



Lost in the Corridors: Bullying, Abandonment, and the Lasting Trauma

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Abstract

This paper explores how boarding school environments uniquely amplify emotional trauma stemming from bullying and abandonment anxiety. The manuscript examines how the absence of familial support and rigid institutional culture can intensify feelings of isolation, significantly impacting students' emotional development, self-perception, and attachment patterns. Utilizing a systematic qualitative literature review approach, this study integrates attachment theory, trauma research, and social-ecological models of bullying to analyze how prolonged experiences of peer victimization and emotional neglect within boarding schools shape long-term psychological outcomes, including struggles with self-worth, trust, and relationship building. A thematic analysis of literature review highlights the hidden scars carried into adulthood, revealing how emotional suppression, institutionalized bullying, and the loss of secure attachments contribute to complex psychological distress. By synthesizing scholarly literature and survivor accounts, this research emphasizes the critical need for institutional accountability, therapeutic interventions, and trauma-informed educational reforms. Ultimately, by uncovering the profound emotional impacts of boarding school experiences, this study calls for systemic change and greater psychological support to promote resilience, emotional health, and recovery among survivors.

Keywords: Boarding school, bullying, fear of abandonment, emotional trauma, attachment patterns

1. Introduction

I was only 9 years old when I was sent to a prestigious boarding school in China. My parents believed it would provide an invaluable opportunity for my personal and academic growth, but the reality was far more complex. Separated from my caregivers at such a young age, I grappled

with a deep fear of abandonment, along with micro bullying, social isolation, and microaggressions—experiences that profoundly shaped my early understanding of attachment and interpersonal relationships.

Many studies have shown boarding school environments uniquely amplify bullying, fear of abandonment, and lasting emotional trauma due to their distinct residential nature and the psychological demands they place on students. The transition to boarding school often coincides with adolescence, a period marked by significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes, which can exacerbate the stress of adapting to a new environment where home and school are merged (Lester et al., 2013). This setting requires students to quickly develop self-reliance and independence, often at the cost of reduced privacy and personal freedom, which can lead to feelings of abandonment and emotional distress (Barclay, 2011; Lester et al., 2013). The constant proximity to peers in a boarding school, where students spend significantly more time together than in day schools, creates an environment ripe for bullying, as students have fewer opportunities to escape negative interactions (Lester et al., 2013). Bullying in boarding schools can become institutionalized, with some schools viewing it as a tradition or rite of passage, further entrenching the behavior and making it relentless for victims (Lester et al., 2013). The psychological impact of such environments is profound, with many students experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychopathological issues due to the trauma of separation from family and the potential for abuse within the school (Rau et al., 2023). The concept of Boarding School Syndrome highlights how the early loss of primary attachments and the need to adapt to potentially unsafe new attachment figures can lead to long-term emotional and psychological issues, including difficulties in intimate relationships and generalized depression (Schaverien, 2011, 2015). These environments can foster a culture of emotional suppression where expressing vulnerability is taboo, leading to an encapsulation of the self that persists into adulthood, affecting personal relationships and mental health (Schaverien, 2004). Therefore, the unique combination of constant peer interaction, separation from family, and the potential for institutionalized bullying in boarding schools creates a setting that can significantly amplify emotional trauma and fear of abandonment in students.

The close-knit and often insular nature of boarding schools can exacerbate issues related to school climate such as engagement, safety, and environment, which are crucial for students' social-emotional well-being. Negative perceptions of these factors are linked to increased conduct and peer problems, as well as hyperactivity and inattention, particularly among gender and sexual minorities (Fredrick et al., 2022). The prevalence of bullying in boarding schools is notably high; studies indicate that a significant percentage of students experience victimization, which is often perpetuated by a culture of seniority and toxic masculinity (Hesfi & Sofia, 2022; Siregar et al., 2024). This environment can lead to severe emotional consequences, including depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with a substantial proportion of students meeting criteria for suspected PTSD (Rau et al., 2023). The phenomenon of bullying is further complicated by the "healthy context paradox," where higher levels of victimization in a classroom setting intensify the emotional impact on individuals, leading to increased depressive symptoms and anxiety (Pu et al., 2024). Additionally, the transition to boarding school can trigger a spike in bullying perpetration, with students experiencing emotional difficulties more likely to engage in such behaviors (Lester & Mander, 2015). The

societal implications of these findings are profound and highlight the need for targeted interventions such as empathy training, which has been shown to reduce bullying behaviors and foster a more compassionate school environment (Siregar et al., 2024). Moreover, the implementation of screening procedures and the adoption of comprehensive prevention models are essential to address the root causes of violence and trauma in boarding schools (Mayasari & Rambe, 2023; Sumawiharja et al., 2024). Overall, addressing these issues is crucial not only for the well-being of boarding students but also for fostering a safer and more supportive educational environment.

This research will explore how the boarding school experience intensifies bullying dynamics and abandonment fears, leaving deep, lasting emotional scars. This research carries deep personal significance. It serves as a form of closure for my younger self, acknowledging the challenges I once endured while affirming the resilience I have since cultivated. More than a reflection, it stands as a testament to my strength and a reminder that I now have the power to create meaningful change.

2. Methodology

This literature review employed a systematic qualitative approach to analyze and synthesize existing research on the psychological effects of bullying and fear of abandonment in boarding school environments. The study integrates theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and first-person narratives to illuminate the long-term consequences of these experiences and propose avenues for intervention and reform. A systematic literature review methodology ensures that findings are derived from a structured process of identifying, selecting, and analyzing relevant scholarly sources. Given the complex interplay between institutional settings, emotional trauma, and psychological well-being, a qualitative thematic analysis was employed to categorize and interpret key themes from the literature. Additionally, narrative analysis was utilized to examine personal accounts of former boarding school students, placing emphasis on the lived experiences that shape long-term emotional and psychological development.

To ensure the inclusion of high-quality, peer-reviewed sources, data collection followed a multistage process. Scholarly articles, books, and reports were gathered through systematic searches of academic databases, including PsycINFO, PubMed, JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ScienceDirect. Boolean search operators were applied to refine searches with terms such as “boarding school AND bullying,” “boarding school syndrome,” and “fear of abandonment AND adolescence.” The review included studies published in peer-reviewed journals or reputable academic books from 2000 to the present, with exceptions for foundational theories. Empirical studies, meta-analyses, and theoretical papers focusing on bullying, attachment theory, abandonment anxiety, and institutional cultures were prioritized. Additionally, first-person accounts from former boarding school students were selected if they were published in academic journals, memoirs, or case studies. The exclusion criteria filtered out studies focusing on day schools or nonresidential settings unless they provided comparative insights. Research on bullying that lacked psychological analysis or methodological rigor was also excluded. Citation tracking was used as a supplementary approach to ensure comprehensive coverage of existing scholarship, with relevant references gathered through snowball sampling techniques.

Using a qualitative thematic analysis, recurring patterns in the literature were categorized into five key themes. The first theme, Institutional Isolation and Emotional Neglect, explored

the psychological impact of separation from family, rigid institutional cultures, and authoritarian disciplinary models. The second theme, Bullying and Peer Aggression in Confined Environments, examined how constant peer proximity in boarding schools exacerbates bullying, leading to heightened psychological distress. The third theme, Fear of Abandonment and Long-Term Psychological Consequences, assessed how boarding school experiences shape attachment styles, increase the risk of anxiety and depression, and contribute to symptoms of PTSD. The fourth theme, Survivor Narratives and Self-Perception, analyzed how former students construct their identities post-boarding school, with a focus on self-worth, self-criticism, and emotional resilience. Finally, the fifth theme, Institutional Accountability and Reform Strategies, examined gaps in psychological support services, emphasizing the need for trauma-informed care, peer support programs, and anti-bullying interventions.

In considering ethical implications, this review ensured sensitivity when integrating survivor narratives. Anonymized case studies were used where necessary, and findings were derived exclusively from peer-reviewed, academically rigorous sources to maintain accuracy and credibility. Given the personal and often distressing nature of the topics discussed, ethical considerations included respecting survivor perspectives, avoiding sensationalism, and presenting findings with objectivity. While this review seeks to highlight the emotional and psychological consequences of boarding school environments, it also acknowledges the diversity of experiences, ensuring a balanced and evidence-based approach.

Despite its comprehensive scope, this study has several limitations. Survivor narratives, while valuable, may introduce selection bias, as those who had positive boarding school experiences might be underrepresented. Additionally, longitudinal studies specifically examining the long-term effects of boarding schools remain limited, making it challenging to establish causation rather than correlation. Another constraint is the lack of access to internal institutional data, as some boarding schools restrict research on disciplinary practices and psychological support systems. These limitations emphasize the need for future research that incorporates longitudinal methodologies, cross-cultural analyses, and deeper institutional case studies to provide a more holistic understanding of the subject.

By systematically integrating psychological theories, empirical studies, and survivor narratives, this literature review provides an in-depth assessment of the emotional trauma associated with boarding school environments. The findings highlight the urgent need for institutional reforms, improved psychological support systems, and policy changes to foster safer and more supportive educational settings. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on boarding school trauma and childhood emotional development, laying the groundwork for further research and advocacy in this area.

3. Institutional Isolation: The Boarding School Environment

Early separation from caregivers significantly impacts a child's emotional security, with long-term consequences on mental health and social functioning. Separation anxiety, a natural response to caregiver absence, is crucial for emotional development, yet prolonged separation can lead to vulnerability and psychological challenges, such as increased anxiety and behavioral issues in children without parental care (Sochukwuma, 2023). Attachment theory emphasizes the importance of early caregiver interactions in forming secure attachment styles, which are foundational for emotional regulation and psychological well-being. Secure

attachments, fostered by consistent and supportive caregiving, promote resilience and reduce the likelihood of mental health disorders, whereas insecure attachments, resulting from unresponsive caregiving, can lead to heightened anxiety and avoidance behaviors (Ginalska & Cichopek, 2024). Emotional separation during adolescence, while a normal part of identity formation, requires a balance of independence and trust in caregivers to ensure healthy psychosocial adaptation (Hodyk, 2024). The effects of caregiver separation are evident in young adults who experienced parental migration, with significant impacts on attachment security, particularly with fathers, highlighting the importance of maintaining communication during separations (Venta et al., 2021). Parental separation, such as divorce, disrupts children's emotional and social stability, leading to anxiety, tension, and challenges in forming healthy relationships (Sabillo, 2024). In foster care, sibling separation exacerbates emotional and cognitive challenges, emphasizing the need for maintaining sibling bonds to provide emotional support and stability (Liu, 2024). Emotional security is further compromised in environments with interparental conflict and parental invalidation, which can erode a child's sense of security and exacerbate trauma-related symptoms (Jobe-Shields et al., 2017). Long-term studies reveal that early parent-child separation correlates with increased depression and impaired social relationships, particularly in males and those with less educated mothers, stressing the importance of minimizing separation duration (Li et al., 2024). Multiple separations or losses of caregivers are linked to psychiatric disorders and functional impairments in young children, independent of other adversities; this emphasizes the need for awareness and intervention to mitigate these effects (Briggs-Gowan et al., 2019). However, secure parent-child relationships can moderate the risk of internalizing symptoms in children with early institutional caregiving experiences, highlighting the protective role of family-level factors in promoting resilience (VanTieghem et al., 2017). Overall, these findings emphasize the critical role of early and consistent caregiver presence in fostering emotional security and mitigating the adverse effects of separation.

Boarding schools, often characterized by strict discipline, conformity expectations, and authoritarian environments, can significantly suppress emotional expression and vulnerability among students. The institutional culture of boarding schools, as described in various studies, creates an environment where emotional suppression becomes a coping mechanism for students. For instance, the concept of Boarding School Syndrome highlights the psychological trauma experienced by children who are sent away from home at a young age, leading to a defensive encapsulation of the self and a split between the “home self” and the “boarding school self” (Schaverien, 2011, 2015). This encapsulation often results in difficulties in intimate relationships and emotional expression in adulthood, as the needs of the distressed child remain active but unconscious within the adult (Schaverien, 2004). The rigid institutional culture of boarding schools, as seen in the Indian context, molds students' affective expressions and experiences, often justifying sacrifice in pursuit of aspirations and internalizing hope for a better future through education (Finnan, 2022). However, this environment can also lead to a loss of primary attachments and significant trauma, as students are forced to adapt to a system that may include bullying and abuse, which further suppresses emotional expression (Schaverien, 2011). The transition to boarding school, particularly during adolescence, involves coping with multiple changes, including the necessity to operate autonomously while dislocated from familial support; this can exacerbate feelings of isolation and emotional

suppression (Mander et al., 2013). Identity Process Theory suggests that the boarding school experience can threaten a child's identity, triggering coping strategies such as amnesia and compartmentalization, which further suppress emotional expression and vulnerability (Simpson et al., 2022). Overall, the authoritarian and conformist culture of boarding schools can have long-lasting impacts on students' emotional well-being, often leading to psychological distress and challenges in forming healthy relationships later in life (Schaverien, 2004, 2015).

The role of family in emotional development is pivotal; it provides the foundational support necessary for fostering resilience in children. A supportive family environment characterized by warmth, communication, and stability significantly enhances a child's ability to cope with adversity, thereby bolstering psychological resilience (Xu, 2024). Conversely, the absence of familial support, such as in boarding schools, can lead to emotional and psychological challenges. Children in such environments often face the breakdown of family relationships, which diminishes the protective role family support plays in setting life goals and developing resilience (Alves et al., 2024). The lack of family presence can result in increased vulnerability to externalizing and internalizing problems, as evidenced by studies on youth in institutional care, where limited family support correlates with higher incidences of behavioral issues (Ostaszewski et al., 2022). Moreover, the absence of family can lead to emotional disintegration, manifesting in low self-esteem, poor academic performance, and social maladjustment (Castillo Costa & Merino Armijos, 2018). In boarding schools, children are thrust into a multigenerational social group, which can lead to confusion and struggle in adapting, further exacerbating feelings of loss and emotional instability (Schaverien, 2024). The emotional maturity of students living away from family, such as those in boarding schools, is often inversely related to aggressive behavior; this indicates that the absence of familial guidance can hinder emotional development (Daulay et al., 2023). Therefore, the absence of familial support in boarding schools can significantly impact children's resilience, necessitating interventions that foster alternative support systems to mitigate these adverse effects (Allen et al., 2022; Wong, 2024).

4. Amplifying the Effects of Bullying

Peer aggression in boarding schools presents unique challenges due to the constant proximity and limited escape from the school environment, which can exacerbate bullying behaviors. Relational bullying, characterized by exclusion, neglect, and social manipulation, is particularly prevalent in these settings, influenced by factors such as extraversion, peer conformity, and school climate; collectively, these explain a significant portion of bullying behavior among boarding students (Feliana et al., 2024). The continuous exposure to peers in boarding schools can lead to sustained harassment, as the lack of separation between school and home life intensifies the impact of bullying, making it a persistent issue that affects students' mental health and academic performance (Georgescu, 2024; Pushpalatha, 2024). The prevalence of bullying in such environments is also shaped by societal factors, including gender dynamics and access to technology, which influence the forms and patterns of bullying such as cyberbullying and indirect aggression (Kasula, 2024). The presence of spectators in bullying incidents is crucial because it sustains the bullying dynamic, highlighting the importance of addressing the roles of all participants, including bystanders, to effectively combat bullying (Tordjman, 2022). Furthermore, the social-ecological model suggests that exposure to violence

in domestic and community settings can contribute to bullying behaviors in schools, indicating a complex interplay between individual and environmental factors (Dragone et al., 2024). Interventions in boarding schools should therefore focus on promoting empathy, inclusivity, and digital responsibility, alongside systemic changes to address peer aggression comprehensively (Denysovets et al., 2022; Kasula, 2024). By understanding the unique context of boarding schools, where students are in constant interaction, strategies can be developed to mitigate the effects of bullying and foster a safer, more supportive environment for all students.

Failures in institutional oversight, staff responsiveness, and supervision significantly exacerbate bullying scenarios across various settings, including educational institutions and workplaces. Institutional negligence often manifests as a systemic issue, where the lack of effective oversight and accountability mechanisms allows bullying to persist unchecked. In educational settings, for instance, schools often fail to implement proven bullying prevention strategies, despite empirical research demonstrating their effectiveness. This negligence is compounded by legal frameworks that inadequately address the foreseeability of bullying, leaving victims without recourse and perpetuating a culture of inaction among school officials (Weddle, 2007). Similarly, in higher education, institutional responses to bullying are often inadequate, with formal procedures sometimes exacerbating the problem rather than resolving it. This is due to a lack of nuanced understanding of the power dynamics and organizational contexts that underpin bullying, leading to a culture that tolerates such behavior (Hodgins et al., 2024; Hodgins & McNamara, 2017). In workplaces, particularly in the public sector and healthcare, bullying is often a result of power dynamics and organizational failures. The hierarchical structures and chaotic environments in these settings create vulnerabilities that enable bullying, with managerial control tactics often going unchecked due to poor organizational oversight (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015; Roscigno et al., 2009). Furthermore, the neoliberal context of many institutions, characterized by hierarchical power relations, exacerbates bullying by prioritizing organizational needs over individual well-being, thus perpetuating a cycle of abuse (Heugten et al., 2013). The failure of institutions to address these systemic issues not only allows bullying to flourish but also results in significant psychological harm to victims, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in institutional policies and practices to effectively mitigate bullying (Curcio, 2017; Hall, 2006).

The lack of parental or familial intervention significantly exacerbates the emotional damage caused by peer abuse, as it leaves children without crucial support systems that could mitigate the adverse effects of such experiences. Research indicates that children who suffer from parental emotional and verbal abuse are more likely to experience peer victimization because these forms of maltreatment contribute to low self-esteem and passive acceptance of their inferior status, making them more vulnerable to further victimization by peers (Hutchinson & Mueller, 2008). This vulnerability is compounded by the absence of safe spaces where children can express and address their emotional distress, as highlighted in studies emphasizing the importance of secure environments for traumatized youths (Yen & Zairul, 2024). The interplay between maltreatment at home and peer victimization creates a cycle of revictimization, where the lack of familial support and intervention leaves children exposed to repeated abuse, further deteriorating their mental health (Goemans et al., 2021). Moreover, the absence of safe spaces and supportive familial structures can lead to social rejection, which is a significant risk factor for psychological distress (Lev-Wiesel & Sternberg, 2012). Emotional maltreatment from

parents not only predisposes children to peer victimization but also affects their cognitive vulnerability to depression, as peer victimization contributes uniquely to this vulnerability beyond parental factors (Gibb et al., 2004). The social fields that children navigate, including their peer groups, play a critical role in shaping their experiences of abuse; without parental intervention, harmful norms and power hierarchies remain unchallenged, perpetuating the cycle of abuse (Firmin, 2015). Therefore, the lack of parental intervention and safe spaces intensifies the emotional damage of peer abuse by leaving children without the necessary support to cope with and resist victimization, ultimately affecting their social and emotional development (Mueller & Silverman, 1989).

5. Fear of Abandonment: Emotional Foundations and Consequences

Attachment theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how prolonged separation can affect attachment styles, often fostering insecure or anxious attachment patterns. According to Bowlby's foundational work, attachment styles are formed through early interactions with caregivers, and these styles significantly influence emotional regulation and relational satisfaction throughout life (Ginalska & Cichopek, 2024; Khadka, 2022). When a caregiver is unresponsive or lacks sensitivity, a child may develop an insecure attachment style, characterized by heightened anxiety or avoidance, which can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Diamond & Keefe, 2024; Ginalska & Cichopek, 2024). Prolonged separation from a caregiver can exacerbate these tendencies by disrupting the child's sense of safety and security; this leads to separation anxiety, a core fear in human development (Diamond & Keefe, 2024; Steele, 2023). This anxiety can manifest as a transdiagnostic risk factor for various psychopathologies, complicating treatment and impacting mental health outcomes (Diamond & Keefe, 2024). Insecure attachment styles, such as anxious-ambivalent and avoidant, are linked to adverse childhood experiences and can have long-term effects on personality development and future relationships (Zhang, 2024). These styles often result in a defensive form of tribalism, where individuals exhibit excessive need for care and attention, potentially leading to identity fusion with in-groups and negative reactions to out-groups (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2024). Moreover, individuals with insecure attachment styles, particularly those with social anxiety disorder, experience greater social anxiety, depression, and life impairment compared to those with secure attachment styles (Eng et al., 2024). The enduring influence of early attachment experiences emphasizes the importance of addressing these foundational dynamics to promote healthier relational bonds and psychological well-being (Zhang, 2024). Overall, attachment theory highlights the critical role of early caregiver interactions in shaping attachment styles, and the profound impact of prolonged separation on fostering insecure or anxious attachment patterns (Ginalska & Cichopek, 2024; Khadka, 2022).

Experiences of neglect, whether perceived or real, can profoundly influence an individual's psychological development, leading to fears of rejection and abandonment. Childhood neglect, the most common form of maltreatment, is associated with developmental impairments and internalizing disorders such as anxiety and depression, which are often mediated by cognitive emotion regulation strategies like self-blame (Tanzer et al., 2021). This neglect can manifest as a heightened sensitivity to rejection, where individuals anxiously expect and intensely react to perceived rejection, equating it with abandonment. In borderline personality disorder (BPD), early life adversity, including neglect, is linked to social difficulties, particularly fears of

abandonment and rejection, which are reflected in altered neural responses to social inclusion (Romaniuk et al., 2016). Emotional maltreatment, encompassing both abuse and neglect, is a significant predictor of social anxiety and rejection sensitivity, with emotional neglect uniquely contributing to these outcomes (Euteneuer et al., 2023; Iffland, 2012). Furthermore, internalized shame, often stemming from early experiences of indifference and abandonment, correlates with memories of neglect and rejection, suggesting a deep-seated fear of being unloved and inferior (Carroll, 2020; Claesson & Sohlberg, 2002). Internalized shame and fear of rejection are also evident in individuals with bipolar disorder, where childhood emotional neglect is linked to higher levels of shame and mood-related issues (Fowke et al., 2012). The neurobiological and psychosocial mechanisms underlying these fears highlight how chronic stress from neglect can alter brain function, increasing vulnerability to emotional disorders like depression (Feitosa et al., 2024). Overall, these findings emphasize the importance of addressing childhood neglect in therapeutic settings to mitigate its long-lasting effects on fears of rejection and abandonment.

Former boarding school students often recount narratives filled with fears of abandonment, a theme that emerges prominently across various contexts and studies. Christine Jack's (2020) work on boarding school trauma highlights the profound impact of institutional life on children's emerging identities, where feelings of longing and loneliness are prevalent due to the separation from family and familiar environments. This sense of abandonment is further explored by Duffell and Basset (2016), who described how ex-boarders frequently struggle with intimate relationships in adulthood, a repercussion of the emotional detachment learned during their formative years in boarding schools. Schaverien's (2015) analysis of Boarding School Syndrome provides a psychological framework for understanding how early losses of home and family can lead to enduring distress, including separation anxiety and difficulties in forming attachments. The narratives of Indigenous boarding school survivors, discussed by Lomawaima and Whitt (2023), also reveal traumatic separations from family and cultural roots, contributing to a pervasive fear of abandonment among those who endured these institutions. Additionally, Rau and colleagues' (2023) study on German boarding schools emphasizes the prevalence of post-traumatic stress symptoms among adolescents, further illustrating the psychological toll of perceived abandonment. These firsthand accounts and analyses collectively emphasize the deep-seated fears of abandonment experienced by former boarding school students, shaped by their early institutional experiences and the resultant emotional and psychological challenges they face in later life.

6. Formation of Self-Perception and Identity

Sustained exposure to bullying significantly impacts self-esteem, fostering feelings of inadequacy, worthlessness, or shame among adolescents. The relationship between bullying and self-esteem is well-documented, with studies indicating that bullying victimization leads to a marked decrease in self-esteem, contributing to a distorted self-worth. For instance, adolescents who experience bullying often report lower self-esteem levels, which can manifest as negative self-perceptions and a lack of confidence in their abilities (Mawlod et al., 2024; Rybinska & Kolesnykova, 2024). This negative self-view is exacerbated in students with communication disorders, who are particularly vulnerable to bullying and its detrimental effects on self-esteem (Mawlod et al., 2024). The emotional impact of bullying extends beyond

self-esteem, affecting mental well-being and leading to issues such as anxiety, depression, and even post-traumatic stress disorder (Drăghici, 2024; Esquivel et al., 2023). The constant harassment and aggression inherent in bullying can lead victims to feel dehumanized and degraded, further eroding their sense of self-worth (Drăghici, 2024). Moreover, the pervasive nature of cyberbullying, which can occur at any time and reach a wide audience, intensifies these feelings, leaving victims feeling constantly threatened and unable to escape the bullying even in their homes (Esquivel et al., 2023). The psychological toll of bullying is profound, with victims often developing distorted beliefs about their personal worth and their ability to relate to others, leading to social withdrawal and isolation (Esquivel et al., 2023). Furthermore, bullying has been linked to impairments in personality functioning, particularly in areas such as identity and intimacy, which are crucial for healthy self-esteem development (Seiffert et al., 2024). Interventions focusing on enhancing self-compassion and emotional flexibility have been suggested as potential buffers against the negative impacts of bullying, as these traits can mediate the relationship between bullying victimization and mental well-being, potentially mitigating the decline in self-esteem (İme, 2025). Additionally, fostering a positive school climate and promoting adaptive emotion regulation strategies can enhance resilience and self-esteem, helping victims cope better with the challenges posed by bullying (Virilia et al., 2024). Overall, the evidence emphasizes the critical need for targeted interventions to address the psychological consequences of bullying and support the development of a healthy self-esteem in adolescents.

The internalization of negative messages from peers and authority figures into self-critical beliefs significantly shapes an individual's lifelong self-concept, as evidenced by various studies. Self-criticism, a transdiagnostic factor in psychopathology, often emerges from adverse childhood experiences and peer victimization, leading to increased depression, anxiety, and stress in adulthood (Lee & Lee, 2024; Leman & Arjadi, 2023). This internalization process is compounded by insecure attachment styles, particularly attachment anxiety, which are strongly associated with self-criticism (Rogier et al., 2023; Santis et al., 2021). The narratives and social representations that individuals are exposed to, such as those related to race, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, further contribute to the internalization of shame and erosion of self-esteem; creating additional barriers beyond the immediate social adversities (Sprinson & Berrick, 2022) between early negative experiences and later social anxiety highlights the profound impact of these internalized narratives (Lee & Lee, 2024). Moreover, self-criticism is not only a stable trait but also fluctuates as a state, influencing behaviors such as disordered eating, which emphasizes the need for therapeutic interventions that address both trait and state aspects of self-criticism (Kelly et al., 2024). Narrative therapy, particularly through externalizing conversations, offers a promising approach to deconstruct these internalized narratives, helping individuals separate their identity from the problems they face and re-author their life stories in a way that aligns with their values and skills (Jagatdeb et al., 2024). Interventions such as cognitive therapy, emotion-focused therapy, and compassion-focused therapy have been shown to reduce self-criticism, thereby alleviating its negative effects on mental health (Pekin & Güme, 2024). Overall, understanding and addressing the internalization of negative messages through therapeutic means can significantly improve self-concept and mental health outcomes.

Personal narratives of individuals who have struggled to reconstruct a positive self-perception following boarding school experiences reveal a complex interplay of identity challenges and coping mechanisms. Boarding school experiences often lead to a phenomenon known as Boarding School Syndrome, characterized by psychological distress stemming from early separation from family, emotional deprivation, and sometimes abuse that can result in long-term identity issues and difficulties in intimate relationships (Schaverien, 2004, 2015). The narratives of ex-boarders often highlight the use of unconscious coping strategies, such as dissociative amnesia, to manage the psychological split between their “home self” and “boarding school self”; this can persist into adulthood, affecting their self-concept and relationships (Schaverien, 2015). In psychotherapy, individuals often face a “double bind” of denial, shame, and privilege, which complicates the therapeutic process. However, therapy that validates their boarding school distress and trauma, and provides expert knowledge, can help them overcome these barriers, leading to increased acceptance of their experiences, emotional expression, and reformation of self-identity (Emerson-Smith, 2021). The process of reconstructing a positive self-perception can also be supported by narrative and art therapy, as seen in the case of Hilda, who used these interventions to integrate traumatic and positive memories, enhancing self-compassion and emotional balance (Haeyen et al., 2024). Furthermore, the narrative identity processing of difficult life experiences, such as those encountered in boarding school, can lead to positive self-transformation when individuals engage in exploratory narrative processing and achieve coherent positive resolution, which are associated with increased ego-resiliency and life satisfaction (Pals, 2006). These narratives emphasize the importance of therapeutic interventions that address both the emotional and cognitive aspects of identity reconstruction, allowing individuals to develop a healthier self-narrative and improve their overall well-being (Cheng, 2022).

7. Long-Term Psychological Impact and Coping Mechanisms

The inability to form secure attachments during childhood and adolescence can significantly impact adult relationships, manifesting as trust issues and relationship challenges. Insecure attachments, often stemming from early experiences with caregivers, lead to heightened skepticism and distrust in adult relationships, making it difficult for individuals to seek help and support during adversities (Jin, 2023). This lack of trust is particularly evident in romantic relationships, where it can reduce readiness for marriage, as seen in early-adult women who experience trust issues (Putra et al., 2024). Attachment theory provides a framework for understanding these dynamics, highlighting how anxious and avoidant attachment styles, which are prevalent in adults, particularly during stress, influence trust and interpersonal relationships (McFarland et al., 2023). Childhood maltreatment further complicates these issues, as it is associated with lower perceived partner responsiveness and increased attachment anxiety and avoidance; this in turn affects adult romantic relationships (Gosselin et al., 2024). These attachment insecurities can also mediate the relationship between childhood maltreatment and violent behavior, suggesting that individuals with such backgrounds may struggle with trust and exhibit maladaptive behaviors in relationships (Baihaqi, 2023; Papalia & Widom, 2023). Moreover, attachment styles, particularly anxious and avoidant, are linked to lower dyadic trust in romantic relationships, with anxious attachment influencing trust through relationship beliefs and avoidant attachment having a

direct impact (Yılmaz et al., 2023). Despite the significant role of early caregiving experiences in shaping attachment styles, these associations are not deterministic, and attachment styles can be more malleable during childhood and adolescence than in adulthood (Fraley & Roisman, 2019). Overall, understanding the interplay between early attachment experiences and adult relationship dynamics is crucial for addressing trust issues and fostering healthier interpersonal relationships.

Maladaptive coping strategies, such as emotional avoidance, perfectionism, withdrawal, and anxiety, are prevalent across various populations and contexts, often leading to negative psychological outcomes. Emotional avoidance, a common maladaptive strategy, involves evading stressful situations or emotions; this can exacerbate stress and lead to further emotional dysregulation, as seen in university students who often resort to avoidance and denial in response to academic stressors (Aloka et al., 2024; Cicolini et al., 2023). Perfectionism, particularly maladaptive perfectionism, is closely linked to anxiety and social anxiety, with studies indicating that it can lead to heightened self-criticism and emotional distress, especially when individuals lack self-compassion (Akkuş et al., 2023; Xiong et al., 2024). This is evident in healthcare students, where perfectionism contributes to significant anxiety, necessitating integrated mental health interventions to manage stress and prevent burnout (Worst & Thompson, 2023). Withdrawal, another maladaptive strategy, is characterized by social isolation and disengagement, which can further deteriorate mental health, as observed in adolescents and university students who often withdraw socially in response to stress (Aloka et al., 2024; Sitinjak et al., 2024). Anxiety itself is both a result and a contributor to maladaptive coping, creating a vicious cycle where individuals struggle to manage stress effectively, leading to increased reliance on harmful coping mechanisms (Ashipala & Albanus, 2023; Xiong et al., 2024). In the context of injured athletes, perfectionism and avoidance are prevalent; athletes often engage in self-criticism and emotional avoidance, which hinders recovery and well-being (Varsheni & Prasad, 2024). These maladaptive strategies are not only detrimental to immediate mental health but also have long-term implications, affecting academic performance, social relationships, and overall quality of life (Ashipala & Albanus, 2023; Birhan et al., 2023). Therefore, addressing these maladaptive coping strategies through interventions like cognitive-behavioral therapy and mindfulness can enhance resilience and promote adaptive coping mechanisms, ultimately improving mental health outcomes across diverse populations (Theodoratou, 2023; Worst & Thompson, 2023).

Research findings consistently demonstrate a significant link between childhood trauma, including experiences in boarding schools, and various adult mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, emotional dysregulation, and complex PTSD. Childhood trauma, broadly defined, is associated with increased risks of depression and anxiety in adulthood, as evidenced by multiple studies that highlight the role of trauma characteristics like type, variety, and repetition in influencing mental health outcomes (Hong et al., 2023; Renu, 2023). Specifically, boarding school experiences can be traumatic due to the separation from family and the potential for abuse, leading to long-term impacts on identity and self-concept, which are crucial for mental health stability (Simpson et al., 2022). The prevalence of PTSD symptoms among adolescents in boarding schools further emphasizes the potential for these environments to contribute to complex trauma, which can manifest as emotional dysregulation and internalizing disorders in adulthood (Rau et al., 2023). Moreover, complex trauma exposure in early life is

linked to internalizing disorders and emotion regulation issues, which mediate the relationship between trauma and mental health disparities (Pfluger et al., 2022). The NAKO Health Study corroborates these findings by showing that individuals with a history of childhood trauma are more likely to develop depression and anxiety disorders, with stronger associations observed in younger individuals (Klinger-König et al., 2023). Additionally, adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which include boarding school trauma, have a dose-response relationship with poor adult mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD (Thurston et al., 2022). The systematic review by McKay et al. (2021) further supports the association between childhood trauma and adult mental disorders, emphasizing the impact of emotional abuse and parental loss, which are relevant in the context of boarding schools. Overall, these findings highlight the critical need for early intervention and tailored therapeutic strategies to address the long-term mental health impacts of boarding school trauma and other childhood adversities (Pandey & Bhat, 2023; Renu, 2023).

8. Institutional Critiques and Recommendations

Boarding schools, while often lauded for their academic rigor and opportunities for personal growth, have been critiqued for fostering environments that can inadvertently lead to emotional neglect and bullying. The transition to boarding school can be particularly challenging for adolescents, as it involves adapting to a new environment where home and school are merged, often leading to a loss of privacy and personal freedom, and necessitating high levels of self-reliance and independence (Lester et al., 2013). This transition can exacerbate feelings of isolation and vulnerability, making students more susceptible to bullying, which is often institutionalized within the culture of boarding schools. Bullying in these settings can be relentless, as students have limited options to escape their aggressors, and it is sometimes justified as a tradition or rite of passage (Lester et al., 2013). Emotional neglect is another critical issue, as the separation from family and primary attachment figures can constitute a significant trauma, leading to what has been termed Boarding School Syndrome, where individuals develop defensive mechanisms that can distort intimate relationships into adulthood (Schaverien, 2011). The emotional and psychological well-being of students is further compromised by the prevalence of bullying, which is negatively correlated with well-being and can lead to long-term mental health issues (Kulkarni & Patki, 2016). Empathy training has been shown to reduce bullying behaviors and increase empathy among students, suggesting that targeted interventions can mitigate some of these negative outcomes (Siregar et al., 2024). However, the institutional culture of boarding schools often perpetuates a hypermasculine environment that can exacerbate bullying, as seen in other institutional settings like the U.S. Naval Academy, where gender-based bullying was prevalent (DeJordy & Barrett, 2014). The historical context of boarding schools, particularly in the United States, also highlights the severe impact of emotional and cultural neglect, as seen in the experiences of Native American children who suffered from forced removal and abuse (Lajimodiere & Carmen, 2013). Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes empathy training, fostering positive peer relationships, and a systematic whole-school approach to bullying prevention (Lester & Mander, 2015).

To address the systemic reforms needed in boarding school practices, particularly focusing on emotional support systems, anti-bullying interventions, and stronger mental health

frameworks, a multifaceted approach is essential. Boarding schools, by their nature, present unique challenges such as the need for students to adapt to living away from home, which can exacerbate emotional and mental health issues (Mander et al., 2013). A critical reform is the implementation of comprehensive anti-bullying strategies. Current measures in semi-boarding schools, especially in regions like China's second-tier cities, are inadequate, lacking legal recourse and specific anti-bullying policies. Recommendations include specialized education on bullying, awareness-raising activities, and the establishment of early warning systems and psychological support mechanisms (Miao, 2024). Similarly, in Islamic boarding schools, adaptive psychology and mental health interventions are crucial. Enhancing teacher counseling abilities and implementing anti-bullying policies can provide mental health coaching and create a supportive environment (Prasetyo, 2023). Furthermore, integrating a multitiered system of support (MTSS) can effectively address internalizing emotional and behavioral problems by aligning positive behavioral interventions with expanded school mental health services (Weist et al., 2018). This approach is supported by evidence suggesting that positive classroom management, access to physical activity, and peer mentoring significantly impact student mental health (Troy et al., 2022). Additionally, the integration of school-based mental health services within a tiered system, as highlighted during the COVID-19 crisis, emphasizes the importance of universal screening and collaboration with medical professionals and community agencies to enhance accessibility and effectiveness (Mathur et al., 2022). Equitable practices in school mental health are also vital, particularly for culturally and linguistically diverse students who face barriers to treatment. Addressing systemic racism and inequity within schools is necessary to ensure all students receive adequate support (DeBoer et al., 2022). Finally, adopting a child rights framework, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, can guide the development of policies and practices that promote psychological well-being and align with the broader educational goals (Cornell et al., 2020). These reforms, when implemented collectively, can create a safer, more supportive environment for boarding school students, addressing both their immediate and long-term emotional and mental health needs.

Educational institutions have an ethical obligation to proactively address the emotional welfare of their students and staff, emphasizing transparency, support systems, and accountability. This responsibility is rooted in the broader ethical standards that govern higher education, which include promoting open communication and ensuring fairness in decision-making processes (Pant, 2024). Institutions must cultivate an environment that supports emotional well-being, particularly in the context of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work, where leaders from marginalized groups often bear a disproportionate emotional burden. Effective strategies include sharing DEI responsibilities, creating spaces for emotional expression, and role-modeling positive behaviors to build trust and reduce emotional labor (Ueda et al., 2023). Furthermore, the mental health of students is a critical concern, as highlighted by the inadequacy of current policies to address psychological distress. A comprehensive campus-based mental health program is recommended to ensure students' emotional preparedness for their professional challenges (Sanchez-Danday, 2019). The ethical responsibility of institutions extends to ensuring the safety and well-being of researchers, particularly in online contexts, where planning and support are crucial for ethical research conduct (Mattheis & Kingdon, 2020). Additionally, fostering a supportive environment that

mitigates issues like bullying through ethical education can enhance students' emotional well-being and resilience (Marhaendra, 2024). The systemic issues within educational settings, such as high-stakes testing and rigid structures, also contribute to emotional discord, necessitating a shift towards a more empathetic and flexible institutional culture (McKnight, 2008). By addressing these multifaceted challenges, educational institutions can fulfill their ethical obligations and create a nurturing environment that prioritizes the emotional welfare of all stakeholders.

9. Personal Narratives and Reflections

The power of lived experience, particularly through the sharing of anonymous or pseudonymous stories, plays a crucial role in illustrating the reality of emotional scars and pathways to healing for survivors of various traumas. These narratives provide a profound insight into the complexities of recovery and the transformation of personal identity. For instance, the narrative of a male survivor of childhood sexual violence highlights how personal stories can drive social change and personal growth, emphasizing the importance of activism in overcoming trauma and fostering posttraumatic growth (PTG; Balfour, 2022). Similarly, the lived experiences of child sexual abuse survivors reveal the deep emotional scars and recurring trauma memories, while also demonstrating resilience and the potential for healing within supportive networks (Magbanua et al., 2023). In the realm of mental health, the integration of lived experiences into treatment and recovery narratives has been shown to enhance understanding and improve outcomes. The use of personal narratives in mental health care, such as those shared in the *Journal of Psychiatric & Mental Health Nursing*, emphasizes the importance of ethical considerations and the need for confidentiality when sharing these stories (Baker, 2023). Furthermore, the role of lived experience in mental health services is highlighted by the concept of the "wounded healer," where mental health professionals with personal experiences of mental illness contribute significantly to patient care and outcomes (Taylor, 2024). In the context of eating disorders, peer support and the inclusion of lived experiences in treatment programs have been shown to inspire hope and foster connections, ultimately leading to improved treatment outcomes and clinical innovation (Duvall & Hanson, 2024). Additionally, the use of lived experience in performance, such as storytelling by those affected by gambling harm, has been effective in reducing stigma and changing attitudes and behaviors among professionals and the community (Thomas et al., 2023). These examples collectively demonstrate that sharing lived experiences, whether anonymously or pseudonymously, not only validates the survivor's journey but also serves as a powerful tool for education, empathy, and societal change, ultimately contributing to the healing process.

Survivors of trauma confront their experiences and reclaim their narratives through various transformative processes that foster resilience. Personal narratives play a crucial role in shaping self-concept and psychological resilience, as seen in cancer survivors who reconstruct their life stories to maintain a coherent sense of self amidst the disruption caused by illness (Ramya & Sheelam, 2024). Similarly, women who have experienced intimate partner violence utilize narrative processing to mediate the impact of PTSD and depression, with resilience emerging as a key factor in emotional and cognitive processing of trauma (Castiglioni et al., 2023). Initiatives like Insight Exchange emphasize the importance of victim-survivor-centered approaches, highlighting the resistance and responses of survivors to violence and thereby

enhancing their agency and resilience (Funston et al., 2023). Educational theater has been employed to support female survivors of wartime sexual violence in Kosovo, using performance to foster empathy and social integration, thus aiding in the healing process (Ferati, 2024). Among Eritrean refugees, Information and Communication Technology-enabled interventions have shown promise in reducing traumatic stress and enhancing social and economic resilience, although challenges such as connectivity issues remain (Kidane, 2024). The resilience of memory, as explored in the context of Armenian and Irish national identities, emphasizes the role of counter-memory in challenging dominant narratives and fostering a sense of continuity and adaptation (Beukian & Graff-McRae, 2018). These diverse approaches illustrate that resilience is not a static state but a dynamic process involving the reconstruction of narratives, the integration of traumatic experiences, and the empowerment of survivors through community and cultural interventions. This multifaceted resilience is crucial for overcoming trauma and reclaiming one's narrative, ultimately leading to personal and collective healing.

Moreover, intersectionality adds critical nuance to our understanding of trauma within boarding schools. Students' experiences are not only shaped by institutional structures but also by their identities across gender, race, class, and linguistic backgrounds. Gendered hierarchies often manifest through normalized hazing, toxic masculinity, or the silencing of female vulnerability, particularly in male-dominated or militarized boarding environments. Ethnic and racial minorities in historically colonial or assimilationist institutions, such as Indigenous students in residential schools across Canada, the U.S., and Australia frequently endured systemic racism, cultural erasure, and intergenerational trauma. Socio-economic status further stratifies student experiences, with working-class or scholarship students in elite institutions often encountering social exclusion, internalized inferiority, or disproportionate disciplinary scrutiny. Language barriers also exacerbate feelings of alienation, particularly in international or monolingual institutions, where linguistic differences can become fault lines for peer aggression and institutional neglect.

These culturally and structurally embedded dynamics shape not only how trauma is experienced but also what coping mechanisms are seen as acceptable or even possible. A trauma-informed lens that ignores these cultural and intersectional complexities risks perpetuating epistemic injustice, misinterpreting or invalidating survivor experiences through a monocultural or decontextualized framework. Therefore, any effort toward reform, healing, or policy change in residential education must engage with the pluralism of cultural norms and the intersecting identities that frame how students endure, resist, and recover from institutional trauma.

10. Healing and Resilience: Pathways Forward

Addressing boarding school trauma requires a multifaceted therapeutic approach that incorporates various evidence-based methods, such as attachment-based therapy, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (TF-CBT), and mindfulness approaches. Attachment-based therapy, as discussed in the context of trauma-focused mentalization-based treatment (MBT-TF), is particularly effective for individuals with attachment trauma, as it helps restore mentalizing abilities disrupted by trauma and fosters epistemic trust, which is crucial for processing traumatic experiences within relationships (Bateman et al., 2023; Smits et al., 2024).

Trauma-focused CBT, a well-supported intervention for PTSD in children and adolescents, has been shown to reduce symptoms of posttraumatic stress and depression, especially when integrated with digital tools to enhance accessibility and engagement (Diržytė et al., 2024; Syros et al., 2022). This approach is particularly relevant in school settings, where collaborative efforts between educational institutions and mental health services can provide comprehensive support for traumatized youth (Lanktree, 2024). Mindfulness-based interventions, such as mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT), have demonstrated efficacy in improving emotional regulation among students experiencing homesickness and other emotional challenges in boarding schools (Dewi et al., 2024). These interventions not only help students manage their emotions but also enhance their engagement with other therapeutic modalities, such as prolonged exposure therapy, by increasing distress tolerance and self-efficacy among both clients and therapists (Price et al., 2024). The integration of mindfulness practices into therapy can also address the unique challenges faced by individuals with boarding school syndrome, where denial, shame, and privilege often complicate the therapeutic process. Expert therapist knowledge and validation of the boarding school experience are crucial in overcoming these barriers and facilitating emotional expression, identity reconstruction, and relationship transformation (Emerson-Smith, 2021). Overall, a combination of these therapeutic methods, tailored to individual needs and supported by a trauma-informed school environment, can effectively address the complex trauma associated with boarding school experiences (Knight, 2024; Wen et al., 2022).

Building emotional resilience for individuals affected by boarding school experiences involves cultivating self-compassion, forming healthy relationships, and reclaiming emotional agency. Self-compassion is a critical component, as it has been shown to buffer against psychological distress and enhance emotional resilience. It involves treating oneself with kindness, recognizing common humanity, and maintaining mindfulness, which collectively reduce self-criticism and promote well-being (Warren et al., 2016). Self-compassion is associated with increased resilience and curiosity, which are essential for navigating the challenges of adolescence and beyond (Bluth et al., 2018). Moreover, fostering self-compassion can lead to improved psychological well-being, characterized by greater optimism, life satisfaction, and reduced negative affect (Bag et al., 2022). Forming healthy relationships is another vital aspect, as strength-based relationships are crucial for healthy development, especially for those who have experienced adverse childhood events (Ginsburg, 2020). The Resiliency Rainbow Toolkit provides practical strategies to help individuals identify their support networks, recognize their strengths, and build supportive friendships, which are essential for emotional resilience (Ttofa, 2017). Additionally, emotional regulation strategies, such as mindfulness and self-compassion, can help individuals manage stress and maintain emotional equilibrium, further supporting resilience (Bein, 2013). Reclaiming emotional agency involves empowering individuals to recognize and enhance their emotional resources, which can lead to improved health behaviors and stress management (Davis, 2009). By integrating these elements, individuals can build a robust foundation of emotional resilience, enabling them to cope with the unique challenges posed by their boarding school experiences and fostering long-term emotional well-being.

Creating emotionally nurturing educational environments in boarding schools requires a multifaceted approach that integrates peer support programs, psychological safety training, and

systemic policy changes. Peer support is crucial; it has been shown to positively influence students' emotional well-being and life satisfaction, particularly in boarding settings where students rely more on peers than parents for emotional support (Li et al., 2023). Implementing structured peer support programs can enhance students' social-emotional well-being by fostering a sense of belonging and community (Fredrick et al., 2022). Psychological safety training is another vital component, as it helps create a school climate where students feel safe and supported, reducing conduct and peer problems (Fredrick et al., 2022). This can be achieved by incorporating character education and socioemotional learning into the curriculum, as seen in military boarding schools, which emphasize values like respect and responsibility, aligning with Maslow's hierarchy of needs to ensure students' basic psychological needs are met (Evans & Campbell, 2020). Systemic policy changes are necessary to sustain these efforts, requiring a commitment from educational leaders to prioritize character education and emotional well-being in their strategic planning (Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024). This includes empowering teachers through professional development and creating policies that support a nurturing school climate (Halimatussa'diyah et al., 2024). Additionally, the development of tools like the Boarding School Climate Scale (BSCS) can help administrators assess and improve the school environment by focusing on factors such as pastoral care, discipline, and resource support (Mehmood et al., 2021). Overall, a comprehensive strategy that combines peer support, psychological safety, and policy reform can transform boarding schools into emotionally nurturing environments that support students' holistic development (Arifin, 2024; O'Bryan et al., 2020; Spano, 2007).

11. Conclusion

Boarding schools, despite their prestige and structured environments, uniquely contribute to profound emotional scarring, exacerbating experiences of bullying, abandonment issues, and long-term psychological distress. Unlike traditional schooling, boarding schools operate within a closed environment where students have little reprieve from peer interactions, creating conditions where bullying can become relentless and institutionalized. The rigid structures and disciplinary frameworks of these institutions further reinforce emotional suppression, discouraging vulnerability and self-expression. In the absence of familial support, students are left to navigate emotional hardships alone, often internalizing feelings of isolation and inadequacy. Psychological theories, particularly attachment theory, illustrate how the early loss of secure attachments leads to maladaptive coping mechanisms, difficulties in trust and intimacy, and, in extreme cases, symptoms of PTSD. The lived experiences of former boarders further reveal the persistent fear of abandonment and struggles with self-worth, reinforcing the long-term consequences of these environments. Ultimately, these findings highlight the urgent need for a critical reassessment of boarding schools, not only as educational institutions but as psychological environments that shape childhood and adolescence in ways that extend into adulthood.

The emotional wounds of boarding school survivors have long been overlooked, leaving many former students struggling with trust issues, self-criticism, and difficulty forming close relationships later in life. It is imperative that educators, policymakers, parents, and mental health professionals acknowledge and address these psychological consequences. Boarding

schools must integrate trauma-informed practices that prioritize students' emotional well-being, including structured mental health support, early interventions for at-risk students, and the eradication of hazing or institutionalized bullying. Institutional responsibility must be redefined, ensuring that schools are held accountable for the long-term psychological welfare of students. Transparency in anti-bullying policies, staff training in emotional intelligence, and the establishment of independent oversight committees are necessary to prevent emotional neglect. Furthermore, families must be encouraged to maintain close emotional bonds with their children, with structured systems in place to counter the effects of early separation and abandonment trauma. Providing safe spaces for survivors, including support groups and therapeutic interventions, can facilitate healing and validation. Additionally, policymakers must enforce strict anti-bullying measures and psychological safety training while developing guidelines that align with children's fundamental emotional needs.

While this study sheds light on the harmful psychological effects of boarding schools, further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts on former students. Longitudinal studies could examine how these early experiences shape adulthood, particularly in areas of mental health, interpersonal relationships, and professional success. Comparative analyses between boarding schools and other residential education settings, such as military academies or international exchange programs, could provide insight into whether similar patterns of trauma and resilience emerge in different contexts. Additionally, understanding the cultural variations in boarding school experiences is crucial, as students from different backgrounds may experience and process emotional distress in diverse ways. Another important area of study is the effectiveness of various therapeutic approaches, including trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, attachment-based interventions, and mindfulness practices, in mitigating the psychological impact of boarding school trauma. Research on institutional leadership and its influence on students' emotional well-being could also inform better policies, emphasizing the need for a shift toward more nurturing and psychologically supportive school environments.

Recognizing the profound psychological effects of boarding school experiences is the first step toward systemic change. By breaking the silence around these issues and implementing concrete reforms, we can ensure that education does not come at the cost of emotional well-being. No child's development should be sacrificed in the name of tradition; it is the responsibility of educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers to create learning environments that foster both intellectual and emotional growth. Moving forward, continued research and advocacy will be essential in transforming boarding schools into places of true learning, where students are not only academically enriched but also emotionally supported, protected, and empowered to thrive.

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