

Mind Matters 2025: Advances in Psychiatry and Mental Health Care

Conference Proceedings

August 29, 2025 (Virtual)

Wounds without Bruises: Hidden Trauma and Recovery in Victims of School Bullying

Lovishka Kalawon

Research Scholar in Psychology, Mauritius

While school bullying is frequently perceived as a behavioural issue, its profound psychological and emotional ramifications remain insufficiently examined, particularly the latent trauma endured by victims and the intricate pathways to recovery. This presentation draws upon doctoral research employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), as conceptualised by Jonathan Smith, to understand the (un)lived experiences of adolescents who have been victimised at school. Anchored in phenomenological epistemology and constructivist ontology, this study seeks to understand how bullying-related trauma is internalised, navigated and potentially transformed in the lives of young people. Seven participants (3 females and seven males) aged between 12 to 16 from Grades 7 to 10 were purposively selected, based on formal referrals for bullying-related issues from the school counselling services in Mauritius. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews designed to elicit rich narratives of suffering and resilience. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the analysis followed a rigorous idiographic approach involving iterative reading, initial noting, development of emergent themes, and abstraction into cross-case superordinate themes. The study delineated five superordinate themes encompassing both trauma and recovery:

- (1) Fractured sense of self,
- (2) Silenced pain and the need to be heard,
- (3) Disrupted relationships and rebuilding trust,
- (4) Hypervigilance and emotional residue, and
- (5) Powerlessness to personal agency.

The findings highlight that trauma from bullying is often invisible, yet profoundly embodied and enduring. Despite the hidden nature of trauma, adolescents demonstrate meaningful capacities for healing and develop substantial adaptive strategies through relational support, personal insight, and self-empowerment in response to prolonged victimisation. This study advocates for trauma-informed, culturally grounded school mental health practices and explores how youth-accessible digital tools, such as expressive writing platforms, anonymous reporting systems, and peer support networks can facilitate recovery by integrating care with compassion. By centring adolescents' voices, this presentation contributes to the broader discourse on innovating care in educational mental health by arguing for a shift from behaviour-focused responses to relational, empathetic, and student-led interventions.

Keywords: Bullying Victimisation, Hidden Trauma, Adolescent Mental Health, Recovery and Resilience, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)