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Bullying at School: The role of family

Maria Papanikolaou[1], Thomai Chatzikosma[2], Koutra Kleio[3]

Tecnological Educational Institute of Crete, Heraklio, Greece, Social Work Department

[1]Bachelor degree. Contact: ma7pa@yahoo.gr
[2]Bachelor degree. Contact: mimi@inbox.com
[3]Phd(c) Social Medicine, MPH, Social Worker, Department of Social Work, Technological Educational Institute of Crete, Heraklion, Crete, Greece. Contact: kkoutra@staff.teicrete.gr

Abstract

Objectives: This study aims to investigate whether family and, the way that children are raised, constitute an influencing factor in the demonstration of intimidating behaviors among children at school environment. **Methods:** Study population consists of 460 students, (2nd and 3rd junior high classes and, 1st class of high school) with a mean of age 14.5 years, who attend in the public secondary educational institutes of the urban area of Heraklion, at Crete, Greece. The measurement instruments used are the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire and, thirteen further questions referring to family, from the general questionnaire of the Health Behavior in School Children research program (launched by WHO). **Findings:** A percentage of 17.5% of the students of the sample were victimized and a 16.5% have participated in bullying others. Furthermore, the majority of students, (40%) in the sample, assess teachers' counteraction to bullying as "little or nothing" while, only the 2.61% of students feel it as "very". Students' involvement in bullying incidents increases when there is no punishment, despite the child's misbehave, or when parents enforce the discipline methods without justification. Moreover, bullying is related with parents' reluctance to provide assistance on issues towards school. Finally, some parenting behaviors which reflect children's upbringing are connected with bullying.**Conclusions:** The outcomes of this study reveal a significant connection between the bullying behaviors of students and specific parenting behaviors related to the upbringing and discipline methods.

Keyword : bullying; family; school; parenting; students

[1]. Maria Papanikolaou[1] Tel.:+ 30 6934972493.
E-mail address: ma7papa@yahoo.gr

1. Introduction

Bullying isn't an unfamiliar occurrence; it is believed to be interwoven with the outset of school institution. For many generations students used to tease and annoy their classmates. Such behavior demonstration considered to be a normal growing procedure and a mean of socialization both by the school community and the family environment (Artinopoulou, 2001). Bullying constitutes a multidimensional phenomenon that arises from the complexity between family relationships, peer relationships, school community and culture (Swearer & Doll, 2001; Swearer & Espelage, 2004).

According to researchers, school bullying is found in many countries (Nansel et al., 2009; Rigby, 2003a; Smith, 2002) and has caused important effects even at the adult life of those who are involved (Rigby, 2003b). "International researches report that approximately 3 out of 10 children have been involved in bullying, as victims, as perpetrators, or as both (bully/ victim)"(Giovazolias, 2008, p.11).

Family is the primary institution of individual's socialization and also the institution which shapes the personality and behavior of its underage members (Kataki, 1994). It's considered to be the one having the longest influence in every aspect of juvenile's life. This is the reason why the scientific community has given a particular emphasis on examining the relationship between the family environments and bullying behaviors (Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1992; Stevens, Bourdeaudhuij, & Ost, 2002).

Many scientific researchers (Curtner & Smith, 2000; Doll, Song, & Siemers, 2004; Olweus, 2009) focus on how the upbringing and discipline methods chosen by parents, influence the display of intimidating or victimization behaviors among children. It has been found that children involved in bullying, taking any role (victim, bully or bully/ victim), come from families where the authoritarian parenting model dominates (Ahmed & Braithwaite, 2004; Duncan, 2004). The authoritarian is characterized by high severity and punitivenes. Moreover, children who are identified as bully/ victim described their parents as authoritarian, punitive and non- supportive (Baldry & Farrington 1998).

Bullying appears in the following forms; corporal/physical, verbal and non verbal/ psychological form (Rigby, 2003a). The physical form includes violent behaviors such as kicking, pushing, hitting etc., which brings into direct contact the perpetrator and the victim. However, there are incidents where bullying occurs through a third person compelled by the perpetrator. The direct verbal intimidation includes verbal offenses as insults, name calling, threats etc. Contrary, the indirect verbal intimidation summarizes spreading malicious rumors or persuasion of a third person (by bully) in order to directly insult the victim. Regarding the non verbal /psychological intimidation, includes threatening and/ or disgraceful gestures, destruction, removal and/or hiding personal belongings or the deliberate victim's exclusion from group or activities (Smith & Sharp, 1995).

This particular survey aims to investigate whether family comprises an influencing factor in the expression of intimidating behaviors, among students at schools. More specifically, it was examined:

- The extent of students' involvement in school bullying, and if
- The upbringing methods and the discipline measures which parents choose are related with demonstration of bullying behavior

2. Methods

2.1 Participants and sampling procedures

The population of study consists of students attending public secondary educational institutions to the urban area of Heraklion, Crete, Greece. Of the total of 37 school units at Heraklion were a random sampling in clusters. After a randomly and systematically drew was selected 11 schools at the following

classes order; 2nd – 3rd junior high grades and 1st high school class (17 classes total). The sample came up to 460 students (153 B class students, 153 C class students and 154 students at 1st high school class) with a mean of age 14.5 years, and represents approximately the 7.6% of the total population of students (6,039) at the specific classes during this period. Data collection was conducted in November, 2009, after permission was granted from the Secondary Education Committee (Ref: 89280/G2) and, there was no repetition for the students who were absent at the time of survey.

2.2 Measures

The questionnaire used, to measure the extend of bullying among students, is the Revised Olweus Bully/ Victim questionnaire (1996), which addresses to children aged 8 to 16 years and is filled out anonymously by students in classrooms. The questionnaire consists of 40 questions which measured the bullying extend as: exposure to various (physical, verbal, indirect, racial, sexual etc) forms of bullying/ harassment, various forms of bullying other students etc, for a period of the last 2 or 3 months. The creator of the questionnaire which measured bullying gave us the permission to use it and, the whole translation and cultural adaptation procedure was followed.

In order to examine the relation between students and their family members, Olweus Bully/Victim questionnaire was enriched with thirteen questions, which were entitled "my family". Questions were taken from the general questionnaire used in the universal survey of student's health, conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in European Countries, under the program "Health Behavior in School Children" (HBSC) at 2006.These thirteen questions measure the contact level between children and family members, the raising and discipline measures which applied by parents. They also measure child's level of satisfaction from relationships that are developed within the family. Furthermore, questions examine at what extend parents are aware of daily issues of their child's life and also the importance ascribed to school matters. Finally, the use of these questions, from the HBSC/WHO questionnaire, which it has been translated and published in Greece by Ms. Kokkevi An.[University Research Institute of Mental Health (URIMH)], was also authorized

2.3 Statistical Analysis

Data processing and analysis was done through the use of the statistical software package SPSS (edition) 16.0. To define the relation between two random continuous variables, the non parametric Spearman's co-efficient was used. To examine the equality of three or more population averages the non-parametric analysis of Kruskal - Wallis was used.

The rearing methods, which parents choose to enforce, was measured by a group of relevant questions: (my mother/ father "helps me as much as I need", "lets me do the things I like doing", "is loving", "understands my problems and worries", "likes me to make my own decisions", "tries to control everything I do", "treats me like a baby", "makes me feel better when I'm upset"; children responses were on a scale from "never" to "almost always" listed separately to mother and father). These are questions that reflect aspects of breeding, practiced by parents regarding their children. These questions were statistical compared as independent variables, with those that measure victimization ("How often have you been bullied at school in the past couple of months?") and perpetration (" How often have you taken part in bullying another student(s) at school in the past couple of months?"), to verify the assumptions made in the study.

Relevant statistical procedure was followed with the group of questions ("what does your mother/ father do, when you do something that he/she thinks is wrong ?", "doesn't punish me, he/she takes no

notice", "explains to me what I have done wrong and why I am being punished", "my mother/ father tells me that I behaved badly but doesn't punish me", "he/ she punishes me immediately without telling me why") which reflect the different discipline methods enforced by parents.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic Characteristics

The sample consisted of 460 children of whom 261 were girls (56.9%) and 198 (43.1%) boys. Greek nationality was significantly superior since it held the 90.9% of the total sample. The majority of children (56.96%) lived with both of their parents, while the 43.3% lived either in a single – parent family or with another relative. In regard with the social – economical status of parents, children mostly asses their family's economic status as "good" (37.8%), or to vary in the "average" (32%). Parents in their majority were graduates of higher education (mother: 42.1% - father: 39.2%).

3.2 Being Bullied & Bullying Others

Students, in the sample, report that they have suffered victimization at a rate of 17.5%, while the 16.5% of students admitted bullying others (Table 1).

Table 1: *Reported frequency of bullying during the last 2 months*

	Victimization [% (n)]	Bullying others [% (n)]
Never	81.7 (376)	81.5 (375)
1 or 2 times	13.9 (64)	12.0 (55)
2 or 3 times per month – several times per week	3.5 (16)	4.1 (19)
No answer	0.9 (4)	2.4 (11)
Total	100 (460)	100 (460)

Regarding the bullying forms, it seems that the frequency of verbal overrates the other forms, contrary to physical which occur less frequent (Table 2 &3).

Table 2: *Reported frequency of victimization's forms during the last 2 months*

	B5	B6	B7	B8	B9	B10	B11	B12	B13
Never (%)	74.6	84.6	87.0	79.1	87.2	91.5	94.1	83.7	90.7
1 or 2 times (%)	18.7	10.0	10.9	17.0	9.1	6.1	4.8	11.3	5.0
2 or 3 times per month (%)	2.0	2.2	0.2	1.5	2.0	1.1	0.0	1.7	1.1
About 1 time per week (%)	1.7	0.9	0.0	0.7	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.9	1.1
Several times per week (%)	2.0	1.7	1.3	1.3	0.9	0.7	0.4	1.1	0.7

| No answer (%) | 1.1 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 1.3 | 1.5 |

B5: I was called mean names, was made fun of, or teased in a hurtful way

B6: Other students left me out of things on purpose, excluded me from their group of friends, or completely ignored me

B7: I was hit, kicked, pushed, shoved around, or locked indoors

B8: Other students told lies or spread false rumors about me and tried to make others dislike me

B9: I had money or other things taken away from me or damaged

B10: I was threatened or forced to do things I didn't want to do

B11: I was bullied with mean names or comments about my race or color

B12: I was bullied with mean names, comments, or gestures with a sexual meaning

B13: I was bullied with mean or hurtful messages, calls or pictures, or in other ways on my mobile phone or over the Internet

Table 3: *Reported frequency of bullying others forms during the last 2 months*

	B25	B26	B27	B28	B29	B30	B31	B32	B33
Never (%)	76.7	84.3	92.8	92.2	97.0	94.8	92.6	91.7	96.1
1 or 2 times (%)	18.5	12.0	4.8	5.9	1.3	3.9	5.0	6.1	1.5
2 or 3 times per month (%)	1.5	1.1	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.4	0.0
About 1 time per week (%)	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.0
Several times per week (%)	1.1	0.7	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.2
No answer (%)	1.7	1.7	1.7	1.3	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.7	2.2

B25: I called another student(s) mean names, made fun of or teased him or her in a hurtful way

B26: I kept him or her out of things on purpose, excluded him or her from my group of friends or completely ignored him or her

B27: I hit, kicked, pushed and shoved him or her around or locked him or her indoors

B28: I spread false rumors about him or her and tried to make others dislike him or her

B29: I took money or other things from him or her or damaged his or her belongings

B30: I threatened or forced him or her to do things he or she didn't want to do

B31: I bullied him or her with mean names or comments about his or her race or color

B32: I bullied him or her with mean names, comments, or gestures with a sexual meaning

B33: I bullied him or her with mean or hurtful messages, calls or pictures, or in other ways on my mobile phone or over the Internet

3.3 Where bullying occurs

For the majority of students the victimization lasts about 1 or 2 weeks (11.5%) and about 1 month for the 2.2% of the students. For a rate of 1.8% of students bullying continues for several years. Regarding the place where bullying incidents take place, the majority of students indicate that they are being bullied to the yard (during the break or gap) at 11.5%. A percentage of 4 % of the sample admits that subject to bullying during the route to and from school, walkways / stairs (3.3%) and class (when the

teacher is not in the classroom) (3.3%), class (when the teacher is in the classroom) (2.4%) and at the bus stop at a rate of 1.3%.

Finally, students mostly believe that teachers' counteraction against bullying during recent months is "little or nothing" at a rate of 41.1%. A percentage of 22.1% of children believe that teachers have contributed "fairly little", the 19.2% that it helped "somewhat" and 15% that have contributed "a good deal." Only 2.7% of the sample believes that teachers have done "much" to counteract bullying.

3.4. Upbringing & Discipline methods

As regards to the upbringing methods, chosen by parents, the majority of children support that both their mother and father, "almost always", provide them the help they need (mother: 74.8%, father: 58.6%). Parents are also appearing as "affectionate" and "loving" (mother: 76.7%, father: 51.8%) even though "sometimes" appear considerably "controlling" (mother: 46.7%, father: 39.9%) (Table 4).

Table 4:　*Parental Bonding (%)*

		Almost always	Sometimes	Never	Don't have/ don't see
Mother	Helps me as much as I need	74.1	22.6	2.0	0.4
	Lets me do things I like doing	27.4	68.0	2.4	0.4
	Is loving	76.7	21.5	1.3	0.4
	Understands my problems and worries	63.3	30.2	5.2	0.4
	Likes me to make my own decisions	50.0	42.8	5.7	0.7
	Tries to control everything I do	33.0	46.3	19.3	0.4
	Treats me like a baby	13.0	31.5	54.1	0.7
	Makes me feel better when I am upset	54.1	33.0	11.7	0.4
Father	Helps me as much as I need	58.3	33.0	5.9	2.1
	Lets me do things I like doing	37.4	55.7	4.3	1.9
	Is loving	51.1	38.7	7.0	1.9
	Understands my problems and worries	44.3	41.3	11.5	1.9
	Likes me to make my own decisions	50.9	39.1	7.2	1.9
	Tries to control everything I do	27.0	39.6	30.4	2.2
	Treats me like a baby	8.7	26.1	62.4	2.4
	Makes me feel better when I am upset	43.3	38.7	15.0	2.2

Relevant to discipline methods, parents in their majority, seem to avoid the direct, non- justified, punishment as 77.7% of children claim that their mother and their father (77.3%) act "never" in this way (Table 5).

Table 5: Discipline *(%)*

	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	Don't have/

							don't see
Mother	Doesn't punish me, she takes no notice	3.7	9.1	20.9	25.9	38.5	0.4
	Explain to me what I've done wrong and why I'm being punished	31.5	24.6	17.0	11.1	13.9	0.4
	Tells me that I've behave badly but doesn't punish me	34.8	23.5	23.7	9.8	6.7	0.4
	Punishes me immediately without telling me why	2.8	2.2	5.0	11.5	76.5	0.7
Father	Doesn't punish me, she takes no notice	5.7	10.2	17.2	20.4	42.8	2.0
	Explain to me what I've done wrong and why I'm being punished	28.7	22.2	18.3	11.1	16.5	1.7
	Tells me that I've behave badly but doesn't punish me	32.4	22.4	19.8	10.9	11.5	1.7
	Punishes me immediately without telling me why	3.9	3.0	4.8	8.5	76.3	2.2

3.6 Bullying & Discipline

The discipline methods, which parents enforce, seem to compose a significant factor, influencing children's involvement in bullying. However, the parenting methods that affect children's behavior vary by the gender of parents. More particular, when mother appears to directly punish child's mistaken behavior, without justification, then both, the "victimization" (sig. = .000< .01) and the "bullying others" (sig. = .033< .05) increases. On the other hand, the lack of any kind of response and the indifference which father show against child's misbehavior is directly related with "victimization" (sig.= .036< .05).

3.7 Bullying & Upbringing

Parents through nurturing methods they choose, play an important role to children's involvement in school bullying. Especially, the lack of understanding to problems and worries of students (sig. = .003< .005), the limitation in letting child to take initiatives (sig. = .032 < .05), the restriction of its autonomy and independence (sig. = .004 < .01) towards mother, and the incomplete provision of the necessary assistance both by mother (sig. = .013 < .05) and by father (sig. = .008 < .01), is significant relevant with victimization. The lack of the necessary assistance to child, by mother, also shows a significant correlation with involvement in school bullying (sig = .021< .05).

3.8 Bullying & Parent's attitude towards school problems

Additionally, it is observed that students' involvement in bullying either as victims or as perpetrators, affected by parents' reluctance to provide assistance on issues relevant to school (bully: sig.= .011 – victim : sig.= .007< .05).

4. Discussion

The phenomenon of bullying establishes a reality in Greek schools. Approximately 1 out of 6 students are entangled in bullying incidents. Verbal form collects the higher rates through which students either intimidate or subject to intimidation. In various scientific researches the verbal form occurs more frequently (Fekkes et. al., 2005; Rivers & Smith, 1994).

The environment that characterizes the class, considered to be a factor which correlates with bullying. Marjoribanks (1994) claims that the school curriculum which is directed towards the cultivation of imagination and challenge the interest of students, could have negative impact on peers' victimization. Moreover, when real interest shown by teachers for their students, combined with the avoidance of establishing "unsubstantiated" rules, it reinforces the feeling of safety to students and removes the feelings of boredom, which may trigger aggressive behaviors. (Rigby, 2008)
Another risk factor when it comes to school bullying is the architectural configuration of the school, providing direct access to teachers throughout the building and a visual supervision at the greatest possible extent. More than 75% of attacks reported by students occurring during the breaks, in corridors, toilets and just before or after school. Classrooms tend to be the safest place. (Safer, 1986 in Kasen et al., 2004)

A significant factor to students' involvement in bullying appears to be the style of discipline chosen by parents. The percentage of parents who refer to authoritarian style ("punish me immediately without telling me why") is the lowest of the sample. When mother uses in a great frequency methods which could be characterized as authoritarian, it appears to be a relation with intimidating behaviors. According to Craig et al. (1998) children who are nurtured in family environments where inconsistency in the way of punishment, cruelty and more hostile than positive interactions prevails, children tend to victimized.

The expression of tender feelings by the parents combined with the level of understanding and support they show and, generally the positive approach which characterize their relationships, seems to be very important for the balanced development of child. Providing the necessary assistance offers child the sense of security and confidence, and also provides the necessary self confidence in order to respond to adequately difficulties which might arise. The provision of assistance also teaches ways to manage and resolve its problems, based on its own abilities.

Students seem to become more vulnerable to victimization when their father don't take active part, as equally as their mother, in their nurturing because of limited contact between them: due to objective difficulties (divorce), to physical absence of father (death), or because father chooses to be uninvolved in child's life. Fosse & Holen (2002), support that children who are victimized, are more likely to have grown up without their biological father. Boys are being taught by their fathers how to interact with other boys and how to remain secure against victimization. Subsequently, boys who do not have fathers do not develop these skills, to the same degree as boys who grown up with their fathers (Duncan, 2004).

The fact that children consider that their parents are not willing to provide them help to problems they face at school ("disagree", "totally disagree") may create them insecurity, which might link to the

targeting by their schoolmates. While, the absence of the required support by their parents might lead to further victimization, since bullying incidents are concealed from adults.

Conclusions

Bullying constitutes an occurrence, which seems to concern Greek society. The dimensions of bullying can not be negligible neither can be ignored. It's a phenomenon which affects different areas of involved parts in a variety of ways, without leaving, the rest of the environment, unaffected. It is recognizable by most of the educational community and even though, sometimes, the term is obscure the actions which reflect it are recognizable. Also, well known and accepted is the fact that such behaviors needed to be confronted, and since school is the place where the majority of those kinds of incidents occur, school must be the context in which to develop and focus interventions.

It shouldn't, however family factor, be ignored, that constitutes the primate frame with the longest effects at individuals development and is apparently indissoluble connected with the various forms of aggressiveness, where person learns to manifest or encouraged to develop. Family bears at a great extent the responsibility for person's mental health and balance of their individuals.

Teachers in Greek schools and students' parents lack of education and training on handling bullying incidents. In addition, the educational community has limited knowledge in preventing programs and anti-bullying strategies application. Given that bullying is triggered by a variety of factors (family, school, educational programs, and peer relationships) and sometimes affects the non-involved individuals, intervention programs should be implemented.

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