Investigating the Attitudes of Primary School Teachers and Staff toward Bullying

Hossein Eskandari[1*], Habib-o Allah Kolahderazi[2]

[1] *Assistant professor of Philosophy of Education, University of Bojnourd, Bojnourd, Northern Khorasan, Iran*
[2] *M.A student of consulting, Allame Tabatabaii University, Tehran, Iran*

Abstract
Purpose: The initiation of anti-bullying movements in school's dates back to nearly three decades ago in some countries. Despite the importance of such a movement and its grave implications for education systems, no particular program or action has been organized in our country. **Materials and Method:** The present study presents a cross-sectional descriptive survey to assess the attitudes of primary school teachers and staff towards bullying. The self-administered questionnaire explored attitude towards bullying in 207 teachers and 73 administrative staff of 25 schools in the city of Bojnourd using stage cluster sampling. **Findings:** The results of independent t-test demonstrated that the attitude toward bullying was not significantly different in male and female subjects with respect to the variables of years of service and administrative position, though women tended to hold a stronger attitude compared to men in this respect (t=2.04 and p<0.04). The results showed that school staff and teachers, whether those with less than five years of service or those who had hold their job for more than twenty years were not sufficiently aware of the sensitivity of the case of bullying and the skills required to handle this issue. **Discussion**: Therefore, it seems that organizing workshops and training courses on the issue of bullying for target groups are necessary and inevitable.

Please cite this article as: Eskandari, H., Kolahderazi, H. (2016). Investigating the Attitudes of Primary School Teachers and Staff toward Bullying .*Interdisciplinary Journal of Education*.1. 1, 26-34.

* Corresponding author   Email: eskandari33@yahoo.com

1. Introduction

The outbreak of conflict and tension between individuals is so common that many consider it as a normal and unavoidable issue. According to some scholars, "conflict among peers is a natural issue, which is not necessarily bad. That is, incompatibility and conflicts are part of the growth process which is essential for children, but this conflict, if left unsupervised, can give rise to the issue of bullying (Rezapour, Souri & Khodakarim, 2013). Traditionally, bullying has been defined as "undesirable and intentional aggressive behavior that involves an imbalance of power whether real or perceived (between bullies and their victims), which is often repeated over time (Olweus, 1993). This traditional definition has been challenged and criticized by many scholars in recent years. For many, this definition is restricted as it fails to account for all forms of bullying. Another criticism is leveled against the definition of violence in its common sense. Although bullying is usually assumed to be associated with the concept of violence, it is a drastically different concept. Violence is largely considered to be precisely relevant to the employment, or better to say systematic exercise of physical power while bullying encompasses other forms of physical violence such as pushing, hitting and so called verbal violence (Espelage, 2012; Vaillancourt et al, 2008).

A common form of bullying is verbal bullying that includes behaviors such as verbal abuse, insulting, teasing, threatening and taunting, gossiping and name calling (if we consider physical bullying such as kicking, pushing and so forth as direct bullying). This is the indirect form of bullying which is the most prevalent among students. Bullying can also take the form of social and communicative issues. For example, victims are ostracized by their peers or exposed to blame and humiliation. Banishment together with alienation from friends and peer groups is more common among girls than boys (Rigby, 2008, translated by Monshi, 2013).

A new type of bullying is cyber bullying which is practiced through the Internet and social networks (e.g. sending threatening texts). The traditional forms of bullying mostly occurred in schools or on school trips and were based on face-to-face communications, but the cyber bullying is mainly implemented by means of communication and information technology, the most notable feature of which is the lack of face-to-face communication between the bully and the victim (Cantone, Piras, Vellante et al, 2012).

As students grow older, with an increase in the use of Internet and smart phones, they are more prone to this type of violence. The reported rate of bullying in primary schools is 1.5% while this figure is 17.6% in high schools (Cantone, Piras, Vellante et al, 2012). Bullying is also realized at various levels (mild, moderate and severe) with factors such as gender and age group affecting it as well. For instance, physical bullying is more common in boys than in girls, whereas social and relational bullying is more prevalent in girls. Moreover, physical bullying is especially common in early years of primary schools while verbal and social bullying tend to be stronger at older age (Rigby, 2008, translated by Monshi, 3rd Edition, 2013).

Bullying has a dynamic and complex nature which is underlain by psychological principles and social-ecological backgrounds. That is, besides school, socio-physical environment like neighborhood, home and playgrounds also contribute to the development of bullying (Swearer and Hymel, 2015). Furthermore, the family emotional environment and parenting style are involved in this process (Beyrami & Alaei, 2013). Nonetheless, considering that children spend most of their time with their peers at school, it can provide a fertile ground for the growth of various forms of bullying. This study

seeks to evaluate the attitude of schools (knowledge, attitude and behavior of teachers and administrative staff) towards the bullying issue. The underlying assumption is that any proper decision and planning to tackle bullying requires an analysis of the current situation of schools. Deeper insight about the status is a perquisite to achieve the desirable outcomes. Therefore, this study can offer innovative and useful findings to managers, planners and education trainers.

2. Research Background

According to the studies of Eriksen, Nielsen and Simonsen (2012) bullying is a widespread and yet dangerous issue. For example, as reported in the literature, 20% of German students are victims of bullying and according to Brown and Taylor (2007), the same number of students in the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark are victims of bullying. This figure in United States, according to national studies on 12-18 years-old students, is 28% (Robers, Zhang, Truman and Snyder, 2012). Given the prevalence and profound consequences of bullying, it has gained the growing attention of researchers and experts in the field of educational psychology in the past three decades (Patchin & Hinduja, 2011, quoted by Beirami et al, 2013). Despite the long precedence and breadth of studies on this issue across the world, there are scant studies on the prevalence rate of bullying in Iranian primary and secondary schools. A survey of scientific and educational sources indicates a paucity of research works on this issue prior to the 2010. Similarly, the number of publications since then has been insignificant (Razi Moradi, Etemadi & Naeem Abadi, 2010, Moghtadaei et al, 2011; Mansourinejad, Behrouzi & Shahni Yeylagh, 2015, Staki Azadi, & Amiri, 2012; Pourseyedi et al, 2012; Chalmeh, 2013; Rezapour, Sourian & Khodakarim, 2013; Beyrami & Alaei, 2013, Qamari Giv et al, 2013). Meanwhile, according to the results of foreign studies and analysis of existing video footage of bullying behaviors, teachers and administrative staff in schools could prevent up to 50% of bullying (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Winter, 2001).

In one of the recent reports on bullying, American Educational Research Association has regarded bullying as one of the greatest threats to the health of children, adolescents and young adults in the United States (Espelage et al, 2013, p. 1). The report entitled as "preventing bullying in schools, colleges and universities" treats the risk of bullying as important as cancer and enumerates its profound implications for personal, social and intergenerational life. The report continues to expand on the devastating consequences of increased bullying at schools. In what follows, only two of these consequences have been mentioned.

Victims of bullying have high levels of anxiety, depression, health problems and social conflicts; problems that stay with them for the rest of their adulthood (Carlisle & Rofes, 2007; Espelage & De La Rue, 2012; Gini & Pozzoli, 2009; Ttofi, Farrington & Losel, 2012). Victims of bullying were less involved in school activities and thus their scores tended to drop (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Van Fan 2013; Robers et al, 2012).

According to the results of the above-mentioned foreign research and a number of Iranian studies, the deleterious effects of bullying are to a large extent obvious for researchers and scholars. In the light of such awareness, there have been global campaigns such as anti-bullying movement to make school environments a safer place, which is bereft of any threat and violence. A notable instance of such efforts is the prevention of bullying in US schools, which pursues the following objectives: 1. Identifying the causes and consequences of bullying in schools, colleges and universities; 2. highlighting the role of

education and specialized assistance to all educational institutions so that they can effectively deal with bullying; 3. Assessing the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies and programs to hamper this issue (Espelage et al, 2013, p. 3). Despite the fact that anti-bullying movement has been in place in countries like Norway since 1983, it seems that Iranian educational system has taken no significant measure in this regard. According to recent studies, "schools can have a significant impact on the prevention of bullying, and by the adoption of appropriate strategies, the effect of this issue can be mitigated to a large extent" (Qamari & Givi, 2013, p. 51).

3. Method

This is a cross-sectional descriptive survey in which the study population consisted of all teachers and administrators of elementary schools in the city of Boroujerd in 2015-16 academic year (n= 915). Of this population, 760 were teachers and 155 were administrative staff of schools. According to Krejcie and Morgan's Table, 300 subjects (207 teachers and 73 school staff) constituted a sufficient sample size. Participants were selected using stage cluster sampling. To this end, initially 25 schools were randomly selected from among all public, private and non-profit schools.

Then, 300 questionnaires were distributed among teachers and school staff. A permit obtained from Department of Education through prior arrangement. The researcher visited each school and after an introduction to the goals of project, distributed the questionnaires among teachers who were willing to cooperate. The questionnaires were given to all teachers, from first grade to sixth grade. Similarly, it was given to all administrative staff, including managers, assistants, bookkeepers, consultants and educators. Unlike some rural areas, none of the school staff taught any of the six elementary grades. After a few days, by prior arrangement, the researcher returned to the schools to gather questionnaires. Of the total number of questionnaires, 5 filled out by school staff and 4 by teachers were distorted (a total of 9 cases).

A number of questionnaires have been developed on the issue of bullying the most notable of which is Illinois Bullying Scale. The purpose of this questionnaire is to evaluate bullying from different aspects including bullying behavior, act of beating and bullying victims. Like other similar instruments, this questionnaire measures students' behavior. Thus, to evaluate the perspective of teachers, a new questionnaire needed to be designed.

Barzegar Befrouei and Khezri (2013) used a self-administered questionnaire to assess the prevalence of bullying (physical, sexual, verbal) in junior high schools from the perspective of teachers in the city of Yazd. Given the goal of the research, it was necessary to create a special questionnaire.

In this study, to evaluate the attitude of teachers and administrative staff to the issue of bullying, a self-administered questionnaire was adopted. The construct validity of this questionnaire was confirmed at several stages using Delphi pattern based on the comments of five professors of Educational Psychology and Counseling. The contents of items on three dimensions of knowledge, feelings and attitudes were mainly developed based on the study of Rigby (2008, translated by Mofidi, 2015) and Espelage (2012).

Cronbach's alpha was used to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire (r=0.72). Also, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for knowledge (0.73), feeling (0.81) and behavior (0.68) dimensions, which confirmed the reliability of this instrument. The questionnaire was first designed by a sample of 30 items, which in light of the data derived from initial implementation, half of the items

were later excluded. The 15-item questionnaire evaluated three dimensions of knowledge, feelings and behavior and provided an overall score that reflected the attitudes of teachers and administrative staff to the bullying issue at schools. In the questionnaire, all items were directly scored: items 1-6 evaluated feeling, items 7-11 assessed knowledge and finally items 12-15 evaluated behavior.

4. Findings

The results showed that about 62% of the participants were female (n=180) and 0.34% were males (n=100). According to Table 1, the highest frequency in the category of "years of service" belonged to teachers with more than 20 years of work experience (n=193). According to Table 2.71% of participants were school teachers and 29% were administrative staff.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of work experience in participants

work experience	Frequency	Percentage
1-5	26	8.9
6-10	15	5.2
11-15	22	7.6
16-20	23	7.9
More than 21	193	66.3
missing data	12	4.1
Total	291	100

Table 2: Frequency distribution of the professional position in participants

Professional position	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Teacher	207	71.1
Principal	13	4.5
Deputy Principal	40	13.7
Trainer	17	5.8
Counselor	3	1.0
Missing data	11	3.8
Total	291	100.0

Table 3: Mean, standard deviation and normal distribution of research variables

Variable	Mean	SD	Z. ks	Probability value
Attitude towards bullying	45.18	7.84	0.73	0.64
Feeling	19.67	3.91	1.60	0.012
Knowledge	14.0	3.51	1.96	0.001
Behavior	11.47	3.00	2.06	0.001

As suggested by the results in table 3, the estimated mean and standard deviation of the attitude towards bullying was 45.18 ± 7.854. Also, the mean and standard deviation of the feeling and behavior variables were 3.91 ± 19.67 and 51.3 ± 14.0 respectively. As indicated by the value of Kolmogorov - Smirnov test, the variable of attitude towards bullying (Z =0.64 P>0.73) had normal distribution whereas feeling (Z=1.60 P< 0.01), knowledge (Z =1.96 P>0.001) and behavior (Z =2.06 P>0.001) variables had abnormal distribution.

To explore the first question, i.e. the significance of the attitude towards bullying and its dimensions (feelings, knowledge and behavior) in teachers and administrative staff on the one hand and gender on the other hand, the independent t-test was used. Moreover, to compare the variables of feeling, knowledge and behavior, Mann-Whitney U test was adopted. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Analysis of attitude score based on the gender of participants

Variable	Gender	No	Mean	SD	T	significance	Mann-Whitney U	Level of significance
Attitude toward bullying	Female	178	46.11	7.27	2.04	0.04	-	-
	Male	98	44.18	7.88				
Feeling	Female	180	20.10	3.71	-	-	-2.41	0.01
	Male	99	18.91	4.19				
Knowledge	Female	180	14.36	3.52	-	-	-2.70	0.007
	Male	100	13.30	3.42				
Behavior	Female	180	11.38	2.98	-	-	-0.54	0.58
	Male	100	11.71	3.04				

The results of independent t-test indicated a significant difference between the mean score of attitude towards bullying between men and women (t=2.04 and P<0.04). That is, women tended to hold a stronger

attitude (in general) towards bullying compared to men. Further, the results of Mann-Whitney U test showed a significant difference between variables of feeling (Z=2.41 and P<0.01) and knowledge (Z=2.70 and P<0.007) with respect to gender. That is, both variables were significantly greater in women compared to men. In addition, no significant gender differences were observed between males and females with regard to the behavior variable (Z=0.54 and P<0.58).

The second research question explored the attitude towards bullying and its components in terms of work experience. Since the total score of attitude towards bullying and the components of bullying attitude - feelings, knowledge and behavior- had abnormal distribution, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare attitude towards bullying. Moreover, Kruskal-Wallis test was employed to compare the components of feeling, knowledge and behavior. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Comparison of the attitude towards bullying and its dimensions based on work experience

Variable	Work experience	N	Mean	SD	F	significance	Kruskal-Wallis	significance
Attitude towards bullying	1-5	26	44.96	7.66	0.740	0.56	-	-
	6-10	14	47.21	10.81				
	11-15	22	44.86	7.09				
	16-20	23	45.47	8.07				
	More than 21	193	44.73	7.61				
Feeling	1-5	26	20.34	3.54	-	-	3.23	0.52
	6-10	15	20.50	4.81				
	11-15	22	22.04	3.88				
	16-20	23	20.69	3.94				
	More than 21	193	19.36	3.91				

	1-5	26	14.50	3.60				
	6-10	15	14.46	4.62				
Knowledge	11-15	22	13.72	3.02	-	-	1.07	0.89
	16-20	23	13.52	3.23				
	More than 21	193	13.94	3.52				
	1-5	26	12.11	2.97				
	6-10	15	11.73	3.73				
Behavior	11-15	22	11.09	2.50	-	-	1.79	0.77
	16-20	23	11.26	2.76				
	More than 21	193	11.43	2.98				

As shown by the results of ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis tests, there was no significant difference between the attitude towards bullying (F= 0.740 and P> 0.56) and feeling (Z=3.23 and P>0.52), knowledge (Z=1.07 and P>0.89) and behavior (Z=1.79 and P>0.77) components in terms of work experience.

The third research question was intended to explore whether there was any significant difference between attitudes toward bullying in terms of the professional position. In light of the normal distribution of the total score of attitude toward bullying and the abnormal distribution of components of attitude towards bullying - feelings, knowledge and behavior – the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was used to compare attitudes toward bullying and Kruskal-Wallis test was employed to compare feeling, knowledge and behavior components. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Comparison of the score of attitude towards bullying and its dimensions in terms of professional position

Variable	Position	No	Mean	SD	F	Level of significance	Kruskal-Wallis test	Level of significance
Attitude towards bullying	teacher	207	45.26	7.97	0.91	0.45	-	-
	principal	12	41.41	7.64				
	deputy	40	45.23	7.26				
	trainer	17	46.11	7.62				
Feeling	teacher	207	19.64	3.93	-	-	5.57	0.21
	principal	12	17.33	4.22				
	deputy	40	19.92	3.59				
	trainer	17	21.11	4.07				
Knowledge	teacher	207	14.10	3.62	-	-	2.93	0.56
	principal	13	12.61	2.14				
	deputy	40	13.95	3.52				
	trainer	17	13.52	3.10				
Behavior	teacher	207	11.51	3.03	-	-	2.55	0.63
	principal	13	11.07	4.07				
	Deputy	40	11.45	2.60				
	Trainer	17	11.47	3.02				

As suggested by the results of ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis tests, there was no significant difference between attitude towards bullying (F= 0.91 and P> 0.45) and feeling (Z=5.75 and P>0.21), knowledge (Z=2.93 and P>0.56) and behavior (Z=2.55 and P>0.63) components in terms of professional position.

5. Discussion

According to the above tables, the attitudes of teachers and other school staff were not significantly different with respect to variables such as work experience and professional position (whether teachers or administrative staff). In other words, teachers with only five years of service were not significantly different from their colleagues with more than twenty years of experience in terms of knowledge, feeling and behavior towards the bullying issue. In other words, the experience of teachers and their increased work experience had neither made them and other school staff more sensitive to the bullying problem nor increased their knowledge and practical skills in this regard.

Moreover, the attitude of teachers who spend more time with students was not significantly different from that of school staff. The above results are promising in that the total score of female attitudes was significantly greater than that of male subjects. The analysis of three components of knowledge, feelings and behavior shows that women scored higher with respect to two variables of knowledge and feeing. Since the majority of primary school teachers are women, this finding can be promising, but given the lack of a significant difference between men and women with respect to the components of behavior, it seems that high level knowledge and feeling did not have any tangible effect on the final performance of teachers and administrators.

The design, implementation and effectiveness of bullying prevention programs such as the plan known as Olweus (Qamari Giv et al., 2013), considering the greater capacity to tackle bullying at schools (Razimoradi, Etemadi & Naeem Abadi, 2010), and even the mother's education program to alleviate bullying issue (Pourseyedi, Amiri, Molavi & Pourseyedi, 2012), which apparently can be done independently from the school, requires all the teachers and their school staff to take the matters in their hand or at least play a significant role in this regard.

It seems that raising awareness of teachers and administrators about bullying should be high on the agenda. Therefore, according to the evidences, despite the design and implementation of national anti-bullying programs in countries around the world, the lack of such a plan is strongly felt in Iran (Qamari Giv, et al., 2013). The major reason for this lack of attention could be attributed to the fact that parents, teachers and administrators are not sufficiently aware of the kinds of bullying and its consequences.

The findings of Baier's research (2007) suggest that one of the factors contributing to the prevention of bullying and aggression in schools is related to the extent of victims' access to sources of support – i.e. parents, teachers, counselors and other school staff. Furthermore, any intervention and monitoring of support resources that requires knowledge about this issue can help change the bullying behavior at school and make schools a safer place for students.

Studies have shown that nearly 50% of boys and 53% of girls, who have been victim of bullying, keep it secret from their parents. Such neglect may affect children's mental health with possible consequences such as increased anxiety, low self-esteem, depression and psychosomatic diseases such as headaches, mouth sores, abdominal pain, defecation disorders and even suicidal tendencies in children (Rigby, 2008, translated by Mofidi, 2015). Thus, in spite of decades of negligence about the issue of bullying, the world has witnessed growing attention of researchers, policymakers and parents to this issue (Rodkin & Espelage,2015) and comprehensive programs have been developed to prevent bullying in schools, colleges and universities (Espelage et al., 2013). The problems, restrictions and concerns of schools cannot justify the lack of attention to the issue of bullying. The problem is compounded when various types of bullying take place unbeknown to teachers and school staff, or in some cases, unreported by

victims. In such cases, the existence of a comprehensive educational system can contribute to the mitigation of bullying in schools. Similarly, the training of teachers, administrative staff, consultants and even family can play an integral role in this process.

References

Staki Azad, N. & Amiri, Sh. (2012). The effectiveness of bullying alleviation educational programs based on Olweus method in school. *Iranian Journal of Psychiatry and Clinical Psychology*, 18.3, 83-175.

Barzegar Begrouei, K. &. Khezri, H. (2013). Prevalence of bullying in schools of Yazd from the perspective of teachers. *Exceptional Education Journal*, 13 (7).

Bayrami, M. & Alaei, P. (2013). Bullying in female middle schools: the role of parenting practices and perceived emotional environment of the family. *Journal of School Psychology*, 2.3, 38-56.

Bayrami, M, Hashemi, T., Fathiazar, S. & Alaei, P. (2012). Traditional and cyber bullying in female middle schools: the role of teacher-student relationship. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 26, 151-175.

Poorseyed, S. R., Amir, Sh., Molavi, H. & Poorseyed, M. (2012). Effectiveness of mother's training program on bullying in the fifth-grade students. *New Findings in Psychology*, 7.24, 43-131.

Chalmeh, R. (2013). *The psychometric adequacy of Illinois bullying scale in Iranian students: an analysis of validity, reliability, factor structure, methods and psychological models*. 3.11, 39-52.

Razimoradi, M., Etemadi, A. & Naeemabadi, E. (2010). The effectiveness of group counseling based on Glasser's Choice Theory in victims of bullying at schools to enhance the ability to tackle bullying behavior. *Psychological Studies, Faculty of Education and Psychology*, University of Al-Zahra, 6.4, 11-36.

Rezapour, M., Souri, H. & Khodakarim, S. (2013). Psychometric evaluation of the Persian version of bullying scales and victimization in Olweus bullying scale in schools. *Safety Promotion and Injury Prevention Journal*, 1.4, 212-221.

Rigby, K., (2008). *Children and defiance: how parents and educators can reduce the rebellion of children in school*. Translated by Marjan Monshi, Tehran: Avay-e Nour.

Rigby, Ken, (2008). *Children and bullying: how parents and educators can reduce bullying at school?* Translated by Farkhondeh Mofidi, 2015. Tehran: Madreseh.

Qamari, Give, H, Soroushzadeh, H., Nader, M. & Michaeili, N. (2013). The efficacy of Olweus bullying prevention program on social skills and self-esteem of students in primary schools. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 3.11, 49-75.

Moghtadaei, M., Amiri, SH., Molavi, H. & Staki Azadi, H. (2011). The effectiveness of training program based on social skills on the behaviors of elementary school boy in the city of Isfahan. *Social Psychological Research*, 1.2, 123-139.

Mansourinejad, R., Behrouzi, N. & Shahni Yeylagh, M. (2015). The causal relationship between parental bonding and bullying in schools mediated with the personality traits of student and teacher-student relationship quality: a proposed model. *Practical Counseling Quarterly*, 5.2, 41-62.