An Investigation of the Family Characteristics of Bullies, Victims, and Positively Behaving Adolescents

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Abstract

The present study investigated the family characteristics of bullies, victims, and positively behaving adolescents. The study was conducted in three elementary schools in Adana central province with students who were attending 6th-7th, and 8th grades. A who is who form prepared by the researchers was used for the determination of the family characteristics of the students in the sample. The form was completed by 1713 students. A total of 273 students (99 girls, 174 boys) are identified according to the results: 118 bully students, 81 victim students, and 74 positively behaving students. The Family Assessment Survey, developed by Epstein, Baldwin, & Bishop (1983) and translated into Turkish by Bulut (1990), was used to measure family functions. One way ANOVA and Logistic Regression Analysis were used for statistical analysis. In conclusion, it is determined that bully and victim students perceived their families more negative than the other students in terms of problem solving, communication, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavior control, and general functioning. All the subscale scores of Family Assessment Survey were successfully classified 70.3% for bullies and 68.4% for victims. It is determined that problem solving, communication, and roles subscales of the Family Assessment Survey have significant support in explaining bullying. Communication, roles and behavior control subscales have significant support in explaining victimization.

Keywords
Bullying, Bully, Victim, Family, Adolescent.

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One of the widest problems at primary schools in many countries including Turkey is bullying. Recent studies from the U.S.A. (Nansel et al., 2001), Australia (Rigby, & Slee, 1991), Norway (Olweus, 1993), England, Germany (Wolke, Woods, Stanford, & Schulz, 2001) and Turkey (Kepenekçi, & Çınkır, 2006; Pişkin, 2003; Yurtal, & Cenkseven, 2007) show that the prevalence of bullying was very high in many countries. Bullying is defined as one or more stronger students persecuting or attempting to persecute in order to harm, injure, disturb, or disgrace weaker students repeatedly and over time (Olweus, 1993; Page, & Page, 2003). Most definitions of bullying categorize it as a subset of aggressive behavior that involves an intention to hurt another person (Camodeca, Goossens, Schuengel, & Terwogt, 2003; Rivers, & Smith, 1994). Not only can this negative intentional behavior be displayed physically, but it can also be verbal, subtle, and elusive. The victim cannot defend himself or herself easily for various reasons such as being outnumbered or being physically inferior (Smith, & Sharp, 1994, cited in Sanders, & Phye, 2004). Marsh, Parada, Yeung, and Healey (2001) determine in their research that bullies were described as individuals who do not follow rules, get into physical fights, and pick on others. On the other hand, victims were characterized as children who did not feel safe at school due to the receipt of threats or real physical harm by someone at their schools.

Peer aggressiveness or being a victim of aggression at a school threats the psychological and social well being of a child or an adolescent (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, & Slee, 1993). Studies on peer violence increase rapidly in the recent years and peer aggression prevention programs are developed in many countries.

Recent studies show that victim and bully students have poorer psychosocial health than their friends. For instance, bully students are found to be more aggressive, antisocial (Craig, 1998), and impulsive (Craig, 1998, Smith, 1991) whereas victims are found to be more passive, anxious, and mistrustful (Craig, 1998; Olweus, 1993; Schwartz, McFayden-Ketchum, Dodge, Pettit, & Bates, 1998). Social-environmental factors such as peer groups, school and family affect peer aggression and victimization (Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007). Family is used in this study as one of the socio-environmental factors.

Families of bullies or violent students have some characteristics such as using physical discipline, repudiations or hostile actions against children,

poor problem-solving skills, and permission for hostile acts (Demeray, & Malecki, 2003; Loeber, & Dishion, 1984). Fielder (2006) indicated that there was a relationship between authoritarian parenting style and the acts of bullying. Families of victims show more defender and less repudiation and less hostile acting (Olweus, 1993; Rican, Klicperova, & Koucka, 1993).

In summary, it is determined from the literature that bully children and adolescents have parents having poor problem-solving skills (Loeber, & Dishion, 1984), inconsistent relationship with their parents and siblings (Connolly, & O'Moore, 2003). Mothers or fathers of both victims and bullies have power imbalance and their children perceive fathers having more power than mothers (Bowers, Smith, & Binney, 1992). Bullies experience family conflict of their parents and less emotional reactions (Avcı, 2006; Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij, & Van Oost, 2002). Poor dependence, poor human touch (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1997, Turgut, 2005), poor control and discipline strategies (Loeber, & Dishion, 1984) are also evident in this group.

Different assessment methods such as observation, sociometric procedures, questionnaires, surveys, teacher ratings, self reports, are used for determining bullying (Crothers, & Levinson, 2004). The self-report method is generally used in many studies in Turkey for determining the groups related to bullying. Assessment using peer nominations is an important source of knowledge because it includes observation of many people having mutual interaction (Atik, 2006; Gültekin, 2003; Pekel, 2004). Peer nomination permits the aggregation of peer/classmate judgment about individuals' roles in school bullying. Aggregation mitigates against the biases of a particular person while allowing for the richness of individual reports at the level of the child (Kim, Koh & Leventhal, 2004). There are many studies in the literature indicating that teacher and peer ratings are more effective than self report for determination of physical and verbal or direct and indirect aggression (Henry, 2006; Pakaslahti, & Keltikangas-Jarvinen, 2000).

National and international research shows that studies on family characteristics are necessary for understanding and preventing bullying (Dölek, 2002; Stevens et al., 2002; Turgut, 2005; Yıldırım, 2001). The family characteristics of bullies and victims, and positively behaving adolescents based on peer nomination were investigated in this study. The determination of family characteristics of bullies, victims and positively

behaving adolescents will be useful to develop programs for prevention. For this reason, it is aimed to determine the family characteristics of bullies and victims, and positively behaving adolescents in the study.

Method

Participants

The sample of the study was determined in two phases. At first, the study was conducted with 1713 students from 7 and 8 grades attending three different elementary schools in Seyhan and Yuregir districts in Adana province. In the second phase, a total of 273 students identified as bullies, victims, and positively behaving students by their friends were chosen. In this group, there were 99 girls (26.26%) and 174 boys (63.74%). There were 118 students who were identified as bullies (43.22%), 81 students as victims (29.67%), and 74 students (27.11%) as positively behaving students. Of the students, 104 were from 6th grade (39.10%), 97 students from 7th grade (35.53%), and 72 students from 8th grade (26.37%).

Measures

Who is who Form: Who is who technique gives valuable information about the ideas and perceptions of persons known to each other in a group. For this purpose, a "who is who" form was developed by the researchers. When questions in the form were determined expert opinions were requested and literature search was integrated. In the form, there are 4 items for bullying (such as who excludes his friends from a game? Who is the most who kicks in the class?, Who is the most who slaps in the class?), 4 items for victim characters (such as; Who is the most excluded in the classroom?, Who is the most name-calling victim in the classroom?), and 4 items for positive behaviors (such as who helps his friends mostly? or Who is the most trusted and respected person in the class?).

Then, it is determined how often the student's peers were noted a student as bully, victim and student having positive features. Students who were identified as both victims and bullies were excluded from the sample. In order to determine the reliability of this survey based on peer preferences, the classroom teachers (n=43) were interviewed to answer the same form. Calculated Kappa value to determine the reliability bet-

ween the two measurements is 0.65 (*p* < .001). These results based on peer preferences indicate that the measurement is reliable.

The Family Assessment Device: The Family Assessment Device developed by Epstein et al. (1983) and translated into Turkish by Bulut (1990) was used to measure family functions. The scale has 7 sub-scales as Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement, Behavior Control, and General Functioning. Test-Retest reliability of the device for subscales is ranging from 0.62 to 0.89. Cronbach Alfa coefficients of the Turkish Form were found as 0.80 for Problem Solving, 0.71 for Communication, 0.42 for Roles, 0.59 for Affective Responsiveness, 0.38 for Affective Involvement, 0.52 for Behavior Control, 0.86 for General Functioning.

Data Analysis

Levene's F-test was used to test the assumption of homogeneity of variance. One-way ANOVA with least significant difference (LSD) post hoc test was used for the inter-group comparisons a value of p < .05. Logistic Regression Analysis was used in the prediction of victimization and bullying. The limit value of probability of Wald Test considered as .25 (Bendel, & Afifi, 1977; Mickey, & Greenland, 1989).

Results

Significant differences were obtained among the scores of bullies, victims and positively behaving students according to the test results of one-way ANOVA for the sub-dimensions of the Family Assessment Device: Problem-solving [$F_{(2, 272)}$=4.072, *p*<.05], communication [$F_{(2, 272)}$=7.697, *p*<.01], Roles [$F_{(2, 272)}$=13.593, *p*<.001], affective responsiveness [$F_{(2, 272)}$=8.196, *p*<.001], affective involvement [$F_{(2, 272)}$=5.070, *p*<.01], behavior control [$F_{(2, 272)}$=6.438, *p*<.01] and general functioning [$F_{(2, 272)}$=5.184, *p*<.01].

LSD test is used to determine which groups caused the difference. According to the test results, bullies and victim students perceive their families as negative on the sub dimensions of problem solving (*p*<.01, *p*<.05), communication (*p*<.001, *p*<.01), roles (*p*<.001, *p*<.001), affective responsiveness (*p*<.01, *p*<.001), affective involvement (*p*<.05, *p*<.01), behavior control (*p*<.01, *p*<.01) and general functioning (*p*<.01, *p*<.01) with respect to positively behaving students.

The model included all independent variables (problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavior control and general functioning) found significant for explaining bullying according to logistic regression analysis results used for the predictor of bullying [X^2= 3.46, Sd=7, N=192, p<.001], (Nagelkerke R^2=.156). According to Wald test results, it was found that Problem Solving, Communication, Roles were the variables which have significant support to explain bullying. Logistic Regression Analysis with the data obtained from 192 students had good results and classified the data with 70.3% successfully.

It was determined that the model included all independent variables was significant after using the logistic regression analysis to determine the prediction variables of victimization [X^2=26.53, Sd=7, N=192, p<.001], (Nagelkerke R^2=.21). According to Wald test, it was found that Communication, Roles, Behavior Control and General Functioning were the variables which have significant support to explain victimization. In conclusion, Logistic Regression Analysis with data obtained from 155 students had good results and classified the data with 68.4% successfully.

Discussion

According to findings, victims and bully students have more negative perceptions about their families than positively behaving students in terms of problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, behavior control, and general functioning. The Family Assessment Survey classified successfully at the rate of 70.3% for bullying and 68.4% for victimization. Especially, problem solving, communication, roles for bullying, communication, roles and general functioning for victimization make more contribution than the other subscales.

Problem-solving is a skill to solve the spiritual and material problems so that at least family functions can be met (Bulut, 1990). According to the results, there were significant differences among families on problem solving according to the perceptions of bullies, victims, and positively behaving students. Bullies and victim students perceived their families more negatively than positively behaving students in regard to problem solving. Studies in the literature show that parents of bullies and adolescent have poor skill for problem solving (Loeber, & Dishion, 1984) and

exhibit general parent conflicts and discordance (Loeber, & Dishion, 1984; Oliver, Oaks, & Hoover, 1994; Olweus, 1993).

Effective communication in a family is that verbal communication is clear and family members express themselves directly. Shortly, communication must be direct and clear (Bulut, 1990). The study results showed that bullies and victim students perceived their families more negatively than positively behaving students on communication. Connolly and O'Moore (2003) determined that bullies had an inconsistent relationship with their parents. Positive and effective communication skills of a family have a vital importance for developing social and personal skills and positive coping for adolescents. Bully adolescents are possibly coming from families having poor communication skills (Bowers, Smith & Binney, 1992). Overprotective attitudes of the victims' families can be obstructive for improvement of social skills of children. In fact, there are some studies in the literature which show that social skills of victims are poor like bullies (Rigby, 2002).

Roles sub-scale is focused on developing behavior patterns of families about providing personal development, support, bringing-up, and resources. Moreover, this sub-scale includes equal distribution of tasks among family members, and implementation of the tasks by family members (Bulut, 1990). In the study, bully and victim students perceive their families more negative than positively behaving students. Bowers, Smith and Binney (1992) determined that bully and victim students perceive inequalities on balance of power between parents, and fathers are more powerful than mothers.

Affective responsiveness sub-scale concentrates on family members and their suitable reactions against all stimulants (Bulut, 1990). In the study, results show that bully and victim students perceived their family more negative than positively behaving students. Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost (2002) determined that families of bully students have more conflicts and less affective responsiveness. Avcı (2006) determined that families of bully adolescents are poorer than the families of other adolescents about affective responsiveness. Bully children show more emotional passiveness and express their selves with more negative sentences (Connolly, & O'Moore, 2003).

The results of the present study show that bully and victim students perceived their family more negative than positively behaving students

in terms of affective involvement. It is determined in the literature that dependence and friendship were poor (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost, 2002; Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1997; Turgut, 2005), exploitation, negligence and rejections are frequently encountered (Elliott, 1991, Turgut, 2005) in the families of bully students. On the other hand, dependence is dominant Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost (2002), and emotional closeness and over interest (Oliver et al., 1994), and overprotective attitude were shown (Hart, DeWolf, & Wozniak, 1992) in the families of victims. Both families of bully and victim students do not meet their functions about affective involvement, when healthy families have adequate concern among family members.

It is determined that bully and victim students perceived their families more negative than positively behaving students in terms of behavior control. Ineffective parenting practices affect children negatively (Boulter, 2004). Loeber and Dishion (1984) determined that families of bully students used poor control and discipline strategies. Olweus (1980, cited in Connolly, & O'Moore, 2003) expressed that behavior included violence encountered frequently at home environment of bully students. Families of bully students use inconsistent and hard child care methods (O'Moore, 1989, cited in Turgut, 2005), oppressive and authoritarian bringing-up methods (Oliver et al., 1994), and physical punishment methods (Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Oliver et al., 1994). In addition, Olweus (1993) expressed that the limits were not open in families of bully students. Families of victims are not supportive against their children for developing behavior control because of overprotective attitude. Both families of bully and victim students do not show effective parent attitude against children in terms of behavior control.

General Functioning sub-scale of the Family Assessment Device evaluates general problems on familial relationships. Moreover, the scale covers other problem areas of family functions (Bulut, 1990). The results of the study show that victim and bully students perceived their families more negatively than the other students as general functioning. Rigby (1993) determined that the families of adolescent having tendency bullying and victim adolescent had poorer psycho-social healthy. Families of adolescents developed social behavior have positive attitude and healthy relationships.

In another study, it is suggested that the complex process of intra-family dynamics should be studied by using different survey scales and met-

hods. For instance, family characteristics of bullies and victim students can be investigated using qualitative research methods. In this study, victims and positively behaving students were identified by peer nominations. This assessment method has some limitations as well as having great advantages. Therefore, similar studies using different measurement tools are recommended. It is seen that family characteristics is an important variable to be investigated in bully research. Therefore, some works are recommended to be done with the families of bullies and victim students by practitioners who work with adolescents to improve communication within the family, improve the parenting role, and gain the skills on effective problem solving within the family.

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