiencing repeated academic failure and school-related frustration.

From a developmental psychology perspective, middle school corresponds to a critical transitional stage characterized by substantial cognitive, emotional, social, and physiological changes. Adolescents often encounter difficulties related to identity formation, emotional regulation, peer acceptance, and self-esteem. When these developmental pressures are combined with academic failure and grade repetition, students may experience feelings of anxiety, inferiority, social rejection, and emotional insecurity. In the absence of adequate psychological counselling and emotional support systems, these unresolved tensions may manifest through aggressive and bullying-related behaviors directed toward peers.

The widespread occurrence of physical, verbal, and psychological bullying among grade-repeating students may also be interpreted within the broader structural context of the Algerian educational system. Educational environments that prioritize academic achievement and cognitive performance while neglecting emotional, social, behavioral, and recreational

development may unintentionally contribute to psychological distress among adolescents. Excessive academic pressure, overloaded curricula, prolonged study hours, and weak alignment between instructional demands and students' individual abilities may generate frustration, disengagement, and emotional exhaustion. Under such conditions, bullying behavior may emerge as a dysfunctional mechanism for expressing stress, frustration, and feelings of inadequacy.

Furthermore, the findings may also be linked to broader social transformations affecting family structures and patterns of parental supervision. Rapid technological development, changing social dynamics, and increasing economic pressures have weakened traditional family roles related to emotional guidance, behavioral monitoring, and psychological support. In some cases, dysfunctional family environments characterized by conflict, neglect, or weak communication may reinforce aggressive tendencies among adolescents, who subsequently project these frustrations within school environments through bullying and intimidation of peers.

The present findings are generally consistent with previous international and regional studies emphasizing the multidimensional nature of school bullying. Prior research has demonstrated that bullying affects millions of students globally and frequently includes interconnected forms of physical, verbal, psychological, and social aggression. The results also align with studies indicating that adolescents involved in bullying behavior often seek dominance, social control, and emotional compensation through aggressive interactions with peers.

However, the current findings differ from several earlier studies that identified physical aggression as the dominant form of bullying behavior among adolescents. Unlike previous research emphasizing the predominance of physical violence, the present study found relatively balanced engagement across physical, verbal, and psychological bullying dimensions. This discrepancy may reflect cultural differences, variations in educational environments, changing adolescent socialization patterns, or the increasing influence of psychological and relational aggression within contemporary school settings.

Overall, the findings suggest that bullying behavior among grade-repeating students should not be interpreted solely as individual misconduct but rather as a broader psychosocial and educational issue associated with academic failure, emotional maladjustment, family instability, and institutional limitations within school environments. Addressing bullying therefore requires comprehensive intervention strategies integrating psychological counselling, family involvement, educational reform, and school-based prevention programs aimed at improving students' emotional adjustment and social well-being.

Table 5. Psychological and Social Motives Behind Bullying Behavior Among Grade-Repeating Students

Statements	Rarely <i>n</i> (%)	Sometimes <i>n</i> (%)	Often <i>n</i> (%)
I mock others to humiliate them.	8 (13.3%)	32 (53.3%)	20 (33.3%)
I fight with classmates to control them.	10 (16.7%)	29 (48.3%)	21 (35.0%)
I try to hurt others to show my strength.	13 (21.7%)	19 (31.7%)	28 (46.7%)
I hit anyone who calls me names I do not like.	16 (26.7%)	24 (40.0%)	20 (33.3%)
I often get into fights because others oppose me.	28 (46.7%)	15 (25.0%)	17 (28.0%)
I threaten some classmates for money.	20 (33.3%)	20 (33.3%)	20 (33.3%)
I am often selfish and aggressive to satisfy myself.	16 (26.7%)	22 (36.7%)	22 (36.7%)
I spread rumours about others so that people dislike them.	8 (13.3%)	27 (45.0%)	25 (41.7%)
To obtain what I want, I seek help from outsiders or use sharp objects.	7 (11.7%)	28 (46.7%)	25 (41.7%)
I insult anyone who disagrees with me.	10 (16.7%)	24 (40.0%)	26 (43.3%)
I create conflicts to destroy friendships among classmates.	17 (28.7%)	21 (35.0%)	22 (36.7%)
I force classmates to ignore certain students because of their appearance.	21 (35.0%)	23 (38.3%)	16 (26.7%)
I prevent high-achieving students from participating in activities.	12 (20.0%)	27 (45.0%)	21 (35.0%)

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that the dominant motives underlying bullying behavior among grade-repeating students are primarily psychological and social in nature. The highest response frequencies were associated with statements reflecting dominance, humiliation, self-assertion, aggression, and the desire to display power over peers. These findings support the second research hypothesis, which proposed that grade-repeating students engage in bullying behavior primarily to establish control, reinforce social dominance, and compensate for feelings of academic and emotional inadequacy.

The findings further suggest that bullying behavior among academically vulnerable adolescents may function as a maladaptive coping mechanism through which students attempt to restore self-esteem, gain peer recognition, or compensate for repeated experiences of academic failure and social marginalization. Adolescents experiencing low academic achievement often develop feelings of frustration, inferiority, emotional insecurity, and social rejection, which may increase aggressive behavioral tendencies toward peers perceived as weaker or more successful.

In addition, family pressure, negative social comparison, and educational stress may intensify emotional instability among grade-repeating students. Continuous criticism from parents, teachers, and peers may contribute to psychological distress and reinforce aggressive reactions. Educational systems that focus predominantly on academic performance while neglecting students' emotional and psychosocial development may unintentionally exacerbate these behavioral patterns.

The findings are also consistent with international bullying literature emphasizing that aggressive adolescents frequently display strong needs for control, social power, dominance, and self-affirmation. Previous studies have shown that bullying behavior often emerges as a compensatory strategy through which emotionally vulnerable adolescents attempt to regain feelings of superiority and social influence within peer groups. Consequently, bullying among grade-repeating students should be understood not only as a disciplinary issue but also as an indicator of deeper psychological, social, and educational maladjustment requiring comprehensive intervention and psychological support.

The findings of the present study may be interpreted in light of the complex psychological and social conditions experienced by grade-repeating adolescents. Students who repeatedly experience academic failure often develop feelings of inferiority, emotional insecurity, low self-confidence, and diminished academic self-esteem. Repeated failure and school repetition may generate frustration, hopelessness, and psychological distress, which can increase the likelihood of aggressive and bullying-related behaviors. From a psychological perspective, bullying may therefore function as a compensatory mechanism through which academically vulnerable adolescents attempt to restore feelings of control, social power, and self-worth. Previous research similarly suggests that academic frustration and school maladjustment are strongly associated with aggressive peer interactions and bullying behavior among adolescents.

In addition to academic difficulties, grade-repeating students are frequently exposed to substantial family pressure through criticism, social comparison, and unrealistic academic expectations. Comparisons with siblings, relatives, or high-achieving peers may intensify feelings of inadequacy, jealousy, resentment, and emotional instability. In many educational and cultural contexts, academic success is often viewed as a primary indicator of family pride and social value, while students' individual abilities, emotional needs, and personal interests receive comparatively limited attention. Such conditions may contribute to emotional distress and reinforce maladaptive behavioral responses, including aggression, violence, and bullying.

The findings also highlight the role of institutional and educational factors in reinforcing bullying behavior among academically vulnerable students. Educational systems that predominantly emphasize memorization, academic performance, and examination outcomes while neglecting students' psychological and emotional development may unintentionally contribute to school maladjustment. The absence of school psychologists, counselling services, and behavioral intervention programs further limits students' access to emotional support and therapeutic guidance. Psychological counselling and school-based intervention programs could play a significant role in improving students' emotional regulation, self-esteem, social adjustment, and coping strategies, thereby reducing the tendency to externalize frustration through bullying behavior.

Furthermore, broader societal and technological transformations may also contribute to the increasing prevalence of bullying among adolescents. Rapid social change, weakened family supervision, digital influence, and exposure to aggressive media content may normalize violence and reinforce domination-oriented behaviors among young people. Under such circumstances, bullying may become a maladaptive strategy through which adolescents attempt to release psychological pressure, compensate for perceived personal shortcomings, and establish social superiority within peer groups.

Table 6. General Demographic and Educational Characteristics of the Study Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	39	65.0
	Female	21	35.0
Academic Grade Level	First Year Middle School	23	38.3
	Second Year Middle School	18	30.0
	Third Year Middle School	19	31.7
Educational Institution	Institution A	18	30.0
	Institution B	22	36.7
	Institution C	20	33.3
Academic Status	Grade-Repeating Students	60	100.0
Educational Context	Public Middle Schools	60	100.0
Total Sample Size	Participants Included in the Study	60	100.0

Note. The table presents the general demographic and educational profile of the participants included in the study. The sample consisted exclusively of grade-repeating middle school students recruited from multiple educational institutions within the Algerian public education system during the 2023–2024 academic year. Male students represented the majority of participants, while the distribution across grade levels and institutions remained relatively balanced, thereby supporting sample diversity and contextual representation.

The present findings are generally consistent with previous international studies on adolescent aggression and school bullying. Earlier research has shown that bullying behavior is frequently associated with dominance, power-seeking, and the desire to control others. Adolescents involved in bullying often demonstrate strong tendencies toward social superiority, aggressive self-assertion, and coercive interpersonal behavior. Existing literature further suggests that exposure to violent social environments and media representations that glorify aggression may strengthen these behavioral tendencies among psychologically vulnerable students.

CONCLUSION

The present study demonstrates that school bullying remains one of the most serious psychosocial and educational challenges affecting contemporary school environments. The findings indicate that grade-repeating middle school students engage in multiple forms of bullying behavior, including physical, verbal, and psychological aggression, primarily as mechanisms for asserting dominance, compensating for academic frustration, and restoring social self-worth.

The study further reveals that bullying behavior among academically vulnerable adolescents is shaped by interconnected psychological, familial, educational, and social factors. Academic failure, emotional insecurity, low self-esteem, family pressure, inadequate psychological support, and institutional limitations within schools collectively contribute to the emergence of aggressive and maladaptive behavior patterns among students.

Given the multidimensional nature and long-term consequences of school bullying, addressing this issue requires comprehensive and collaborative intervention strategies involving educators, psychologists, families, and policymakers. Effective prevention and intervention programs should focus not only on disciplinary measures but also on improving students' emotional adjustment, psychological well-being, and social integration within educational environments.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Employ qualified school psychologists and counsellors across all educational levels.
- Develop parental awareness and guidance programs focused on adolescent psychological development and positive parenting practices.
- Strengthen school-based psychological support and behavioral intervention services.
- Integrate social-emotional learning and behavioral education into school curricula.
- Promote safe, inclusive, and supportive school environments that reduce academic and psychological pressure on students.
- Conduct further empirical and longitudinal research on school bullying, adolescent aggression, and academic maladjustment in different educational and cultural contexts.

Overall, the study emphasizes that bullying among grade-repeating students should not be interpreted merely as individual misconduct but rather as a broader indicator of psychological distress, educational maladjustment, and institutional challenges within school systems. Comprehensive psychological and educational interventions are therefore essential for reducing bullying behavior and improving adolescents' academic and social adjustment.

DECLARATIONS

Author Contributions

Dr. Dehbia Gouri solely contributed to the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data collection, formal analysis, writing, review, editing, and final approval of the manuscript.

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Ethics Approval

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards for educational and psychological research. Permission to conduct the field study was obtained from the relevant educational institutions and school administrations prior to data collection.

Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from the participating students and their parents or legal guardians before participation in the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the confidentiality and academic purpose of the research.

Data Availability Statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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Artificial Intelligence (AI) Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, AI-assisted language tools were used to improve academic language quality, grammatical accuracy, and readability. The author carefully reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript and takes full responsibility for its scientific content, interpretations, and conclusions.

Confidentiality Statement

All participant information was treated confidentially and used exclusively for scientific and academic purposes. No identifying personal information of the participants was disclosed in the study.

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