A Study on Bullying Tendencies among Preadolescents

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Abstract

The amount of bullying escalating in schools in recent years has been approached as an issue that needs to be investigated, whose causes need to be searched and for which preventive efforts should be made. This study is aimed at examining the bullying tendencies among preadolescents. The study was carried out with middle school preadolescents in Konya between the years 2016 and 2017. The voluntary participants were 122 female and 78 male students with an age range of 13 to 14 years. The participants were administered the Bullying Tendency Scale, which was developed and whose validity and reliability was established by Dölek (2002), and the demographic information about the students were collected using a Personal Information Form developed by the researcher. Analysis of the data obtained in the study revealed significant results in favour of male students in negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency according to the gender of participants. In terms of age factor, significant results were obtained in favour of 14 year-olds in causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency. For negative reflection, no significant difference was found in justification and lack of emotional sharing according to the age of preadolescents. Similarly, no significant difference was found in relation to the socio-economic status of the participants. Recommendations were offered based on the results of the study.

Keywords: teenager, bullying, tendency

1. Introduction

As it is the case in every aspect of social life, aggression and violence have been observed to be escalating in recent years in school environments across the world and Turkey. Not only violence but also bullying behaviours take place in schools as examples of aggressive behaviours. James (2010) reports that bullying, as a form of aggression, occurs very often in schools. It is known that first studies on bullying in schools were undertaken by Dan Olweus in 1970s (Olweus, 1993).

Bullying, by definition, is a form of aggressive behaviour repeated physically, psychologically, socially and verbally against a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons for their own benefits or enjoyment (Satan, 2006); a form of continual violence with physical or psychological effects committed by a person or group of persons against the weak or defenceless ones (Pişkin, 2002); longstanding and systematic violence, physical or psychological, conducted by an individual or a group directed against an individual who is not able to defend himself Ronald (1989); the continual physical, psychological, social or verbal intimidation by a stronger individual/individuals against weaker ones in order to distress them for their own benefits or enjoyment. Bullying is typically repetitive, it requires tendency and it is an unbalanced use of force (Li, 2007).

Research studies have long been conducted on bullying in schools and the results emphasize that most of the bullying takes place in middle schools (James, 2010; Satan, 2005; Olweus, 1993; Smith et al., 1999; Pellegrini & Long, 2002; Salmivalli, 2002; Griffin & Gross, 2004; Englander & Muldowney, 2007) and bullies tend to be bullies as adults (Satan, 2006). It is reported that in Turkey verbal bullying is the most common type of bullying, followed by physical, emotional and sexual bullying (Çınkır, 2006).

Previously conducted research studies have shown that studies on bullying were mostly undertaken within family (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Turgut, 2005; Akgün, 2005; Baldry, 2003; Finnegan, Hodges, & Perry, 1996; Bernstein & Watson, 1997; Yöndem & Tokinan, 2007; Önder & Yurtal, 2008; Şimşek & Palancı, 2014) and school contexts (Çalık et al., 2009; Uysal & Dinçer, 2012; Bayraktar, 2006; Kartal, 2008). In the studies carried out in Turkey, age, socio-economic status, time and place of bullying, type of bullying, characteristics of bullies

and behaviours exhibited by victims during bullying have been selected as independent variables (Dölek, 2002). With the changes in the bullying tendencies in the modern age, bullying among adult students was also studied in terms of several variables in Turkey (Sargın & Güven, 2010).

It has been seen that very few studies have been done in Turkey in relation to bullying (Yüksel-Şahin, 2015; Malkoç & Ceylan, 2010; Arıman, 2007; Çayırdağ, 2006). By definition, tendency is a natural inclination, bent, or predisposition to like, want or do something; an attitude determined by the feelings felt for an object or entity; a desire to achieve a certain goal due to the effect of emotions (TDK, 2017). Based on this definition, it could be suggested that tendencies are among the causes that drive people to behave in certain ways.

Previous studies report that gender is one of the reasons that gives rise to bullying and males display more intimidating behaviours than females (Yüksel-Şahin, 2014; Duy & Yıldız, 2014; Arıman, 2007; Bayraktar, 2006; Espelage et al., 2000; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999; Pişkin, 2003; Şahin & Sarı, 2010). It is also reported that there exists a connection between bullying and mental disorder (Koç, 2006; Smith & Sharp, 2003). Schwartz and Proctor (2000) argue, based on social learning theory, that children are likely to learn bullying. Berkowitz (1990) also points to a number of research findings he reached supporting that behaviour tendencies inherent in human beings are open to change through learning.

In the light of the facts above, it is clear that knowing and being aware of bullying tendencies is essential in order to prevent bullying. The present study is therefore aimed at determining the bullying tendencies of preadolescents during middle school years, the age when bullying is most common. The study has significance as it reveals the risk situations by identifying bullying tendencies. Once bullying tendencies are identified, it is firmly believed that the amount of bullying cases in schools can be reduced by means of preventive actions or programs to be developed against bullying.

2. Method

The present study was conducted in accordance with the survey model. Survey model is a research approach aiming to determine a condition existing in the past or present. The individual or object handled in the research is described within their existing conditions (Karasar, 2008).

2.1 Sample

Sample of the study included 200 students from middle school in Konya. In the sample, there were 78 (39%) male and 122 (61%) female students with ages ranging from 13 to 14. The working group was composed of only randomly chosen voluntary students.

2.2 Data Collection Tools

In the study, data were collected using Bullying Tendency Scale, which was developed and whose validity and reliability was established by Dölek (2002), and the demographic information about the participants was gathered using a Personal Information Form developed by the researcher. Bullying Tendency Scale was comprised of 42 items and 6 dimensions (Negative Reflection, Lack of Emotional Sharing, Justification for Bullying, Causing Distress, Use of Force and Bullying Tendency). The data in the study were examined across dimensions and total scores.

Table 1. T-test results regarding negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, justification for bullying, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency in terms of the gender factor

Bullying	Gender	n	$\bar{x}$	sd	t	p
Negative Reflection	F	122	8.2	3.5		
	M	78	10.8	4.5	-4.2	.0
Lack of Emotional Sharing	F	122	10.1	3.1		
	M	78	11.3	3.9	-2.3	.0
Justification	F	122	9.2	3.1		
	M	78	9.6	2.9	-.7	.4
Causing Distress	F	122	6.5	2.4		
	M	78	7.6	2.8	-2.6	.0
Use of Force	F	122	10.7	4.1	-2.6	

	M	78	12.3	4.3		.0
Bullying Tendency	F	122	46.8	11.5		
	M	78	53.9	14.3	-3.6	.0

Note. n=sample group; $\bar{x}$=arithmetic mean; sd=standart deviation; t=t value; p=significance.

2.3 Data Analysis

SPSS Version 17 was used for statistical analyses and the analyses were performed using t-test and variance analysis. As the data analysis exhibited normal distribution, t-test and variance analysis were used to interpret the data.

3. Results

In terms of the gender factor, t-test results regarding negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, justification for bullying, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency were given in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, significant results were found in negative reflection (t=-4.2, p=.0), lack of emotional sharing (t=-2.3, p=.0), causing distress (t=-2.6, p=.0), use of force (t=-2.6, p=.0) and bullying tendency (t=-3.6, p=.0) in favour of male preadolescents according to the gender factor. However, for the gender factor, no significant result was obtained in justification for bullying (t=-.7, p=.4).

For the age factor, t-test results with relation to negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, justification for bullying, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. T-test results regarding negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, justification for bullying, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency in terms of the age factor

Bullying	Age	n	$\bar{x}$	sd	t	p
Negative Reflection	13	96	8.8	4.1		
	14	104	9.6	4.1	-1.4	.1
Lack of Emotional Sharing	13	96	10.3	3.2		
	14	104	10.8	3.7	-1.0	.3
Justification	13	96	9.0	3.0		
	14	104	9.7	3.0	-1.7	.0
Causing Distress	13	96	6.5	2.5		
	14	104	7.3	2.7	-2.2	.0
Use of Force	13	96	10.6	4.2		
	14	104	12.0	4.2	-2.3	.0
Bullying Tendency	13	96	47.5	12.5		
	14	104	51.5	13.4	-2.1	.0

Note. n=sample group; $\bar{x}$=arithmetic mean; sd=standart deviation; t=t value; p=significance.

As presented in Table 2, significant results were found in causing distress (t=-2.2, p=.0), use of force (t=-2.3, p=.0) and bullying tendency (t=-2.1, p=.0) in favour of 14 year-old preadolescents according to the age factor. Yet, for the same factor, no significant result was obtained in negative reflection (t=-1.4, p=.1), lack of emotional sharing (t=-1.0, p=.3) and justification (t=-1.7, p=.0).

For economic status, t-test results related to negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, justification for bullying, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency were presented in Table 3.

Table 3. ANOVA results regarding negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, justification for bullying, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency in terms of economic status

Bullying	Economic Status	n	$\bar{x}$	sd	f	p
Negative Reflection	low	95	8.8	3.8		
	moderate	66	9.0	4.0		
	high	39	10.5	4.9		
	Total	200	9.2	4.1	2.4	2.4
Lack of Emotional Sharing	1	95	10.8	3.5		
	2	66	10.3	3.4		
	3	39	10.3	3.4		
	Total	200	10.6	3.4	.6	.5
Justification	1	95	9.1	3.1		
	2	66	9.5	2.8		
	3	39	9.9	3.2		
	Total	200	9.4	3.0	1.0	.3
Causing Distress	1	95	6.9	2.3		
	2	66	6.8	2.7		
	3	39	7.3	3.2		
	Total	200	6.9	2.6	.5	.5
Use of Force	1	95	11.2	4.1		
	2	66	11.0	4.1		
	3	39	12.4	4.8		
	Total	200	11.4	4.2	1.4	.2
Bullying	1	95	48.8	11.8		
	2	66	48.7	12.9		
	3	39	53.0	15.9		1.6
	Total	200	49.6	13.1	1.6	

Note. n=sample group; $\bar{x}$=arithmetic mean; sd=standart deviation; f=ANOVA; p=significance.

In relation to the economic status of preadolescents, variance analysis showed no significant results in negative reflection (f=2.4, p=2.4), lack of emotional sharing (f=.6, p=.5), justification (f=1.0, p=.3), causing distress (f=.5, p=.5), use of force (f=1.4, p=.2) and bullying tendency (f=1.6, p=1.6), as evidenced by the data in Table 3.

4. Discussion

The findings of the study indicated significant results in favour of male preadolescents in negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency in terms of the gender factor. No significant effect, nevertheless, was obtained for the dimension of justification.

Dölek (2002) describes negative reflection as attitudes of directing emotions such as anger, anxiety and being prevented that make one feels bad towards weaker ones. The present study found that male preadolescents, compared with female ones, have tendencies to direct their emotions such as anger, anxiety and being prevented that make them feel bad towards weaker preadolescents. Following early childhood and preceding adolescence, preadolescence is a period with certain characteristics that lasts 2 or 3 years between the ages of 11 and 13 or 12 and 14 (Kılıç, 2013). These years, especially when considered along with adolescence, are the years of maximum risks and problems (Çetinkaya, 2013). It is reported that the skills of coping with the new challenges faced are not completely developed yet in these years (Aydın, 1997). Also, girls are known to be better in

communication skills than boys; they can express themselves better. Male preadolescents, therefore, might be exhibiting negative reflection.

Dölek (2002) states that attitudes such as the lack of skill in developing empathy for other students, inability to express thoughts by speaking and the difficulty of calming oneself down are measured within the dimension of lack of emotional sharing. Some previous studies have found that female students have higher emphatic tendency levels (Bozkurt, 1997; Ünal, 1997; Dökmen, 1987). It is seen that our finding that male students have lower empathy skills than female ones is in consistent with other research findings in the literature. Strayer and Roberts (2004) argue that aggression decreases as the tendency to develop empathy increases. This finding seems to explain why male preadolescents have a tendency to be more aggressive and why they have difficulty in calming themselves down.

Causing distress can be described as an intentional act of hurting, disturbing or giving pain to the other person and taking pleasure in doing so (Dölek, 2002). In the present study, the intentional act of hurting, disturbing or giving pain to the other person and taking pleasure in doing so was found to be significantly higher in male preadolescents than female ones. The intentional act of hurting, disturbing or giving pain to the other person and taking pleasure in doing this is regarded as an aggressive behaviour. During the socialization process in which gender roles are adopted, males are encouraged to be tough, strong and authoritarian (Dökmen, 1999, 2004). The finding from this study can be explained by these aforementioned masculine roles.

Dölek (2002) defines the use of force as any act of intimidation by a more powerful person toward a less powerful person. In their studies to determine the characteristics of bullies, Bjorkquist et al. (1982), Lowenstein (1978) and Olweus (1978) found that bullies have a sense of self which is grounded on power, regard themselves as a tough, successful and skilful person, and do not feel dissatisfaction at all (Cited in Dölek, 2002). Our findings obtained in favour of male preadolescents in the dimension of the use of force are in consistent with such findings in the literature.

According to Dölek (2002), justification is a situation in which bullies believe that victims of bullying deserve the punishment and they know how to get away with their bullying acts by asserting their rightness when they have trouble with the authority due to their bullying attitudes. In the present study, no significant difference was found in terms of the gender factor.

Total scores in bullying tendency indicated that male preadolescents had significantly higher scores than female preadolescents. This finding aligns with findings from previous research carried out into bullying (Baldry & Farrington, 2000; Karaman-Kepenekçi & Çınkır, 2006; Kandemir et al., 2008; Kartal, 2008).

Regarding the age factor, significant results were obtained in favour of 14 year-olds in causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency. No significant difference was observed in negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing and justification for bullying. A study found that bullying behaviours occur mostly in 7th and 8th grades in schools (Seals, 2002). Our finding that 14 year-old preadolescents are more likely to show bullying tendency is in consistent with this finding. With respect to causing distress and use of force, it was found that children of this age demonstrate more willingness to hurt, disturb and intimidate the weaker ones. Higher bullying tendencies among 14 year-olds might result from the fact that these children, compared with younger ones, might find themselves more advantageous to show superiority due to their increased age.

According to variance analysis, no significant difference was found in negative reflection, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency according to the economic status of our sample. This finding was found to be inconsistent with the finding reported by Şimşek and Palancı (2014) that bullying behaviours displayed by children escalate as the level of being affected by economic problems increases, and with another finding reported by Çayırdağ (2006) suggesting that bullies come from low socioeconomic backgrounds; it is however supported by a similar research finding by Pişkin (2003) that bullying does not differ in terms of socioeconomic status.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study was carried out to investigate bullying tendencies among preadolescents. The results indicated significant results in favour of male preadolescents in negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency in terms of the gender factor. No significant difference was found in the dimension of justification for the gender factor. Regarding the age factor, significant results were obtained in favour of 14 year-olds in causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency while no significant result was observed in negative reflection, lack of emotional sharing and justification. Finally, results of the variance analysis performed on the economic status of the participants yielded no significant results in negative reflection,

lack of emotional sharing, justification, causing distress, use of force and bullying tendency. Accordingly, the following recommendations were made:

1) Helping male preadolescents to appropriately express emotions such as anger, being prevented and anxiety that make them feel bad,

2) Helping to develop emphatic tendencies among male preadolescents,

3) Providing male preadolescents with training in the skills of self-expression and communication so that they can express themselves appropriately,

4) Identifying bullying tendencies of preadolescents and taking preventive actions for those at risk.

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