

Student Teachers' Perceptions of Bullying in Schools

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ABSTRACT The purpose of the study is to investigate and provide insights into the problems concerning school bullying. The objective of the research was to investigate the following issues like What kinds of behaviors are defined as bullying by student teachers?, How frequently do students engage in bullying behaviors?, Where do these behaviors most commonly take place in a typical school environment?, and How do student teachers deal with incidents of bullying? The present study applies a quantitative research design. To formulate availability sampling, student teachers were selected from the teaching certificate program in Yıldız Technical University. A total of 400 student teachers participated in the study. The study explored that verbal bullying appeared the most often perceived by the student teachers followed by emotional bullying as compared to physical bullying, and finally sexual bullying, was the least observed type of bullying.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of bullying has been on the agenda of schools worldwide since the last decade (Bauman et al. 2008). In line with current research, schools and some non-governmental organizations have implemented anti-bullying policies to maintain a safe and healthy environment for school children. Schools have developed practices for working closely with parents, for appropriate and effective responses to bullying, and for the rigorous surveillance of playgrounds and whole school activities to help develop constructive interpersonal attitudes and behavior. Vos et al. (2012) noted that an ineffective or 'unhealthy' organizational climate can have a negative effect on school activities. Bullying, not only has a destructive impact on the school climate as a whole, rather, it can also have long term psychological effects on individual students. In a South African context, Pretorius and Villiers (2009) highlighted the need for democratic leadership in schools and emphasized the importance of school leadership teams. With a democratic setting and the active participation of teachers, school administrators, students and parents, "cases of bullying" can be discussed in a transparent manner, leading to the elimination or minimization of destructive behavior. In addition, Bauman et al. (2008) argued that bullying is not clearly defined in most of the studies.

A review of the literature was conducted revealing studies undertaken on the issues of bullying in schools followed by an empirical investigation based on student teachers' views regarding bullying in their schools. The article is expected to provide teachers and school administrators with the anticipated types of bullying incidents that may occur at schools.

Although, researchers may have varying definitions of bullying, Greene (2000) suggested five key features:

1. The bully intends to inflict harm or fear upon the victim.
2. Aggression toward the victim occurs repeatedly.
3. The victim does not provoke bullying behavior by using verbal or physical aggression.
4. Bullying occurs in familiar social groups.
5. The bully is more powerful (either real or perceived power) than the victim.

Bullying first became the focus of large-scale social and psychological research in the late 1970s and early 1980s, primarily in Norway, Sweden, and Finland (Greene 2000). In Malta, Borg's (1999) study of 6,282 pupils investigated that one in every three pupils was engaged in serious bullying (either as bullies or victims). Utilizing a 2001 study by the Kaiser Foundation in conjunction with Nickelodeon TV network and Children Now, Coloroso (2003) revealed that 86 percent of the children, aged 12–15 interviewed

said that they were teased or bullied at school—making bullying more prevalent than smoking, alcohol, drugs, or sex among the same age group.

Research in Turkey has also shown that bullying is a serious problem in schools. Kepenekci and Cinkir (2006) viewed that, at least once during the academic year, 35.3 percent of pupils in their study reported having been bullied verbally, 35.5 percent were bullied physically, 28 percent were bullied emotionally and 15.6 percent were bullied sexually. Just over half of the verbal bullying was calling names (52.0%). Most of the physical bullying took the form of pushing (60.5%) and emotional bullying was mainly humiliation (30.6%). Yurtal and Cenkseven's (2007) study also indicated that 75% of the students experienced the following bullying behavior: "pushing, swearing, calling names, damaging personal belongings and gossiping".

Olweus (1993: 9), a pioneer in this area of research, defines bullying or victimization as instances 'when [a student] is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students'. Olweus (1993) proposes that to apply the term bullying to an incident there should be an imbalance in strength, where the student who receives the negative actions is unable to defend him/herself and is helpless against the bully (Houndoumadi and Pateraki 2001). Several aspects of bullying follow from these definitions:

1. It is an aggressive form of behavior or intentional harm-doing.
2. It is carried out repeatedly over time.
3. There is a power imbalance between the bully and the victim (Olweus 1993; Kepenekci and Cinkir 2006).

Bullying can also be viewed as a component of a more generally antisocial and rule-breaking behavior pattern (Olweus 1995). Bullies are, "often characterized by impulsivity and strong needs to dominate other people ... they have little empathy...[and] they are likely to be physically stronger than...the victims" (Olweus 1995: 197). Victims are often cautious, sensitive and quiet students, who suffer from low self-esteem. Handwerk (2005) also claims that victims lack the social skills that can help deflect bullying, such as knowing how to use humor. When bullied, they often react emotionally -crying, getting angry, withdrawing - which only encourages more abuse. Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) reveal that families play a significant role in preparing their kids to deal with bullying.

Handwerk (2005: 19) notes that bullies can be quite popular among their friends as opposed to the common belief, "Many times, they are very connected to school life through athletic, academic or other extracurricular activities. Bullies are generally strong, confident and aggressive much more so than their victims, who, by comparison, tend to be weak, timid and non-assertive".

In fact, several common assumptions about the causes of bullying receive little support from empirical data. These include the hypotheses that bullying is a consequence of (a) large class or school size, (b) competition for grades and failure in school, and (c) differences in appearance. There may also be other factors related to personality characteristics. In addition, teachers' attitudes, behavior and routines play a major role in determining the extent to which the problem will occur in a classroom or a school setting (Olweus 1995).

Smith and Sharp (1994) described bullying as physical and verbal. Physical bullying, which includes actions such as kicking and damaging personal belongings, and verbal bullying, which includes actions such as using humiliating names, gossiping about and isolating the person.

Coloroso (2003) is of the opinion that identifying relational bullying is the most difficult of all the types of bullying. This type of bullying includes activities such as ignoring somebody's existence and regularly excluding a child, activities which can be difficult to recognize. Aggressive looks, sighing, rolling their eyes, frowning, pulling faces and sniggering are also categorized as the body language of bullying activities (Coloroso 2003).

Sexual and racial harassment are sometimes viewed as types of bullying (Smith et al. 2004). In Amsterdam in 2000-2001, the Municipal Health Service Department of Child Health Care approached all 104 primary schools to invite them to participate in a study. The results of this study of 4,721 pupils aged 9-13 indicated that depression and suicidal ideation were more common in children, who sometimes or frequently bullied other children. This was true for both boys and girls and for bullying directly as well as indirectly (Van et al. 2003). Though bullying and the perception of bullying of various stakeholders had been investigated, as seen above, there remains a paucity of empirical data concerning stu-

dent teacher perceptions on bullying. Therefore, the aim of the present study is to investigate student teachers' perceptions of bullying to gain new perspectives and insights on the bullying dilemma with which current and future teachers and administrators will be faced.

In this context, the purpose of the study is to investigate and provide insights into the problems concerning school bullying in Istanbul, Turkey. The research questions that directed the study were as follows:

1. What kinds of behaviors are defined as bullying by student teachers?
2. How frequently do student teachers observe students engaged in bullying behaviors in a typical school environment?
3. Where, according to student teachers' perceptions, do bullying behaviors most commonly take place?
4. How do student teachers deal with incidents of bullying?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study applies a quantitative research design contextualized by a post-positivistic investigative approach. As discussed below, the post-positivistic approach makes it possible for this research to make meaningful and statistically justifiable analyses, conclusions and generalizations (Maree and Pietersen 2008; Creswell 2009).

Participants

Using purposeful sampling, researchers selected particular subjects from the population, student teachers enrolled in the teaching certificate program at Yildiz Technical University in Istanbul, Turkey. Out of the five universities in Istanbul with Faculties of Education, Yildiz Technical University students (student teachers) were selected using availability sampling since researchers serve as lecturers in that university's program. A total of 410 student teachers participated in the study. Out of the 410 questionnaires received, 10 were not used due to having incomplete information. The sample size was therefore 400 in total. 354 of the participants were aged 20-29 and 46 were aged 30 and above.

Measuring Instrument

Tintorer's survey (2004) titled 'Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of and Responses to School Bullying', and Rigby's (2006) survey titled 'Handling Bullying' was combined as one form. This new form's translation as well as the validity and reliability study had been previously conducted by Kanik (2010).

The survey was divided into four sections. The first three sections of the survey are from Tintorer (2004). The first section asked student teachers the extent to which they defined certain behaviors as bullying. Responses ranged from 1.00-1.75: 'I definitely disagree'; 1.76-2.50: 'I disagree'; 2.51- 3.25: 'I agree'; 3.26-4.00: 'I definitely agree'. The second section asked student teachers for an estimate of how frequently students engage in bullying behaviors in a typical school environment. Responses ranged from 1.00-1.75: 'never'; 1.76-2.50: 'rarely'; 2.51- 3.25: 'sometimes'; 3.26-4.00: 'frequently'. The third section asked student teachers where they believed bullying most commonly took place. Responses ranged from 1.00-1.75: 'never'; 1.76-2.50: 'rarely'; 2.51- 3.25: 'sometimes'; 3.26-4.00: 'frequently'.

The last section of survey is from Rigby (2006). This section focused on how student teachers would respond to various acts of bullying. 1- 1.80: 'I definitely would not'; 1.81-2.60: 'I would not'; 2.61-3.40: 'I'm unsure'; 3.41-4.20: 'I would'; 4.21-5.00: 'I definitely would'. For each of the scales, higher scores indicated stronger endorsement of the strategy.

Reliability and Validity

The SPSS 16.0 program was used in the analysis of data. Kanik's (2010) Reliability and Validity analysis was used. Alpha values in the scale for "Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of and Responses to School Bullying" corresponding to the four factors were as follows:

- ♦ Physical bullying sub scale: .917
- ♦ Verbal bullying sub scale: .890
- ♦ Emotional bullying sub scale: .865
- ♦ Sexual bullying sub scale: .888

Alpha values in the scales for "Handling Bullying" corresponding to the five factors were as follows (Kanik 2010):

- ♦ Working with the victim sub scale: .69
- ♦ Working with the bully sub scale: .69
- ♦ Ignoring the incident sub scale: .58

- ♦ Enlisting other adults sub scale: .57
- ♦ Disciplining the bully sub scale: .60

Ethical Considerations and Administration

Written permission was obtained from Tintorer (2004) and Rigby (2006) to use the questionnaire and from Kanik to use the Turkish context questionnaire, the instrument translated into Turkish by Kanik (2010). The authors also received official permission to use the reliability and validity analyses. Permission was also obtained from Yildiz Technical University, Department of Educational Sciences, and the student teachers selected from the Teacher Certificate Program run by the same department. The researcher distributed the questionnaires during class hours to the student teachers. Guidelines for the completion of the questionnaire were given to the participants. Participants were given 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Participants were assured that their identity would be kept confidential.

RESULTS

The study investigated student teachers' observations and perceptions regarding bullying in the schools where they were being trained. An analysis of the results is presented below in Tables 1 to 4.

Table 2: Frequency of bullying types

		Mean	sd
<i>Verbal Bullying</i>	Teasing	3.50	.728
	Insulting or calling someone a name	3.37	.866
	Starting hurtful rumors about someone	2.74	.929
	Making fun of way someone looks (that is, clothes, weight)	3.16	.934
	Threatening	2.83	.953
<i>Emotional Bullying</i>	Trying to get others to dislike someone	2.81	.890
	Not being listened to on purpose by another child	2.86	.827
	Socially excluding someone	2.83	.918
	Making others not to talk someone	2.61	.904
<i>Physical Bullying</i>	Intentionally leaving someone out of an activity	2.58	.874
	Bumping into or pushing someone intentionally	3.11	.874
	Intentionally kicking someone	2.92	.975
	Stealing or taking someone something from someone	2.30	.836
	Punching or hitting someone	2.87	.976
<i>Sexual Bullying</i>	Someone intentionally breaks or damages another peers property	2.41	.888
	Someone makes comments about another person's body	3.19	.926
	Sexual labeling/teasing (that is, faggot, <i>puto</i>)	3.23	.905
	Someone asks another peer to inappropriately touch them	1.64	.774
	Someone makes an obscene gesture toward another	2.60	1.022

Types of Behaviors Defined as Bullying

In this section of the survey there were 20 questions, which were divided into 4 categories as seen in Table 1. Considering there are four types of bullying such as verbal, emotional, physical and sexual; the study required student teachers to determine from a list of a variety of student interactions whether each interaction was an act of bullying or not.

Table 1: Types of behaviors defined as bullying

	N	Mean	Sd
Verbal bullying	400	3.10	0.708
Emotional bullying	400	2.74	0.706
Physical bullying	400	2.72	0.732
Sexual bullying	400	2.55	0.680

As could be seen in Table 1, student teachers recognized incidents of "verbal bullying" most frequently. This is followed by emotional bullying (2.74), physical bullying (2.72) and lastly sexual bullying (2.55). Mean scores for each item show that verbal bullying and emotional behaviors were more recognized by student teachers than physical and sexual behaviors as a bullying.

Frequency of Bullying

Table 2 demonstrates that how frequently student teachers observed students engaged in

bullying behaviors in a typical school environment. Student teachers were asked to reveal the frequency of behaviors they observed and perceived as bullying among the pupils at the schools they were trained. Verbal bullying, teasing, insulting or calling someone a name was observed "frequently". Starting hurting rumors about someone, making fun of way someone appears (that is, clothes, weight), threatening, and hurting somebody were observed "sometimes" by student teachers. As for emotional bullying, trying to get others to dislike someone, purposefully ignoring another child, socially excluding someone, making others not to talk someone and intentionally excluding someone from an activity fell into the "sometimes" category. Analysis of physical bullying shows that bumping into or pushing someone intentionally, intentionally kicking someone, stealing or taking something from someone and punching or hitting someone were "sometimes" seen in schools, whereas breaking or damaging another peers property was seen "rarely". The later results could be related to the policies implemented in schools as damaging another peers' property could be used as proof of bullying by the school administration. This might be the reason why it was seen less in schools. As for sexual bullying, making comments about another person's body has the highest mean score within the sexual bullying sub-dimension. It was "sometimes" seen in schools. However, asking another peer to inappropriately touch them was "never" observed in schools. Inappropriately touching another peer and making an obscene gesture toward another was "rarely" observed among the students.

Places of Bullying

Table 3 reveals the finding concerning the following research question: "According to stu-

Table 3: Places where bullying was observed

	X	ss
On the playground before school	3.65	1.575
Restrooms	2.36	.820
Hallways	3.54	.659
Classrooms	3.34	.794
Cafeteria	3.19	.769
Recess	3.71	.569
In line (to go into the classroom)	3.08	.807
On school buses	2.61	.838
Walking to school	2.70	.843
Walking home from school	3.03	.851

dent teachers' perceptions where do bullying behaviors most commonly take place?" Table 3 shows that bullying in schools was "Frequently" seen in the on the playground before school, hallways and classrooms. Bullying was also observed frequently during recess. Bullying was observed "Sometimes" in cafeteria, restrooms and on school buses. Bullying was also "sometimes" observed in line (to go into the classroom), walking to school and walking home from school. Students were also observed to be "sometimes" bullied in the cafeteria.

Strategies for Handling Bullying

Table 4 reveals the finding concerning the following research question: "How do student teachers deal with incidents of bullying?" In other words "What are their possible responses to bullying?" Table 4 shows 20 survey questions that were divided into 5 categories. "Ignoring the incident" had the highest score compared to the other strategies. This was followed by "working with the victim", "working with the bully", "enlisting other adults" and "disciplining the bully" respectively. The strategy of "disciplining the bully" was not often chosen to cope with bullying behaviors by student teachers. This could be explained by the teachers' general tendency to cope with problems in a constructive way at schools. It could be thought that "disciplining the bully" may have undesirable consequences on both the victim and the bully. The mean score for the strategy of "working with the victim" falls into the "Unsure" category. As for "working with the bully", student teachers indicated that they would probably not take any action.

Table 4: Student teachers' responses to bullying

	X	ss
Ignoring the incident	4.32	.661
Working with the victim	2.95	.936
Working with the bully	2.13	.702
Enlisting other adults	1.99	.661
Disciplining the bully	1.54	.600

DISCUSSION

Bullying is a high stakes issue in schools in all parts of the world. From a human rights perspective, Greene (2000) asserts that not only can

all forms of bullying be understood as human rights violations, but it is also clearly incumbent upon schools to provide social programs that remedy such infractions and the underlying norms and situations that facilitate the violations.

Research has shown that bullying in schools is widespread. Borg's (1999) study informed that one in every three pupils was engaged in serious bullying. A study of 150,000 Norwegian and Swedish students showed that 15 percent of the students aged roughly from 7 to 16 were regularly involved in bullying, approximately 9 percent as victims and 7 percent who bullied other students (Olweus 1995).

The study brings out that four types of bullying were observed in schools by student teachers. Verbal bullying appeared to be the most common type of bullying defined as bullying by the student teachers followed by emotional bullying and physical bullying respectively, whereas incidences of sexual bullying were the least recognized as bullying. Bullying in schools might have long term detrimental effects. Wet (2010) separated the influence of bullying into the three following categories: Personal lives at the micro level, influences on the institution in terms of teaching and learning and influences on the interaction between the victims and society at the macro level. Therefore, negative influences of bullying are spread on a wide spectrum starting from the individual to the society. Liepe-Levinson and Levinson (2005) also supported this concern in a study of students, in which symptoms of poor physical health were observed more among bullied students than students not involved in bullying behavior. Similarly, victimized children were more likely to have problems with sleeping, bed wetting, headaches and stomach-ache attacks. Dake et al.'s study (2003) revealed that, compared to non-involved students, victims are 4.6 times more likely, bullies 5.1 times more likely and bully/victims 8.7 times more likely to experience psychosomatic symptoms such as neck and shoulder pain, low back pain, stomachache, feeling tense and nervous, irritation or tantrums, difficulty sleeping or walking, headache and fatigue. The American Association of School Psychologists reported that every day over 160,000 children miss school for fear of being bullied (Liepe-Levinson and Levinson 2005).

The US study also highlighted different social aspects between the bully and the victim, for example, the different role that alcohol and

smoking plays for the bully and the victim. The study also explored that the poorer academic achievement was associated with both bullying and being bullied, while a poorer perceived school climate was also related to bullying. Poorer relationships with classmates and increased loneliness were associated with both, bullying and being bullied, while the ability to make friends was negatively related to being bullied and positively related to bullying (Tonja et al. 2001). Besides teachers noted that bullying rarely occurred in the classroom, but most likely to occur at recess followed by in the restrooms (Tintorer 2004). The present study also revealed that bullying was "frequently" seen in "school yards, halls and classrooms" and it was observed "frequently" during lesson breaks.

To reduce the frequency of school bullying school counsellors have a key role. They are responsible for running of pupil peer counselling. However, majority of pupils (60%) failed to identify that this service will help them to deal with bullying, and more than one in twenty pupils were not sure the services' main function (Boulton 2014). Researches on school safety show that an effective teaching and learning can be realized in a safe and secure school environment (Prinsloo 2005; Xaba 2006; Dilion 2007; Masitsa 2011). Bradshaw, Waasdorp and Johnson (2014) brought forward that the school-level indicators of disorder such as broken lights, cameras and electronic device usage have an essential impact on school bullying. Besides Leadbeater et al. (2014) found that there is a significant relationship between school climate dimensions and peer bullying. Briefly, to overcome the school bullying, a kind of team-work between principals, teachers, counsellors, parent, school staff and teacher trainers is necessary. Since no matter where in the world, our children are our future and they have the right to an education in a safe and pleasant environment.

CONCLUSION

The present study reveals that while verbal bullying is observed most frequently, sexual bullying is observed at the least by student teachers. The study also investigated that teasing is the most observed and asking another peer to inappropriately touch the other students is the least observed bullying behaviors. Besides, student teachers state that students bul-

ly their peers while they are in recess and student teachers usually ignore the incidents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrators and teachers should take necessary precautions to reduce bullying incidents as much as possible such as assigning responsibility for certain days to observe and monitor student behavior during break time. However, it is also learnt during these seminars that these preventive actions do not permanently alter student behavior. Alternative prevention strategies could be used to create a culture in which students internalize the idea of collaboration rather than confrontation. Such a culture needs to be cultivated because, as this study reveals, bullying sometimes occurs in “canteens, restrooms and school buses” as well as “on the way to classrooms”, “on the way to school” and “on the way back home”. The most common attitude student teachers employed was ignoring the incident. However, teachers should be leaders inside and outside the classrooms, both for their students and their colleagues. As future education leaders and as role models for appropriate behavior, they need to be trained in effective ways for dealing with bullying.

The study did not investigate student teacher perceptions of bullying with regards to demographic differences. Further, the research could examine student teachers' observations and experiences of bullying through in-depth interviews to determine the gender, age and socio-economic differences in cases of bullying, an aspect that has been highlighted in other researches.

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