



Abstract: *The purpose of this study was to explore principals' perceptions and practices to deal with students who show disruptive and aggressive behavior in schools by using qualitative research methods. The conceptual framework of the study was based on six different approaches to effectively deal with bullying in educational institutions. A basic qualitative research design was used, and twelve elite school principals were selected through the purposive sampling technique. The framework analysis of the interview data revealed that principals' understanding of what could be done to address bullying was not limited. They were well acquainted with the alternatives or options to deal with a problematic situation, and they creatively mixed different approaches according to their own perceptions and the nature of the problem. However, most of the participants dealt with students while strengthening their confidence and making them independent through counselling techniques.*

Key Words: Bullying, Principals, Elite Schools, Qualitative Analysis, Perceptions

Introduction

Principals are concerned about controlling the classroom environment because discipline problems sometimes become a threat to a teacher's job and can hinder a principal's ability to work properly. The school that has disciplinary issues demotivates students to focus upon studies, demoralizes teachers from teaching, and negatively influences principals' functioning [Atilas, Gresham, & Washburn, 2017]. Therefore, principals must lead and cooperate with the other staff to deal with the issues and solve them for the sake of children.

To manage disciplinary issues, most teachers and principals in Pakistan usually resort to punishment, believing that the foundation of discipline is punishment. Most teachers and principals believe that punishment is necessary in order to keep children disciplined. These punishments are minor or major such as giving extra homework, keeping the child stand in class for the whole period, or writing remarks in students' diaries. However, adopting punishment for controlling behavioral issues may bring certain consequences [Dhuey & Smith, 2018]. These consequences include the increased dropout rates of students, frustration, boredom, and demotivation related to coming to school and studying properly.

For students, there must be a peaceful environment far from all the negative influences that could injure their well-being [Rajpoot, Muhammad, & Anis, 2021]. Negative experiences at school force a child to become part of negative circles. These incidents also impact the child's mind extensively, and in worse scenarios, the happenings in life torture him/her for the entire life, hurting the brain as a physical wound and taking away the capability to perform actively [Gage, Scott, Hirn, & MacSuga-Gage, 2018]. Bullying can also have consequences for the bully.

The strategy that a principle applies or techniques that he or she uses influences students' learning. Some principals also take part in-class activities with students. In this way, students get more focused and aim to be appreciated by their principal. For example, around the class, a principal takes a book of the current lecture subject and starts asking questions about the previous lecture. In this way, the principal can get feedback on student learning and know the lacking areas in which effort is more required. In addition, the principal also gets attached and concerned about the students' education and knows if the targets are being achieved. Moreover, this ensures that all students

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are treated as same, and no student is being ignored or left behind. In the future, the students will be attentive and prepared that the principal can come unannounced and check the performances of ours [\(Owens et al., 2018\)](#). Moreover, teachers are more attentive and concentrated on each student when he or she knows that he can be judged anytime. In this way, teachers and students both are attentive and work collaboratively towards learning and achieving educational goals. Teachers also work more efficiently to bring positive outcomes related to students' performance [\(Blume et al., 2018\)](#).

In schools, principals are the educational leaders, and they are responsible for making policies for managing issues related to children's behaviors and for improving the learning environment [\(Siddiqui, Muhammad, & Naseer, 2021\)](#). Although the implementation of rules is often considered to be a teacher's responsibility, these rules are made by principals. Principals do meetings with their staff and use different strategies to address the problems of children in school [\(Latham, Mark, & Oliver, 2018\)](#). By adopting new ways and understanding children's needs, principals bring positive changes in children's personalities.

In short, principals play an important role in providing a safe learning environment, and they are concerned with controlling classroom behaviors. Bullying is a common problem that every principal faces; there are multiple creative and situational related ways that principal keenly focuses and apply them to students of their school [\(Pas, Cash, O'Brennan, Debnam, & Bradshaw, 2015\)](#). Principals need new ways so that these issues can be solved and the school becomes a better and safe place for all students.

In addition, elite schools in Pakistan are known for the best practices for teaching students of the affluent class. No physical punishment law is strictly observed in these schools. School principals' practices in Pakistan are yet an unexplored area in theoretical literature [\(Abid, Irfan, & Naeem, 2017; Siddiqui, Arif, & Muhammad, 2020; Siddiqui et al., 2021\)](#). In this case, it would be interesting to explore elite school principals' perceptions and practices to deal with students who show disruptive and aggressive behavior inside or outside of classrooms. This study explores different ways principals use to deal with disruptive and aggressive behaviors of students in school.

Conceptual Framework

In this article, we draw on the six basic intervention approaches proposed by [Rigby \(2012\)](#) in order to interpret principals' perceptions and practices they

use to effectively counter bullying incidents in elite schools in Pakistan.

[Rigby \(2012\)](#) proposes that principals may adopt six basic approaches with which they try to solve disruptive/bullying incidents that occur in their schools. Within the *traditional disciplinary approach*, principals must follow the rules and policies of the school, and any disturbance or bullying has no place in their institutions. The approach demands that principals impose "an appropriate sanction, penalty, or punishment" [\(Rigby, 2012, p. 39\)](#) on offending students in order to discourage bullying behavior. Those principals who believe in strengthening the victim approach claim to be supportive and encouraging with their students. They believe that every problem of a child could be handled and solved by adopting this strategy in which counseling is so important and giving the confidence to face their problems themselves is necessary for a child to survive.

For those principals who believe in *Mediation*, this approach has its own value while dealing with students' problems. Students need someone in the school who listens to their problems to whom they can build their trust and have faith in their advice. The principal adopts this approach in order to solve the issues among students. Here, an attempt is made "to bring about a peaceful settlement or compromise between disputants through the intervention of a neutral party" [\(Rigby, 2012, p. 64\)](#).

The next approach that principals may adopt is the *restorative justice approach* in which the principals—in a relatively informal meeting with the bully in the presence of other students, sometimes whole class—try to communicate to both parties, and with reasonable discussion, the principals try to resolve the issues among bully and victim child.

Some principals try to solve the issues by adopting the *support group approach* in which the children step forth to help their group mates or peers whoever in desperate need. This approach "makes use of selected peers of the students who are involved in the bullying. Peers are invariably present at meetings that are held with the bullies...to help to bring about support for the victim" [\(Rigby, 2012, p. 87\)](#).

The last approach that principal's may adopts to solve the issue among children is *the matter of shared concern*. Principals persuade the children that they all are family, and they have to be supportive and believe in joint responsibility. To face the problem together and to be a supportive members of the group, they have to take the initiative to build trust in

each other. With mutual cooperation, they come up with generous solutions for solving problems.

Methodology

This research study employed qualitative methods. Qualitative research is one of the ways of learning about social reality and an effective way to explore the meanings people ascribe to activities [Mason, 2018; Patton, 2015]. This study used what Merriam (2009) calls a *basic qualitative study research design*, which is used to explore “[1] how people interpret their experiences, [2] how they construct their worlds, and [3] what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” [Merriam, 2009, p. 23]. The data were collected using semi-structured interviews from purposefully selected participants.

Sampling and Participants

For the data collection, elite schools situated in Lahore city were selected. The data were collected via interviews. The participants were the principals of schools, and they provided data related to their perceptions and practices about the disruptive and aggressive students in their schools.

The selection of the research sites and participants was guided by theoretical and practical factors. The participants were selected over the predefined selection criteria. There must be bullying incidents that prevail in these institutions, and principals must be in leading authority for over more than five years. Only those schools were selected for collecting the data whose principals have experienced the phenomenon of dealing with disruptive and aggressive students in the classroom. As we know that bullying, either minor or drastic manner prevails in schools, but in elite schools, such chances are more because of the wealthy environment of the child's home, and if such bullying is among the students, it is eventually reported to the principal. Therefore, it was more admirable to take responses from principals about the bullying students and try to figure out how principals deal with such situations. Practical factors include the fact that the schools that have been selected for data collection should be easy reaching locations and the direct and easy approach to principals of schools. Schools that have been selected are located in Lahore city. The staff and institutional leaders were quite cooperative and helpful with the researcher and provided all sorts of help and support to collect data.

Since the aim of the research was to explore how a principal is performing his/her role to deal

with the issues related to the incidents of bullying created by students in schools, the purposive sampling technique was used to select the information-rich principals of elite schools [Flick, 2018]. The twelve selected participants were school principals who helped to collect the information regarding the research agenda. Participants were caretakers of schools and had full authority and power of leadership in the schools. All principals had management experience of at least six years.

Data Collection Methods

In this particular research study, the semi-structured tool was used to collect data [Fylan, 2005]. A semi-structured instrument was used in order to allow the participants to share their perceptions and practices regarding disruptive-aggressive students in schools [Brinkmann, 2013; Josselson, 2013; Roulston, 2010]. The interview was not a common meeting but a super active and interesting interaction between the two. The participants (the interviewer and interviewees) thoroughly negotiated and related the common happenings and experienced-based knowledge. The guide that was used according to get the collect related information from the participants included open-ended questions with interlinked probing and follow up questions [Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Schostak, 2005; Seidman, 2006]. While taking an interview, a series of questions were asked from the selected participants. The environment, that is, the place and time, was according to the participant's selection so he or she may feel comfortable and secure to talk about their past experiences in their own school premises [Arksey & Knight, 1999].

A self-constructed interview guide was used to collect data from the purposefully selected participants. The interview guide for this research was based upon the literature review [Patton, 2015]. More specifically, research literature related to bullying in schools and principals' practices regarding principals' interventions for dealing with bullying incidents in schools [Rigby, 2012, 2017; Rigby & Griffiths, 2018; Rigby & Slee, 2008] was helpful in constructing the interview guide. The data were based on past experiences of principals related to dealing with students with bullying and disruptive behavior in schools.

Data Analysis Methods

Framework analysis was used to analyze interview data. This method of qualitative data analysis “involves a systematic process of sifting, charting and sorting material according to key issues and themes” [Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 177]. Five analytical

techniques, “familiarization, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 178), were applied to the interview data in order to understand the perceptions and practices of the principals to deal with disruptive and aggressive students.

For familiarization, the researcher listened to and read through the audiotapes and interview transcripts material in order to list key ideas and recurrent themes. Key issues, concepts and themes identified through familiarization were then used to set up a thematic framework, mostly drawing upon a priori issues. A third technique, indexing, was used by systematically applying the thematic framework to the interview data in its textual form. Then data were “lifted from their original context and rearranged according to the appropriate thematic reference” (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994, p. 182), and charts were devised with headings and subheadings, a key characteristic of the charting technique. The final technique was ‘mapping and interpretation,’ which involved the analysis of the key characteristics as laid out in the charts. Laying out charts thematically and comparing all participants’ perceptions and practices helped in developing themes.

Findings

Traditional Disciplinary Approach

The traditional disciplinary approach suggests following the rules and policies of the institution at any cost. The proponents of this approach that discipline is the essential factor in running a school system, and no matter what, the authorities should not tolerate the disruptiveness or disobedience of children in the school. They suggest that there are some strategic steps that principals should take to address disruptiveness and bullying in order to maintain discipline in school. Their main priority is to make the school learning environment safe and disciplined.

Findings suggest that principals used different strategies to approach the children and solve the issues of bullying. Some believed that if they reached to the students themselves, that would be more standard and appropriate action against the problematic issue, but some believed that professionals, experts in problematic situations knew better how to reach and what to speak; therefore, they let the coordinators or trained counsellors step in the situation and solve the issues in their own expert ways. Many believed that the teachers were the first ones to reach the children and solve their issues if bullying or repeated disruptive situations occurred. However, some principals believed in

approaching students themselves so that they could be aware of incidents taking place in the school. They reported that they themselves took the initiative to reach to the students who were in need and tried to understand what the students wanted. Some principals hired trained coordinators and counsellors in order to deal with problematic issues and reported to the principals afterwards so that the possibility of occurrence of the same issue again could be minimized.

All principals agreed that discipline was essential in their schools since it promoted commitment and well-mannered students. In addition, discipline cultivated responsible traits among students who made students more focused on their education. They emphasized that discipline was necessary to be maintained very carefully so that students could effectively gain knowledge. They reported that their schools had a zero-tolerance policy in relation to maintaining a disciplined atmosphere, and they adopted different strategies and techniques to create a healthy atmosphere for students to learn and grow. In order to solve the bullying issues among students, principals keenly took steps so no children were ignored and everyone’s needs were fulfilled, whether they related to personal business or other stuff that disturbed a child’s physical or mental health.

Most principals believed that parents’ involvement was also necessary because they played such a big role in children’s lives. In addition, they were of the view that the home environment impacts greatly on a child’s mind, and the atmosphere he or she is in at home more often becomes the reason for children being upset. They emphasized that the involvement of parents was very important, and the parents should know what their children were going through and how they could solve the issues in order to provide a better environment for their children. However, very few principals believed that involving parents might get things worse. They wanted to reach to kids and solve the situation without the involvement of parents because they believed that inside the walls of the school, it was the teachers’ and principals’ responsibility to help the children and resolve their issues carefully. One of the principals stated that:

We don’t involve the parents right away. We deal with the situation politely and deeply and investigate who is really the bully and who is the victim. (Participant 9)

All principals believed that physical punishment was degrading and demeaning, which affected students’ self-esteem. Therefore, they did not

physically punish any students. For instance, two principals stated:

We don't physically punish the students. Physically punishing or abusing children is against our school policy and our ethics. Hitting, slapping, or scolding is not an appropriate way to deal with bullying. [Participant 1] No. I don't think punishing, scolding, or hitting kids is the best option against the bully. [Participant 5]

Most of the principals believed in giving detention, extra homework, or suspension from school as more acceptable punishments for disruptive children, but in case of extreme violence, expulsion was the only way left behind. Principals also mentioned the use of the technique of isolating children from all sorts of activities and from everyone because, according to them, it was one of the best punishments for disruptive children. However, they reported that in some cases, it did not solve the issue; rather, it worsened the situation. Therefore, they reported their preference for the use of punishments that have a positive impact on children's minds instead of keeping them apart from peers and friends. They believed that for one student or a few disruptive students, they could not put other students' safety at risk.

Strengthening the Victim Approach

Strengthening the victim approach assumes that the victim lacks the confidence to confront the bully. Therefore, this approach recommends principals adopt certain strategies to develop the confidence of victim children. For that, the principals have to go through the whole procedure in order to make victim children tough and brave so they can face bullying situations with a courageous attitude.

All principals perceived that counselling was the best way to approach the victim child. Counselling, listening to children's needs, and making them calm and satisfied in their efforts to bring back the students from their distracted paths towards their education, was highlighted as the main strategy for dealing with bullying in schools. All the principals perceived that sometimes children got ignored in their families or could not adjust in class because of introverted personalities, which made such students distracted from studies, and they either become too sensitive or disobedient. This becomes the reason for attention-seeking through bullying. Most principals reported that when they adopted the counselling strategy, children became more open and expressive of their feelings. They believed that the traits like hitting, scolding, or physically hurting others come from the disturbance in the personality of a child or mental pressure that the child faces.

They described that with counselling, not only bully problems were solved but also if the child was going through some bad stuff in his or personal life that could be sought out with the help of counselling sessions and the child became better and stable with every session, he or she received from school counsellors. Moreover, if the child was too frightened over the incident, the principals and counsellors were able to provide him/her support and safety to rebuild confidence. For example, a principal stated:

We ask them to be close to their friends and be confident to face bully on their own. Also, if the situation gets out of hand, report the guards immediately around them. [Participant 10]

All principals believed that encouragement was the only way to make the victim motivated and fearless towards horrific bullying incidents. They mentioned that they showed faith in children and persuaded them to be confident, determined, and conscious of their self-power so they could deal with bullying on their own fearlessly. All principals mentioned that to face a bully, they persuaded the victims their students to be strong with verbal talent rather than fighting or hurting each other. Moreover, all principals believed in taking the side of victim children. They felt that it was the best way and necessary to cautiously make the victim feel calm and safe out of trauma he or she had by facing the bully situation. Furthermore, all the principals believed that by attentively listening and giving a secure environment, the victim felt less afraid and frightened.

All principals described that they always investigated the reasons behind the occurrence of a problem in order to reach the solution since they believed that behind any bullying incident, there were reasons that could be any but mostly the home environment, where children spent most of their time. All principals shared a belief that bullying was frequent in their schools because children attending their schools were from elite backgrounds. A principal described this, "they have a negative attitude to be a leader and play a bossy role among students, and if other students do not listen to them, they start hurting them physically." Similarly, another principal supported this notion, "students show the power of money and fame of their parents and siblings and threaten other students, which brings serious issue for their schools."

All principals believed that strengthening the confidence of the victim was necessary. They gave the confidence to challenge the bully with verbal speech, assuming that physically hurting back to the bully was not the way to handle the situation. They persuaded the victim to be confident and fearless

over bully situations and face the bully alone, along with providing assurance that they would always be there to protect and help them out in their times of need.

Mediation Approach

Mediation involves a middle party, a person who comes in two or more individuals and listens to both sides and tries to resolve the issues among them. The mediator has to be neutral and act in a supportive way to both parties. Principals adopt this strategy in order to solve the issues among their students involved in disruptive or bullying activities.

Most principals believed that Mediation was the best approach to solve bully incidents among students, especially when they were confused and unable to understand each other's perspectives. They underscored that resolving the issue among the bully and victim was the best way to approach the solution of the problem. They asserted that if the bully and victim child resolved their issue and got back in a healthy and positive relationship, it could minimize the chances of happening of bullying incidents again. The principals believed that they had to make the bully and victim understand each other's feelings. They reported that if the bully and victim talked to each other in the presence of any mediator, they could talk out things in a more appropriate way and settle the dispute among them. For example, one of the principals stated:

I try to make both parties calm and focused towards studies and stop such nonsense acts. I make them talk to each other and let them decide what they actually want and what the reasons behind this problem are. If any one of the parties is unwilling to cope, I then step in, and with mutual support towards both parties, I solve their issues. Usually, the issues are minor that could easily be resolved but if the bully case becomes physically harmful, then taking serious action is necessary. (Participant 5)

Very few principals believed that restoring the relationship between the bully and victim was not a good idea. They believed that if they resolved the issue, the children repeated the same mistake, and chances of the same incident's occurrence were possible. They reported that they always kept such students apart and did not let them engage in any activity together again.

Most principals reported that staying neutral in a mediation role was not appropriate because they believed taking sides could make things worse, and any one of the kids might feel insecure or outrageous. They further added that if they stayed neutral and gave equal attention and support before they could

investigate and find who the bully was, the situation became easy to handle. However, few believed staying neutral in the bullying situation was not an appropriate strategy to adopt because the children did not always tell the truth and accused each other of false actions. They asserted that by staying neutral, there might be a chance that the victim could get ignored. Therefore, they believed that taking sides with a proper investigation and punishing the bully could set an example for other kids as well—and also boost the self-confidence of the victim to perform his or her activities fearlessly. All principals often used a listening strategy to deal with a bully situation.

Restorative Justice Approach

The restorative approach deals with restoring the relationship between the bully and victim. By forgetting and forgiving all, the children come up with better understandings and resolve their issues that disrupt the school environment.

Most principals believed that making the bully feel remorse, guilty, and ashamed over his or her bad actions was a good strategy. The principals claimed that making the bully remorse gave the bully lifelong lessons not to repeat the same mistake again and gave a sense of understanding and accepting their faults. Most of the principals believed that making the bully feel guilty over their bad deeds gave him/her consciousness and stability for the future and knowing the difference between wrong and right. One of the principals stated that:

Making children feel remorse over their bad deeds to others is essential. This gives consciousness to students about good and bad and also the understanding of others' pain. The relationship between the bully and victim is necessary because if they stay positive and be friendly or act in a good manner, this does not disrupt the school environment. It's important for their well-being. I always persuade kids to be caring, honest, and virtuous so they understand things more than just in books and be good persons before good students. (Participant 3)

Very few principals believed that making the bully feel remorse was too extreme and harsh treatment to give. The principals believed that to stop the negative actions from students, they must come up with positive energy and solve the issue. For this, the principals often made the bully school prefect or discipline in charge. In this way, the child showed responsible traits, and eventually, he or she stopped bullying.

Most principals believed that to make bully remorse, they had to adopt counselling strategies to make them realize that their actions were extremely unacceptable. The principals made students feel the suffering of the victims. Moreover, they gave punishments like detention or writing long passages, or even disallowing the bully from all sorts of activities of schools. Using spiritual guidance and experience-based knowledge, the principals accomplished the task of making the bully feel remorse over his or her bad deeds.

Most of the principals believed that restoring relations among the bully and victim was a good strategy to adopt because it lowered the chances of bullying in school. In addition, principals claimed that by restoring relations, the children learned to accept the conflicts among them and be more cautious for future perspectives. However, very few principals reported that restoring relation among the bully and victim was their personal preference, whether they wanted to end the fight on good terms/notes or the students wanted to stay out of each other's way. However, this strategy could only be adopted by knowing the intensity of the situation.

Support Group Approach

The support group approach encourages students to be supportive towards their group members and reach

out in the most creative and innovative ways to help their peers in times of need. In a support group, the principal set a meeting among the victim and bully and students who want to take the initiative and step in on behalf of the bully or victim. The principals listen to both groups and come up with possible mutual decisions and solutions.

Most principals believed in support group strategy. The principals claimed that their students were very supportive, caring, and understanding towards their group members—and if somehow any student was bullied, their peers and group mates always step forth to help the victim child confidently and supportively. Some principals also believed that by working in a group, the students learn communicative skills. In addition, they developed a better understanding, acknowledged the conflict among arguments, and came up with better solutions with shared responsibility. Very few reported that group members felt reluctant to step forth in order to protect their victim mate; therefore, instead of group members, the victim's friends sometimes faced the bully with them and tried to protect and help their friend in need. One of the principals stated:

When we tell and show the suffering of the victim children how he or she is bearing all the hardship, the students mostly empathize with that student. Individual counselling and good advice work among the members of the group and initiate the meaning of responsibility among students. (Participant 6)

Some principals believed that the support group approach was not a great approach to deal with a bully situation. Principals claimed that the shared concern approach raised more conflict that ruined the atmosphere of school: The children got in fights, plotted revenge, and held grudges for a long time. For that, the principals tried to resolve the situation of bully privately between the bully and victim.

Most principals believed that by having group meetings, the children got to know their peers better, developed better understanding, gained the power of mutual decisions, thus making the children more supportive and helpful towards their group members' needs. The principals claimed that mostly showing and telling the suffering of the victim persuaded the children to adopt the strategy willingly and cope with the bullying situation. Some of the principals believed that group meetings created more fuss among students, had a negative effect on children's minds, and distracted them from their studies. The principals reported that in group meetings, instead of learning the shared responsibility factor, the students got out of control and started bullying each other verbally and physically as well.

All principals reported that extreme violence was unacceptable, intolerable in their schools—and when a child committed an extremely violent action, he had to face serious consequences. All principals reported that expulsion from school was the only way to resolve the horrible issue in their schools: If extreme violence occurred, they first suspended the child from school for at least three months or more if still, the situation got worse, they struck off the bully from school.

Shared Concern Approach

The shared concern approach deals with the situation, where students take the role in sharing the burden of their group mates also believing in joint responsibility. The principal has to set a meeting, and children take responsibility to help their peers in difficult times.

Most of the principals believed that working towards shared concerns negatively influenced children as they got distracted from studies and became obsessed with hot discussions about

bullying. Some principals believed that instead of having group meetings, the bullying case must be solved by authority. One of the principals noted:

As I have told earlier that group meetings and letting students handle situations are not the best strategies. We have to take part, and with school policy and rules, we have to come up with possible solutions. I do not leave my students alone in such cases. [Participant 2]

However, few principals reported that joint responsibility and shared concern increased the meaning of unity among students: The students became more confident, and they understood things in a much better way. Moreover, students got motivated and adopted a fearless attitude towards dealing with bullying situations. Principals claimed that the victim did get supported by group members since all the children in their schools believed in shared concern—and even by going out of the way, they always supported their peers. Moreover, students learned the idea of joint responsibility on the basis of unity among them. In addition, students took the initiative to help the victim by knowing and understanding the pain/suffering of the victim. As two participants stated:

When the situation gets out of hand, and the victim child suffers a lot in fear or pain, the classmates take the initiative to help their classmate and deal with the situation jointly. [Participant 10]

From the start, I always encourage our students to work in groups to participate in activities in groups to understand each other and give space, accept others opinions. This lesson from the start brings the idea of joint responsibility to our children. [Participant 11]

All principals reported that listening to students' opinions and innovative ideas were important in curbing bullying. The principals asserted that by listening to their ideas and statements, they felt important and encouraged—this made the children more stable, conscious, and independent.

Discussion and Conclusion

The preceding results provide an insight into the principals' perceptions and practices related to dealing with disruptive-aggressive students in selected elite schools in Lahore city. Six different approaches [traditional disciplinary approach, strengthening the victim, Mediation, restorative practice, shared concern, and support group approach] were employed to understand the ways principals used to deal with bullying or disruptive situations. The interviewed principals' understanding of what can be done to address bullying was not limited. They are well familiar with the alternatives or

options to deal with bullying incidents. [Rigby \(2012\)](#) listed multiple factors which determine the use of an approach to address bullying in schools:

The social philosophy of the school, knowledge, and understanding that exists in the school on how cases of bullying can be addressed, acceptance by the school and the community of the use of particular methods, and finally, the availability of resources needed for the employment of each method. [p. 109]

All the principals in this study seemed to be using and creatively mixing different approaches according to their own perceptions and the nature of the problem. However, most of the principals deal with the victims while strengthening their confidence and making them independent through counselling techniques. Findings show that principals, in general, were inclined to the counselling strategy since children become more open and expressive of their feelings. They find it a more easy and accurate way to solve the bullying problems in schools.

The findings here point to the fact that principals used negative consequences—penalties, sanctions, and punishments—for dealing with the bullies. However, they considered physical punishment as degrading and demeaning and, therefore, they preferred the use of punishments that could have a positive impact on children's minds and help in correcting the behavior of the bullies. This is an interesting finding in the Pakistani context, where it is allegedly reported that teachers and principals deal with the bullies with harsh physical punishments so that the incidents of bullying may not happen again ([Siddiqui et al., 2020](#); [Siddiqui et al., 2021](#)).

Findings from this study provide grounds for concern regarding elite school principals' perceptions and practices in relation to the shared concern approach. More specifically, their shared belief that this approach negatively influences children and their labelling of this approach as a distractor from education and a source of obsession with hot discussions about bullying. [Rigby \(2012\)](#) considers the shared concern approach "the most comprehensive and complex method for addressing cases of bullying" (p. 96). This approach address bullying in the social context in which the individual operates, and thus, using this approach means inducing "a positive change in how the group functions and how its operation affects the individual members" (p. 97). There is a need to develop principals' positive attitudes towards this approach.

Although this study provided information about responding elite school principals' perceptions and perceptions related to dealing with disruptive-aggressive students in selected elite schools in

Lahore city, more research is needed about the use of specific approaches in dealing with bullying in elite schools. The participants of this study reported whether approaches were being used in their contexts. However, specific information about various intervention strategies needs further exploration. In addition, the study is qualitative in nature; there are certainly some limitations due to which implications of the research study will be accordingly to the criteria mentioned for qualitative

research. This research implication could only be useful for the institutional leaders working in elite school contexts to solve issues related to students' disruptive-aggressive behavior that offends the school's educational environment. Moreover, this study could be helpful for the teachers who are facing the problem of disobedience in classrooms. However, more detailed empirical research studies are needed to examine specific approaches used to address bullying in the schools of Pakistan.

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