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Recording the Opinion of Students about the Attitude of Adults in School-Bullying

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Abstract

The presented herein survey aims at correlating the attitude of students towards bullying incidents at schools with their opinion about the attitude of the adult members of the school community (teachers/guardians) towards the respective incidents. The specific correlation is considered regarding the sex, the grade and the family type of students as well as whether they attend the extra-curricular programmes of Health Education or not. In this survey, 191 students participated, from six schools of the Secondary Education Directorate of West Attica region (Dytiki Attiki, Greece), with random sampling in case of schools and non-proportional quota sampling design, regarding the schools classes, in order to compare results across students who attended or not a Health Education Programme (HEP). The students answered an online questionnaire, which was filled in at the computer laboratory of their school. The questionnaire was based on the revised Olweus Bully Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) that has been internationally applied to a large number of surveys. For analyzing the results, the SPSS version 21 of the statistical package for Social Sciences has been used.

Keywords: School-bullying, Health Education Programmes.

Introduction

The school-bullying as a phenomenon has significantly troubled the Hellenic society and the educational community over the last years. For this purpose, intervention actions like the Health Education programmes are being implemented by students and teachers. These programmes constitute an important category of the extra-curricular educational activities that are dated since 2000 in the Greek educational system. The purpose of the Health Education programmes is the protection, improvement and promotion of the mental, physical and social health of students, by developing their critical abilities and the associated skills and by attempting to upgrade their immediate social and natural environment (Mourtzini, 2010).

For this reason, it was deemed advisable to investigate the role of the adults according to the opinion of the students and to attempt making the associated correlations with the issue of

school-bullying, thus enriching the relevant bibliography. At the same time, the specific survey is innovative to the extent that attempts to record the attitude of students who attend Health Education programmes.

The present survey aims at correlating the attitude of students towards the incidents of bullying at school along with their opinion about the role of the adult members of the school community (teachers/guardians) regarding these incidents. The particular correlation is considered regarding the sex, the grade and the family type of students, plus whether they attend a Health Education programme or not.

The survey was conducted at six schools of the Secondary Education Directorate of West Attica region (Dytiki Attiki, Greece), from four municipalities (Megara; Elefsina; Aspropyrgos; Fyli), between January and March 2014. This Directorate covers a region with specific environmental and social problems (Salvati & Mavrakis, 2014), while the student population embodies and bears its particular moral-values background to the school activities (Papavasileiou & Mavrakis, 2014).

The confidentiality of the process was stressed to the participants. These participants were 191 students of the afore-mentioned schools, chosen with random sampling in case of schools and a non-proportional quota sampling design, regarding the schools classes, in order to compare results across students who attended or not a Health Education programme (HEP). The students answered an online questionnaire, which was filled in at the computer laboratory of their school. This questionnaire was based on the revised Olweus Bully Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) that has been applied internationally to a large number of surveys (Olweus, 1993, 2009).

Conceptual and Functional Definitions

According to Farrington (1993), school-bullying has the following features:

- a) physical, verbal or psychological offense or insult;
- b) intention of causing fear, anxiety or pain to the victim;
- c) imbalance of power between the stronger and the weaker child;
- d) repetition by the same children for a long time.

On the contrary, it is not regarded as bullying (Olweus, 1997) when:

- a) there is a confrontation between persons of about the same physical and psychical strength;
- b) there is a teasing among persons of the same age;
- c) there is a playful or friendly mood.

Of course every child doesn't perceive in the same way a particular behaviour, thus a teasing may become bullying if a child feels intimidated (Olweus, 2009).

In the present survey, the approach of Olweus (1997) will be followed, who has attributed to school-bullying the following features, based on the research results being carried out:

- a) offensive or intentional behaviour,
- b) repeatedly happening for a certain period and
- c) being characterized by *imbalance of strength*, an *asymmetrical relation of power*, where the student can not defend him/her-self.

Regarding the role of students in the incidents of school-bullying, Salmivalli et al. (1996) identified six different roles:

- those who bully - intimidators;
- those who are bullied - victims;
- the advocates of the intimidators;
- the *passive* advocates of the intimidators;
- the defenders of the victims, and
- the inactive who are not directly involved in school-bullying.

Since the particular role classification is very detailed, we will follow the approach of Olweus (1993), who identifies the persons that participate in bullying incidents to:

- those who bully - intimidators;
- those who are bullied - victims and
- the observers.

In particular, to consider a student being involved in bullying, the incidents must have been repeated for 2-3 times per month, for the last two months.

In the present paper, the terms *intimidator* and *victim* will be avoided in favour of the terms *exert* or *suffer* bullying respectively, since the goal is rather to describe a situation than specific persons, which is not deemed as appropriate by the educational community (Kokkevi et al., 2012; Europe's antibullying campaign project, 2012; Psalti & Konstantinou, 2007).

Research Questions

Within the previous framework, it will be attempted to answer to the following questions:

- 1) Which is the attitude of students towards incidents of school-bullying?
- 2) Which is the opinion of students for the role of adults towards the incidents of school-bullying?
- 3) Is the attitude of students towards incidents of school-bullying correlated to their opinion about the attitude of the adult members of the school-community (teachers/guardians) towards the relevant incidents?
- 4) Is the attitude of students towards incidents of school-bullying correlated to sex, grade, family type and attendance of Health Education programmes?

Methodology

Data Collection Process

The present survey was conducted in six school of the secondary education of the West Attica region (Greece) between January and March 2014. Specifically, the participating schools are situated to the municipalities of Megara, Elefsina, Aspropyrgos and Fyli. The collection of data was conducted at the computer laboratory of each school, where there is access to the internet. Initially, a message was sent to the e-mail address of the school, wishing to participate, where the research process was described. In addition, it was noted that the results of the questionnaire are confidential. The data collection was conducted during a session of a course, where the collaborating teacher indicated the webpage that the questionnaire of each school had been uploaded, in order to be filled in anonymously. Special care was taken that each student would fill in the questionnaire only once. It was also checked, through the time-recording facility of the answers, whether the process took place within the school sessions time or not.

Validity and Reliability of the Survey Process

The research designing of the present survey is based on a series of assumptions. In particular:

- a) The existence of a sample survey through a structured questionnaire suggests that the goal is the experiential validity (Kyriazi, 1998), since the students are considered to be subjects of measurable features, while what is recorded is their attitude and not their actions. In this way, school-bullying is regarded as a stable / non-variable phenomenon. On the contrary, a combination with other methods, such as the qualitative survey, would be useful. For example, different results are reported in a research design including both questionnaire and observation (Black & Jackson, 2007).
- b) The fact that the questionnaire was an online one means a limited social interaction with the answering subjects. Consequently, the influence of the researcher is equally limited. Nevertheless, there are also cases reported of various teachers in the role of the researcher, who have discrete social interaction with the answering subjects, because of the student-teacher relation (Kyriazi, 1998).
- c) The participation of students and teachers who attend a Health Educational programme indicates a priori more sensitization towards the specific issue.
- d) It should be clarified, that we refer to the way that students perceive school-bullying, which does not necessarily means that this is the reality of it.

For the technical formation of the questionnaire, we refer to below.

Sample

In the present work, the approach of quantitative survey was followed, since what it is studied is the correlation of variables (Creswell, 2011). For the selection of the sample, the method of available sample was used, regarding the schools, while the method of simple random sampling was used regarding the school classes. In particular, the collaboration with the schools that volunteered in participating to this survey was conducted through teachers who implemented a Health Education programme.

It is recognized according to the international bibliography that for the implementation of a relevant survey, the method of Cohort study is selected as more suitable (Kyriakides et al., 2006; Olweus, 1997, 2005) although there is more cost and longer implementation time demanded.

In the survey, 191 students participated from six schools of the secondary education of West Attica region (Dytiki Attiki, Greece) who filled in an online questionnaire. From the participants, 47% were boys, 53% were girls, while 33.5% of them attended the first three grades (7-9) of high-school (the Greek *Gymnasium*), 55.5% attended the last three grades (10-12) of general high-school (the Greek *General Lyceum*) and 10.5% attended the equivalent *Vocational Lyceum*. In addition, 39% of the students attended a Health Education Programme, while the rest 61% of them did not.

Data Collection Tool

For the data collection, an online questionnaire was used, based on the revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire. The specific questionnaire has been internationally applied to a large number of studies (Bauer et al., 2007; Black & Jackson, 2007; Gollwitzer et al., 2006; Katsigianni, 2006; Olweus, 1997, 2005), thus its validity and reliability has been proven many times.

The online version of the questionnaire was selected in order to minimize both the implementation cost and the data collection and processing time. It was translated (into Greek) and modified to better match the scope and conditions of the particular study. The questionnaire had been also tested in a pilot-survey by a class of the 7th grade students, in order to reveal implementation problems or difficulties in understanding by the students, without any problem reported. The number of questions included (25) is based on the principle that the questionnaire must be filled in within one session's time (45-50 minutes) and within the existing restrictions of the computer laboratories.

At the beginning of the questionnaire there is an introductory note, giving to the student the necessary information about:

- the definition of school-bullying on behalf of the student who suffers bullying;
- what incidents are not regarded as bullying;
- how important is to fill in the questionnaire with sincerity;
- the existing anonymity with regard to the answers.

The questionnaire is composed of 25 closed-type questions, allowing so the collection of plenty of data in a short time period (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Moreover in five of the questions, the choice *Else* is also included last one, as an open-question alternative.

Data Analysis Method

For the analysis of the results, the statistical package for social sciences SPSS ver. 21 was utilized. Specifically, the utilized facilities were:

- a) relative frequencies and percentages;
- b) chi-square (χ^2) test for the study of relations among variables;
- a) reliability test (Cronbach's alpha statistic).

In addition a spreadsheet program was utilized for presenting charts. The terms *independent* or *depended* variable should be used with cautiousness, since the goal is mainly to discover the relation among two variables although without proceeding to a causality analysis (Creswell, 2011).

Results

Due to the nature of the studied variables and the relatively small final sample of students who have exerted or suffered bullying, a statistically significant correlation can be supported only in a few cases because quite often there is a small number of observations (less than five) even when there is a recoding of data. Thus, only these correlations of scientific interest are reported, below.

Frequency of Bullying Incidents

Initially, it was requested from the participants to answer to a series of questions regarding:

- whether they have suffered school-bullying or not;
- how many students have exerted bullying on them;
- in which way and where had the incident happened.

The 11.5% of the students declared that they had suffered bullying at school in the last two months. In details:

- 6.3% for a couple of times;

- 2.1% once a week;
- 2.6% several times per week.

In addition, 13% of the students declared that they had exerted bullying in the last two months. Especially:

- 8.4% for a couple of times;
- 2.6% for 2-3 times per month;
- 2% once or more per month, cumulatively.

Attitude towards Bullying Incidents

Initially, we note a statistically significant difference between gender and the possibility of exercising aggression against classmates that are not liked (65.6% for boys and 44.6% for girls): $\chi^2(1, N = 191) = 8.463, p = 0.004$.

Such a significant difference is also observed in the case of participation in Health Education Programs (HEP) (44.6% for those participating in a relevant program and 60.7% for those who do not participate):

$\chi^2(1, N = 191) = 4.731, p = 0.030$.

It is interesting to note that 68% of the students who live within an *extended* family (parents, siblings, grandparents) feel sorry whenever they see a bullying incident and want to help somehow. On the contrary, the same attitude is manifested only by 45.5% of the students who live within a single parent family.

Regarding whether the students have talked to somebody about a bullying incident or not, in the last two months:

- 3.3% of the students who had suffer bullying did not talk to anyone about it;
- 2.1% of them talked about it to their parents;
- 1.6% told their friends.

The majority of the students (62%) feels sorry and wants to help the persons that suffer bullying, while 26% of them just feel sorry. On the contrary, 7% of the students declared that they did not feel anything special about it or even a 5% of them declaring that the victim disserved it (Fig. 1).

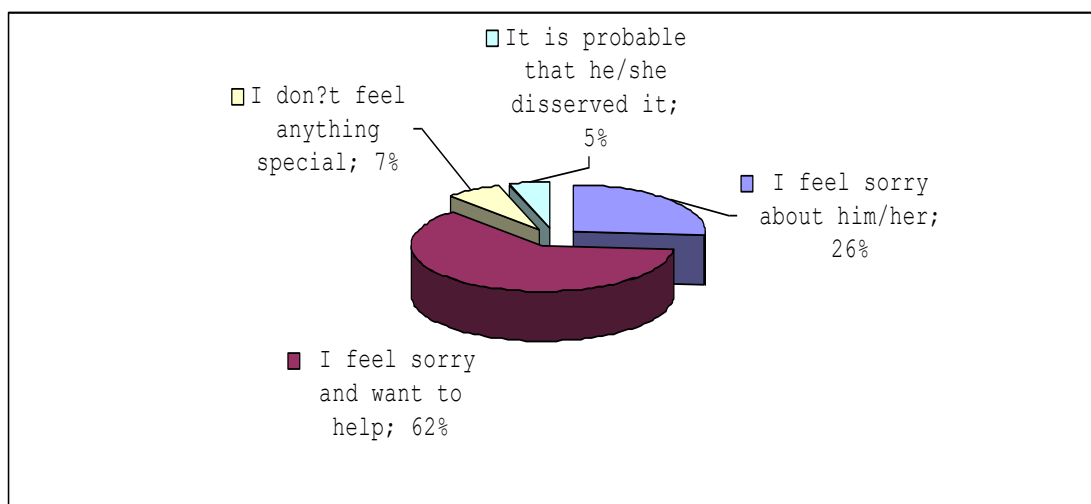


Fig. 1. What do you usually feel or think when you see a schoolmate of yours suffer bullying?

The Role of Teachers in Bullying

The answers of students regarding how often their teachers try to stop bullying incidents are of particular interest (Fig. 2):

- 17% of them declare *Almost never*;
- 16% of them declare *Occasionally (Once a while)*;
- 25% of them declare *Sometimes*;
- 22% of them declare *Often*;
- 20% of them declare *Almost always*;

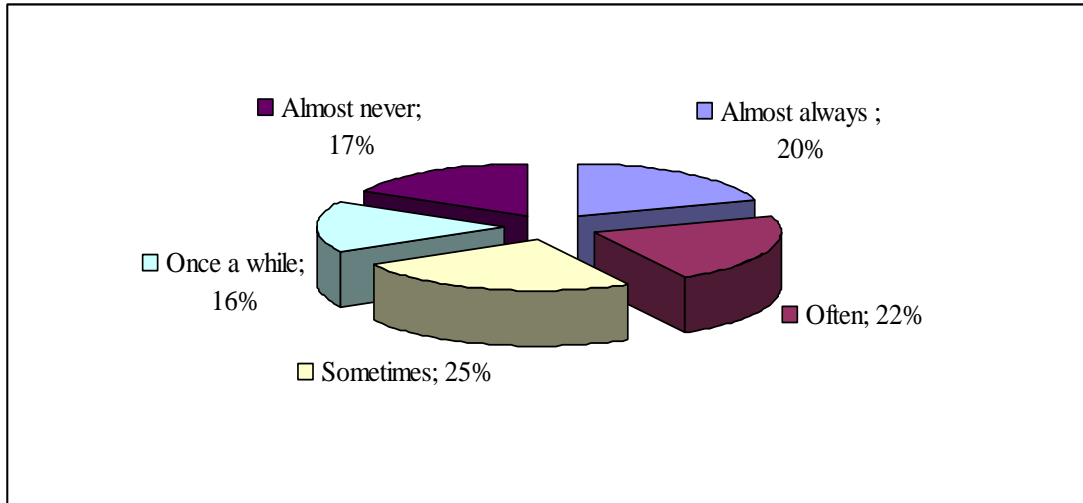


Fig. 2. How often do your teachers try to stop an incident of bullying at school?

It is also very interesting that 10.5% of the total of students have exerted bullying and declare that they were not admonished by a teacher of them. Essentially, 80% of the students who have exerted bullying (20 cases) declare that they were not admonished (Fig.3), 12% of them were admonished just once (3 cases) and 8% were admonished several times (2 cases).

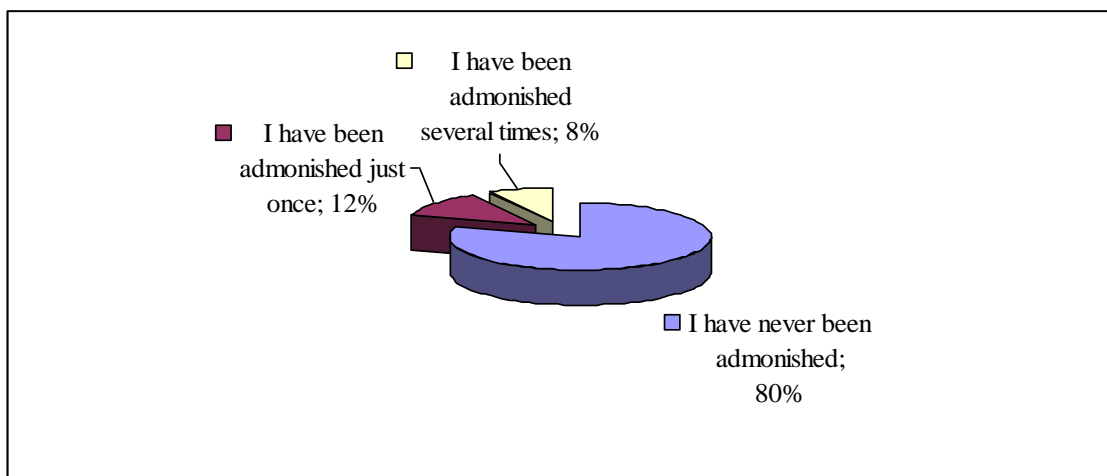


Fig. 3. The opinion of the students who have exerted bullying about the attitude of their teachers.

Similar results, although with smaller percentage, are declared by the students who have exerted bullying, regarding the attitude of other adults (i.e., guardians) towards these incidents (Fig. 4):

- 57% of them have never been admonished;
- 31% of them have been admonished just once;
- 12% of them have been admonished several times.

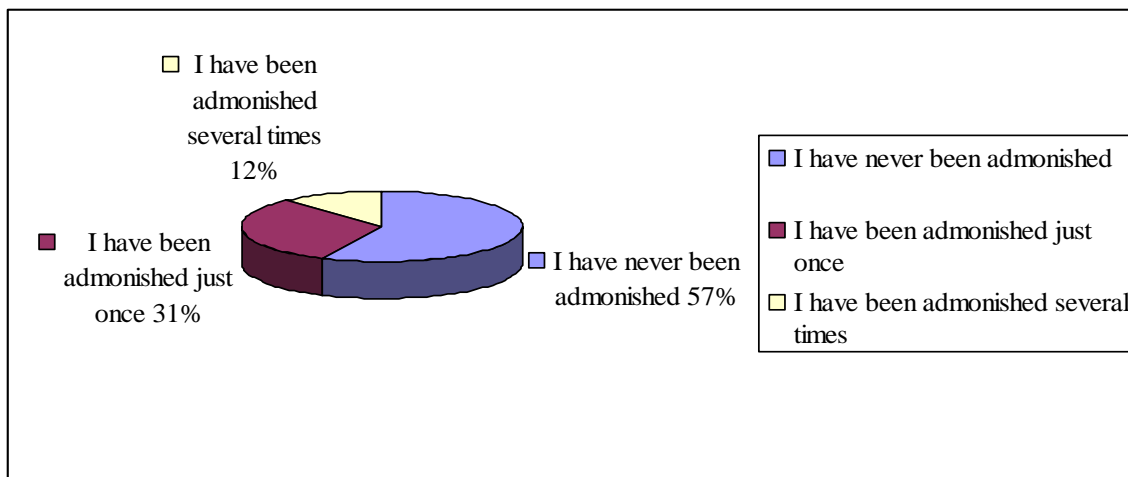


Fig. 4. The opinion of the students who have exerted bullying about the attitude of adults (other than teachers).

Regarding sex distribution, a large percentage of boys have exerted bullying (17%) and 12% of them regard that they were not admonished by their teachers, compared to girls, where the relevant percentages are 10% and 9% respectively.

There is a statistically significant relation observed between students who have exerted bullying and their opinion about the attitude of teachers towards these incidents:

$$\chi^2 (4, N = 191) = 13.68, p = 0.008.$$

It can be observed that 36.7% of the students who have suffered bullying (13% of those who haven't) regard that their teachers *Almost never* try to stop such an incident. On the contrary, 23% of the students who haven't suffer bullying regard that their teachers *Often* (18.6% of them regard *Occasionally*) try to stop such an incident. For the students who have suffered bullying, the relevant percentages are 13% and 3% respectively.

It is interesting that 27.3% of the students who declare certain that they would not have an aggressive behaviour towards their schoolmates (they answer *Of course no* or *No*) regard that their teachers *almost never* interfere with bullying incidents. Only 12.5% and 10% of the students who are certain that they would have an aggressive behaviour towards their schoolmates (*Maybe Yes* and *Yes* respectively) regard that their teachers *almost never* interfere with bullying incidents. There is a statistically significant relation observed between the two variables (*potential exertion of aggressive behavior* and *opinion of students about the attitude of teachers towards bullying incidents*):

$$\chi^2 (10, N = 191) = 9.066, p = 0.039.$$

There is also a statistically significant relation between bullying and the students' opinions regarding the frequency of teacher's intervention in bullying incidents. Specifically, 22% of intimidated students believe that the teachers almost always interfere in respective cases (0%

for students who exerted bullying). Similarly, another 26.1% of intimidated students believe that the teachers almost never try to stop bullying (15.5% for those not being intimidated): $\chi^2(4, N = 191) = 9.519, p = 0.49$.

Bullying at School, Attendance of Health Education Programmes and the Role of Teachers

Undoubtedly, those students who attended a Health Education Programme (HEP) have exerted bullying in a lesser scale (9.5%) compared to those who didn't (15.5%). Moreover, only 6.8% of those who attended a HEP and have exerted bullying regard that they have not been admonished by a teacher. The relevant percentage of those who didn't attend such a programme is 12.5%. On the contrary, 13.5% of the students, who attended a HEP, have suffered bullying, compared to 7% of those who didn't attend such a programme. In addition, although there is a small number of cases observed, only 1.5% of the participants in a HEP wish to talk to their parents about suffering bullying, while the rest of 12% prefer to talk about it:

- to their teachers (4%);
- to no-one (4%);
- to friends or sibling.

Those who didn't attend a HEP and have suffered bullying choose as their very last option (just 1%) to talk about it to their teachers.

It is also interesting that from those students who didn't attend a HEP, a large percentage (39% in total) regard that the teachers either *Almost never* (19%) or just *Occasionally* (20%) try to stop a bullying incident at school. On the contrary, for students who attended a HEP the relevant percentages are 13% and 11% respectively (24% in total).

In overall, there is a marginal significant deference observed between the participation of students in a HEP and their opinion about the attitude of teachers towards bullying incidents: $\chi^2(4, N = 191) = 8.60, p = 0.071$.

Conclusions

In the present work, the issue of bullying at school was studied according to the opinion of the students. Especially, the opinion of the students about the role of the teachers in incidents of bullying was approached, as well as the relevant role of Health Education Programmes.

According to the herein results, there is a statistically significant relation between the opinion of the students about the interference frequency of their teachers with bullying incidents at school and whether those students have suffered bullying or they regard as probable to exert aggressive behaviour. The main results of this survey can be summarized in the existence of a statistically significant relation between a student who has suffered bullying and his/her opinion about the attitude of teachers towards such incidents:

$\chi^2(4, N = 191) = 13.68, p = 0.008$.

There is also a statistically significant relationship between bullying and the students' opinions regarding the frequency of teacher's intervention in bullying incidents:

$\chi^2(4, N = 191) = 9.519, p = 0.49$.

In addition, there is a marginal significant deference observed between the participation of students in a Health Education Programme and their opinion about the attitude of teachers towards incidents of bullying at school:

$\chi^2 (4, N = 191) = 8.60, p = 0.071.$

From both the present survey and the relevant bibliography, it is proved that coping with bullying at school is mainly an issue of the adults and especially of the teachers. At the same time, the particular importance of the relation between student and teacher is stressed, as well as the necessity of implementing actions that will bridge the gap between them (Karakiozis & Papapanousi, 2015a). It is also observed that the opinion of the students about the attitude of teachers could be redefined through the implementation of Health Education Programmes having the relevant topic (Karakiozis & Papapanousi, 2015b).

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