

Bullying in a School Context: Teachers as Victims

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Abstract: This research deals with workplace bullying from the perspectives of one of the occupations - the victimized teachers, and is addressed the question of being a target of different types of bullying of multiple subjects in school settings. The representative samples of 613 teachers in Estonia were surveyed via a self-reported questionnaire which asked about the experiences of bullying of subjects by adults: teachers, school administration, parents, maintenance staff members in school, and by children - pupils. The level of victimization of teachers by children was higher than victimization of teachers by adult subjects. The most common forms were verbal predominating in bullying of teachers by pupils comparing with bullying of teachers by different adult subjects in schools. Three types of teacher target bullying behavior connected with threat to personal standing (insults, offensive remarks, and shouting) were more frequent among teacher-teacher/administration/parent relations compared with teacher-maintenance staff relations.

Introduction

Bullying has been found to occur among children and adults within a range of different settings including schools, prison, old people's homes and family homes (Smith & Brain, 2000). Most of the research into bullying has focused on children within school environments, with the first study appearing in the 1970s (Olweus, 1978). Little research addressed bullying among adults until the early 1990s. Adult bullying has mostly looked at workplace settings (e.g. Adams, 1992; 1997). The topic of workplace bullying had some overlap with the methodology and literature in school bullying (Schuster, 1998). In terms of the issues of school bullying, the general consensus of the European reports is that bullying is one part of aggressive behavior, in accordance with the definition provided by Olweus (1999). The accepted understanding of bullying is that

it is a particularly destructive form of aggression, defined as physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress or harm to the victim, and where the intimidation involves an imbalance of power in favor of the perpetrator. Typically there are repeated incidents over a period of time. In scientific formulation, there is no agreed definition of workplace bullying and according to Randall (2001) definitions vary into four categories according to the predominant viewpoint and methodological frame: (1) definitions deal with motivational factors and describe the purpose behind the bully's intentional actions; (2) definitions describe a variety of bullying behavior; (3) definitions reduce the meaning of the bullying to the emotionally abusive behavior; (4) definitions deal with workplace aggression.

There is overlap between workplace bullying and workplace aggression, but the term "workplace aggression" focuses on aggressive verbal behavior or physical aggression which can be between strang-

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ers and may only happen once (Rayner & Hoel, 1997), and distinguishing features of bullying, as broadly accepted definition, is the power imbalance and repetition over time. Workplace aggression is a generic domain of human aggression. Neuman and Baron (1998, p 395) definition states that the term as “efforts by individuals to harm others with whom they work, or have worked, or the organizations in which they are presently; or were previously, employed”. Violent behavior defined as “aggressive behavior where the actor or perpetrator uses his or her own body or an object (including a weapon) to inflict (relatively serious) injury or discomfort upon another individual” (Olweus, 1999, p. 12). Violence refers to the use of physical force or power. It does not include verbal aggression or relational/indirect aggression (Underwood, 2002). Above-mentioned, so-called “narrow” definition of violence is parallel with the use of “broad” definition in scientific field (Smith, 2003a). The latter approach emphasizes not only the intentional use of physical, but also psychological force; threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, group or community. Despite the disciplinary and country differences in how the violence is defined (Smith, 2003b), the definition of school violence follows the second – broad – definition of violence. School violence has been defined as any interpersonal activity or situation in which a member of the education community is being physically, psychologically or morally damaged (Ortega, De Rey & Fernández, 2003; Roy, 1994). The problem with defining bullying and violence is reflected in numerous ways it is operationalized. Identifying the incidence of bullying has quite major methodological problems, which begin with definition of bullying. Ireland (1999) has noted that

one way in which researchers try to avoid definitional problems in bullying research is to present respondents with a definition of the phenomenon.

Teacher targeted bullying should take a broader perspective than only teacher-pupil bullying raised by Twemlow, Fornagy and Sacco (2004) and emphasizing that bullying of students by teachers and bullying of teachers by students is a factor in the aggravation of school bullying and violence that needs to be more openly discussed. Most countries provide some data on pupil-to-pupil bullying viewing this issue as a serious international problem (Smith et al., 1999), but there is also an opposite viewpoint - to negate this problem at the public and also at the academic level (e.g. Ebbesen & Jensen, 2003).

Introduced by Olweus (1996), as the first systematic investigation of bullying of students by teachers - in the 1980s a special questionnaire was used to explore the possibility that teachers bullied students. It was the first specific intervention of this topic. Results indicated that less than two percent of 6 through 9 grade students could be identified as having been bullied by one or several teachers during a five-month period. Chapell et al. (2004) investigated the bullying of college students by their teachers and results indicated that over 44% of students had seen a teacher bully a student, and almost 5% reported being bullied by a teacher occasionally or very frequently. Twemlow, Fornagy and Sacco (2004) also presented data from a study of teachers' perceptions of other teachers who bully students, and mentioned that bullying of students by teachers and bullying of teachers by students is a factor in the aggravation of school bullying and violence that needs to be more openly discussed. Also, bullying of and by teachers has got some public attention (Björkqvist &

Österman, 1999). Only one study to the author's knowledge has examined the issue of bullying of teachers by students in school environment. Pervin and Turner (1998) revealed that teachers from all subjects have experienced teacher targeted bullying documenting the nature, duration and level of bullying of teachers by pupils. 71 per cent teachers claimed that they mainly suffered verbal bullying; they also indicated that pupils frequently ignored their requests and that their property was often damaged. Adult bullying among two occupations (teachers, students) in three countries (Spain, Germany, UK) was one of the research areas of Schäfer's et al. (2004) study. Results indicated that teachers reported more victimization in their workplace than students in college, and the variation between the rates of victimization varied between countries at 12 to 23 per cent. Research results among five different working populations (managers, technicians, call cent operators, engineers, and teachers) indicated that about one-fifth defined themselves as victims. The analysis of types of bullying behavior by participant role indicated that victims experienced significantly greater threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, and isolation (Jennifer, Cowei & Ananiadou, 2003).

Bullying is a serious matter, but has received a little attention as teacher targeted bullying compared with pupils targeted bullying in the school settings. There is an urgent need for a new focus on not viewing only bullying of teachers by children, but also by other age-groups - adult subjects in school settings. Also, there is a need for not viewing only teacher targeted bullying behavior in general terms, but to take into account different types of bullying.

A limited amount of empirical research that has addressed the teacher targeted bully-

ing behavior: bullying of teachers by pupils and by adults, points out a need to take into account research results conducted in the area of school violence toward teachers as a basis of formulating research hypotheses.

Violence in schools may take different forms: it may mean violence by teachers toward students, violence of students against teachers, and also destruction of school property (Junger-Tas, 1999). Most countries provide some data on pupil to pupil violence. Other dyads are more rarely reported: teacher-pupil and pupil-teacher violence (Smith, 2003a). There are some data on pupil to teacher violence viewing teachers' victimization of students through corporal punishment and discipline and covering the research area as labeled "psychological maltreatment of students by educators" (e.g. Hyman et al., 1997; Krumm et al., 1997). A limited attention is paid on teacher to pupil (Budd, 1999; Neill, 2001; Roland, Bjørnsen & Mandt, 2003; Schäfer & Korn, 2003), and adult to adult violence in school environment (Budd, 1999; Neill, 2001; O'Moore & Minton, 2003), whereby there is also reports pointing out that adults violence against pupils is not possible (e. g. Schäfer & Korn, 2003). Based on the data from research surveys it was found that 13.5 per cent of pupils reported observing violent acts against teachers once, and 2.7 per cent often or very often (Schäfer & Korn, 2003); 34.5 per cent of teachers had personally experienced physical aggression from a pupil at last once a year (Neill, 2001); 3.2 per cent of teachers in primary schools and 4.2 per cent in secondary schools were victims of pupils violence (Budd, 1999); 47.7 per cent of teachers in primary and lower secondary schools had experienced harassment and/or criminal damage, and 2.2 per cent physical aggressive behavior

in the period of the last three years (Roland, Bjørnsen & Mandt, 2003). Some data from research surveys is connected with the violence in adult-adult relations viewing teachers as victims of violence: most often perpetrators of physical assault towards teachers were pupils, followed by parents (Budd, 1999; O'Moore & Minton, 2003); 4.6 per cent of teachers had experienced physical aggression from parents (Neill, 2001); adults in school (teachers, school board members, pupils counselors, school administrative and maintenance staff) were mostly the victims of verbal and to a much smaller extent of maternal aggressive behavior (Huybregts, Vettenburg & D'Aes, 2003).

The aim of this study was to explore the differences in the extent of different types of bullying experienced by teachers in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships.

The following two research tasks were established: (1) to ascertain the prevalence of different types of bullying of teachers by children (pupils) and adults (parents, teachers, school administrative and maintenance staff) in school settings, and (2) to ascertain the differences in the extent of different types of bullying experienced by teachers between five types of relationships in school setting: teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent.

Ólafsson and Jóhannsdóttir (2004) divided workplace bullying into two broad categories: (1) general bullying (e.g. humiliation, social exclusion, negative emotional experience, indirect bullying) and (2) work-related bullying (e.g. excessive work loads, unfair criticism and treatment by superiors, and having to tasks which were not

part of the job description). Examining the occurrence of different types of bullying in school settings in the present research only general bullying, but not work-related bullying, was included based on the typology of workplace bullying among adults (Rayner & Hoel, 1997): (1) threat to professional status, (2) threat to personal standing, and (3) isolation. Following the tradition of school bullying (e.g. Farrington, 1993; Olweus, 1999), one general category of bullying was added – physical and psychological aggressive behavior.

Based on previous research in teacher targeted bullying and teacher targeted aggressive behavior it was hypothesized that teachers would report more verbal types of bullying by children compared bullying by adults.

Method

Selection of subjects

The school was chosen to obtain a fairly representative sample - schools were selected from all (16) separate districts from Estonia representing one randomly selected school from each district, whereby the ratio of different types of schools (basic schools versus gymnasium: 6 versus 4) among sample of schools corresponds to the whole-country school sample. All teachers from randomly selected 16 schools were included to the research sample of the study. The sample consisted of 613 teachers: 527 females (85.55%) and 69 males (14.45%). Approximately five per cent of the sample (32 teachers) was monitored for refusal rates. The mean age of the subjects in this study was 43 years (median = 42, SD = 9.1). The youngest subject was 23 years old and the oldest was 63 years old.

Instrument

An instrument for the measurement of different types of bullying of teachers by children and by adults in school setting was developed for the purposes of this study. Questionnaire consisted of 15 items describing acts harming the target person. Participants were introduced to the following definition of bullying in the workplace: *Bullying is negative behavior that occurs repeatedly over time, and causes distress. It characterized as a dyadic power imbalance between bully and target.* It was instructed to view themselves as victims of bullying.

In this exploration of bullying to participants, a questionnaire was constructed following the pattern established by Olweus (1999), and adapted to include the contingency of bullying by adults (administration, other teachers, parents, and school maintenance staff) and children (pupils) in school settings. Viewing teachers as multiple-targeted victims the frequency of different types of bullying was investigated. Subjects were asked: *How often have the following incidences happened to you in different relationships in your present workplace over the last six month?* and were given 15 bullying-type experiences based on typology of workplace bullying (Rayner & Hoel, 1997), but adapted to include only general bullying: (1) threat to professional status: accusation regarding lack of effort, belittling opinion, public humiliation; (2) threat to personal standing: devaluation, insults, intimidation, name-calling, offensive remarks, shouting, slandering; (3) isolation: physical isolation, withholding of information. One general category of bullying was added - psychological and physical aggressive behavior: physical attack, threatening with position, and threatening with violence.

Participants answered each item using one of four response alternatives, with scores ranging from 0 to 3: never = 0; seldom = 1; often = 2; very often = 3.

According to the definition of bullying as repeated behavior, victims of bullying were identified as those who have been bullied "often" or "very often".

Results

The following results (Table 1) are for those who reported being involved *often* or *very often* in bullying incidents in the last six month that was defined by the researcher as being bullied. The data were analyzed as a percentage of the number of replies received. The results were not separated on the basis of gender of teachers.

Approximately one-fifth of teachers reported experiencing *often* or *very often* interaction defined as being victimized by pupils in connection with at least one type of bullying. With regard to the different types of victimization, 20.8% reported experiencing shouting, 18.9% offensive remarks, 14.7% insults, 9.0% name-calling, 8.0% slandering, 5.4% public humiliation, 4.8% devaluation, 4.5% withholding of information, 3.8% accusation regarding lack of effort, 3.5% intimidation, 2.6% belittling opinion, 2.2% threatening with position, 1.8% threatening with violence, 1.8% physical isolation and 1.0% physical attacks.

Less than eight per cent of subjects questioned were involved in bullying behavior (at least one type of victimization) in school setting as targets of other teachers. The most common ways in which victims started they were bullied were slandering (7.7%), and offensive remarks (16.2%). Other suggestions offered by

Table 1 - The percentage of teachers who have been victimized often or very often during last six month on each of the 15 victimization items in different bullying relationships

Item (types of bullying)	Bullying of teachers by pupils	Bullying of teachers by other teachers	Bullying of teachers by school administration	Bullying of teachers by Parents	Bullying of teachers by school maintenance staff
Accusation regarding lack of effort	3.83	0.32	0.64	0.32	0.00
Belittling opinion	2.62	0.00	0.32	0.00	0.00
Devaluation	4,9	0.64	0.00	0.32	0.32
Insults	14,0	2.56	2.56	1.92	0.00
Intimidation	3,1	0.32	3.51	1.60	0.00
Name-calling	8.5	0.00	0.00	0.32	0.32
Offensive remarks	18.85	6.39	7.35	9.27	0.32
Physical attack	0.96	0.00	0.32	0.00	0.00
Physical isolation	1.28	1.28	0.96	0.96	0.32
Public humiliations	5.43	1.28	1.28	0.64	0.00
Shouting	20.77	2.56	2.56	2.56	0.32
Slandering	7.99	7.66	0.00	7.66	0.32
Threatening with violence	2.24	1.28	1.28	1.28	0.00
Threatening with position	1.28	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Withholding of information	4.47	4.47	0.96	4.47	0.00

victims included less than two per cent of subjects.

Also, less than eight per cent of victims reported being bullied (experienced at least one type of bullying) by school administrative staff, and the most frequently reported types of bullying between teachers and administration were offensive remarks (7.4%) and intimidation (3.5%), followed by insults, shouting, public humiliation and threatening with position as verbal abuse.

Of the sample, less than ten per cent reported teachers an incident defined as being bullied by parents at least one type of victimization. Of those reporting victimization, the most frequently reported types were offensive remarks (9.3%), slandering (7.7%), and withholding of information (4.5%).

Less than 0.3% of teachers said that they had been bullied recently *often* or very *often* at least experiencing one type of bullying by school maintenance staff members. Across the different types of victimization less was the following types: slandering, shouting, offensive remarks, name-calling, devaluation, and physical isolation, whereby the remained types were not experienced.

Overall, the general level of victimization of teachers by adults (teachers, parents, school staff administration and maintenance staff) in school settings was very low, with less than one tenth of subjects had experienced at least one type of victimization. Perceptions of teachers of the extent of different types of children-to-teacher bullying in school settings were slightly over 20% reported at least one type

of victimization. Teacher targeted bullying by children took many forms but the most common were verbal: insults, offensive remarks, and shouting. Verbal forms of victimization were relatively prevalent in adult-teacher bullying relationships in school environment, including the intimidation, offensive remarks, slandering, and also withholding of information. All forms of physical and psychological aggression (physical attack, threatening with position, threatening with violence) and psychical isolation were clearly unrevealing between all five types of bullying relationships in school setting: teacher - pupil, teacher - teacher, teacher - school administrative staff, teacher - school maintenance staff, and teacher - parent.

In order to explore the differences in the extent of different types of bullying behavior experienced by teachers in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships, t -tests (for paired samples) were performed for each type of bullying. The results of these analyses are presented in the Table 2.

As the table reveals, belittling opinion, accusation regarding lack of effort, devaluation, public humiliation, name-calling, offensive remarks, insults and shouting were the more commonly experienced types of bullying of teachers by pupils compared with bullying of teachers by adults: teachers, parents, school administration and school maintenance staff (all this differences were statistically significant).

Additionally, there was a trend among adult bullying behavior for a high proportion of teachers to describe bullying by other teachers, school administration and parents than bullying by school maintenance staff in connection to three bullying types:

insults, offensive remarks, and shouting. This trend would have been significant at the .05 or .01 level.

Exploring the differences in the extent of slandering, intimidation and withholding of information experienced by teachers among teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships, two trends were revealed: (1) two significant differences were found regards to withholding of information and slandering with a higher proportion of teachers describing bullying by pupils, teachers and parents compared with bullying by other subjects' groups, and (2) more participants reported that they had been targets of intimidation by pupils and school administration compared with other subjects' (teachers, parents and maintenance staff) groups.

There were no statistically significant differences of teacher's experiences of four types of bullying - physical attack, withholding of information, threatening with violence and threatening with position - between all different types of relationships: teacher-pupil, teacher-administration, teacher-other teacher, teacher-other school staff members, and teacher-parent.

Discussion

The present research supports conceptualization of bullying at the individual level – dominant conceptual emphasis was on bullying as interpersonal aggressive repeated act characterized as a dyadic power imbalance between bully and victim, taking the teacher's as victim's perspective.

Approaching the problem of bullying from a slightly different angle, there is not only bullying a teacher by students, but also

Table 2 - χ^2 -values of different types of bullying experienced by teachers in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships

Type of bullying	Teacher pupil versus teacher-teacher	Teacher pupil versus teacher administration	Teacher pupil versus teacher parents	Teacher pupil versus teacher maintenance staff	Teacher -teacher versus teacher administration	Teacher-teacher versus teacher parent	Teacher-teacher versus teacher-maintenance staff	Teacher administration versus teacher parent	Teacher administration versus teacher maintenance staff	Teacher versus teacher maintenance staff	Teacher versus teacher maintenance staff
Physical isolation	0,00	0,14	0,14	1,81	0,14	0,14	1,81	0,00	1,01	1,01	
Physical attack	3,01	1,00	3,01	3,01	1,00	0,00	0,00	1,00	1,00	0,00	
Threatening with violence	1,06	1,06	1,06	1,06	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	0,00	
Threatening with position	0,83	0,83	0,83	4,08	0,00	0,00	4,00	0,00	4,00	4,00	
Public humiliations	8,33**	8,33**	12,21**	17,47**	0,00	2,03	0,67	2,03	0,67	2,01	
Devaluation	10,22**	15,37**	12,57**	12,57**	2,00	0,33	0,33	1,00	1,00	0,00	
Name-calling	29,31**	29,31**	26,40**	26,40**	0,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	1,00	0,00	
Belittling opinion	5,04*	2,69*	5,04*	5,04*	1,00	0,00	0,00	1,00	1,00	0,00	
Accusation regarding lack of effort	9,51**	7,31**	9,51**	12,23**	0,33	0,00	1,00	0,33	2,01	1,00	
Insults	29,27**	29,27**	33,56**	49,45**	0,00	0,29	8,10**	0,29	8,10**	6,06*	
Offensive remarks	36,02**	31,35**	11,90**	62,01**	0,22	1,79	17,79**	0,78	20,97**	27,55**	
Shouting	50,38**	55,38**	50,38**	69,37**	0,00	0,00	5,52*	0,00	5,52*	5,52*	
Standering	0,02	26,34**	0,02	23,11**	24,96**	0,00	22,04**	24,96**	1,00	22,04**	
Withholding of information	0,00	7,32**	0,00	14,32**	8,51*	0,00	8,04*	7,31**	3,01	14,32**	
Intimidation	8,50*	0,00	2,31	11,20**	8,50**	4,04	1,00	2,31	11,20**	4,04	

* - p<0,05
** - p<0,01

bullying a teacher by other adult subjects in school settings. The rate of teachers victimization (experienced at least one type of bullying found here in teacher-adult relationships (teacher-teacher, teacher-parents, teacher-school administration, teacher-school maintenance staff) and was less than eight per cent, which was lower than those reported in teacher-children relationships (approximately 20%). Previous research have revealed that victimization in workplace was somewhat more common among teachers compared with current results (Pervin & Turner, 1998: 71%; Schäfer et al., 2004: 39%; Chapell et al., 2004: 44% versus present results: 5%). There were methodological differences in the design of the different studies (conceptual emphasizes on bullying as interpersonal aggressive nonrepeated act versus interpersonal repeated act with power imbalance), which created definitional difficulties in cross-national comparisons.

Also, previous surveys (O'Moore & Minton, 2003) have revealed that 9% of teachers had been victims of violence in schools, whereby most often the perpetrators were pupils, followed by parents. Our findings were parallel with this findings revealing that workplace bullying is not widespread problem in school setting among adults: teacher-teacher, teacher-administration, teacher-parent, and teacher maintenance staff. The key question is not whether, but to what degree different types of bullying reveal in teacher-pupils relationships viewing teachers as targets of bullying in schools. In school settings serious types of bullying connected with physical and psychological aggressive behavior (physical attack, withholding of information, threatening with violence and threatening with position) were not common among teacher-children and teacher-

adult bullying behavior viewing teachers as multi-target subjects. Prevalent types of bullying of teacher targeted bullying among teacher-children and teacher-adult interactions were verbal forms of bullying, pointing out the proof of the generated hypothesis. These results confirm Pervin's and Turner's (1998) findings that bullying of teachers by pupils is mostly verbal, but our results specified last mentioned finding - the prevalent types of teacher targeted bullying behavior by pupils were insults, offensive remarks, and shouting. Additionally, it was found that offensive remarks, slandering and withholding of information were prevalent forms of bullying among teacher-adult relationship viewing teachers as multi-targeted victims. These finding are parallel with Ireland (2002, 2004) who reported that prisoners and patients in high-secure hospitals experienced verbal, physical and theft-related bullying most frequently.

The analysis of verbal forms of bullying behavior considering different relationship between teachers-children and teachers-adults brought out two tendencies. At first, it was found that bullying of teachers by pupils was more frequent compared with bullying of teachers by adults (school administration, other teachers, maintenance staff and parents) in connection with two subtypes of bullying: (1) a threat to professional status with specific types of bullying as accusation regarding lack of effort, belittling opinion, and public humiliation; and (2) a threat to personal standing with specific types of bullying as devaluation, insults, name-calling, offensive remarks, and shouting, whereby insults, offensive remarks and shouting were the most frequent types of bullying of teachers by students. These results support Jennifer, Cowie and Ananiadou's (2003) conclusions that victims of workplace

bullying (among different working populations, included teachers) experienced significantly greater threat to professional status and personal standing. Present research enriched results in this area concretizing the prevalence of different types of bullying behavior among teachers in school context.

Also, it was revealed that victimization rate of teachers were different in different adult relationships in school context. It was found that the extent of three serious verbal types of bullying (insults, offensive remarks, and shouting) connected with threat of personal standing were higher in frequency among teacher targeted bullying by other teachers, school administration and parents compared with teacher targeted bullying by maintenance school staff. Two specific types of bullying behavior which were connected with systematic distortions of information – slandering and withholding of information, were more frequent among bullying of teachers by pupils, other teachers and parents compared with bullying of teachers by administration and school maintenance staff members. However, the third serious specific type of bullying – intimidation, was experienced by teachers significantly greater rates among teacher-pupils/administration relationships compared with other relationships (teacher-teacher, teacher-parent, teacher-maintenance staff). Parallel with this Ireland (2004) has found that among adult personality-disordered patients in hospital the frequent type of bullying was intimidation.

The current results, although providing some insights into the extent and structure of different types of teacher-targeted bullying, are not without limitations. At first, the results of the current study are based on self-reports made by teachers and are not restricted to any other occupational

group. Secondly, the overrepresentation of woman in the sample and the disproportion of males and females in school settings made it impossible to compare the amounts of female and male bullying on the basis of experiences at their own workplace.

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