# Psychology Of Defense Mechanisms In Bullied Children At School: A Clinical Study Of Three Cases

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## Abstract

Bullying has become a common and serious problem among students in schools. Research confirms the negative effects that remain in a child's memory and affect their mental health, leading them to resort to defense mechanisms to reduce its severity. This was the focus of our study titled "Defense Mechanisms Psychology in Bullied Children at School." We adopted a clinical approach including interviews and observations through case studies. Three cases were deliberately selected: a 10-year-old male in fifth grade, a 6-year-old female in first grade, and a 12-year-old male in the second year of middle school. To crystallize this study, we used Adham Rajab Al-Khafaji's Bullying Victims Scale and the Children's Understanding of the Topic (CAT) test. The findings revealed that the most commonly used defense mechanisms by bullied children at school were projection, identification, repression, displacement, and regression.

**Keywords:** Psychology of defensive mechanisms - child – bullying.

## Introduction

Every child has unique psychological characteristics that distinguish them from their peers, and as soon as they open their eyes to the outside world, they begin to be influenced by those around them. This influence includes both their actions and the reactions of others towards them. In recent times, the term bullying has emerged as a common behavior among children and adolescents. Researchers have started studying the impact of this behavior on society, especially on childhood demographics.

Early childhood is one of the most crucial stages in a person's life. It shapes their personality and serves as the foundation for their psychological development. Therefore, it is essential to study the impact of incidents resulting from a child becoming a victim of bullying during this stage. Such incidents often lead to conflicts and various situations where conflicting motivations arise. The child may experience frustration, anxiety, and low self-esteem, prompting them to develop specific responses to cope with these difficulties and situations. They use defense mechanisms as masks to conceal the realities of their motivations and unacceptable tendencies, thus protecting themselves and maintaining self-congruence.

Returning to its historical roots, we can say that Sigmund Freud first articulated the comprehensive conceptualization of defense mechanisms. Many others, including his daughter Anna Freud, expanded on this concept through their research. They view defense mechanisms as having biological roots, with repression being the

primary primitive mechanism associated with the avoidance of pain.

From this, we can determine the role defense mechanisms play in the overall functioning of the psyche and their role in its major function, which is adapting to the outside world, forming relationships to satisfy needs, and reducing tension. However, excessive use of these mechanisms diminishes their effectiveness, as Barjouri put it, "An individual is not sick for having defenses, but the improper use, rigidity, and lack of cohesion in them are what constitute a disorder."

## Problem Statement

The family is considered the building unit of society, where everyone strives to create a stable family and provide their children with proper upbringing. The family plays an active role in influencing the psychological well-being of children and is one of the most important sources of fulfilling their various needs.

It is widely known that school is a child's second home, where they spend most of their time after their actual home. Schools are among the most crucial institutions in society, expected to provide proper education and be responsible for instilling noble morals, values, and societal norms in children. Schools should also ensure safety, protection, be a trusted source, and set a good example. Socially, school education is an extension of family upbringing. Despite all these positives, negative behaviors infiltrate schools, with bullying being one of the forms of violence and aggression. It has become a common problem threatening the school environment. Bullying involves intentional and repeated actions aimed at humiliating and disturbing others, either verbally (using insulting and demeaning words to belittle someone in front of others or make them feel ashamed) or physically (such as hitting, pushing, breaking someone's belongings, or showing superiority over them).

"Olweus" was the first to scientifically define bullying based on research experiments. He provided a definition that specifically identifies the victim as "a child who is repeatedly exposed over time to negative behaviors by one or more students with the intent to harm due to an imbalance of power, causing anxiety and emotional instability." (Abu Al-Diyar, 2012).

These pressures increase the likelihood of the victim contemplating ending their life. All these decisions are made consciously or subconsciously through the subconscious mind, which is divided into three aspects (id, ego, and superego).

The child unconsciously seeks to protect their ego and maintain an acceptable image through what is known as defense mechanisms. According to Freud, as cited by "Redwan" (2009), defense mechanisms are a set of unconscious mechanisms that the ego harnesses to protect the individual from stress and anxiety. However, excessive use of these mechanisms can exacerbate anxiety and weaken the ego, making the individual susceptible to various psychological and physical disorders (Redwan, 2009).

Therefore, defense mechanisms play an effective role in reducing the severity of these crises and difficult situations. Based on this, the current study aims to shed light on the psychology of defense mechanisms in bullied children at school, with a focus on answering the following question:

What are the most commonly used defense mechanisms by bullied children at school?

## Study Hypothesis

The most commonly used defense mechanisms by bullied children at school are projection, repression, identification, rationalization, and regression.

## Study Objectives

Identify and analyze the most important defense mechanisms used by bullied children at school.

Contribute to generating interest among researchers, especially those focusing on children's psychological issues.

## Operational Definition

Defense mechanisms: These are unconscious psychological tactics used by individuals to alter reality and protect themselves from painful crises and pressures. We measure them using the Children's Understanding of the Topic (CAT) test.

The bullied child: They are victims of unsuitable behavior, which can manifest in several forms (verbal, physical, social, etc.), measured using Adham Rajab Al-Khafaji's Bullying Victims Scale.

## Theoretical Framework

The concept of the psyche becomes clearer when we delve into the fundamental principles governing psychological life, along with integrating various theoretical perspectives. The contextual perspective describes psychological spaces, while the dynamic perspective concerns the fate of conflicts (Malal, 2017).

The contextual perspective, according to Freud, involves two integrated positions: firstly, distinguishing between three levels (unconscious, pre-conscious, and conscious), and secondly, differentiating between three fundamental systems (id, ego, superego) (Malal, 2017).

Regarding Freud's meta-psychological theory, awareness is one of the functions of the perceptual system, located at the periphery of the psyche between the external world and memory systems. Freud indicated that awareness is the higher sensory organ for perceiving psychological traits and distributing mobilized quantities appropriately (Malal, 2017).

Studies have thrived in uncovering the unconscious, a significant contribution of psychoanalysis by Freud, asserting that the unconscious is a legitimate realm. We only know

about the external world what our senses convey to us (Boukli, 1976).

The unconscious can also be inferred through tricks the mind uses without conscious awareness, such as discarding rejected motives, displacing some memories, and expelling them from consciousness.

"Jacques Lacan," in defining the unconscious, encapsulates Freud's aspect of the unconscious in his grandmother's quote: What it is and what it is not. "The unconscious is a concept shaped according to the impact of the thing it does to form the self; it is not something that actually points in psychological reality to a domain lacking the attribute (or virtue) of consciousness" (Clément, 2004).

Freud used the term pre-conscious to denote a psychic system entirely distinct from the unconscious system. The energy present in the pre-conscious system is constrained due to the conceptual connection in the pre-conscious system being verbal, i.e., related to the conception of words (Malal, 2017).

Further, according to the second contextual perspective and Freud's psychoanalytic theory, "id, ego, and superego" form three systems encompassing all aspects of human psychological life. Freud not only aims to reveal these systems' functions but also attempts to uncover the dynamics of unconscious activity and the process of unconscious conflict (Abbas, 2004).

According to Freud, the id represents the inherited deep layer of human organization and is the source of instinctual energy, with its nature being unconscious, dominated by the pleasure principle. It represents the mysterious and closed part of our personality according to Freud (Abbas, 2004).

The ego is one of the pillars of the psychic apparatus, representing the defensive pole between the id's instinctual demands, the pressures of the external world, and the

requirements of the superego. It is a unit that gradually forms throughout life (Malal, 2017).

Psychoanalytic analysis has revealed that some processes attributed to the ego in psychic conflict are unconscious processes. Freud says, "We have found something unconscious in the ego itself, and it behaves completely as something repressed, causing profound effects without being itself apparent in consciousness, and it requires special effort before it can appear in consciousness" (Abbas, 2004).

The higher self includes the pronoun of religious and ethical values, playing the role of an ideal example for the self. Therefore, "establishing the higher self can be considered a successful case of alignment with parental authority, where it monitors and threatens like parents" (Abbas, 2004).

Thus, personality becomes a product of biological interaction and transforms into a stage for constant conflicts. To alleviate or limit these crises, one resorts to specific means, namely defense mechanisms.

The concept of defense mechanisms is one of Freud's most important concepts. They are unconscious reactions that operate mechanically when threats are painful, faking reality by excluding thoughts, memories, and emotions from consciousness (e.g., repression, denial) (Eveleigh & Gleiser, 2008).

These psychological processes related to the self help maintain optimal psychological conditions, aiding in avoiding and confronting anxiety and all psychological disorders. However, if used repeatedly or inappropriately, they may lead to mental disorders. Furthermore, they are the means through which the self unconsciously avoids direct expression, aiming to alleviate anxiety.

In addition, defense mechanisms encompass various forms of defense, including clinical manifestations of these processes (Debon, 2021).

According to Chazoud, differences in defense mechanisms and their characteristics are related to the level of self-regulation and the nature of the pressure one seeks to protect themselves from.

Nacht also believes that the defensive mechanisms used by the self vary depending on whether the self is organized or disorganized (Malal, 2017).

However, there is no consensus among researchers regarding the number of defense mechanisms. Freud presented ten defense mechanisms in her book "The Ego and the Defense Mechanisms." In the DSM-5 diagnostic manual and in the meeting in which Vaillant was a member, held by the American Psychiatric Association, a different set of defense mechanisms were discussed (Debon, 2021).

### Here are some defense mechanisms

Repression: Freud considers repression as the primary or fundamental defense mechanism of the ego because it is the direct method of avoiding anxiety. The ego uses repression to prevent anxiety-provoking thoughts from reaching consciousness (Aldahesat, 2016).

Repression involves pushing away painful or shameful motives and thoughts from the conscious mind to the unconscious mind, causing them to be forgotten. It is a preventive measure to avoid acknowledging motives that the individual prefers to deny, as if cleansing oneself out of fear of feeling guilt and self-blame. It is like burying live experiences that always try to emerge into consciousness and can manifest in dreams and slips of the tongue (Zahran, 2005).

Additionally, there is regression, which refers to a psychological process involving a backward movement or regression, returning to the opposite direction from a point previously reached to a point before it. Freud introduced the idea of regression in his book "The Interpretation of Dreams" in 1900 to explain one of the basic characteristics of dreams, as dream thoughts

primarily appear in sensory images that impose themselves on the individual (LaPlanche & Pontalis, 1997).

- The concept of regression is more precisely described as a descriptive concept, as Freud himself indicated. It belongs to the last chapter of dream interpretation where it is presented as a defense mechanism much less important than repression when it is essential (Lhote Chaud, 1997).
- Escape through Regression: Escape from reality can occur through regression by recalling transient phases of sexual life that once provided pleasure to the individual (Abbas, 2004).
- Regarding Projection, it involves attributing to oneself or others things related to one's flaws or shortcomings, akin to what a foolish worker does by blaming their tools (Watson & Lindgren, 2004). This pattern is characterized by justifying the expression of opposition or rejection by assigning negative desires or traits to others. This form of attribution reduces the person's anxiety (Debon, 2021).

Moreover, it is a primary psychological process where a person rejects sensations and perceptions at their ego level and attributes them to others, as seen in dreams and projectional output, so the ego does not feel they belong to it. This leads to tension at their level (Malal, 2017).

- Fixation, on the other hand, refers to the cessation of personality growth at a stage that the individual does not surpass, especially when the next stage of growth is seen as a serious threat. Fixation is considered a rejection of the growth process (Zahran, 2005).

Elevation is considered one of the ego's most defensive mechanisms, preventing unsatisfactory thoughts from entering consciousness and avoiding individual anxiety (Watson & Lindgren, 2004).

- Denial, which is a method used by a person who confesses one of their desires or thoughts that was repressed until that moment while simultaneously defending themselves against it through denial. It is considered more advanced than repression. For Freud, denial and negation have the same origin and meaning in psychoanalysis (Malal, 2017).

Further, there is Substitution, which involves taking an alternative to achieve a goal or behavior that is socially unacceptable. The alternative is usually quite similar to the unacceptable goal or behavior.

- Compensation is an attempt by an individual to succeed in one field to compensate for their shortcomings in another field, giving them a sense of identity or presenting an acceptable appearance to compensate and cover up an unacceptable trait (Zahran, 2005).
- Identification, or introjection, is a psychological process where a person embodies aspects or traits of another person, either fully or partially, depending on their model. Personalities form and differentiate through a series of identifications. Identification is evident in the TAT test through narrative contexts (Malal, 2017).
- Moving on to Displacement, it is a process where a person unconsciously redirects their pent-up emotions towards thoughts, people, or situations contrary to the original thoughts and situations causing the emotions. It transfers negative emotions along with positive ones from their original source of arousal to another less arousing and impactful subject. In the field of dream analysis, displacement indicates the diversion of emotional or affective content from its true objective to a secondary one of lesser significance (Awad, 2010).
- Idealization is also worth mentioning, where a person adopts the qualities of admired individuals and their socially, innately acceptable traits, attributing them to

themselves and considering them an integral part of their personal identity. It's not merely copying the image of a beloved role model but rather becoming, even if only in imagination, the person with whom we identify and merge into their personality, blurring individual differences. We then experience their happiness as our own, rejoice in their success, and lament their failures (Al-Issaoui, 1992).

Additionally, Undoing is a mechanism where an individual seeks to make past thoughts or actions as if they never happened. Freud in his book "Inhibition, Symptoms, and Anxiety 1926" views undoing as an addition to the isolation mechanism and active in the obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) (Malal, 2017).

-   The French school sees Undoing in Test A2.3 of understanding the subject, while the American school sees it in the deletion of desire or impulse despite a response from the examinee (Malal, 2017).
-   Rationalization involves interpreting behavior (failed or erroneous) and justifying it with logical and acceptable personal and social reasons and excuses. Rationalization differs from lying, as it is an unconscious process where the individual deceives himself or herself, whereas lying is conscious deception aimed at others (Zahran, 2005).
-   Sublimation directs pent-up energy and exhausts it in other fields of activity and production endorsed by social situations and traditions. It achieves a minimal level of gratification for instinctual conflicts (Awad, 2010).
-   Isolation represents the isolation of an idea or behavior, breaking its links with other thoughts. It includes temporary suspensions in thought processes or formulations. Isolation prevents the troubling relationship between the subject and perceptions, utilized by the ego when repression is not enough (Malal, 2017).

-   Intellectualization, according to Freud, is a smooth process where the ego attempts to control instincts by linking them with thoughts that can be consciously managed. This mechanism is considered one of the most crucial and oldest acquired capabilities for the human ego. Therefore, imagination involves resorting to the world of fantasy to achieve what could not be achieved successfully in reality.
-   Transference, on the other hand, is the expression of repressed conflicts or motives externally through sensory, motor, or physiological processes (Malal, 2017).

Finally, reverse projection is an unconscious trick where an individual controls an unacceptable motive or feeling by forming its opposite, such as hatred appearing as exaggerated love (Awad, 2010).

-   School bullying, with its aggression towards others, whether physical or verbal, is a problem that has negative effects on both the bully and the victim. It affects their psychological and emotional well-being, making the victim feel rejected and unwanted, in addition to experiencing fear, anxiety, and discomfort (Al-Saeed, 2019).

According to Olweus, bullying is a form of aggression that occurs when a child or individual is continually exposed to negative behavior that causes pain. The bully may use direct or indirect actions to bully others, with direct bullying being an attack on others through verbal or physical aggression

"Boni" 2003 confirms that bullying is the exposure of a particular student to a series of harmful negative actions on a continuous and repetitive basis all the time, and the victim's inability to defend himself. (Abu Al-Diyar, 2012)

Maawiya Abu Ghazal (2009) views bullying as aggressive behavior involving physical and verbal

harm, resulting from an imbalance of power between two individuals: the bully and the victim.

Hala Ismail (2010) provides a more comprehensive definition, considering bullying as a form of harm to others when an individual or group uses their strength to attack the victim. It has three characteristics: intentionality, repetition, and imbalance between the bully and the victim (Al-Dasuqi, 2016).

Researchers differ in their study of bullying in terms of their perspectives on the concept. Coloroso (2000) defines bullying as a deliberate and intentional activity aimed at causing harm or instilling fear and terror through threats and assaults (Abu Arar, 2010).

-   "Adair, Dixon, and Moore" (2000) revealed the reasons why victimized children tend to keep incidents of bullying hidden and not report them, out of fear of future punishment and mistreatment from the bullies. Victims believe they will be more isolated if they report being bullied, and they think the bully will like and respect them if they keep it secret. They also don't want to cause their parents worry (Gracey, 2012).
-   Among the potential reasons for school bullying are:

Psychological Reasons: Bullies often have aggression and impulsiveness towards others, along with a desire for control and display.

Family Reasons: Family issues like parental separation, improper upbringing, lack of communication, and harsh punishment contribute.

Social Reasons: Bullies gain social status and popularity among their peers because they are seen as powerful, so others constantly seek to please and support them.

School-related Reasons: Lack of supervision, high student numbers, discrimination, contempt, etc.

These intertwined reasons lead students towards bullying behavior (Al-Saeed, 2019).

In addition, the prevalence of violent electronic games and wrestling films, along with improper family upbringing, contributes to this. Therefore, parents must reflect on themselves and pay attention to their children and their behaviors (Al-Dahisat, 2017).

One of the most common forms of bullying is physical bullying, which involves physically harming an individual (severe hitting, biting, spitting, damaging personal property). It is less common among females, who often use indirect means like exclusion or spreading rumors. Vinz and Mack (2008) noted that the rates of Reporting of bullying is high for girls with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Abu Al-Diyar, 2012).

Verbal bullying is widespread in school environments. This phenomenon involves attributing a specific characteristic to a person, even in a dubious and questioning manner by others, which can tarnish their reputation or subject them to people's contempt and disdain. It is expressed through insults, threats, and verbal abuse (Al-Masa'eed, 2017).

There is also sexual bullying, which includes unwanted gestures such as images, mocking, starting rumors of a sexual nature, and may also involve physical contact.

Moreover, there is emotional bullying, also known as relational bullying, where the bully aims to diminish the victim's self-esteem and sense of worth. This type includes ignoring, isolating, sulking, laughing at, using aggressive body language, and is one of the most impactful forms of bullying.

Regarding racial bullying, it stems from hatred and bias towards a person based on their race, religion, nationality, or it can be directed at individuals with special needs (Abu Al-Diyar, 2017).

One of the most significant theories explaining bullying behavior is Freud's psychoanalytic theory. From Freud's perspective, aggression is an innate, instinctive force in humans that arises from the death instinct, representing an unconscious desire. He interprets bullying behavior within this theory by suggesting that the bullying student lives in a harsh family environment, experiencing parental punishments and aggression, which leads to the child identifying with the aggressor and manifesting similar behaviors (Al-Dasuqi, 2016).

Behavioral theory is based on stimuli and responses, representing observable activity by living organisms. Bullying is seen as repeatable because it is associated with reinforcement. For example, if a boy hits his brother and gets what he wants, he will repeat this behavior to achieve his goal again. If responses are not reinforced, they tend to extinguish and fade, and the individual does not repeat them (Abu Al-Diyar, 2012).

The frustration-aggression theory, pioneered by scholars like Miller and Robert Sears, posits that frustration leads to aggressive impulses. This frustration gradually decreases after harming others and is termed as catharsis or discharge because frustration causes anger and feelings of injustice, making the individual predisposed to aggression due to unmet biological desires (Al-Dasuqi, 2016).

**Methodological procedures for the study**

**Research Methods**

**3-1- Children's Apperception Test (CAT):**

The physician and psychoanalyst Leopold Bellak developed the Children's Apperception Test (CAT) in 1949. He modified test plates and created suitable images for children with the help of Sonia Bellak. After a year of studies, they were able to define several social and fundamental situations in a child's life. The test is designed for children aged 3-10 years. It helps in understanding the child's emotional structure, dynamics, reactions to problems, psychological motives, and focuses on what the child sees and thinks about. Its importance lies in uncovering family relationships (parents, siblings) and aims to measure personality traits and psychological mechanisms.

The test involves presenting a set of images where the child is asked to imagine a story for each one. Through this, the specialist reveals the child's defense mechanisms and the dynamics of their social and family life. It is conducted individually and does not exceed one hour, consisting of 10 plates containing images of animals in human-like daily situations (Al-Shartoni, 2016).

**3-2- Bullying Victims Scale**

Developed by researcher Adham Rajab Mahmoud Al-Khafaji, who identified areas of bullying victims in five categories (psychological, social, verbal, physical, sexual). To verify these areas and their inclusiveness for bullying victims, they were presented to a group of specialized judges, totaling 10, who were asked to assess the accuracy of the definitions.

**3-2-1 Scale Correction**

The researcher verified the validity of the School Bullying Victims Scale using two types of validity: face validity, based on logical examination by the judges during its preparation, and self-validity, representing the highest level of validity. The scale's stability coefficient, using the Cronbach's alpha formula, was found to be 0.94, indicating good face validity. The self-validity coefficient for the School Bullying Victims Scale was calculated at 0.96, indicating high self-validity.

**3-2-2 Scale Stability**

After the researcher confirmed the ability of the items in the School Bullying Victims Scale to discriminate and their validity, and assessed the scale's stability using the Cronbach's alpha formula and its validity, it became ready for use.

Thus, the highest score on the scale is 310 points, the lowest is 0 points, and the theoretical average is 140 points. Since each score (2) is multiplied by the frequency (2) of occurrence, the item score (4) becomes 4 points. With a total of 35 items, the theoretical average becomes 140 points.

## Data Analysis and Discussion of Results

## Analysis of Case Study 1

- Through interviews and observations, we noticed that his language is somewhat incomprehensible, which is due to his recent transition and lack of adaptation. He appears to be quiet and reserved, as confirmed by his mother.

When applying the Children's Apperception Test (CAT), it became evident that he has low self-esteem and needs independence and a sense of security. This was reflected in card numbers (6-9), indicating that the family is not providing the necessary emotional support he needs. Additionally, the bullying he experiences and the chaotic environment contribute to mixed feelings of fear, anxiety, and frustration, as shown in cards (2-3-7-8). Some scenes that may occur in school, such as teasing and bullying by peers, were depicted. It was also observed that he uses "projection," a concept introduced by Freud, which plays a crucial role in forming conflicts between the self (ego) and the external world. Projection always appears as a defense mechanism or as sincerely expressing traits and feelings that the person rejects or denies in themselves. Furthermore, "identification" is a psychological process through which a person adopts aspects of another person's personality, either partially or completely, forming personality or differentiating through a series of identifications. Additionally, repression and rationalization were observed in finding solutions to problems and giving logical formulation to conflicts in order to control them.

Melanie Klein states in "Projective Identification" that the basis of projective identification lies in the individual transferring their negative aspects onto an external object, causing ongoing repression and anxiety whenever the object is present or imagined (Robert et al., 2003).

## Analysis of Case Study 2

After interviews and observations, it became evident that the case is shy and eager to please, hesitant in speech, enjoys drawing and playing, possibly as a means of psychological release. These activities help reduce low self-esteem and cope with the provocation and bullying from her peers.

Applying the Children's Apperception Test (CAT) revealed that her relationship with her mother is good, with high and idealistic expectations. She is preoccupied with thoughts of eating and food, indicating regression in the oral stage. The ego is poorly organized, leading to oral responses instead of reproductive behavior. Among the defense mechanisms used are "projection-identification-transformation," where Melanie Klein introduced the term "projective identification" to refer to a process where the person fully or partially inserts themselves into the subject to cause harm and control it.

Projective identification appears as a method of projecting and rejecting one's needs to others. Melanie Klein describes it as a form of defensive escape and refusal to acknowledge needs to others (LaPlanche & Pontalis, 1997).

## Analysis of Case Study 3

- Through interviews, it was evident that the case is ambitious despite obstacles, polite, shows signs of despair yet remains optimistic and accepts his condition.

The CAT revealed that the main theme in his storytelling revolves around family atmosphere and the need for motherly care. He suffers from a lack of positive environment and experiences

bullying from peers, as indicated in cards (2-3-6-7-8). His basic need lies in psychological and familial stability, with stories reflecting realistic situations and indicating the actual lived experience of the case.

The defense mechanisms employed by the case include projection, identification, repression, splitting, and identification with the aggressor. Freud views the latter, identification with the aggressor, as active in various contexts like physical aggression and criticism, resulting in observed behavior where the victim becomes the aggressor due to role reversal.

- Splitting, according to Freud, results from conflicts. While this idea may have descriptive value for him, it does not inherently carry interpretative value but rather presents the opposite.

Human division within oneself, or ego splitting (part observing and part observed), is explained by LaPlanche and Pontalis in 1997.

## Discussing the Results in Light of the Hypothesis and Previous Studies:

Psychoanalytic theorists believe that bullying behavior is rooted in human nature, attributed to an innate drive that emerges with humans, propelling them toward violence against those obstructing the fulfillment of that drive. Psychoanalytic school emphasizes the importance of early childhood experiences and their role in aggressive behavior, seeing aggression as a behavioral phenomenon governed by instincts.

Klein suggests that bullying operates within the child from the beginning of life, and this drive can be so intense that the child experiences severe anxiety surrounding those who care for them.

- Through our clinical approach and the tools used, including interviews, observation, bullying scale, and the Children's Apperception Test (CAT), after presenting and analyzing the case results, we aim to

answer the question: What are the most commonly used defense mechanisms by bullied children in school?

The proposed hypothesis suggests that the most commonly used defense mechanisms by bullied children in school include projection, repression, identification, rationalization, and regression.

We can say that our hypothesis has been confirmed, as the internal and external conflicts are expressed by the bullied child through inappropriate psychological responses such as anxiety and frustration, as seen in the first case, crying and attachment to the mother like the second case, and isolation and a preference for solitude like the third case.

Melanie Klein says, "The ego is capable of suffering anxiety from the beginning and of using mechanisms and establishing primary relationships. The ego forms early and part of it remains irregular despite its inclination towards integration." (Wood et al., 2003)

- Based on our previous discussion and the results we have obtained from the projective test, we find that the bullied child, in order to adapt to living conditions and achieve the desired harmony, uses projection, identification, identification with the aggressor, repression, regression, splitting, and rationalization.

Our study aligns closely with studies by Sarfani and Tarchoun, aiming to understand the defense mechanisms used by the helped child, which included the use of clinical methods and tools such as interviews and the Children's Apperception Test. Their results indicated that the mechanisms used by the helped child included identification, repression, projection, regression, compensation, and repression.

Similarly, a study by Malal Khadija titled "Defense Mechanisms among University Students" found that the defense mechanisms used by students included control (20.42%),

indicating internal conflicts, flexibility (20.59%), indicating relational conflicts, avoidance (52.82%), indicating conflict avoidance, and primary processes (6.16%), which appeared in The form of language and cognitive disorders. The defense mechanisms used vary depending on the gender of the student.

## Conclusion

- This study addressed an important category in society, which is childhood, especially victims of school bullying. This period requires necessary care and follow-up from all aspects, especially psychological, as they are subjected to pressure in society, particularly in the school environment. To adapt to this reality, they use defense mechanisms to cope with the stress resulting from these pressures. Therefore, the environment, especially the school, plays a significant role in their lives. The more it helps them fulfill their needs, the less they resort to using defense mechanisms.
- The goal of our study was to identify the most commonly used defense mechanisms by bullied children in school, and it was found that they frequently use projection, identification, repression, rationalization, and identification with the aggressor.

The results we obtained are relative as they were limited by a timeframe and simple means. The objective of our study still requires further depth and exploration.

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