

An Unheeded Issue in Child Welfare: A Qualitative Study of Bullying from School Personnel Perspective¹

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Abstract:

Bullying is a widespread problem in different settings such as workplaces and schools. The cases of bullying show proliferation tendency, which has made it a problematic area to be discussed carefully. It is apparent that bullying has negative outcomes on victims, perpetrators and related others. Bullying affects the school and orphanage environments negatively, and worsen the psycho-social state of affected adolescents. This paper is originated from a research project funded by TUBITAK titled as “Determining Bullying State of Adolescents in Orphanages and Board Schools, and Development and Application of a Preventative Training Program” in order to specify and prevent bullying through in-depth interview with school personnel. The main objective of this research is to collect data through first-person accounts of school personnel and provide a valuable source for the literature. In addition, the aim of this research is to collect data about experiences of school personnel and understand how they perceive and intervene bullying problem at school. The majority of

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those who responded take bullying as a common problem. Solutions offered by attendants to prevent bullying are ending or at least limiting collective settlement and care, social, sports and art activities, counselling and guidance services, student consciousness-raising activities. As a result, it is important to commission a psycho-social team (psychological counsellor, psychologist and social worker) at schools is quite important for preventing bullying and creating positive school climate.

Key words: Child welfare, bullying, board school, orphanages

1. INTRODUCTION

There are different settings individuals are in contact and interaction with each other. The most important of them are the schools they attend and the places they live in. Normally the children spend the most of their time with their peers at school, and at home after school. However, the children staying in orphanages and board schools are in deep contact and relation with their peers, since they spend the night together. Though the basic aims of these institutions are to develop communication and problem-solving skills of the adolescents living there, it is not always the case for them. One of the negative interactions between the students at schools or living in orphanages is bullying.

Bullying goes unheeded in school settings is a significant problem affecting many children. Research for bullying, thus, should proliferate, and attention should be heightened to this very problem, accordingly. Bullying is aggressive behaviour of children targeting other children in school settings. Children behaviours such as mocking someone's appearance, nicknaming, social exclusion and violence targeting other children is called bullying. An unheeded issue in child welfare, bullying, unless treated, may have many negative effects on both the bully and the victim such as psychological problems,

early school leaving, etc. If not prevented or decreased, bullying will lead adolescents to face persistent social and psychological problems in their later lives.

Dynamics, types, characteristics and consequences of bullying have been discussed by scholars for many years. That's why we should move beyond. Bullying is not as easy to spot as emotional abuse. So, it is a hard task to find up-to-date and reliable data. As a result of many quantitative research, bullying is understood to be a common problem. Few qualitative research has been carried out based on observation and interview. The main objective of this research is to collect data through first-person accounts of school personnel and provide a valuable source for the literature. In addition, the aim of this research is to collect data about experiences of school personnel and understand how they perceive and intervene bullying problem at school.

Bullying

Bullying is also referred to as peer victimization (Jarolmen, 2013: 259). Bullying is a widespread problem in different settings such as workplaces and schools. Bullying is seen in the school as well as the community (Ibid), which needs to be immediately intervened. Generally defined as aggressive behaviour involving unwanted, negative actions between the students having imbalance of power or strength. The first studies related to bullying dates back to 1970s by Olweus, whose definition of bullying is widely used. Bullying, as he coined, is a set of repetitive negative behaviours of one or more people towards people who are weaker (Olweus, 1993). This definition is furthered by other researchers. Besag (1995), for example, defines bullying as repetitive assaults of people intend to oppress weaker people physically, psychologically, socially and verbally. Similarly, Smith and Sharp (1994) explained that bullying is such behaviours of students to others by saying unpleasant words, hitting, kicking, confining the victim,

remaining silent to them. Piskin (2002) analysed the definitions within the literature, and concluded that it is a type of aggressiveness of one or more students by intentionally and repetitively disturbing weaker ones, namely, the victims, who are not able to protect themselves.

Types of bullying are classified in different ways. The classification in the work undertaken by Olweus (1993) can be exemplified, which is a) physical b) verbal c) social exclusion. As physical and verbal bullying can be observed, it is classified as direct bullying, whereas social exclusion is classified as indirect bullying. Direct bullying is verbal or physical assaults towards the victim. Indirect bullying, on the other hand, is such behaviours as isolating the victim, excluding from the group, spreading rumour. In literature, relational bullying or aggression is used as alternative terms for indirect bullying (Crick and Bigbee, 1998). Elliott puts forward an extensive classification for bullying: physical, verbal, social exclusion, emotional and sexual. However, the studies undertaken in Turkey suggested another classification: (a) physical bullying (hitting, kicking, slapping, biting), (b) verbal bullying (calling bad names, swearing, threatening, mocking), (c) isolation, (d) spreading rumours, (e) damage to property (Piskin and Ayas, 2011).

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

Qualitative research method is employed in this study to understand the nature of the bullying problem. Different from quantitative methods, qualitative one makes it possible to collect data in depth related to such a multi-dimensional fact. In general, qualitative research methods are especially useful in discovering the meaning that people give to events they experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The aim of this research is to collect data regarding experiences

of school personnel and understand how they perceive and intervene bullying problem at school. Thus, action research method was used as a research design to collect information from 20 school personnel about their practices, experiences and opinions. In parallel with our study aims, action research method is employed to analyse problems within its context and find solutions to them (Yildirim & Simsek, 2016: 74).

2.2. Data Collection Tool

Throughout this process, semi-structured interviews are held as a data collection tool to specify feelings and thoughts of school personnel working in orphanages, children's house and board schools related to bullying. The interview includes following themes: perception, attitude and behaviours in preventing bullying; peer bullying intervention patterns.

2.3. Sampling

Multi stage cluster sampling method used, and face to face interviews are held with a total of 20 personnel, 4 of whom are (administrator, teacher, nurse, staff) working in Eskisehir Male Orphanage, 6 of them (administrator, child development specialist, teacher, caregiver) are working in Ankara Saray Children's House, and 10 of them (teacher, staff, administrator) are working in Ankara Karaali Secondary Board School participated in this present research.

2.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis technique is used to analyse data as a result of semi-structured interviews. Firstly, a frame is formed under six titles by including the questions. Then the basic expressions are categorized with main themes. And then the findings are discussed.

3. FINDINGS and DISCUSSION

The findings will be discussed in six categories:

- Commonality of the problem
- Types of bullying
- The reasons of adolescents for bullying
- Comments on distinctive features of bullies from other students
- Preventative measures against bullying
- Solutions offered by attendants to prevent bullying

3.1. Commonality of the problem

It is possible to categorize participant responses as “extensiveness” and “prevention” related to the question of how common and important the bullying at schools are. Majority of the participants perceive the problem to be very extensive, whereas some see it extensive at medium level.

Scope of the problem	Basic Expressions	Main Themes	Number of Arguments
What do you think about the commonality of bullying problem at schools?	“there are different types of bullying in board schools than others. The problem is very extensive that no one can imagine.”	Extensiveness	8
	“it is very extensive in terms of our school. You noticed that our students are exposed to violence.” Bullying is a common problem. Here, they bully the students that they can regardless of their sex.		
	“We are trying to monitor such things. We try to prevent the time we notice. We generally control and interfere.”	Prevention	2

3.2. Types of bullying

Participants stated that the most common types of bullying are verbal and physical bullying. In terms of verbal bullying, the most expressed are insulting, rebuffing, swearing, mocking, to be ridiculed and to be threatened. In addition, students tend to exclude others they want, to exclude from their groups, and sometimes they try to hinder other students’ relations with excluded students by threatening and blackmailing. As for

physical bullying, kicking and smacking are the most common ones.

Scope of the problem	Basic Expressions	Main Themes	Number of Arguments
What do you think about the types of bullying that happens at schools?	“making his friend swear, mocking, calling bad names, and so on. “calling bad names, verbal bullying, mocking, mocking with appearance, threatening...” “Physical and verbal. Just a minute ago, a girl was telling bad words that I have never used before.”	Verbal bullying	8
	“Exclusion is the most common. Grouping especially between the girls only or the boys. Gangs can gather on their own, and can exclude others they want.” “Newcomers and students with different accents are excluded...”	Exclusion, isolation	8
	“physical bullying” “both male and female students resort to physical bullying”	Physical bullying	7

3.3. The reasons of adolescents for bullying

The reasons of adolescents for bullying, as observed by the participants, can be classified within five categories, such as family, media, proving oneself, social environment and boy-girl relationship. Most of the participants related the reasons of bullying with the families. They think that students learn bullying from their families. Violent images on media (TV, internet, etc.) prompt students to acts of violence.

Scope of the problem	Basic Expressions	Main Themes	Number of Arguments
Why do you think that adolescents bully?	“The student inherited it, s/he saw it from the family or his/her environment. S/he thinks s/he should behave like that. S/he think s/he will be popular; will attract girls. Especially because of their families. When s/he sees at home, s/he bullies weaker ones. We cannot prevent, for example at the dorm.	Family	8
	They imitate the characters they watch or see in press, publications and/or TV, and direct them to the students in the class.	Media	8
	Some students want priority. They want to prove themselves to be popular. To be accepted or not. I think when they are isolated, they bully as a solution.	To prove oneself	7

Everybody knows that the level of bullying is high at the school from where the student came. Majority of women are beaten; men are dominant and uneducated.	Social environment	5
Especially problems regarding boy-girl friendship trigger bullying behaviour.	Boy-girl relationship	4

3.4. Comments on distinctive features of bullies from other students

The most common distinctive feature of bullies is academic failure. The following feature is their families. The most of the participants state that bullies are uninterested in courses and their success rate is low. Another important point is their families. Students from broken homes (uneducated parent, being in a bad financial condition) show high levels of violent behaviour.

Scope of the problem	Basic Expressions	Main Themes	Number of Arguments
.	Physically stronger ones have the most behaviour disorder. Leader students in the groups or the students want to be leader can be aggressive.	Aggressive personality Leader	6
	I think academically unsuccessful students become aggressive. They talk little, and are not active during classes.	Academic failure	9
What are the distinctive features of bullies from other students?	Most of the aggressive students come from broken homes.	Family	8
	They are ego-centric. They behave like they know everything. They try to attract attention. They dress, behave, talk differently. They need affection and love. They try to be spotted. They try to attract attention by dressing differently.	The need to attract attention and be spotted.	4
	They are physically strong. Their appearances are different, so are their dress, speech, and walking.	Physical appearance (strongly built)	6

3.5. Preventative measures against bullying

The preventative measures taken by staff are mostly monitoring and preventative measures and measures taken by the school management. Teachers are desperate and there is no

counselling service within the board schools. At certain times, counsellors from Counselling Research Centre within the region visit school. The preventative measures are dissuasion, advice, taking statements, and expelling from the school.

Scope of the problem	Basic Expressions	Main Themes	Number of Arguments
What are the measures taken to prevent bullying among adolescents?	When happened for the first time, the teacher refers to school management. Then the family interferes. We try not to confront them with each other. We try to treat equally to students. We try to make them feel that they are not different from each other. Additionally, we teach them to respect, be kind to each other. In order to solve problems, we advise them to talk.	Monitoring and preventative measures	8
	We talk to them every time over and over again. We give examples from our past experiences. We monitor them and try to prevent if we notice.		
	Firstly, the teachers notice or generally the students refer to teachers. Then minutes are written.	Measures taken by the school management	5
We try everything good or bad. Minutes are written; statements are taken, and they plead.			
	We tell them that students who have certain number of minutes will be expelled. Expelling from a school cannot be a form of punishment but they are aware that they can go nowhere.	Punishment	8
	Writing minutes are used as punishment. If so many, they are suspended. You cannot do anything to children. Smart students are aware of this. These students know that there is no punishment as a result of any minutes written.		

3.6. Solutions offered by attendants to prevent bullying

The solutions offered by the attendants are giving up the policy of collective care, offering more artistic and sports activities, referring to counselling and guidance services, and organizing conscious raising activities. Giving up collective care may diminish acts of violence, since the participants relate bullying with the collective settlement. Such schools urgently need a psycho-social services with a counsellor and a school social worker. At macro level, conscious raising activities should be organized with the support from regional authorities and the ministry.

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Scope of the problem	Basic Expressions	Main Themes	Number of Arguments
What are your solutions to prevent bullying among the adolescents?	Collective accommodation and lack of parental love lead to bullying It is hard to intervene adolescents in groups; however, we should be able to do so. They want to feel special.	Collective settlement/Care	8
	Available places are needed for adolescents to discharge. This may affect in decreasing violence. People interested in arts of philosophy will change; we will all change for sure.	Social, sports and artistic activities	8
	We do not know how to change people's behaviour. We haven't received proper training. Pedagogues should be involved. A counsellor or a social worker like you should be involved. It will be better. From time to time, temporary counsellors are sent, but the child doesn't want to talk to them.	Counselling and guidance services	6
	Seminars, drama activities about violence should be arranged. This is important in order to raise their consciousness.	Conscious raising activities	5

CONCLUSION

Considering that bullies are of disadvantaged group; such research results are inevitable when compared to students living in healthy family. This makes it important to employ qualified school personnel. On the other hand, it is obvious that commissioning psycho-social team (psychological counsellor, psychologist and social worker) at schools is quite important for preventing bullying and creating positive school climate. Team work is also essential for problem-solving, empowerment and creating positive settings. Cooperation of psychological counsellor, psychologist and social worker with the adolescent, his/her family and the school will provide solution for preventing bullying and violence, empowering students and having them gain social functioning.

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