

Behavioral Characteristics and Likeability of Bullies, Victims, Bully/Victims, and Controls in an Elementary School

Bir İlköğretim Okulundaki Zorba, Kurban, Zorba/Kurban ve Kontrol Gruplarının Davranış Özellikleri ve Hoşlanılma Düzeyleri

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the differences among four groups of students who were identified as bullies, victims, bully/victims, and controls in terms of their behavioral characteristics and likeability as evaluated by their peer groups. The sample consisted of 140 (70 males, 70 females) fourth grade elementary school students. Three separate peer nomination procedures were followed: One for assigning the students to bullying groups, two others to six behavioral categories ("cooperates", "disrupts", "shy", "fights", "seeks help", and "leader") and to three likeability groups ("liked most", "liked", "liked least"). The results of a two separate one-way multivariate analysis of variance employed to the behaviors scores and likeability scores showed significant main effects for bullying groups. The results of two separate one-way multivariate analysis of variance of the behavior scores and likeability scores showed significant main effects for bullying groups. The results regarding behavioral characteristics revealed significant differences in "cooperates", "disrupts", "shy", and "fights" scores among bullying groups. The results concerning likeability indicated that controls were significantly different from bullies and bully/victims both in "liked most" and "liked least" scores. Findings were discussed in the light of research findings.

Key words: Bullying, behavioral characteristics, likeability.

Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı; zorba, kurban, zorba/kurban ve kontrol olarak tanımlanan dört grup öğrencinin arkadaşları tarafından değerlendirilen davranış özellikleri ve hoşlanılma düzeyleri arasındaki farklılıkları incelemektir. Araştırmanın örneklemini ilkokul dördüncü sınıfa devam eden 140 (70 erkek, 70 kız) öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Araştırmada üç ayrı atama yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Bunlar, öğrencileri dört zorbalık grubuna (zorba, kurban, zorba/kurban ve kontrol) atama, altı davranış kategorisine ("işbirliği yapar", "rahatsız eder", "utanır", "kavgaları başlatır", "yardım arar" ve "liderlik yapar") atama ve üç hoşlanılma düzeyine ("çok sevilen", "sevilen" ve "az sevilen") atamadır. Davranış puanları ve hoşlanılma puanlarına uygulanan iki ayrı tek yönlü MANOVA sonuçları, zorbalık grupları temel etkisinin anlamlı olduğunu göstermiştir. Davranış özellikleri ile ilgili bulgular, zorbalık grupları arasında "işbirliği yapar", "rahatsız eder", "utanır" ve "kavgaları başlatır" puanları yönünden anlamlı farklılıklar olduğunu; hoşlanılma puanları açısından ise kontrol grubundaki öğrencilerin "çok sevilen" ve "az sevilen" puanlarının her ikisinin de zorba ve zorba/kurbanların puanlarından anlamlı düzeyde farklı olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bulgular, diğer araştırma sonuçlarının ışığında tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Zorbalık, davranış özellikleri, hoşlanılma.

Introduction

Bullying in schools has been the focus of quite a number of studies over the last two decades in the literature. Several studies have been carried out to

determine its prevalence in schools as well as its consequences for the students since it can dramatically affect not only the school climate but also the ability of students to progress academically, socially, and psychologically (Arsenio and Lemerise, 2001; Forero, McLellan, Rissel and Bauman, 1999; Juvonen, Nishina and Graham, 2000; Kaltiala-Heino, Rimpela, Marttunen, Rimpela and Rantanen, 1999).

Theoretical arguments on whether bullying is a subset of aggression have led scholars (Olweus, 1994; Smith,

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1991) to identify three criteria to distinguish bullying from aggressive behavior: hurt done without provocation, repetition of action, and perceived power. Based on these criteria, bullying can be defined as systematic, repeated hurtful actions, either psychological or physical, exerted over a less powerful person by a more powerful person. By this general definition a fourfold categorization of bullying was commonly used in the literature. Accordingly, a bully is defined as a person who tends to react aggressively in many situations. On the other hand, victim is described as someone who is systematically harassed. A bully/victim is defined as both bullying others and being bullied by others. The group of children who neither bully others nor are bullied by others is defined as a control.

Research investigating the psychological features of bullies and victims revealed that bullies are strong, assertive, enjoy aggression, not anxious or insecure, and hold positive views about themselves. They exhibit a need for power and attention. This group of children is described as the ones, who are easily provoked, anxious, have aggressive reaction patterns and little control on emotional and behavioral responses (Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager and Short-Camilli, 1997; Menesini, Melan and Pignatti, 2000; Olweus, 1994). Victims, on the other hand, are characterized by insecurity, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, and social skills. They demonstrate clumsiness, disabilities, low or fragile self esteem, prior traumatic experiences, emotional, behavioral or attention difficulties (Garrity et al., 1997; Olweus, 1994, Salmivalli, 1999).

Some researchers (Bowers, Smith and Binney, 1994) also investigated more specific behavioral characteristics of bullying groups. Among six behaviors referred to as "cooperates", "disrupts", "shy", "starts fights", "seeks help", and "leader", bullies and bully/victims were found to be high on "starts fights" and "disrupts"; bullies were found to be higher on "leader" than victims and controls; bully/victims were higher on "leader" than victims; controls were the highest on "cooperates" but the lowest on "seeks help".

Research on interpersonal aspects of bullying has long been another area of emphasis in the literature. For example, Perry, Kusel and Perry (1988) in a study on victims of peer aggression found that children's

victimization scores were correlated with peer acceptance and rejection scores and victimization had a stronger relation to peer rejection than peer acceptance. Similar findings about victims' social status were also reported by different researchers (e.g. Austin and Joseph, 1996; Boulton and Underwood, 1992). Victims were found to have lower popularity and they seemed to be mostly isolated (Garrity et al., 1997; Olweus, 1994; Salmivalli, 1999).

Bullies, on the other hand, were reported as popular children in their peer groups and bully/victims, the likely victims, were found to be at a high risk of being rejected by their peers (Austin and Joseph, 1996; Olweus, 1994; Smith, 1991). The results of these studies underlined the role of social status in studying bullying.

In general, as the review of literature suggests, it can be argued that although the several characteristics and popularity of bullies and victims are well documented, little is known about the behavioral characteristics and popularity of bully/victims and particularly controls, and their relative positions within other groups, i.e., bullies and victims. Besides, although several studies from the countries all over the world reported findings regarding different aspects of bullying, the lack of studies carried out with Turkish children would make this study a contribution to bullying literature. In the present study, it was expected that the comparisons of behavioral characteristics defined by the researchers (Bowers et al., 1994) of four groups of students described as bullies, victims, bully/victims, and controls and their likeability among peers would provide further evidence on this issue.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the differences among four groups of students who were identified as bullies, victims, bully/victims, and controls in terms of their behavioral characteristics and likeability as evaluated by their peer groups.

Method

Sample

The sample in the present study was 140 students (70 males, 70 females) in all the fourth grades (six classes) of a private elementary school. The age range of the students was 8-11 and the mean was 9.9 (SD=3.90).

Peer Nomination Procedure

In the present study, three separate peer nomination procedures were used. One was for assigning the students to bully groups and the other two were for behavioral characteristics and likeability.

In the present study, following the guideline proposed by Bowers et al., (1994), a peer nomination procedure was employed for establishing the bully groupings. Although there are several ways in which bullying can be assessed, including direct behavioral observation, teacher reports and peer reports, the peer nomination method was frequently used by researchers, especially with elementary school students based on the argument that since the most serious bullying acts occur in unsupervised areas of the school, this method might minimize the impact of any individual's bias and increase the statistical reliability of the assessments (e.g., Bowers et al., 1994; Byrne, 1994; Perry et al., 1988).

In the present study, the procedure used for peer nomination involved the following steps:

First, the definition of bullying was projected on the wall by an overhead projector in each classroom. The behavior defined was a physical (hitting, pushing, taking someone's belongings, or hiding them etc.) or verbal (name calling, saying nasty things about someone or gossiping, threatening, making fun of someone, ignoring someone etc.) action that was done permanently by someone without any reason toward another, who has not got the power to protect him/herself during this action.

Second, the students were presented with their classmates head and shoulder photographs with names written under each one. They were asked to assign their classmates into two groups as "This person does the behavior described" and "This person does not do the behavior described". After the completion of the nomination, they were asked to assign their friends to another two groups. "This person is the one who is subjected to this behavior" or "This person is the one who is not subjected to this behavior".

The procedure was repeated with six behavioral characteristics the definitions of which were projected on the wall: "cooperates", "disrupts", "shy", "starts fights", "seeks help", "leader", as described by Coie, Dodge and Coppotelli (1982) and used in the study of Bowers et al. (1994).

Then the students were asked to assign each friend into three categories of likeability described as, "I like him/her very much", "I like him/her", "I like him/her a little".

Scoring

Two separate bully and victim scores were calculated in terms of the percentages of classmates who nominated a particular child into that category. Similar procedure was followed for calculating six separate behaviors and three separate likeability scores.

In assigning the students into bully, victim, bully/victim, and control groups, bully and victim scores of the students were used. A cut-off score of one standard deviation above/below the mean was established to define groups. On the basis of these cut-off scores, a group of 122 students were assigned to the bully, victim, bully/victim and control groups as follows: Bullies were defined as the students who received nominations from 50 percent or more classmates as "This person does the behavior described", and less than 25 percent as, "This person is the one who is subjected to this behavior". Victims were defined as the subjects who received nominations from 50 percent or more classmates as "This person is the one who is subjected to this behavior", and less than 25 percent as, "This person does the behavior described". Bully/victims were described as the ones who received nominations from 25 percent or more classmates for both groups as "This person does the behavior described" and "This person is the one who is subjected to this behavior". Controls were described as the students who received less than 25 percent nominations in these two groups.

Teachers' ratings were used to ensure the reliability of bullying categorization. All the class teachers of fourth graders ($n = 6$) were asked to nominate the students into categories with the same instructions given to the students. The overall kappa for the agreement was 0.34 ($p < .001$).

Procedure

The administration of the peer nomination procedure was carried out in classroom settings by the researcher working as a counselor. The data collection procedure took approximately 80 (2 successive class hours)

minutes with a break and some activities (drawing, games, etc.). All the subjects were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

Results

Bullying and Behavioral Characteristics

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to examine the differences in the behavioral characteristics (“cooperates”, “disrupts”, “shy”, “fights”, “seeks help”, “leader”) of four groups of students (bullies, victims, bully/victims, and controls). Significant differences were found among the four groups of students on the dependent measures, Wilks’ $\Lambda = .27$, $F(18,320) = 10.63$, $p < .001$. The multivariate η^2 based on Wilks’ Λ was quite strong, .36.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations on the dependent variables for the four groups.

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) on each dependent variable were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. Using the Bonferroni method, each ANOVA was tested at the .008 level (by dividing .05 by the number of dependent variables of 6) in order to control Type I error. The results yielded significant differences among four groups of students in “cooperates” scores ($F(3,118) = 41.6$; $\eta^2 = .51$; $p <$

.001), “disrupts” scores ($F(3,118) = 30.1$; $\eta^2 = .43$; $p <$.001), “shy” scores ($F(3,118) = 7.7$; $\eta^2 = .16$; $p <$.001), “fights” scores ($F(3,118) = 28.9$; $\eta^2 = .42$; $p <$.001) with a large effect size and in “seeks help” scores ($F(3,118) = 4.2$; $\eta^2 = .10$; $p = .007$) with a moderate effect size. The differences among the four groups of students in “leader” scores were not significant, $F(3,118) = 2.9$; $\eta^2 = .07$; $p = .039$.

Post hoc analyses to the univariate ANOVA for “cooperates”, “disrupts”, “shy”, “fights”, and “seeks help” scores consisted of conducting pair-wise comparisons to find the differences among four groups of students in each behavior. Therefore, pair-wise comparison was tested at the .008 divided by 4 or .002 level. Results yielded significant differences in “cooperates”, “disrupts”, “shy”, and “fights” scores. More specifically, results indicated that, in “cooperates” scores, victims and controls, although controls had significantly higher scores than victims, scored significantly higher than bullies and bully/victims. In “disrupts” scores, bullies and bully/victims had significantly higher scores than victims and controls. In “shy” scores, victims scored significantly higher than the bullies. Finally, in “fights” scores, although bullies had significantly higher scores than bully/victims, they both scored significantly higher than victims and controls.

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of the Behavior Scores of Bullies, Victims, Bully/Victims, and Controls

Behavioral Characteristics	Bullies (n = 20)		Victims (n = 32)		Bully/Victims (n = 29)		Controls (n = 41)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Cooperates	16.8	11.5	43.8	16.9	28.6	17.3	58.9	14.4
Disrupts	27.6	14.7	10.9	9.1	32.8	17.4	8.8	7.6
Shy	4.3	4.6	16.8	13.7	7.5	9.3	11.6	9.0
Fights	33.3	18.2	7.1	7.1	19.4	15.5	6.5	6.8
Seeks help	6.6	5.7	14.1	9.7	8.8	9.8	8.8	6.8
Leader	12.2	16.2	7.0	10.8	2.8	4.3	6.1	11.6

Table 2.
Means and Standard Deviations of the Likeability Scores of Bullies, Victims, Bully/Victims, and Controls

Likability	Bullies (<i>n</i> = 20)		Victims (<i>n</i> = 32)		Bully/Victims (<i>n</i> = 29)		Controls (<i>n</i> = 41)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Liked most	24.8	14.9	33.2	16.9	21.1	10.1	38.3	12.6
Liked	26.6	10.1	29.6	13.4	30.6	12.5	32.0	8.6
Liked least	48.3	21.4	37.1	15.1	48.4	15.0	29.4	10.8

Bullying and Likeability

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance was also conducted to examine the differences in the likeability (“liked”, “most liked” and “least liked”) scores of four groups of students (bullies, victims, bully/victims, and controls). Significant differences were found among the four groups of students on the dependent measures, Wilks’ $L = .72$, $F(9,280) = 4.53$, $p < .001$. The multivariate η^2 based on Wilks’ Λ was moderate, .10.

Table 2 presents the means and standard deviations of likeability scores of bullies, victims, bully/victims, and controls.

Analyses of variances (ANOVA) on each dependent variable were conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. Using the Bonferroni method, each ANOVA was tested at the .017 level (by dividing .05 by the number of dependent variable of 3). The results yielded significant differences among four groups of students in liked most scores ($F(3,118) = 10.5$; $\eta^2 = .21$; $p < .001$), and liked least scores ($F(3,118) = 12.0$; $\eta^2 = .23$; $p < .001$) with a large effect size. In liked scores, no significant differences appeared among the groups ($F(3,118) = 0.9$; $h^2 = .02$; $p = .431$).

Post hoc analyses to the univariate ANOVA for “liked most” and “liked least” scores were tested at the .017 divided by 4 or .004 level. Results reveal that controls scored significantly higher than bullies and bully/victims in “liked most” scores and lower than them in “liked least” scores. Victims were not significantly different from any other groups in these two scores.

Discussion

The results of the present study, in general, revealed consistent findings with the relevant literature stressing the behavioral characteristics and likeability of bullies and victims.

Regarding behavioral characteristics, the findings of the present study revealed that there were significant differences between bullies, bully/victims and victims, controls in “cooperates”, “disrupts”, “shy”, and “fights” scores. More specifically, findings suggested that bullies and bully/victims, as compared to victims and controls, were perceived by their peers as less cooperative but more disruptive and they both were perceived as the “fighters”. Besides, the findings of the present study revealed that in the “fights” score, bullies had the highest scores among the groups. This finding seemed to suggest that “fights” might be the only characteristics of bullies which discriminate them from bully/victims.

The findings of the present study regarding the scores of “disrupts” and “fights” of bullies and bully/victims were supported by the study of Bowers et al. (1994) which also revealed high scores in these two behaviors of these two groups. In the literature, there are several other studies which seemed to support these findings revealing that bullies showed more antisocial and non-cooperative ways of behaving (Boulton and Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1994; Rigby and Slee, 1991); bully/victims were those who tended to cause irritation and tension around them (Byrne, 1994; Olweus, 1994).

In the present study, the control group was found to have the highest score in the “cooperates” category. This

finding was supported by most of the results of the studies in the literature. Researchers found that controls tended to be more cooperative and prosocial than the other groups of children (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Rigby, Cox and Black, 1997). As Rigby et al. (1997) found, cooperative students seemed to be less likely to bully others and they were less likely to be bullied by their peers.

Present study also yielded that victims were the ones who scored the highest in "shy" scores. Findings of the several studies indicated the characteristics of the victims as; the lack of assertiveness and the withdrawal (Smith, 1991); a lower level of self-esteem (Byrne, 1994; Rigby and Slee, 1991); and feelings of being ashamed (Olweus, 1994). All these characteristics might lead them to be evaluated as "shy" persons among their peers.

The results regarding the likeability of bullies, victims, bully/victims and controls also revealed significant differences. Results showed that controls scored significantly higher than bullies and bully/victims in "liked most" scores whereas they scored lower than bullies and bully/victims in "least liked" scores as a result of peer nomination procedure. The likeability of controls is also evident in the study of Bowers et al. (1994). As it was previously mentioned, although the research on the cooperative tendency of the control students is limited (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Rigby et al., 1997), the result of the present study could also be explained by control students' main behavioral characteristic as "cooperates" and this behavioral characteristic could make them the most liked among peers.

As for the bullies, studies generally yielded inconsistent findings regarding their popularity. Griffiths (1997), for example, suggested that children who bully often appear to be popular but they are often disliked. Olweus (1994) has also mentioned that bullies have two or three peers who seem to like them. Besides Olweus's findings, Smith (1991) also stated that several studies have found bullies to be average or slightly below average in popularity and this popularity tends to decrease in the higher grades. As also mentioned by Boulton and Underwood (1992), it can be concluded that bullies' need for social dominance and their way or manner to satisfy this need could lead to the cost of being unpopular or least liked in the peer group at large.

Present results revealed that bully/victims, like bullies, were the least liked students. Although limited, studies (Austin and Joseph, 1996; Smith, 1991) indicated that bully/victims are amongst the least popular children and they were found significantly lower on social acceptance. Based on these findings, it can be speculated that this might be due to their behavioral orientation as both bullying others and also complaining about being victimized.

Overall, the results of the present study seemed to indicate two distinctive patterns of peer evaluation to bullying, i.e., bullies and bully/victims are uncooperative, disruptive, they tend to fight and are the least liked ones whereas victims and controls are cooperative, undisruptive and, particularly controls are the most liked ones among peers.

It is important to acknowledge that the present study has certain limitations. First, considering that the assignment of the students to bullying groupings was based on peer nominations, the results may not reflect the participants' own view in belonging to one of the four groups. Second, the study was carried out with the fourth grade students at a private elementary school, and the results can only be generalized to students participating in this study. Finally, because of the limited number of students in each bullying grouping, the results must be interpreted cautiously.

However, the findings of the bullying studies as well as the present one may have significant implications for all the members of school staff since providing a safe school environment for the students is the responsibility of all adults in schools. In particular, teachers and counselors should take steps to prevent bullying by taking the distinctive behavioral characteristics of each group into consideration and by developing preventive strategies to help the students to be more prosocial.

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