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Teachers bullied by their students: how their classes influenced after being bullied?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine how the teachers' who are being bullied by their students influenced from the bullying events according to perceptions of teachers and draw the attention of those preparing anti-bullying programs and of teacher trainers to the subject. The teachers reported that their stress levels had increased, a bad atmosphere in the classroom had been created, their expectations for students and teaching profession had decreased. Also, the teachers stated that they most frequently turned to guidance counselors, deputy headmasters, and headmasters for help. These results indicate that the classes in which teachers are bullied are at risk in terms of learning-teaching activities and communication between students and teachers.

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1. Introduction

The bullying events at school can be exhibited by students toward other students, by teachers toward students, by school administrators or colleagues toward teachers and by students toward teachers. The students bullying behaviors toward teachers called as “educator/teacher targeted bullying” (De Wet, 2010; Pervin and Turner, 1998) and defined as a persistent aggression directed against teachers such as abuse of teachers, ignoring teachers, swearing at or mocking teachers, gossiping about teachers and damaging teachers' belongings (Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998). To prevent bullying at school, it is clear that bullying behaviors exhibited by all parties at school should be examined. However, studies investigating bullying behaviors exhibited by students toward teachers are very limited in number (Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998; James et al., 2008) and summarized at below paragraphs.

In two studies at England, teachers were asked to make an evaluation of the bullying behaviors of students toward them. Ninety one percent of 84 teachers who participated in the research conducted by Pervin and Turner (1998); and 56.4% of 101 teachers who participated in the research conducted by Terry (1998) stated that they had been bullied by their students. According to the results of the more recent study conducted by Benefield (2004) on 587

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teachers in New Zealand, 28% of teachers stated that they had been bullied. Most of the 544 teachers (79.7%) who participated in another study conducted in South Africa (De Wet and Jacobs, 2006) indicated that they had been bullied by their students.

In these studies, conducted concerning teachers who were bullied by their students (Pervin and Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998; Benefield, 2004; De Wet and Jacobs, 2006), have remarked that being bullied may affect the mood and performance of teachers besides affecting student learning. In another recent study conducted by De Wet (2010), it is concluded that bullying events toward teachers may have effects on the personal lives of teachers, the learning-teaching process in the classroom and the relations of teachers with other individuals in society.

In a qualitative research conducted in Turkey, the researchers (Yaman & Kocabaşoğlu, 2011), identified teachers who were bullied by their students and who work in secondary schools and high schools. The research results showed that teachers are bullied mostly by groups of students; students have problems in their family lives; the media, the virtual environment and the social environment trigger bullying; and teachers are exposed to verbal, emotional and mixed forms of bullying.

From these findings forth, it can be stated that not only victim teachers but also their colleagues, who are in the observer position, can be expected to perform their duties without going under the effect of these negative experiences when performing their educational activities at school. In this respect, the purpose of this study is to determine how the teachers' who are being bullied by their students influenced from the bullying events according to perceptions of teachers and draw the attention of those preparing anti-bullying programs and of teacher trainers to the subject

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants of the study were volunteer teachers (n=221) serving at the 6th, 7th and 8th grades of primary schools (n=99) and high schools (n=122) Osmangazi district of Bursa city in Turkey. Of these teachers, 109 female (%20.2) and 112 male (%20.7) teachers and they were participated to this study at their in-service training period.

2.2. Instrument

A questionnaire was used to determine perceptions of teachers. The first part of the questionnaire involves questions related to the serving grade levels of teachers and their genders. After then, the multiple-choice questions were asked in order to determine the perceptions of the participants related to the influence of bullying on them in a way enabling them to mark more than one alternative.

2.3. Procedure

The teachers who came to participate in the activities for in-service training were asked before starting the activities whether or not they wanted voluntarily to participate in the research. The data were obtained from 221 of the 540 volunteer teachers who provided "yes" answer to the question in the questionnaire: "Have you come across any bullying behaviors exhibited by your students toward you while serving as a teacher?" The participants were not asked for information such as names, surnames and schools where they worked which could reveal their identities; and they were given no time limit in which to answer the questions.

3. Results

When the teachers were asked if they had been influenced by the bullying behaviors of students toward them, 33,5% of them (f = 74) stated that they had never been influenced, 33,9% of them (f = 75) stated having been affected very little, 16,7% of them (f = 37) stated having been influenced, and 15,8% of them (f = 35) stated having been influenced very much. In next question, the teachers were asked about how the bullying behaviors exhibited by the students toward them had influenced their lives and the answers obtained were summarized in Table 1.

As seen at Table 1, more than half of the teachers participating to the study (52.5%, $f = 116$) expressed that their stress levels increase due to bullying behaviors exhibited by students toward them. However, 39.4% of the teachers ($f = 87$) expressed that these kinds of behaviors cause bad atmosphere in the classroom. 26.2% of the participant teachers ($f = 58$) expressed that they decrease their expectations for students, and 25.8% ($f = 57$) for the profession of teaching. The percentage of the teachers expressing that they modify their teaching methods is 22.6% ($f = 50$). These are followed by the statements of ‘I do not want to teach my classes’ (8.6%, $f = 19$), ‘I do not like some students’ (6.3%, $f = 14$), ‘I decrease the number of activities I perform in the classroom’ (6.3%, $f = 14$) and ‘They lead me to find another job’ (1%, $f = 2$) respectively. Six of the teachers marking the ‘other’ choice (23.1%, $f = 51$) and explaining their thoughts. They stated that they had disheartened from the profession of teaching, 5 of them stated that they had been feeling very sad, 3 of them stated that they had been serving with low motivation. The others of the responses expressed in written can be summarized as frustration, getting angry, decreasing hope, tiredness, spending excessive effort, being desensitized and remaining indifferent. Only two of the teachers marking the ‘other’ choice used statements indicating their spending personal effort to make this situation positive. While one of these teachers stated that “I try to renew and improve myself for handling this problem”, another teacher stated looking for new ways to communicate with students.

Table 1. The influences of bullying behaviors directed toward teachers by students

Statements (n = 221)	f	%
They increase my stress.	116	52,5
They cause a bad atmosphere in the classroom.	87	39,4
I decrease my expectations for students.	58	26,2
I decrease my expectations for the profession of teaching.	57	25,8
I modify my teaching methods.	50	22,6
I do not want to teach my classes.	19	8,6
I do not like some students.	14	6,3
I decrease the number of activities I perform in the classroom.	14	6,3
They lead me to find another job.	2	1
Other	51	23.1

The participant teachers were asked from whom they ask for help when encountering bullying behaviors exhibited by students toward them and the answers they provided were summarized in the table given below.

Table 2. Distribution of preferences of teachers to ask for help

Those who are asked for help (n = 221)	f	%
Guidance and counselor	64	29
Deputy headmaster	56	25,3
Colleagues	55	24,9
Headmaster	50	22,6
Chairman of branch teachers	8	3,6
I did not ask for help	34	15,4
Other	25	11,3

When the table was examined, it appeared that the participant teachers preferred to ask the guidance and counselor for help more frequently (29%, $f = 64$). The rates of asking for help for the deputy headmaster (25.3%, $f = 56$),

colleagues (24.9%, $f = 55$) and headmaster (22.6%, $f = 50$) were a little lower and close to one another compared to the guidance and counselor. However, the rate of those asking the chairman of branch teachers for help was very low (3.6%, $f = 8$). The teachers stating that they had not asked anyone for help (15.4%, $f = 34$) were asked to explain why they had not asked for help. 16 of the teachers expressed that the school administration had expected them to solve these kinds of problems by themselves. Ten of them stated that they could not trust anyone about these matters for fear that they would be perceived as unsuccessful teachers. Eight of them stated that they regarded this as a part of normal education. Two of the teachers marking the 'other' alternative stated having asked the law enforcement agency for help, and two of them stated having asked the students' parents for help. Furthermore, the rest of the teachers marking the 'other' choice expressed that they had had talks with their colleagues about the matter; however, those talks were not held with the intention of asking for help but mostly with the purpose of sharing and getting relaxed.

After this question, the teachers were asked whether the help they had received served the purpose or not, and while 27% of the participant teachers stated that the help they had received helped to solve the problem, 25% of them stated that the problem remained unsolved although they had asked for help and 11,8% of them stated that there occurred an improvement for a short while. Additionally, 9% of the participant teachers stated that they had not received any responses to their help demands. When the answers provided by the teachers marking the 'other' choice were examined, half of the teachers not having received any responses to their help demands were observed to mark this alternative. These teachers stated that they felt themselves ineffective, and neither the administration nor their colleagues cared about them. The teachers marking the 'other' choice expressed that there is not a mechanism in the Ministry of National Education to support them about this matter, and the school administration expects them to solve these types of problems by themselves.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

If there is a violent behavior at a place, it is extremely natural that every individual in this environment somehow goes under the effect of this. As a matter of fact, in the answers provided by the teachers to the question "inquiring about the way(s) how bullying affects their lives", they stated that their stress levels had increased, there had appeared a negative atmosphere in the classroom, they had decreased their expectations for their students and professions. If exposing to bullying behaviors affects teachers' lives in this way, this situation will certainly reflect into their ways of performing their duties and their communication processes, and perhaps it will unfortunately create a more suitable environment for students to exhibit bullying behaviors. These results indicate the risk of formation a vicious circle which will cause problems in terms of both learning-teaching activities and school climate at schools where teachers are exposed to bullying. Moreover, when the teachers were asked about the ways how bullying behaviors influenced their lives, it was observed that they used the 'other' choice very frequently and it was considered that this might have been due to a need to express their feelings because of the problems they had lived. However, the teachers having stated that bullying behaviors had not influenced their lifestyles were considered to have become insensitive to the matter. And insensitiveness is a state which creates problems in communication.

The teachers stated that they had turned most frequently to guidance teachers, deputy headmasters and headmasters for help. For this reason, it is necessary that these people as other school personnel should be provided in-service training sessions on bullying. Especially through school guidance counselors, it might be possible to inform teachers about bullying and developing their bullying intervention skills. Actually, when the implementation of an anti-bullying program (Jacobsen, & Bauman, 2007; Bauman, Rigby & Hoppa, 2008) at a school becomes a matter of discussion, it is not possible to carry out that program without support from school guidance counselor and administrators.

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