



Investigation of the relationship between school climate, coping strategies, and peer bullying in secondary school students¹

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Abstract. The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between school climate and coping strategies and peer bullying in students in secondary school. The study population is secondary school students in the 7th and 8th grades. The study group included 284 students attending a secondary school located in Afyon (153 female and 131 male). The study used data collection instruments such as the School Climate Scale (SCS), KIDCOPE, and Bully Scale (BS). With Pearson Moments Multiplication Correlation Coefficient Technique, the relationships between SCS scores and KIDCOPE scores and bullying were examined. SCS total score and some of the subscales (fairness, order and discipline, parent involvement, resource sharing, student interpersonal relationships, and teacher-student relationships) have significant and positive relationships with peer bullying as a result of the analysis. Additionally, it was observed that there were positive and significant relationships between bullying and some of the subscales of KIDCOPE (avoidant coping and negative coping). In addition, multiple regression analysis was used to test the predictability of the school climate and coping strategies. As a result of the analysis, some of the SCS subscales (order and discipline and teacher-student relationships) and one of the KIDCOPE subscale (negative coping) were found to be a significant predictor of bullying.

Keywords: School climate, coping strategies, peer bullying, school environment, adolescence

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INTRODUCTION

Derived from the concept of organizational climate (Çalık & Kurt, 2010) and first used by George Sterns, school climate is an organizational feature that is influenced and influenced by all, including teachers, students, school administrators and parents, It is defined as a concept related to how they feel (Hoy, 2003).

Freiberg and Stein (2005) emphasized that this situation will positively affect everyone, from the manager, teacher and student of the positive school climate, and will make people feel happy and psychologically good. Therefore, school climate is an important factor in terms of the success of the students, psychological well-being, socializing and getting along with each other (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). A lot of studies show that the perceptions of students about the school climate affect academic motivation and success. These studies show that the perceptions of the students about the school climate also affect their behavioral and emotional issues. Research shows that perception of the school climate contributes positively to the students' positive self-confidence (Loukas, 2007).

School climate is a concept closely associated with strategies to coping with. School climate perception positively affects the coping strategies, and positive relationships between school climate and coping strategies are observed (Dobešová Cakirpaloglu, Čech, 2019; Dobešová Cakirpaloglu, Čech, Kvintová, 2017). The negative perception of the school climate can result in increased bullying behaviour. Indeed, studies show that the perception of negative school climate increases bullying behavior and impacts coping strategies negatively (Deniz Yöndem & Totan, 2008).

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Coping strategies are a dynamic process that includes specific cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses, used to combat stress and psychological distress, or to reduce the negative effects of resources, and the coping strategy to be used has a structure that varies from situation to situation. (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The process of choosing the coping strategy, therefore, depends on the stress source itself and the person's coping with that stress source. When individuals perceive the source of stress as controllable, they use problem-oriented coping strategies to solve the problem, but when they perceive the stressful situation as uncontrollable, they use emotion-oriented coping strategies as an attempt to manage the situation (Carver, Scheier and Weintraub, 1989).

Spirito, Stark and Williams (1988) describe the coping strategies used by adolescents; classified as active coping, negative coping and avoiding coping strategy. Active coping strategy; It draws attention in terms of having a constructive coping strategy. There is a positive orientation to the problems in the active coping strategy, and there are steps to identify the problem, understand it, produce solution options, decide which solution to apply, and evaluate the results. In avoiding coping strategy; There are non-functional parties in problem solving such as avoiding problems and not acting for the solution of the problem. In the negative coping strategy; There are features such as perceiving the problem as a threat, not believing that it can be solved, and accusing yourself and others (Bedel and Kutlu, 2018).

Coping strategies are considered an important factor in peer bullying (Harper, Parris, Henrich, Varjas & Meyers, 2012). Individuals using the negative coping strategy believe that they cannot overcome the problem. Believing that the solution is difficult can cause victims of bullying to enter the search for necessary help late. While individuals who use the active coping strategy (understanding the problem, seeking solution alternatives, implementation and evaluation) and who are in a positive school climate are able to effectively deal with bullying when they are exposed to bullying, the negative school climate factor and the negative coping strategy make it difficult to cope with bullying.

Victim students who experience peer bullying during their school years experience situations such as depression and low self-esteem in adulthood (Olweus, 2003), and show symptoms such as loneliness, decreased self-esteem, psychosomatic complaints, and depression (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Anxiety levels increase in individuals exposed to bully behavior, and situations such as anger, helplessness, not enjoying the school environment and not wanting to go to school occur (Borg, 1998).

There are distinctive features such as the intentional and repetitive behavior of bullying behavior, the presence of power imbalance between the bullying and victim, the harm shown and the intimidation direction of the behavior shown. While bullying students face higher levels of behavioral problems and negative attitudes towards school, students who are victims of bullying; Concentrated anxiety, depression, loneliness, unhappiness, intensity of physical illness symptoms, high levels of stress, social cohesion and self-confidence are encountered and (Gür, 2019) exposure to bullying has long-term social emotional and academic effects (McDougal & Vaillan, 2015).

There are many studies where the concepts of school climate, coping, and peer bullying are conducted within Turkey. Some of these studies are: The relationship between bullying status of primary school students with school climate, prosocial behavior, basic needs and gender (Çalık, Özbay, Özer, Kurt & Kandemir, 2009), Evaluation of school climate according to perceptions of secondary school students (Saraç, 2015), Perceptions of secondary school students towards school climate (Tavsanlı, Birgül & Oksal, 2016), The relationship between school burnout and emotional deafness and school climate in adolescents (Circır, 2018), Secondary school students' quality of school life, sense of belonging to school and factors affecting school climate (Günalan, 2018), School destruction and school climate relationship (Doğan, 2011), Virtual bullying and school climate relationship (Damascus, 2017), School climate of secondary school students as a predictor of school engagement (Özgenel, Yılmaz & Baydar, 2018), The relationship between school climate and bullying (Kartal & Bilgin, 2009; Kılıç, 2010; Özdemir, Sezgin, Şirin, Karip & Erkan, 2010; Karaman, 2011), Perceived social support in coping strategies (Bedel & Kutlu, 2015),

Coping strategies for psychological soundness of secondary school students (Bedel & Güler, 2019), Peer bullying and accompanying factors in secondary school students in primary education (Gür, 2019), The role of coping strategies in bullying and aggression in secondary school students (Bedel and Güler, 2020).

Peer bullying is an important social problem that affects our country's students directly, as in children and adolescents around the world, and exposure to bullying has a negative effect on individuals' physical and psychological development (Gür, 2019). To prevent bullying, the study of peer bullying in schools is of great importance. In the fields of individual and social development, coping strategies that secondary school students apply in the event of problems they face have an important place among the development tasks expected to be completed.

In schools, planning and implementation of works for the purpose of early intervention and prevention in order to prevent bullying behavior is also important in terms of being included within the scope of the Ministry of National Education Special Education and Guidance Advisory Services (2017).

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between school climate and coping strategies and peer bullying in secondary school students. The results to be obtained from the study are thought to contribute to the school climate, coping strategies and bullying literature, as well as preventive and developmental guidance and psychological literature. It is anticipated that the results achieved in this study will guide psychological counselors working in schools, prepare preventive guidance and psychological counseling programs and create their content. The aim of the study was therefore to examine the relationship between the school climate and coping strategies and to determine their role in peer bullying.

Purpose of the research

The purpose of this research is to study the relationship between the school climate and coping strategies in secondary school students with peer bullying.

Sub Objectives

The four sub-targets examined in this study are:

- 1) Is there a significant relationship between students' school climate scores and peer bullying scores?
- 2) Is there a significant relationship between students' coping strategies scores and peer bullying scores?
- 3) Do the students' school climate scores significantly predict peer bullying scores?
- 4) Do the students' coping strategies scores significantly predict peer bullying scores?

METHODS

Population and Study Group

The current study population was 7th and 8th grade students attending Secondary School in Afyon Neriman Küçükkurt. The sample consisted of 300 selected students from the population, 680 using screening method. There are 284 students in the study group; 153 females, and 131 males. The data collection tools were administered to 300 students; however, 16 students were excluded from the analysis because they failed to properly fill out these tools. Table 1 shows the study group distribution according to variables of gender, grade and age.

Table.1. *Demographics of sample*

		Grade			Age			
		7th	8th	Total	13	14	15	Total
Gender	Female	83	70	151	85	62	6	153
	Male	68	63	131	66	57	8	131
	Total	151	133	284	151	119	14	284

Table 1 shows that the participants have relationships with a total of 284 participants, including 151 participants (83 girls, 68 boys), 133 participants (70 girls, 63 boys) in the 8th grade.

In addition, it is seen that the participants are 13 years old (85 girls, 66 boys), 14 years old (62 girls, 57 boys) and 15 years old (6 girls, 8 boys).

Data Collection Tools

School Climate Scale (SCS)

School Climate Scale was developed by Emmons et al (2002) and intended for primary and secondary school students. The scale aims to evaluate school climate and the quality of relationships between students and administrators. The scale was adapted to Turkish by Atik and Yerin Güneri (2016). According to the results of confirmatory factor analysis, the Turkish form of the scale consists of 36 items and 6 subscales (fairness, order and discipline, parent involvement, sharing of resources, student interpersonal relations and student-teacher relations). The scale also has convergent and discriminant validity. Internal-reliability coefficients for the overall scale and subscales and test-retest reliability values are within the acceptable limits. In the scale adaptation study, two groups were studied. Cronbach alpha values obtained from the data of the first participant group; while it is .90 for the entire scale, it ranges from .56 to .86 for its sub-scales. Cronbach alpha values obtained from the data of the second group; While the scale is .89 for the entire scale, it ranges from .64 to .88 for its sub-scales. In the test-retest study, the scale was applied to 65 students from the first study group at two-week intervals. While the test-retest reliability coefficient obtained for the whole scale was .67 ($p < .01$), these coefficients ranged between .50 and .73 ($p < .01$) for the sub-scales.

KIDCOPE

Developed by Spirito, Stark, and Williams (1988) and known as KIDCOPE in the literature, the scale was adapted to Turkish by Bedel, Işık, and Hamarta (2014). KIDCOPE consists of three subscales. These are: active coping, avoidant coping, and negative coping. Internal reliability of KIDCOPE was calculated as .72 for active coping, .70 for avoidant coping and .65 for negative coping. Three month-interval test-retest reliability values were calculated as $r = .66$ for active coping, $r = .61$ for avoidant coping and $r = .76$ for negative coping ($p < .001$). These results show that the Turkish form of three-factor KIDCOPE is a reliable and valid measurement tool (Bedel, Işık, and Hamarta, 2014).

Bully Scale (BS)

The scale, developed by Kutlu (2005), includes bully, victim and buffer scales. The response options of the 19-item scale developed as a self-evaluation form are arranged as a 5-point Likert type scale scoring between "1-I completely disagree" and "5-I completely agree". Internal reliability of the scale was calculated .83 for "bully" subscale, .86 for "victim" and .70 for "general areas of interests" subscales. Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed that the three-factor model has good fit values (Kutlu, 2005).

Procedure

The participants were administered the "School Climate Survey (SCS)", "KIDCOPE" and "Bullying Scale (BS)" together. To eliminate "order effect", they were administered to each participant in a random order each time.

The relationships between SCS subscales' and KIDCOPE subscales' scores and BS total score were examined by calculating the Pearson Product of Moments Correlation Coefficient. After, multiple regression analysis was done for SCS subscales scores to determine its predictive power on bullying. It also examined the predictive power of KIDCOPE subscales scores through multiple regression analysis. In the data analysis the degree of significance was taken as 0.05. Using IBM SPSS 18.0 software, the data were analysed.

RESULTS

The Relationship Between School Climate and Peer Bullying

Pearson Product of Moments Correlation Coefficient was used to determine whether there are significant relationships between SCS and KIDCOPE subscalescores and BS total score. The results are set out below in Table 2.

Table 2. *The relationships between SCS and KIDCOPE subscales scores and BS total score*

		Fairness	Order and Discipline	Parent Involvement	Sharing of Resources	Student Interpersonal Relations	Student-Teacher Relations	Active Coping	Avoidant Coping	Negative Coping
BS Total Score	r	.316***	.358***	.157**	.226***	.303***	.351***	-.044	.173**	.196**
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.463	.003	.001
	N	284	284	284	284	284	284	284	284	284

** p<. 01, *** p<.001

Table 2 shows that there are positive significant relationships between BS total score and fairness (r=.316, p<.001), order and discipline (r=.358, p<.001), parent involvement (r=.157, p<.01), sharing of resources (r=.226, p<.001), student interpersonal relations (r=.303, p<.001) and teacher-student relations (r=.351, p<.001). Table also shows that there are positive and significant relationships between BS total score and avoidant coping (r=.173, p<.01) and negative coping (r=.303, p<.001). On the other hand, a negative and insignificant relationship was found between BS total score and active coping (r= -. 044, p>.05).

Findings Regarding Whether School Climate Scores Significantly Predict Bullying or not

Results of multiple regression analysis on predicting bullying are given in Table 3 according to the variables of the SCS subscales scores.

Table 3. *Multiple regression analysis results for SCS subscales scores' predictive power over bullying*

Variables	B	S.E	β	t	p	Zero Order-r	Partial-r
Constant	25.644	2.522		10.167	.000		
Fairness	.450	.277	.119	1.628	.105	.316	.097
Order and discipline	.608	.194	.222	3.137	.002	.358	.185
Parent involvement	-.158	.216	-.048	-.731	.466	.157	-.044
Sharing of resources	.156	.237	.041	.660	.510	.226	.040
Student interpersonal relations	-.001	.196	-.001	-.007	.995	.303	.000
Teacher-student relations	.358	.157	.182	2.283	.023	.351	.136

R=0.427, R²=0.183, F (6,277) = 10.322, p=.000

Looking at Table 3, it is seen that the school climate variable has a high-level and significant relation to bullying (R=0.43, R²=0.18, p<.001). The school climate therefore explains 18 per cent of the total bullying variance.

The relative importance of the predictive variables on bullying are as follows according to the standardized regression coefficient (β): order and discipline, fairness, teacher-student

relationships, parent involvement, resource sharing, and interpersonal student relationships. When examining the t-test results related to the meaning of the regression coefficients, it is seen that the order and discipline and teacher-student relationships are significant predictors of bullying. On the other hand, fairness, parent involvement, resource sharing and student interpersonal relationships are seen on significant effects.

Findings regarding Whether Coping Strategies Scores Significantly Predict Bullying or not

Multiple regression analysis results of predicting bullying according to coping strategies variables are given in Table 4.

Table 4. Multiple regression analysis results for KIDCOPE subscales scores' predictive power over bullying

Variables	B	S.E.	β	t	p	Zero Order-r	Partial-r
Constant	34.816	1.737		20.039	.000		
Active coping	.040	.189	.013	.211	.833	-.044	0.013
Avoidant coping	.383	.218	.107	1.755	.080	.173	.104
Negative coping	1.295	.284	.283	4.558	.000	.303	.263

R=0.323, R²=0.104, F (3,280)=10.839, p=.000

When Table 4 is examined, it is seen that coping strategies variable has been significant relationship with bullying (R=0.32, R²=0.10, p<.001). Accordingly, coping strategies explain 10% of the total variance in bullying.

According to the standardized regression coefficient (β), the relative importance order of the predictive variables on bullying is as follows: negative coping, avoidant coping and active coping. When the t-test results are examined regarding the significance of the regression coefficients, negative coping is seen as a significant predictor of bullying. Active coping and avoidance of coping with nonsignificant effects is observed.

DISCUSSION and CONCLUSIONS

The study examined the relationship between the school climate and peer bullying coping strategies among secondary school students. The study's finding that the school climate significantly predicts peer bullying is supported by the literature results from similar studies (Konihi, Miyazaki, Hymel and Waterhouse, 2017; Olweus, 2003 2005).

In the study conducted by Konihi et al. (2017), it was found that when the social organization is well managed and a positive school climate is created, the probability of showing bullying is low and the probability of showing healthy behavior is high. It's unlikely that students who perceive justice and clarity in school will be bullied. When the rules are clearly stated and consistently applied when they see that they are treated fairly, students can develop more positive relationships with school staff. When they feel that they are protected and valued, bully behavior decreases. The finding that the bullying rate decreases when witnesses of the bullying obtained from KIVA anti-bullying program research (Salmivalli, Voeten, and Poskiparta, 2011) implemented at Finnish primary schools improve their supportive attitudes and behaviors and shows the importance of revealing the school's social norms. Individuals who apply to bullying behavior in school settings; It attracts attention with its characteristics such as adherence to school, having problems with accepting and applying school rules, frequently violating the rules, showing more aggression/violence behavior and having problems in interpersonal relations (Olweus, 2005).

The quality of school life and the perception of the school climate are the determinants of the sense of belonging about school among students (Günalan, 2018). Violence is less common in schools where students are respected, students are involved in decision-making processes, and rules are set out clearly, consistently, and impartially (Olweus, 2003). The characteristics of the school environment play an important role in determining the severity and outcomes of peer aggression (Gür, 2019). By creating a positive school environment, when the need for trust and

support for students is met, students act in accordance with determined values and goals to achieve greater emotional commitment and school identification (Solomon, 2000).

Study by Özdemir, Sezgin, Sirin, Karip and Erkan (2010), in which primary-level students examine the factors affecting their perception of the school climate, concludes that the student-friendly behaviors of teachers and school leaders are positively associated with the school climate. It was concluded in the similar study (Yang, Sharkey & Reed, 2018) that a positive school climate increases student participation and school engagement.

The student-friendly behaviors of the teachers, the possibilities of the school and the investments towards the students have a very important role in the positive perception of the school climate of the students (Tavsanlı, Birgül and Oksal, 2016). Even the “effort to improve” climate in schools has a positive effect on the student (Benbenishty, Astor, Roziner & Wrabel, 2016). Sharkey and Reed (2018), positive school climate; found it to be a factor which increases student participation and loyalty to the school. In other studies (Çalık, Özbay, Özer, Kurt & Kandemir, 2009; Sharkey & Reed, 2018), it was concluded that there are important effects of a positive school climate. Çalık et al. (2009) concluded that when the school climate is positive, the probability of bullying behaviour is reduced.

In another study of a similar nature (Konold & Cornell, 2015), it was concluded that the authoritarian school climate was positively associated with school attachment and negatively related to bullying. In a study by Turner, Reynolds, Lee, Subasic, and Bromhead (2014), it was observed that less bullied than adults were students who received more support, value, and acceptance at the school. In another study (Williams & Guesra, 2007), it was concluded that students who considered the school climate to be reassuring, fair and pleasant were less likely to engage in verbal, physical and cyberbullying.

The findings obtained from Welsh (2000) study, such as respect for students, enabling student participation and clarity of school rules, are negatively related to bullying behavior and victims, and the findings of the study. The finding obtained from a similar study, when perceived as supporting teachers and other school staff, is more likely to seek help when bullying and violence are encountered, and the finding that this supportive attitude can have a preventive effect on bullying and violence issues (Elliot, 2010). The finding obtained from the study of Durlak, Domitrovich, Weisberg and Guillotta (2015) brings the healthy development of students to a high level, and shows the important role of the school climate in academic and personal development. There is a strong relationship between school climate and bullying (bully-victim experience), and the perception of school climate reduces or increases effective coping. Perceived school climate and the system of values play an important role in effective student coping skills (Mischel & Kitsantas, 2020). Another finding obtained from the study is that coping style and bullying are related. The relationship between using a negative strategy for coping with victimization is drawing attention.

The weakness of empathic tendencies (Akyol & Bilbay, 2018) observed in individuals who showed bully behavior obtained from the results of previous studies conducted on the subject (Akyol & Bilbay, 2018), interpersonal relationships (Reiter and Lapidot-Lefler, 2007), weakness of social problem solving skills (Warden & Mackinnon, 2003), draw attention to features such as having difficulties in obtaining and using effective coping strategies (Wagner, 1993).

Coping strategies are considered an important factor in peer bullying (Harper, Parris, Henrich, Varjas & Meyers, 2012). The negative approach to the problem, perceiving the problem as a threat and believing that it cannot be solved, cannot be overcome, blame itself is effective in students being victims and staying in a victim position. Believing that the solution is difficult may cause it not to enter the search for necessary help late.

It is noteworthy that in individuals exposed to bullying, the perception of school climate is low, and it is more directed towards the negative coping strategy. In their study, Kapıkıran and Fiyakalı (2005) concluded that students using hasty problem-solving approaches are exposed to direct peer pressure. In the study of Cenkseven and Yıldırım (2017), it was found that victim adolescents who were bullied by their peers, who were involved in stress management, had the ability to regulate and manage emotions and the individual's ability to self-motivate.

In a similar study (Gücüyeter, 2003), adolescents used more problem solving and social support search strategies as their acceptance levels increased; as their acceptance levels decrease, it is determined that they use the avoidance strategy more. The finding of Bedel and Güler (2019), which is the strongest predictor of bully, victim and aggression scores from the study they investigated the relationship between bullying and aggression and coping strategies in secondary school students, supports the findings of the study. The finding obtained from the study of Bedel and Kutlu (2018), obtained from his studies with middle school students, there is a positive relationship between social support perceived from parents and friends, and negative coping between active coping supports the findings of the study. The finding obtained from another study, self-judgment and negative coping style significantly predicts the self-harm behavior of the individual (Toksoy and Oktan, 2019) emphasizes the importance of using coping styles effectively.

Having an important place in the concept of school climate, the student, the social support resources available to the school and other circles are at the forefront of the individual's effective coping. To cope with bullying effectively, the use of an active coping strategy, which includes processes such as positive orientation towards the problem, defining the problem, producing solution options, evaluating the results and evaluating the results, will bring quite effective and functional results for the individual.

Individuals in adolescents who struggle many different emotional, physiological and psychological problems may not be at a sufficient level to use coping strategies effectively. It is very important to include families and teachers in intervention studies that aim to provide students with the ability to use their coping skills effectively, due to their importance in being role models.

Social support from family, teacher and friends is very important in order to effectively deal with the problems experienced. In the regulation prepared by the Ministry of National Education (2017), guidance activities are expected to be carried out to families on these issues through interviews, visits and training programs.

Since bullying is an important problem in the school environment, school administrators and teachers also have important roles. Seminars can be organized by the field experts on the subject to the school administration, staff and teachers. When encountered with bullying, programs that can help effectively cope and develop social skills and problem solving strategies can be prepared and trainings can be provided.

The ability to effectively deal with problems is an important development task expected during this developmental period (Eskin, 2018). Supporting this development task is among the responsibilities of the school counselor. Intervention programs can be created for the field experts to use in psychological counseling and guidance studies, to examine students' coping methods in detail and to help them work with bullying strategies, to teach students' communication skills and to help them maintain healthy interpersonal communication. Such practices can guide psychological counselors working with adolescents to prepare preventive psychological counseling and guidance activities and to construct them for therapeutic purposes. In addition, students can be helped through individual and group counseling.

In a study (Gücüyeter, 2003), the result was that as adolescents' self-acceptance levels increased, they used more active coping strategies in case of problems encountered and used avoidance strategy as their acceptance level decreased. Psychoeducations can be organized to increase self-esteem. Personal-social guidance field (social problem solving, effective communication skills, assertiveness, social problem solving, etc.) in preventive guidance and psychological counseling events for individuals in school and adolescence can be submitted.

This study contains some limitations regarding the working group's characteristics. When generalizing the results these limitations should be considered. This study is limited to the sample of students in Afyon from a public secondary school. It is possible to enrich working with students at public and private secondary schools in various cities. It is thought that having a larger sample size and repeating it on bigger samples would be beneficial. Repeating similar studies in non-secondary (primary and high school) samples will contribute to the literature. The data from this study are based solely on the students

self-expression. Observations on school climate, coping strategies and peer bullying may also be included in new research by teachers' and families.

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