International Symposium: School Violence in Context

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GREEK CONTEXT

- In Greece, bullying has been widely recognized as a serious social issue in 2007, when a young student disappeared in circumstances suspected of peer victimization.

- Risk discourse and teachers' blame culture

- 2013 Ministry of Education Observatory for bullying, inter-professional collaboration for the integration of violence prevention and intervention into existing school activities and the curricula.

- Specific anti-bullying procedures published with definitions, information on the impact, and a template for schools to develop their own anti-bullying policies

- An inter professional team with school coordinators and set requirements to record, report, and take preventive action against bullying in schools
- The utility and impact of this Act have yet to be determined

- Barriers: in Greece, lack of supportive psychosocial services that could help the schools to deal with everyday school life.

- Lack of school culture to be open to inter-professional collaborations

- Lack of resources and training for schools

- Financial cuts, shrinking of community services

- Definition of roles-overlap and mistrust
- Public prosecutors being involved
- Lack of data registered
- Lack of collaboration within the school communities. The coordinator burdened and held responsible for any incident of bullying, no professional support

To begin with

- it is necessary to be clear about the definition of bullying. In the beginning, what seemed to set bullying apart from other aggressive and abusive attacks was its 'repeated' nature, fuelled by the silence and powerlessness of the victim.

- The problem was mainly situated within the interpersonal relationships of pupils and family pathology.

- Teachers question their role as ensuring the intent for bullying acts
- A great deal of consciousness- raising achieved by organizations/research centers mainly resulting to the identification of a number of specific characteristics of bully and victim and the development of a detailed taxonomy of different kinds of either bully or victim behaviour.

- In addition, there is a tendency to encompass bullying as just another child protection issue, without acknowledging the complex interactions between school culture, family functioning and peer culture.

Focusing too narrowly on safeguarding children without a raised awareness of the potential for partnership with non-violent peers and for tackling both the aggressor and the victim can lead to dangerously ineffectual responses both for the involved parties.

- When the academic and professional debate first started in this field, children were conceptualized as "passive victims" or "silent witnesses". Recent data, although, show that children who live with bullying have their own coping strategies and their own perspectives on what happens to them.

- This realization led to a conviction that research in this field must involve children directly, as well as those who care for and work with them. It also means that as users of services, children require interventions tailored to their level of understanding, their age or stage of development, their particular viewpoint, and their specific circumstances.

Prevailing culture in Greek schools

- Focus on individuals, underestimation of childhood, however
- Apart from trying to change the individual students concerned, necessary to change the educational paradigm that formulates student-teacher relationships, the nature of learning and the manner of keeping necessary order. Schools as a 'safe' place?

Overview of initiatives and studies

- In general, Greek studies divided into

- Investigations of prevalence rates

- Psychological impacts

- Interventions (less)

- Mostly in primary education (41%)

- Mostly quantitative

- Mostly self reported questionnaires by students (Olweus)

- Most common type of study cross-sectional analysis using a survey type research tool

- Most common location school setting

- The bullying phenomenon has been represented in the field of recent research by the use of the quantitative research paradigm (Mishna, et al., 2008)

Review of 62 studies

- Psychological characteristics (50%)

- Parenting practices (26%) (Baumrind, attachment)

- School factors (17%)

- Perceptions/ definition of bullying 10%

- Coping strategies 20%

Prevalence of bullying/victimization

- Papers referring to b in general terms and not accounting for different types

- Age, gender, ethnic origin as consistent variables

Overall

- Variations from 5% to 56%!

- As bystanders, students report more incidents of bullying than as victims or bullies

- Differences in terms of methods, definitions, informants, time frame of the experience

Encouraging

- The majority of the students state that they try to help (51.9%) or would like to do so (24.5%).

- The two thirds of the students would not join in bullying events (62.5%).

- Feelings of empathy (mostly cognitive) expressed by 80.6% of the students

Health behavior in school aged children study 2013/14 survey WHO

- New topics included

- Peer and family support

- Serious injury (stitches, cast, surgery, overnight hospitalization)

- Migration

- Cyberbullying

Comparative data at least 3 times [a month] in the last 12 months (%) (girls,boys)

Topic	Greece 11/13/15	Albania 11/13/15	Bulgaria 11/13/15	MKD 11/13/15	HSBC / gender 11/13/15	HSBC Average 11/13/15
Physical fight	4,13/5,13/4,14	3,17/7,21/6,24	7,19/6,17/6,20	2,9/3,12/3,13	5,19/5,15/4,12	12/10/8
Been bullied	5,6/9,6/6,7	7,13/8,10/5,7	17,20/15,17/10,12	6,13/10,12/6,11	11,14/11,12/8,9	13/12/8
Bullied others	3,5/6,13/4,14	7,15/11,14/8,14	8,15/11,17/6,18	5,11/5,13/6,11	5,9/6,11/6,12	7/9/9
Been cyberB	0,1/1,2/1,1	2,5/1,2/1,3	6,8/6,7/3,5	1,4/2,3/1,2	3,4/4,3/3,3	3/3/3
High quality of family C	52,49/38,39/33,31	68,62/67,60/68/64	45,47/31,36/32,31	59,58/52,52/45,44	51,49/41,41/36,35	50/41/36
Nervous	20,16/36,24/44,25	15,12/26,16/39,22	32,26/46,33/57,34	29,23/44,30/52/33	18,15/28,17/34,19	17/22/26
Low	13,10/30	12,12/24	13,10/19	17,13/29	15,11/23	13/17/21

HBSC comparison

- **Fighting** tending to decline with increasing age
- Age-related patterns less clear for girls
- Cross-national range in prevalence very large, especially boys
- **Being bullied** 12% boys, 10% girls
- Decrease over time peaking for boys 11, 13 and then drop.
- Very large cross-national range
- Gender differences in a third of countries and regions

HBSC comparison

- **Bullying others** 11% for boys and 6% for girls

- Increase over time

- Gender differences in all countries at all ages, with boys bullying most

- Large cross-national differences very high Latvia Lithuania, very low Ireland and Sweden

- Cyber B similar prevalence boys and girls

- Boys peak 11, girls 13

- In less than half of countries, gender differences

Back to Greece: Psychological correlates

- Generally, self-esteem, life satisfaction, mental health, empathy, personality traits (e.g callous-unemotional traits, see Zych, Ttofi & Farrington, 2016)

- Less friendships and family relations

- Peer mentoring and restorative justice not applied

Lack of research in terms of

- Aspects of the school context such as the nature of academic instruction, classroom management and discipline, and the nature of social interaction

- These all deserve greater attention as important factors in understanding school bullying.

Interventions in Greece

- Most intervention programs focused on changing the individual characteristics of the bullies and the victims

- Little attention to the school context and its ecology (Rigby, 1996).

- Tabby for cyber-bullying

- Safeland 2008 (Pyxida)

- Mental health promotion programs

Intervention programs

- Lack of evidence-based research on whole school anti-bullying initiatives and their impact on prevalence rates and
- Very few studies with a high level of fidelity

General discussion and policy reflections

- Very large cross national variations: cultural norms, socioeconomic level, success of intervention and prevention

- Less strong gender pattern for victimization, especially with increasing age

- No clear gender pattern for cyber B

- Less prevalent though than traditional forms need for search

and policy reflections

- Parent training and meetings
- Improved playground supervision
- Disciplinary methods
- Classroom management
- Teacher training
- Classroom rules
- A whole-school policy
- School conferences
- Information for parents
- Bystanders, cooperative work group

Suggestions

- the development of anti-bullying approaches to take into consideration the role of friendships. Many formal (such as the circle of friend's model) or informal methods have been suggested as a way of supporting friendships and fighting bullying (Boulton, 2005. Boulton, Trueman, Bishop, Baxandall, et al., 2007. Minton, & O' Moore, 2004).

Theoretical background

- New sociology of childhood, children as social actors and as active in the negotiation and construction of social reality

- developments in social policy, including a focus on children's rights and the need to consult children and young people

- in line with the discursive, rhetorical and social constructionist approaches in social psychology

Why to address students as main informants?

- Young people's perceptions of their worlds are needed
- Adults tend to underestimate children's knowledge and experiences
- The tendency of adults to dismiss bullying as a phase of growing up common to childhood
- Children's views are intrinsically valuable since they reveal how do they explain, experience and manage bullying, as social actors

Example of an Interview schedule

- *How do they form their social relationships at school, with whom, how do they feel,*
- *What about their relationships with adults at school,*
- *Who are friends or not, what are they like, what feelings do they evoke, ways of cultivating, testing and maintaining friendships, and developing a social identity*
- *Issues of disputes and conflict in peer relations,*
- *How are conflicts important in their daily activities and peer cultures, issues on cooperation and competition,*
- *Sources of support,*
- *Incidence of bad experiences in terms of their social relationships at school*
- *How social distance and separation toward peers' unfriendly behavior are managed.*

Greek qualitative studies

- Friendships constructed as learning morality in peer groups. Bullying is "breaking this morality"

- Co-constructing identities and social images

- Bullying as dominance [teachers]-subordination [students]

- **Bullying as a gender issue** Boys talk: Boys' friendships: Bullying as a gang and stories of betrayal

- **Bullying and family life**

- **Bullying exists since there is not such a place like safety**

How could young people be helped?

- A lack of information/ explanation and a sense of helplessness creates as much, if not more, distress than the original problem itself.

- *the student-teacher relationship* as a hidden curriculum/*the principle of power/*

- *everyday friendship practices* and their accounts of these practices-their relationship cultures-are significant sites

- Children's / young people's help-seeking behaviour is determined by the *subjective meaning* which they give to events and this is often at variance with what adults might expect. It is not always the originating problem which causes the 'worst experience' but the secrets and difficulties associated with it (Butler and Williamson, 1994, 1996).

- A lack of information or explanation and a sense of helplessness can create as much, if not more, distress than the original problem itself.