

## **Evaluation of Bullying Events among Secondary Education Students in Terms of School Type, Gender and Class Level**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines whether the intensity and amount of bullying and/or being bullied among secondary education students vary significantly according to gender, school type and class levels. The scanning method was used in the research. The research sample consisted of 213 students, 96 female and 117 male, who were enrolled in secondary education in the Fatsa district of Ordu province during the first semester of the 2013-14 school year. No significant gender differences were identified with regard to either bullying or being bullied. In terms of school type, it was found that students in trade vocational high schools exhibited bullying acts more than students in other high school types, while students in industrial vocational high schools were bullied more than students in other high school types. Additionally, it was found that bullying and being bullied were both more prevalent among students in the 12<sup>th</sup> class than among students in other class levels.

**Keywords:** *Bully, Bullied, Bullying, Secondary Education Students*

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## Introduction

Humans are biological, cultural, psychological and social beings. The social side of humans is related to efficient compliance with the environment they are in. Many social institutions, especially families, function to realize this goal. However, schools are institutions that are created specifically for the purpose of socializing students. For schools to achieve this goal, their curricula, staff and physical conditions as well as the social circles of their students are vital. The behavior patterns and value judgements of the students' social circles are likewise important in every term. However, these behavior patterns and value judgements may overcome the values promulgated by both school and family, especially during puberty. Therefore, the communication and interaction patterns in the social circles of pubescent students are important to the educational process as a whole. When these interactions are beneficial, they may contribute to students' adopting positive behaviors, including sharing, cooperation, protection of their own rights, and respecting the rights of others. Nevertheless, communication and interaction between students at school may not always serve such purposes. Bullying is one type of negative interaction that prevents students from adopting positive social behaviors.

The first studies of bullying were conducted in the 1970s by Olweus, who later defined bullying as repeated negative behaviors by one or more individuals directed against weaker individuals (1993). Besag (1995) further developed Olweus' definition, as repeated physical, psychological, social or oral assaults carried out by a strong individual or individuals against individuals who are not strong enough to stand up against them; while Roland and Munthe (1989) defined bullying as long-term and systematic, psychological or physical violence committed against an individual who is not capable of defending him- or herself. Wallace and Shute (2009) define it as one student causing fear, damage or stress to another student through physical, verbal or psychological assault. Piskin (2002), who examined the different definitions in the literature, defined bullying as a kind of aggressiveness carried out by one or more students against weaker students, resulting in the constant and purposeful disturbance of the victims, who are in no position to protect themselves.

According to Koc (2006), bullying is an important academic and disciplinary problem. It especially impacts the victims, but all students in a school where it takes place are also affected. However, because of many problems such as limited time and budgetary opportunities, workloads, and lack of effective leadership, schools tend not to prioritize the solution of bullying problems among their students. Only a small proportion of schools have carried out serious studies in support of bullying prevention, while most either routinely ignore bullying events, or expect someone else to solve such problems. Yet, bullying has a range of negative effects on students' academic achievement and personality development: negatively affecting their social, emotional, behavioral and academic development (Toksoz, 2010); and if school staff tolerate an atmosphere of bullying, this may cause students to fear going to school and result in physical, emotional and social changes among them (Koc, 2006). That bullied students develop negative attitudes towards their teachers and friends, and have lower academic achievement, are important results supported by research findings (Lai, Ye & Chang, 2008). Bullying acts can cause stomach aches and headaches, sleeping and eating disorders and concentration impairments in the victims, as well as long-term problems such as depression, hyperactivity, drug use, antisocial behaviors and the use of guns (Anderson & Swiatowy, 2008). Elliot (1997) points out that bullying students likewise have low levels of school success and low self-esteem, while Fitzgerald (1999) finds that bullies are jealous of others' achievements, have trouble admitting defeat, often fail, and are short-tempered in their relationships. Research also demonstrates that students with bullying habits continue these acts after school-age; that their children also tend to exhibit the same kind of behaviors; and that the children of bullying victims are more likely to be victims as well (Farrington, 1993).

Research studies also show that bullying is related to many other problems. For instance, Bosword and Espelage (2000) identify a linear relationship between behavioral and psychosocial variables of bullying and the frequency of misconduct. Bullying students exhibit more antisocial behaviors than their non-bullying peers and have a negative image among other students at school

(Klicpera & Klicpera, 1996). According to Bently and Li (1995), bullying students have more aggression-triggering beliefs than others.

A thorough examination of existing literature related to the extent of bullying reveals that, in almost every country, the rate of bullying presents a serious problem – although the detailed research findings reveal considerable variation. For example, Kaltiala-Heino et al. (1999) carried out research in Finland which found that 11% of students conduct bullying acts at least once a week, and that the same proportion of students suffer from these acts. Another study, conducted in Southern Cyprus by Stavrinides et al. (2010), found that 5.4% of students were exclusively bullies, 7.4% were only victims, and 4.2% were both bullies and victims. Similar research has indicated that 7.5% of Scottish students are bullies and 16.7% of them are victims (Karatzias, Power & Swanson, 2002); that the rate of bullied high school students ranges from 11.4% to 26.8% in Spain; and that 13% are bullies, 10.3% are victims and 6% are both in the USA (Nansel et al., 2001). Based on research in 19 countries with low and moderate national income Josephson Institute (2010) gives categorically higher figures: 50% for bullies and 47% for victims.

Though no scholarship has claimed that bullying is not a serious problem in Turkey, the research findings related to the extent of it there vary to a surprising degree. According to Yildirim (2001), 16% of Turkish schoolchildren are bullies and 26% are victims, with 23% of individuals falling into both categories. The work of Kapci (2004) would appear to support this, indicating that the proportion of students who are involved in bullying acts, either as a bully or a victim, is 40%. However, Pekel (2004) found a much lower incidence: 7.6% for bullies, 9.3% for victims and 6.4% for both. Atik (2006), meanwhile, found that the rate of bully students is 4.6%, the rate of victim students is 23%, and the proportion of students who were both bully and victim is 21.3%. Gokler (2007) found that the rate is 10% for bully students, 27% for victims and 21% for both bully and victim students. Most recently, Piskin's (2010) study claims that the rate of bully students is 6.2%, the rate of victim students is 35.1%, and the rate of both bully and victim students is just 3.2%. A general review of the studies carried in Turkey suggests that the extreme estimates range between 3.3% (Kartal and Bilgin, 2009) and 33% (Kutlu, 2005) for bullying students; between 9.3% (Pekel, 2004) and 41.3% (Kartal and Bilgin, 2009) for victims; and between 6.4% (Pekel, 2004) and 30.2% (Piskin, 2010) for students who fall into both categories. Despite significant differences between them, the findings obtained from studies both in Turkey and abroad reveal 1) that the number of victim students is consistently higher than the number of bullying students, and 2) that the rates for Turkey are high in a broad sense.

The bullying-related studies conducted in Turkey have presented the bully and victim rates in different levels of education, but the number of studies that have sought to establish these rates according to school type and class level is very limited. Therefore, for purposes of the present research, it seemed advisable to examine bullying according to school type and gender as well as class level.

## **Method**

The following sections will describe the design of the study, the characteristics of the sample, the tools used to collect data, and the statistical techniques used in analysis of the data.

### **Research Design**

This research examining whether the bullying and bullying-victimization experiences of students in different secondary education schools vary according to gender, class level and school type is a correlational descriptive research utilizing the scanning model.

### Sample

The sample for the present research consisted of a total of 213 students, each of whom was attending one of six secondary schools in Fatsa district of Ordu province during the first semester of the 2013-14 school years. Within this group, a total of 40 students were attending a trade vocational high school, 40 an Anatolian high school, 31 an industrial vocational high school, 37 a girls' vocational high school, 35 a religious vocational high school, and 30 a medical vocational high school. In all, 96 of the students were female and 117 male. The schools and the students were both chosen using the unbiased-random method.

### Data Collection Tools

This research made use of the "Peer Bullying Detection Scale-Adolescent Form" (hereafter PBDS-AF) developed by Piskin and Ayas (2007). PBDS-AF consists of two parallel scales, called the "bully scale" and the "victim scale", which involve the same items asked in different ways. The students are expected to score items in terms of how frequently they perform acts and words in the case of the bully scale, and how frequently they are exposed to acts and words in the case of the victim scale. Psychometric studies carried out on these sub-scales are summarized below.

The victim scale consists of six factors, which are: 1) physical victimhood, 2) verbal victimhood, 3) exclusion, 4) exposure to rumors, 5) damage to belongings, and 6) sexual victimhood. To evaluate the validity of this scale, first expert opinion was obtained, and then confirmatory factor analysis was performed. The results of first-order CFA found a fit index of  $\chi^2=5407.73$  ( $sd=1307$ ,  $p=.00$ ),  $\chi^2/sd=4.13$ ,  $RMSEA=0.041$ ,  $GFI=0.90$ ,  $AGFI=0.89$ ,  $CFI=0.90$ ,  $NFI=0.96$ , and  $NNFI=0.97$ . As the result of second-order CFA, fit index was found to be  $\chi^2=5959.71$  ( $sd=1315$ ,  $p=.00$ ),  $\chi^2/sd=4.53$ ,  $RMSEA=0.043$ ,  $GFI=0.89$ ,  $AGFI=0.88$ ,  $CFI=0.97$ ,  $NFI=0.96$ , and  $NNFI=0.97$ . The Cronbach  $\alpha$  internal consistency coefficient was 0.93 for the victimhood scale as a whole; 0.82 for the physical victimhood sub-scale; 0.75 for the verbal victimhood sub-scale; 0.77 for the exclusion sub-scale; 0.75 for the exposure to rumors sub-scale; 0.80 for the damage to belongings sub-scale; and 0.88 for the sexual victimhood sub-scale.

The bully scale also consists of six sub-factors. These are: 1) physical bullying, 2) verbal bullying, 3) excluding, 4) creating rumors, 5) damaging belongings and 6) sexual bullying. To evaluate the validity of this scale, first expert opinion was obtained, and then confirmatory factor analysis was performed. As the result of first-order CFA, fit index was found to be  $\chi^2=6461.32$  ( $sd=1307$ ,  $p=.00$ ),  $\chi^2/sd=4.94$ ,  $RMSEA=0.046$ ,  $GFI=0.89$ ,  $AGFI=0.88$ ,  $CFI=0.96$ ,  $NFI=0.95$ , and  $NNFI=0.96$ . Following second-order CFA, fit index was  $\chi^2=7298.38$  ( $sd=1316$ ,  $p=.00$ ),  $\chi^2/sd=5.54$ ,  $RMSEA=0.049$ ,  $GFI=0.87$ ,  $AGFI=0.86$ ,  $CFI=0.96$ ,  $NFI=0.95$ , and  $NNFI=0.96$ . The Cronbach  $\alpha$  internal consistency coefficient is 0.92 for the bully scale as a whole; 0.83 for the physical bullying sub-scale; 0.74 for the verbal bullying sub-scale; 0.75 for the excluding sub-scale; 0.66 for the creating rumors sub-scale; 0.79 for the damaging belongings sub-scale; and 0.88 for the sexual bullying sub-scale.

### Findings

The findings obtained of the present research are presented first according to gender, then high school type and finally class level.

Table 1. *T-test results for bullying according to gender*

Gender	N	S	Sd	T	P
Female	96	70,5417	28,98599	211	-,600
Male	117	72,8803	27,73028		,54

From Table 1, it can be observed that there is no significant association between bullying and gender. (t(211)= -.600, p>05)

Table 2. *T-test results for being bullied according to gender*

Gender	N	S	Sd	T	P	
Female	96	72,6979	33,67777	211	-.286	.77
Male	117	73,8462	24,88027			

Table 2 shows that there is no significant association between gender and being a victim of bullying. (t(283)= .040, p>05)

Table 3. *ANOVA Table for Level of Bullying according to School Type*

School Type	N	$\bar{x}$	ss.		Mixed Total	sd	Mixed average	F	p An. Difference
TRAD	40	80,79	38,45	Between	10748,59	5	2149,71	2.80	. TRADE-MED
E				groups	7				0
IND.	31	69,41	25,88						1
MED	30	56,20	15,87	Within	158557,9	212	765,981		
REL.				Group	7				
VOC.	35	76,22	20,41			217			
GIRLS'	37	73,72	28,32						
ANA	40	63,67	21,52						
Total	213	71,82	28,25	Total	169306,573				

Table 3 reveals that there is a statistically significant (F(5-212)=2.80) association (p<.05) between the type of school a student attends and his/her bullying scores. In order to refine this result, Scheffe test was conducted, and it indicated that trade vocational high school students (=80,79) perform bullying acts more than medical vocational high school students (=56,20).

Table 4. ANOVA Table for Level of Being Bullied according to School Type

School Type	N	$\bar{x}$	ss.		Mixed Total	sd	Mixed Average	F	An. p	Difference
TRADE	40	41,49	21,63	Between groups	7211,01	5	1442,20	3,35	.	IND-REL.
MED	30	38,03	26,08							
ANA	40	34,28	18,15	Within Group	119948,96	212	429,92		0	
GIRL	37	37,72	16,20			217				
IND	31	48,22	27,48							
REL VOC	35	30,39	15,88							
Total	213	38,94	21,16	Total	127159,98					

Table 4 indicates that there is a statistically significant ( $F_{(5-212)}=3.35$ ) association ( $p<.05$ ) between the type of school a student attends and his/her being bullying-victimization scores. A Scheffe test revealed that in this case industrial vocational high school students ( $\bar{x}=48,22$ ) are exposed to bullying acts more than Religious Vocational high school students ( $\bar{x}=30,39$ ).

Table 5. ANOVA Table for Level of Bullying according to Class Level

Class	N	$\bar{x}$	ss.		Mixed Total	sd	Mixed Average	F	An. p	Difference
9	61	69,18	30,83	Between groups	11468,141	3	3039,31	5,06	.00	9-12
10	58	70,39	26,19							
11	46	63,73	18,75	Within Group	157838,43	209	815,823			12-11
12	48	84,66	31,22			212				
Total	213	71,82	28,25	Total	169306,573					

Table 5 reveals that there is a statistically significant difference ( $F(3-212)=5.06$ )( $p<.05$ ) between students' bullying scores across class levels. A Scheffe test indicated that 12th grade students ( $=84,66$ ) perform bullying acts more often than 9th grade students ( $=69,18$ ), and 10th grade students ( $=70,39$ ) perform bullying acts more often than 11th grade students ( $=63,73$ ).

Table 6. ANOVA Table for Level of Being Bullied according to Class Level

class	N	$\bar{x}$	ss.		Mixed		F	p.	An. Difference
					Total	sd			
9	61	69,55	33,16	Between groups	9117,941	3	3,72	.01	9-12
10	58	72,08	26,63						
11	46	67,60	19,47	Within Group	170507,05	209	815,823		12-11
12	48	85,10	31,62						
Total	213	73,32	29,10	Total	179624,995				

Table 6 shows that there is a statistically significant difference ( $F_{(3-212)}=3.72$ )( $p<.05$ ) between students' bullying-victimization score across class levels. A Scheffe test revealed that 12<sup>th</sup> grade students ( $\bar{x}$  =85,10) are exposed to bullying acts significantly more than 9<sup>th</sup> grade students ( $\bar{x}$  =69,55), 10<sup>th</sup> grade students ( $\bar{x}$  =72,08) or 11<sup>th</sup> grade students ( $\bar{x}$  =67,60).

### Discussion and Conclusion

Bullying is an experience that negatively affects students' cognitive, emotional, social, moral and personality development as well as their academic achievement. In spite of this, systematic study of the phenomenon began only recently, both in Turkey and abroad. According to Atik (2011), the total number of articles relating to bullying published between 1975 and 2010 is 1,703, but 85% of these articles appeared after the turn of century. Similarly, the number of bullying-related studies carried out in Turkey over the same years was just 82, of which 88% were conducted after 2005. Creating the desired safe school environments that support students-development, will only be possible through the implementation of efficient programs especially designed to prevent and deal with bullying. To be able to achieve this, reliable data related to the phenomenon that can constitute a basis for these programs is required. Most of the studies on bullying in Turkey have been based on samples of primary education students (e.g. Cayirdag, 2006; Gokler, 2007; Bektas, 2007; Alper, 2008; Ariman, 2008), while the number of studies that include high school students is very limited (Piskin&Ayas, 2005; Koc, 2006; Ayas&Piskin, 2011). As such, the present research helps to fill in a significant gap in the existing literature.

This section begins with a brief summary of the research findings after which it will discuss theoretical implications in light of both the present findings and those of previous studies.

Almost all bullying-related research conducted to date uses gender as a variable, and most such studies have found that, males both perform and are exposed to bullying acts more than females are (e.g. Baldry & Farrington, 2000, Carney & Merrell, 2001, Delfabro et al. 2006; Elliott, 1992; Eslae & Smith; 1994, Jarrett, 2001; Menesini et al., 1997; Mouttapa et al., 2004). In this respect, results obtained from research conducted in Turkey were similar to those obtained in other countries (e.g., Dolek, 2002; Pekel, 2004; Piskin & Ayas, 2005a; Bilgic, 2007; Esici, 2007; Hilmioglu, 2009; Ayas & Piskin, 2011). However, as previously mentioned the present research did not find any significant difference between male and female students either in terms of bullying or being bullied. This situation may be explained by an increase in studies intended to raise social gender awareness in Turkey in recent years. These studies have begun to convey the message that aggressive behaviors are not specific to biological gender, but are related to social gender. Violent messages both in media and

video games as well as in the social environment are effective in exhibiting bullying acts to both genders. Certainly, more research is required on this issue. Likewise, only a small amount of prior research has compared bullying across different types of school, which proved a significant factor in our sample. Cheraghi and Piskin (2011), compared the bullying and victimization levels of students attending general high schools against those attending vocational high schools in Iran. According to this research, the rate of bullying behaviors among vocational high school students is significantly higher than among general high school students. Ayas and Piskin (2011), who also compared different high school types in their research, found that private high school students engage in bullying acts more often than Anatolian high school students. The findings of the present research are consistent with above mentioned the findings. The fact that trade vocational high school students in our sample exhibited bullying behaviors more often than medical vocational high school students did may be explained by the fact that students in the former type of high school are chosen from among less successful students, and have fewer opportunities for both employment and academic advancement than their medical high school peers. The present research also found significant differences in bullying-victimization scores across different types of high school. Industrial high school students in our sample were exposed to bullying acts more than Religious Vocational high school students. Subject to further investigation, this situation may be explicable by industrial students' higher level of anxiety about their futures and low academic expectations. Religious Vocational high schools, meanwhile include religious courses in their curricula which present the message that bullying acts are not approved by the religion and this may be effective.

Examination of the bullying and bullying-victimization scores of students according to their class level also presented a statistically significant difference between 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and others. If bullying can be broadly defined as rude and domineering behavior directed against the weak by the strong. It is worth considering that 12<sup>th</sup> grade students are the eldest and therefore usually the physically strongest students at any school, which may go some way to explaining this situation. On the other hand, this finding may reflect that negative behaviors which were not corrected in previous years are indirectly reinforced, and therefore increase in frequency as time goes by. In any case, this finding of the present research is consistent with the findings of Borg (1988), Yurtal and Cenkseven (2006), and Ayas and Piskin (2011).

Despite recent increases in the number of scientific studies related to bullying, and in the number of such studies carried out in Turkey, bullying remains an important problem requiring a solution. Without doubt, it is not a problem that can be solved by schools acting alone. Families, non-governmental organizations and the media should support the studies conducted at schools. As is well known, psychological counseling and guidance services necessitate team work. The most important members of this team are undoubtedly the schools. Thus, all staff, especially the professional team can contribute to the solution of the problem by participating in raising awareness, prevention and relevant studies. Further research should focus on practical approaches that can be applied to dealing with bullying.

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