Pergamon

Child Abuse
& Neglect

Bullying among Turkish high school students

Yasemin Karaman Kepenekci [*], Şakir Çınkır

Ankara University, Faculty of Educational Sciences, 06590 Cebeci Ankara, Turkey

Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this study was to investigate school bullying among public high school students in Turkey.

Method: This study used a survey to examine different aspects of bullying in schools. The participants ($N = 692$) were students chosen from five state high schools in Ankara in the 2000–2001 academic year. A self-administered questionnaire of 28 single or multiple-choice questions was devised by the authors to examine the students' perceptions of bullying in schools. Descriptive statistical analyses were used to interpret the data.

Results: Of the total of 692 students, everyone reported having been bullied. Thirty three point five percent had been bullied verbally, 35.5% had been bullied physically, 28.3% had been bullied emotionally, and 15.6% had been bullied sexually, at least once during the academic year. Victims were faced with one or more types of bullying. There were clear gender differences, with boys consistently experiencing more physical bullying including kicking-slapping, assault with a knife, rude physical jokes, and more verbal bullying including name calling and insulting-swearing (all significant at $p < .001$). Among the four types of bullying, the most common forms of bullying faced by girls and boys were the same in order: pushing (58.1% girls/63.5% boys) and name-calling (44.1%/61.8%). About one-third of the students stated that they did not get any help in coping with bullying. The main reason for bullying was pretending to be strong (43.1%). Among the four types of bullying in both genders, students generally reported negative views about the consequences on them including low psychological well-being, poor social adjustment, and psychological distress.

Conclusions: Bullying is a serious problem in schools in Turkey and is a matter of recent concern. This is the first research investigating bullying in Turkey. At the present there is no policy at the central level to deal with bullying. It is expected that the results of this study will raise the awareness of students, teachers, school principals, and educational managers and parents to the problem.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Bully; Victim; School bullying

---

[*] Corresponding author.

Introduction

Over the last 20 years there has been a growing awareness of school bullying in many countries of the world. As Olweus (1993), Oliver, Hoover, and Hazler (1994), Banks (1997), and Fitzgerald (1999) have pointed out, bullying in schools is a worldwide problem that can have negative consequences on the general school climate and on the rights of students to learn in a safe environment without fear.

Bullies come from virtually all social classes and family backgrounds. The main characteristic of bullies is the need to feel powerful and in control. Bullies seem to derive satisfaction from imposing injury and suffering on others (Banks, 1997; Elliot, 1998). Bullies also have little sympathy for their victims (Fitzgerald, 1999; Olweus, 1999) and defend their actions by saying that their victims provoked them in some way (Banks, 1997; Elliot, 1998). Stephenson and Smith (1989) pointed out that the bullies/victims are the least popular in their peer groups, are easily provoked and provoke others. Studies also indicate that victims rarely defend themselves or react when confronted by bullies. Victims tend to be close to their parents, quiet, and may have parents who can be described as overprotective (Olweus, 1993; Elliot, 1997).

Bullying can also have lifelong negative consequences for victims. Studies investigating the consequences of involvement in bully victim problems have focused upon possible negative mental and physical health outcome. Rigby (2003) identified four categories of negative health conditions as (1) low psychological well-being, (2) poor social adjustment, (3) psychological distress, and (4) physical unwellness. Elliot (1998) points out that bullying makes the victims miserable, threatens them and causes them to feel frightened and unhappy, especially as victims have in no way provoked the bully. For example, Sharp's (1995) study correlates the consequences of bullying in a sample of 723 secondary school pupils aged 13–16 years and found that 20% of these pupils said they would miss school to avoid being bullied; 29% found it difficult to concentrate on their school work; 22% felt physically ill after being bullied; and 20% experienced sleeping difficulties as a result of the bullying. Williams, Chambers, Logan, and Robinson (1996) interviewed 3,000 children with similar results and further evidence of the negative consequences is provided by Baldings, Regis, Wise, Bish, and Muirden (1996).

Research on the prevalence and location of bullying has occurred in diverse settings, including Norway, UK, Spain, Italy, and the United States. The prevalence of bullying in secondary schools varies, for example, in the UK, the prevalence was 4.2–25% (Whithney & Smith, 1993) and in the USA between 6 and 10% (Nansel et al., 2001).

The definition of bullying

The term "bullying" has been defined in a number of ways. Olweus (1999) states that: "a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more other students." In the study of Johnson, Munn, and Edwards (1991; in Elliot, 1997) bullying is described as involving the conscious desire to hurt or threaten or frighten someone else or the use of aggression with the intention of hurting another person.

Several aspects of bullying follow from these definitions. First, it is an aggressive form of behaviour or intentional harm-doing. Second, bullying is carried out repeatedly over time. Third, there is a power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Olweus, 1993). Bullying is made up of direct behavior such as teasing, taunting, threatening, hitting, stealing and breaking belongings that are initiated by one or more