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Article:	**Mitigating Violent Behaviour in Primary School Children through Emotional Intelligence Video Literacy program**
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ABSTRACT

Measures of Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism (C/PVE) utilize education and awareness programs to develop resilience in vulnerable communities. With a scarcity of research looking at emotional resilience in primary school children in Pakistan, this study aimed to look at the effects of anti-bullying education through the means of cartoon-based learning. With research on cartoon-based literacy projects indicating greater efficacy with improved retention in children, we undertook this 6-week experimental study (N=160 [Experimental (N) = 120, Control (N) = 40]), with students recruited from the Islamabad/Rawalpindi area (ages 9-11). Awareness about the concepts of bullying (victimization and perpetration), as well as qualitative data about the cartoon themes were assessed for pre- and post-test comparison. Results indicated that students had limited awareness about bullying and its different types before the intervention. Over the course of the program, they engaged more. Post-test scores implied changes in behaviour in the experimental group. This video literacy program will enable development of effective emotional education to help create a more resilient society long-term.

Keywords: Preventing Violent Extremism, vulnerable communities, cartoon-based learning

Introduction:

Pakistan has a unique position in the war on terror as being labelled in western media as both a frontrunner on the anti-terrorism front, as well as being touted as responsible for sponsoring terrorist organizations. The country's social, political, economic, and physical infrastructure has been influenced by the effects of war on terror, escalating especially after the events of World Trade Centre attack in United States of America popularly known as 9/11 attack (Nizami et al., 2018). The interventions focusing on 'soft' policies and programs to alleviate radicalization upstream in the 'breeding ground' phase are referred to as Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) measures (Davies, 2018; Stephens et al., 2021). One of the five major "push" factors towards Violent Extremism (VE) is mental illness or psychological disturbances (Mirahmadi, 2016). One of the PVE approaches is enhancing resilience and encouraging the building of cognitive resources in the individual vulnerable to VE (Porche, 2016). Educational PVE interventions have been used extensively before with success, as evidenced in several targeted programs that allow for opportunities to obtain defensive techniques that enhance self-control and mitigate violent behaviours like bullying (Aly et al., 2014; Harris-Hogan et al., 2019; Sebba & Robinson, 2010; Siddiqui et al., 2017; Stephens et al., 2021; E. Taylor et al., 2017; Theriault et al., 2017). Using approaches and mitigation strategies to PVE and curb radicalization in the 'breeding ground' phase, thus have a significant importance in countries like Pakistan, often institutionalized by national or state infrastructure (Davies, 2011, 2018; Orakzai, 2019; Stephens et al., 2021).

Fear of terrorism, coupled with the psychological impact of extremist activities has a profound effect on the youth, especially since educational institutions are frequently targeted in Pakistan (S. A. A. Shah et al., 2018). What exacerbates this problem of the youth and children being negatively affected by VE, is the susceptibility in this age from a developmental, psychological, physical and social perspective. Children can experience between 10-90% of symptoms related to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), along with mental health problems like depression, anxiety, and dysregulated behaviours, when exposed to VE activities (Shaw, 2003). When compared to adults and adolescents, children under 12 years of age are three times more likely to develop a trauma response to violence and terrorism (Garbarino et al., 2015). Hence, targeting the vulnerable children of Pakistan (being one of the key segments of the population to focus on) in national efforts to PVE, is very important. It is vital to develop their resilience against extremist elements and support them in finding their identity as individuals and as a community, especially in context of indigenous extremist ideologies (Nizami et al., 2018; Orakzai, 2019; E. (Lily) Taylor, 2018). One of the complimenting factors in focusing on children, and investing specifically in primary education is the malleable nature of their development at that age – their behaviours and attitudes are developing and shaping up at that point (Sas et al., 2020).

The current study proposes a theory of change in context of developing children's resilience and psychological wellbeing with Emotional intelligence (EI) education. Empathy education (part of EI education) may lead to compelling social change and this needs to be understood by the policymakers of a country. Initiating and polishing the scope of EI education can be instrumental in tackling larger social issues like inequality, intercultural conflict, and community fragmentation. EI education can help in downplaying the fear associated with terrorism through emotional regulation (S. J. Shah et al., 2020). There is, however, a scarcity

in research about psychological wellbeing in relation to VE and terrorism in children and adolescents in Pakistan (S. A. A. Shah et al., 2018).

EI education in children has been used to deter behavioural issues like inter-personal conflict and other disruptive behaviours like aggressive conduct (Lomas et al., 2012), and overall there is a positive impact on the child's mental and emotional wellbeing, and their social interactions as they grow older, and are able to regulate their emotions more successfully (Billings et al., 2014; Elipe et al., 2015; Osher et al., 2016). Violent and aggressive behaviour involving physical bullying has a psychological impact on both the perpetrator and the victims, and EI education has been shown to lessen such behaviours (both physical and verbal) as emotional competency increases (García-Sancho et al., 2014). Bullying behaviours have been associated with violent behaviour later in the child's life (Ttofi et al., 2012). There is evidence of perpetration of school bullying behaviour being associated with inadequate emotional support at home (Zimmerman et al., 2005). With evidence of bullying and aggression behaviour being common in Pakistani schools (Fariha & Najam, 2015; Karmaliani et al., 2017; Khawar & Malik, 2016), using an educational intervention program to modify children's behaviours is warranted. Efficacy of anti-bullying school programs has been shown before in research (Cantone et al., 2015) with significant reduction in bullying perpetration by about 19-20% and victimization by 15-16% in a meta-analysis by Gaffney et al. (2019).

With regards to the optimal method of imparting this type of education in children, previous research has shown that programs using videos, animations, cartoons and other forms of multimedia tools are effective in learning because children find it more engaging and interactive (Beheshti et al., 2018; Eker & Karadeniz, 2014; Mayer & Gallini, 1990; Shreesha & Tyagi, 2016; Taher Bahrani & Rahmatollah Soltani, 2011; Willmot et al., 2012). When information is packaged into brief segments involving more than one channel of communication (auditory and visual), with accessible and enthusiastic dialogue-based language (like in cartoons), children's focus is maximized, they do not feel their thoughts wandering and the monotony of classroom learning is avoided, along with disruptive behaviour in class (Brame, 2016; Habib & Soliman, 2015; Taher Bahrani & Rahmatollah Soltani, 2011)

Objectives of the study

With this extensive knowledge of how disruptive environment due to VE and terrorism can be detrimental to children's emotional health, and how aggressive and bullying behaviour in children is in turn indicative of violent tendencies in later life, a 360° approach to enhance emotional resilience in primary school children is much needed. The current study thus undertook a 6 week intervention program to introduce a cartoon-based video literacy program focused on the theme of anti-bullying by showing the animated cartoon characters develop resilience and become aware of the consequences of bullying perpetration and victimization. The objective was to assess the validity of the research-based video literacy script, and its efficacy before and after the intervention. Following hypothesis were tested in the study:

H_1: Anti-bullying interventional training will significantly improve victimisation behaviour in primary school children in Pakistan

H_2: Anti-bullying interventional training will significantly improve the perpetration behaviour in primary school children in Pakistan.

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Methodology

A mix-method approach was used to assess both quantitative measures of bullying behaviour in children through adapted measures of physical bullying, coercion behaviour and extent of damage to others' property (Olweus, 1993; Rana et al., 2020) and qualitative measures of awareness about bullying concepts. The study cohort was recruited from two schools (one private and one public) in the Rawalpindi/Islamabad area with 120 experimental group students; Male (M) =59, Female (F) =61, and 40 control group students (M=15, F=25). Formal consent with total transparency of the research design was obtained from participating students in the target age range (9-11 years), their parents as well as their teachers. Participating students were able to orally understand and write in English. Students with any history or currently in treatment for any mental disorder were excluded (so as not to be triggered by sensitive content like bullying shown in videos). The partnering school's administrative departments also gave prior approval to conduct the program. All data were kept confidential and anonymized for data analysis. To maintain transparency, the researchers and teachers both noted student's feedback and corroborated it later to ensure unbiased data. To comply with the COVID-19 protocols, the 6-week program was held in a hybrid online and physical classroom setting depending on the school policies.

For the pre-test, teachers and parents also were interviewed to note their initial observations about behaviour along with students that were given the pre-test questionnaire. Daily cartoon screening was done in a 40-minute session for 6 weeks (for repetition effect), along with daily exercises about the characters, role-playing, and moral reasoning discussions to engage the students and reinforce the concepts covered in the cartoon. The cartoon storyline was designed using research-based evidence as well as vetting from a panel of clinical psychologists, neuroscientists, and EI researchers. Daily observations of students were noted. After the intervention same measures was again used for assessing the post-test effect. Teachers and parents' observations were also noted after the program. The control group were not exposed to any intervention but were evaluated after the 6 weeks again to compare the results with the experimental group.

Data was analysed using repeated measures testing to note changes in behaviour and awareness using SPSS. Thematic analysis for the qualitative part obtained from interviews and cartoon-adjacent activities were analysed using NVivo.

Results

In order to assess the study cohort's violent and bullying tendencies in specific areas, the research team used a number of adapted measures to quantify the change in behaviours and level of awareness about bullying. These specific bullying tendencies included measures of physical bullying, coercion behaviour and damaging others' property (Rana et al., 2020). The measures noted both the tendencies of victimization and perpetration of these behaviours. For the current study major difference for experimental and control groups are presented, the socioeconomic status of both groups was similar, and representation of gender was also similar due to the as well as the age group. Due to the scope of the study gender comparison is not made.

H1: Anti-bullying interventional training will significantly improve victimisation behaviour in primary school children in Pakistan
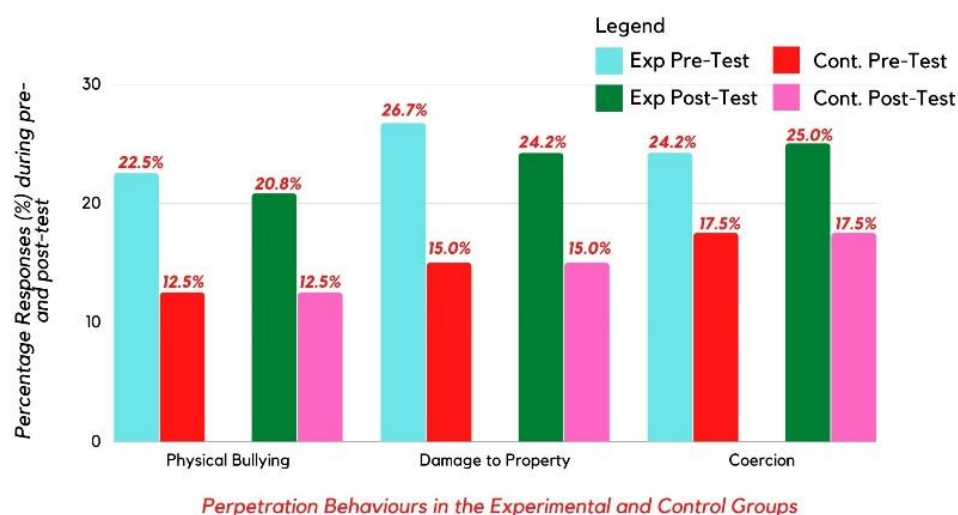
Mitigating Violent Behaviour in Primary School Children
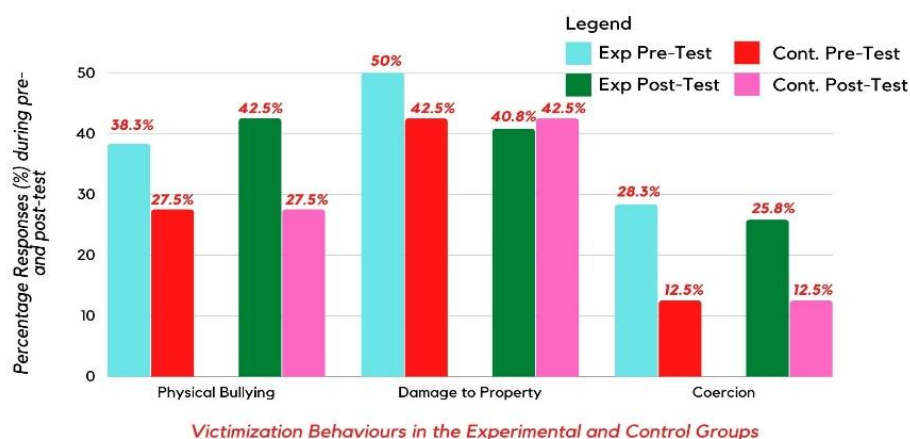
Figure 1: Pre- and post-test comparison in experimental and control groups of different bullying measures, in the victimization context.

Figure 1 shows how frequently the experimental and control group students were victims of these bullying behaviours. Overall, there was not a statistically significant difference in their responses, but they did answer more openly in the post-test evaluation (all p >.05, McNemar's χ2 Test for difference in proportions of victim/non-victim and bully/non-bully in pre- and post-test used, data not shown). The statements highlighting certain types of bullying behaviours, and the student's responses to those statements in the experimental group (N=120) are given in Appendix A.

The victimization and bullying tendencies of the Control Group students (N=40) demonstrated no variation in their responses either (all p>.05, McNemar's test with binomial distribution used, data not shown, for statement percentages see Appendix B).

As can be seen there is not much difference for control group, in pre- and post-tests, however for experimental group there is a statistically significant difference for awareness of physical bullying score from 38.3% to 42.5%, similarly awareness of damage to property declined from 50% to 40.8 % in 6 weeks and coercion declined from 28.3 to 25.8%.

H2: Anti-bullying interventional training will significantly improve the perpetration behaviour in primary school children in Pakistan

Figure. 2: Pre and post-test comparison

in experimental and control groups of different bullying measures, in the perpetration context. The perpetration behaviour also showed improvement in the scores (Fig 2).

The student's qualitative responses to the question 'Do you know what bullying is?' were also noted in the pre- and post-test evaluation in the experimental group. In the pre-test, only 3.3% the students replied with an affirmative answer (Yes, I know what bullying is), while in the post-test the answer went up to 98.3% indicating a massive increase in level of awareness in the children.

Furthermore, to reinforce the student's concepts about anti-bullying, we also administered activities related to our cartoon's storylines. One of them included exercises that applied the knowledge that was presented in the cartoons. We collected qualitative responses from the students, which gave an insight into the student's increasing knowledge about bullying. Over the 6-week program, we gave the students a multitude of exercises, out of which we selected some to analyse to see how well the students have understood the central themes of the cartoons. Some of the responses to selected questions are represented as word clouds in Figure 3.

Fig. 3: Student's qualitative responses in the form of word clouds to, '*Why doesn't anyone stop bullies, why do they keep getting confident, & why do they make others feel so miserable as well?*'

Discussion

To deter involvement of young individuals in extremist groups when they are at a vulnerable age, education is very significant (Davies, 2011), and furthermore, there is a more accentuated need for investing in primary school education because morality and empathetic behaviours are starting to develop during that phase (Sas et al., 2020). In the context of educational training, following themes are paramount: self-awareness and self-control of emotions, finding personal motivation, being empathic, and being able to manage social relations (Rafaila, 2015). It is also described as a skill which can guide your thoughts and actions when coping with environmental demands and pressures.

Results and observations garnered from this experimental design study were quite fascinating. As explained in the methodology for the purposes of this discussion, we kept the results and measures limited to aspects of bullying related to physical harm, damage to others' properties and coercion behaviour. Considering that, the researchers astutely observed a marked difference in the perception of bullying and understanding of the victimization and perpetration of related behaviours, in the experimental group. In as little as 6 weeks of intervention with a cartoon-based program, the anecdotal and observational results were remarkable. In order to comply with COVID Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), 3

out of those 6 weeks were conducted online. After the fact, the general consensus among teachers and the researchers was that children were more open and responsive in the face-to-face discussions. For the future, it is anticipated that even more behavioural modifications can occur if all the experimental design is done in-person without hiccups due to hybrid mode of learning.

Changes in children's behaviour was explained through better understanding of bullying and victimization mentality in the experimental group while the control group saw no notable change in their answers about physical bullying, damaging others' property and coercion, either as victims or initiators. During the pre-test, the experimental group students weren't able to identify much with the bullying statements and hence showed mixed responses. This was because of their general lack of understanding about the basic concepts of bullying itself. After the intervention and learning in detail about what bullying is, how it can be initiated and what causes it to keep happening, in the post-test, the students were more responsive to the statements and openly discussed and resonated with the statements resulting in change in behaviour. Through communication with the parents and teachers during the intervention program, it was learned that the students were very excited about this program and would wait for the cartoons and often ask their parents to find the cartoons for them at home. This implies that if creative content is developed to make the message clearer and accessible, the students will engage and participate enthusiastically. All the stakeholders revealed that this is first time they or their child/student were part of such a great activity to develop resilience and learn more about disruptive and problematic behaviours. Through observational data, it was learned that quite a number of students had actively started calling out bullies in their routine interactions with their peers and were not afraid to call out the perpetrators, as they had learnt from the cartoons that speaking up about their victimization is important. The massive spike in the post-test awareness of bullying in the experimental group explains that the children were not even aware that they were actually bullied by peers as they thought it was a norm before. This research clearly indicated that emotional resilience with a focus on aggressive, or violent behaviour should be part of curriculum and should be reinforced from time to time.

Furthermore, our study findings are reflective of other studies, for instance, positive relationship has been seen between integrating EI education, as in the case of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) programs, in pre-adolescent children and their emotional development, social competence and behaviour (Billings et al., 2014; Osher et al., 2016). In contrast, the inability to regulate emotions is linked not only with inter-personal conflict but with serious disruptive behaviours like aggressive conduct (as our study results suggests that awareness programs significantly improves anti-bullying behaviours) (Lomas et al., 2012). Children with lower emotional competency show violent behaviours with their friends, and their non-involved friends have a better EI skill-set and display more healthy relational dynamics (Zysberg & Raz, 2015).

The main limitation of the study was the hybrid mode of instruction. To facilitate online classes, we had to choose the students that could understand, write, and communicate in English, therefore students from grade 4-5 were selected. It would be more effective if this education starts from even earlier. Since, it was a first of its kind study using experimental design, the study could have been more effective if the duration of intervention was increased from 6 weeks to 8-12 weeks. For future research we suggest a longer module duration and for

more themes to be introduced as a syllabus and results for behaviour modifications be noted across a larger sample size.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Pre- and Post-Test responses of the experimental group about different types of bullying and extremist behaviours, as victims of it. Frequencies of male and female responses are indicated.

tatements	Pre-Test Responses					Post-Test Responses				
	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)	(%), (N)
hysical Bullying: *I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around or locked indoors*	1.7 (n=37), F (n=37)	7.5 (n=15), F (n=18)	.3 (n=2), F (n=2)	.5 (n=2), F (n=1)	.0 (n=3), F (n=3)	7.5 (n=29), F (n=40)	1.7 (n=24), F (n=14)	.0 (n=4), F (n=2)	.5 (n=1), F (n=2)	.3 (n=1), F (n=3)
amage to Belongings: *I had money or other things taken away from me or damaged*	0.0 (n=29), F (n=31)	4.2 (n=11), F (n=18)	.2 (n=6), F (n=5)	.7 (n=5), F (n=3)	0.0 (n=8), F (n=4)	9.2 (n=33), F (n=38)	1.7 (n=15), F (n=11)	1.7 (n=8), F (n=6)	.2 (n=1), F (n=4)	.3 (n=2), F (n=2)
oercion:	1.7	5.0	.3	.5	.5	4.2	8.3	.2	.7	.7

Mitigating Violent Behaviour in Primary School Children

I was threatened or forced to do things I didn't want to do	(n=39), F(n=47)	(n=12), F(n=6)	(n=5), F(n=5)	(n=2), F(n=1)	(n=1), F(n=2)	(n=42), F(n=47)	(n=12), F(n=10)	(n=3), F(n=2)	(n=1), F(n=1)	(n=1), F(n=1)

1: It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, 2: only once or twice, 3: 2 or 3 times a month, 4: about once a week, 5: several times a week

Appendix B

Pre- and Post-Test responses of the experimental group about different types of bullying and extremist behaviours, as initiators of it. Frequencies of male and female responses are indicated.

Perpetration of Bullying Behaviours										
tatements	**Pre-Test Responses**					**Post-Test Responses**				
	(%), (N)	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**	**(%), (N)**
hysical Bullying: *I hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around or locked them indoors*	7.5 (n=45), F(n=48)	.2 (n=3), F(n=8)	0.0 (n=8), F(n=4)	.5 (n=2), F(n=1)	.8 (n=1), F(n=0)	9.2 (n=45), F(n=50)	.8 (n=4), F(n=3)	.2 (n=6), F(n=5)	.7 (n=1), F(n=1)	.2 (n=3), F(n=2)
amage to Belongings: *I took money*	3.3 (n=43), F(n=45)	0.0 (n=5), F(n=7)	.8 (n=6), F(n=1)	.5 (n=4), F(n=5)	.3 (n=1), F(n=3)	5.8 (n=46), F(n=45)	2.5 (n=6), F(n=9)	.5 (n=1), F(n=2)	.8 (n=3), F(n=4)	.3 (n=3), F(n=1)

or other things away from them or damaged their belongings										
oercion: *I threatened or forced them to do things they didn't want to do*	5.8 (n=44), F (n=47)	0.0 (n=5), F (n=7)	.0 (n=3), F (n=3)	.5 (n=5), F (n=4)	.7 (n=2), F (n=0)	5.0 (n=42), F (n=48)	4.2 (n=8), F (n=9)	.2 (n=3), F (n=2)	.0 (n=4), F (n=2)	.6 (n=2), F (n=0)

1: It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months, 2: only once or twice, 3: 2 or 3 times a month, 4: about once a week, 5: several times a week