

DEVELOPING A BULLYING SCALE FOR USE WITH UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

NAZAN DOĞRUEK AND HÜSEYİN YARATAN
Eastern Mediterranean University

Bullying is not a new topic to be researched but the consequences of bullying for university students is an area yet to be studied. Thus, in this study our aim was to develop a bullying scale for use with university students. In order to do this we categorized their bullying behaviors as physical, verbal, emotional, and cyber; and their bullying status as bully, victim, bully-victim, and bystander. The survey we developed to validate our scale was completed by volunteer participants individually. Exploratory factor analysis was done to determine construct validity of the scale. The internal consistency values were calculated for reliability. The resultant values showed that the developed scale can be accepted as a valid and reliable scale to be used for measuring both bully and victim behaviors among young adults studying at tertiary level.

Keywords: bullying scale, bully, victim, young adults, university students.

The incidence of bullying is rising internationally and is considered an issue both inside and outside schools. Bullying has gained attention as it affects many individuals at varying ages in varied environments. This topic has been discussed extensively by a number of researchers in the fields of psychology and education (Coloroso, 2003; Cooper, Walker, Askew, Robinson, & McNair, 2011; Haber, 2007; Kohut, 2007; Lines, 2008; Olweus, 2005; Palaz, 2012; Rigby, 2008; Roberts, 2006; Shore, 2005; Swearer, Espelage, & Napolitano, 2009; Tattum & Lane, 1994). However, a problem with the definition, raised by Lines (2008), is that any attempt to explain this many-faceted concept must describe it in all

Nazan Doğruer, Languages and English Preparatory School, and Hüseyin S. Yaratın, Educational Sciences Department, Eastern Mediterranean University.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: Nazan Doğruer, Eastern Mediterranean University, Gazimağusa, Mersin 10 Turkey. Email: nazan.dogruek@emu.edu.tr

its aspects, including all the types of bullying activities. Thus, one of the most commonly used and broad definitions has been suggested by Olweus, who has worked on developing an understanding and awareness of this topic since the late 1970s. Olweus (2005) emphasized the phrases “imbalance in strength” and “repeatedly and over time” in his definition of *bullying*, which reads as follows:

“A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, **repeatedly and over time**, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students... It is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another...In order to use the term bullying, there should be **an imbalance in strength**” (p. 9).

In cases of bullying the victim, the bully, and the bystanders are all affected. *Victim* is defined as the individual who suffers from physical or psychological abuse, ignorance, isolation, and threats; and bystanders are the individuals who witness bullying and prefer not to stop it due to various reasons (Tattum & Lane, 1994).

In discussing the definition of bullying, it is also important to draw attention to its specific characteristics. In circumstances where bullying occurs, the bully perceives the victim as somehow weaker than him or herself, and he/she feels satisfied in harming the victim in order to feel more powerful (Haber, 2007). As Olweus (2005), Roberts (2006), Lines (2008), and Rigby (2008) all emphasize, bullying behaviors are intentional, threatening, and consist of repeated episodes that target someone weaker to make the targeted individual feel uncomfortable, humiliated, and to make the perpetrator feel satisfied, powerful, dominant, and in control. Rigby (2008) also states that parenting styles and childrearing are important factors that influence the manifestation of bullying traits. Crucial factors of bullying are well described by Fried and Fried (1996) as having “intent to harm,” “intensity and duration,” being situations in which “the bully has the power,” and which, for the victim, exposes the “vulnerability of the victim,” his or her “lack of support,” and as having “consequences.”

Bullies tend to torment others intentionally and repeatedly for several reasons. McGrath (2007) has categorized bullies in schools into three different groups according to their characteristics and motives: a) *confident or clever bullies* do not have low self-esteem; they enjoy aggression, they are typically smart, popular students and they abuse weaker students to feel more powerful (Haber, 2007; Olweus, 2005); b) *anxious or not-so-clever bullies* are not good at school subjects, are not very popular, and have concentration problems (McGrath, 2007), they do not have the ability to make friends easily, to be kind, to share, to care about, and get along with, others or to show empathy toward others (Romain, 1997); and c) *bully/victims* - described by McGrath as being often the worst type - are the perpetrating bullies in some situations and are the individuals being bullied in other situations. They tend to be unpopular and manifest behavioral problems

because of various character deficiencies (McGrath, 2007; Rigby, 2008).

The most common consequences of bullying for victims are related to social interaction, and may include a high level of anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, stress, crying while sleeping, self-harm, suicidal tendency, feeling of alienation, loneliness, experiencing belongings going missing, getting dirty or torn clothes, bruises, having a decrease in grades, a decrease in the number of friends, coming to fear and hate school, in cases of cyberbullying, avoidance of the computer, and, finally, psychosomatic symptoms such as headache and stomachache (Fried & Fried, 1996; Haber, 2007; Kohut, 2007; Ma, 2004; Rigby, 2008; Romain, 1997; Shore, 2005). Victims may also experience personality changes, and become shy, quiet, moody, and introverted (Kohut, 2007; Shore, 2005). Bullying also affects the individuals who witness it. These bystanders often experience similar effects to the victims. When students become bystanders, this also results in fear and hate of school, stress, an increase in anxiety level, distraction, and resistance to learning (Kohut, 2007; Shore, 2005).

Bullies choose their victims from those who are poor (financially or intellectually), physically weak, or who are people looked on by their peers as being different (Coloroso, 2003; Haber, 2007; Olweus, 2005; Rigby, 2008; Shore, 2005). In other words, victims tend to be chosen because of their social status, special needs, or sexual identity (Roberts, 2006). Bullying can be direct or indirect, physical, verbal, or sexual, and can be in person or by use of technologies. Therefore, the main types of bullying are physical, verbal, emotional, and cyber.

Physical bullying is bullying that takes a physical form and can include punching, kicking, tripping, pushing, and shoving. *Verbal bullying* is any kind of language-related action to deliberately hurt another individual such as name-calling, spreading rumors, making up stories, and mockingly imitating the way someone speaks. *Emotional bullying* is a type of bullying with no exchange of words or physical contact. Fried and Fried (2003) classify this type of bullying into two areas: nonverbal and psychological. Laughing, pointing, staring, and drawing pictures can be nonverbal emotional bullying and isolation and rejection are considered psychological emotional bullying. *Cyberbullying*, which is a recent development and occurs when technologies such as emails, mobile phones, text messages, personal websites and blogs, or instant messaging are deliberately and repeatedly used to hurt others (Haber & Haber, 2007). Sending rude or mean messages via email, instant messaging, or mobile phone, repeatedly sending offensive and/or threatening messages, using the online identity of another person to post inappropriate words and images in order to upset the victim, are common examples of cyberbullying.

In addition to the four major types of bullying that are typical in the ages of school pupils who have been studied, bullying also occurs at the adult level in the workplace. Researchers have found that the type of bullying experienced in

the workplace does not differ significantly from the types of bullying among children and adolescents. Moreover, the concept of workplace bullying has often been observed in a number of different parts of the world (Cooper, Walker, Askew et al., 2011; Palaz, 2012) and the awareness of this issue is increasing. Randall (1997) described *workplace bullying* as “aggressive behavior with the deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological distress to others.” (p. 12). Unfortunately, wherever there is social interaction between human beings, bullies and the act of bullying will continue to exist. This observation contrasts with the commonly held idea that bullying occurs in elementary schools and continues only until the end of adolescence.

Bullying occurs particularly in competitive environments - which both schools and workplaces are - and is, therefore, fostered in both of these environments. Even though there have been a limited number of studies of bullying at the tertiary education level (Chapell et al., 2006; Clark & Springer, 2010; Cooper, Walker, Askew et al., 2011; Cooper, Walker, Winters et al., 2009; Finn, 2004; Hutchinson, 2009; Magnussen & Amundson, 2003; Turan, Polat, Karapirli, Uysal, & Turan, 2011; Walker, Sockman, & Koehn, 2011), researchers believe that bullying and victimization still occur in early adulthood. Although researchers (Nansel et al., 2001; Rigby, 2002; Smith et al., 1999) have claimed that the older the students are the less they are bullied, it has been noted that, in contrast to conventional belief, bullying does not disappear at tertiary institutions. Significantly, although the rate of physical bullying decreases as individuals mature, indirect bullying is the preferred method at the university level. In her study Ozkal (2011) found that university students were mostly exposed to isolation and ideological bullying, and Alzahrani (2012) reported that verbal abuse and belittlement were more common than physical abuse among university students.

Cultural differences have been found to play an important role in defining and measuring bullying behaviors. The different types of bullying have been studied by researchers all around the world (Atik, 2006; Borg, 1999; Chapell et al., 2006; Clark & Springer, 2010; Cooper, Walker, Askew et al., 2011; Cooper, Walker, Winters et al., 2009; Dolek, 2002; Finn, 2004; Hutchinson, 2009; Magnussen & Amundson, 2003; Piskin, 2006; Roland & Galloway, 2002; Tasgin, 2007; Walker et al., 2011; Wong, Lok, Wing Lo, & Ma, 2002) and they have tended to focus primarily on bullying among children and adolescents between the ages of 4 years and 18 years. Despite the fact that bullying has also been examined in studies conducted in Turkish cultures - in Turkey and North Cyprus - (Atik, 2006; Bayraktar, 2011; Celik & Bayraktar, 2004; Dolek, 2002; Ozturk, Sokemen, Yilmaz, & Cilingir, 2008; Palaz, 2012; Piskin, 2006; Tasgin, 2007; Turan et al., 2011), the intensity and frequency of bullying traits differs from one context to another, even from one school to another. As stated by Macklem (2003, p. 21) “The influence of culture is pervasive. Behavior is culture-specific.” Also Rigby

(2002, p. 70) observed that “schools most certainly differ widely in the amount of bullying that goes on between the children who attend” because the school climate affects the prevalence of bullying that occurs in the school.

Therefore, continued investigation of bullying in several contexts with an increasing number of participants is important to be able to increase awareness of the actual situation in each context. Nevertheless, it is also necessary to use an appropriate measure within this process. In order to examine bullying at university level in North Cyprus, it is necessary to adapt or develop a bullying scale for use with the university students within this context. Thus, in this study our aim was to determine which of the bullying behaviors were used by tertiary-level students in North Cyprus, in order to develop a bullying scale that was valid and reliable for use in this context.

Method

Participants

The participants in the study were 211 students enrolled at various levels in the English Preparatory School of the Eastern Mediterranean University during the 2012–2013 fall semester. Most participants were aged between 18 and 21 years, with a small group older than 21. Among the group, 45.6% of them were women and 54.4% of them were men. Most of the participants (55.5%) were from Turkey, 16.6% of them were from North Cyprus and the rest were from other countries including Jordan, Iraq, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan.

Scale

In order to prepare the items used in the scale, we determined a definition for bullying after reviewing the literature and examining various resources. In addition, we defined the terms bully and victim and, from the perspective of both bullies and victims, we defined the types of bullying to be studied as verbal, physical, emotional and cyber. We constructed the item pool after examining in detail several English and Turkish scales that had been developed and used in different parts of the world. For each of the four types of bullying (verbal, physical, emotional, and cyber) we prepared 15 items and in total we prepared 60 items for bully behaviors and 60 items for victim behaviors. The items were prepared both in English and in Turkish to accommodate the target sample group for the study, which was made up of students from both Turkish- and non-Turkish-speaking countries. The items in the pool were checked by four field experts resulting in a total of 20 items being excluded from the scale according to their recommendations.

The aim of the study and the definition of bullying were printed at the beginning of the scale survey form and in the same location students filled in

four demographic information items (age, gender, country of origin, level of English fluency). We prepared the final 100-item scale in a Likert-type format with alternative responses of *Never* = 0, *Rarely* = 1, *Sometimes* = 2, *Often* = 3, and *Always* = 4. As the researchers did not want to lead the participants in any specific direction when they were responding to the survey items, the items in the scale were placed randomly, and the bully and victim items were placed together, not in different sections. Sample English items for the bully category are given in Table 1 and sample items for the victim category are given in Table 2.

Table 1. *Sample Bully Items*

Statement	Types of Bullying
I push other students.	Physical
I call other students bad names.	Verbal
I exclude other students from my friends' group deliberately.	Emotional
I send anonymous emails to others to threaten them.	Cyber

Table 2. *Sample Victim Items*

Statement	Types of Bullying
I'm pushed by other students.	Physical
I'm called bad names.	Verbal
Some friends deliberately exclude me from their friends' group.	Emotional
Other students send anonymous emails to threaten me.	Cyber

Procedure

Firstly, we reviewed the literature and prepared and revised the items. Then we wrote the final version of the scale and, with this, we applied to the school administration to get permission to conduct the study with the participants. After receiving the necessary permission, we contacted each prospective participant individually and, after explaining the aim of the study, we distributed the scale survey form to the students who had volunteered to take part in the study. The participants were asked to mark their answers on optic answer sheets and when all the data were collected, we processed these optic answer sheets using an optic reader and analyzed the data using the PASW18 Statistical Package.

Results

Factor Analysis of Bully Items

As a starting point, we examined the factorability of the bully items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO) was .88, which is greater than the cut-off value of .70. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed a significant result, $\chi^2(1225) = 8081.89, p = .000 < .01$, which showed

that the correlation matrix of measured variables was significantly different from an identity matrix; in other words, items were sufficiently correlated to load on the components of the scale.

In order to identify the scores for each factor of the bully items we used principal components analysis (PCA). As the aim was to classify the items under the four specified factors, at the beginning of the analysis we selected four factors as the fixed number of factors to be extracted. We used varimax rotation for the factors. At the beginning of the factor analysis six items were eliminated, as they did not load .45 or more on any factor, also another six items were eliminated as they loaded on more than one factor. Later, when we examined the items under each factor, we observed that, although the scale was assumed as a four-factor scale, the items loaded on each factor appeared to be labeled as three factors, so it was decided to conduct factor analysis after eliminating the items for physical bullying (15 items). When three factors were selected as fixed numbers to be extracted, eight items below .50 were eliminated from the scale and another eight items were eliminated, as they were loaded on different factors.

In the final version of the bully items in the scale three factors were labeled as verbal with 9 items, relational/emotional with 6 items and cyber with 4 items and the loadings of the items are given in Table 3.

Table 3. *Factor Loadings of Bully Items*

	Verbal	Emotional / Relational	Cyber
VAR00031	.784		
VAR00002	.736		
VAR00003	.725		
VAR00006	.695		
VAR00029	.693		
VAR00033	.684		
VAR00036	.640		
VAR00001	.607		
VAR00030	.557		
VAR00069		.770	
VAR00070		.741	
VAR00079		.712	
VAR00064		.659	
VAR00063		.648	
VAR00060		.646	
VAR00073			.817
VAR00098			.732
VAR00094			.703
VAR00056			.667

Note. Extraction method = principal components analysis; rotation method = varimax with Kaiser normalization. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

Then we examined the internal consistency of each factor using Cronbach's alpha. The alphas were .88 for verbal, .83 for relational/emotional, and .80 for cyber.

Factor Analysis of Victim Items

Initially we examined factorability of the victim items. The KMO was .89, which is greater than the cut-off value of .70. Furthermore, Bartlett's test of sphericity revealed a significant result, $\chi^2(1225) = 7469.57, p = .000 < .01$, which showed that the correlation matrix of measured variables was significantly different from an identity matrix; in other words, items were sufficiently correlated to load on the components of the scale.

We used PCA in order to identify the scores for each factor of the victim items. As the aim was to place the items under the four specified factors, at the beginning of the analysis we selected four factors as the fixed number of factors to be extracted. We used the varimax rotation method. At the beginning of the factor analysis six items were eliminated, as they did not load .45 or more on any factor, also 11 items were eliminated, as they loaded on more than one factor. Later, we examined the items under each factor and labeled them. It was observed that nine items were placed under factors where they did not belong so they were also eliminated.

In the final version of the scale there were 22 items under four factors and the factors were labeled as relational/emotional with 9 items, verbal with 6 items, cyber with 4 items and physical with 3 items and the items with their loadings are given in Table 4.

Table 4. *Factor Loadings of Victim Items*

	Emotional/ Relational	Cyber	Verbal	Physical
VAR00020	.796			
VAR00021	.700			
VAR00022	.697			
VAR00023	.562			
VAR00024	.705			
VAR00027	.573			
VAR00038	.661			
VAR00042	.599			
VAR00044	.548			
VAR00075		.804		
VAR00076		.779		
VAR00077		.755		
VAR00100		.608		
VAR00005			.735	
VAR00012			.646	
VAR00014			.727	

Table 4 continued

	Emotional/ Relational	Cyber	Verbal	Physical
VAR00016			.544	
VAR00017			.682	
VAR00054			.489	
VAR00053				.689
VAR00062				.737
VAR00096				.649

Note. Extraction method = principal components analysis; rotation method = varimax with Kaiser normalization. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

Then internal consistency of each factor was examined using Cronbach's alpha. The alphas were .88 for relational/emotional, .80 for cyber, .80 for verbal, and .82 for physical.

Discussion

Our aim was to develop a scale for measuring bullying status among university students. Most of the previous research we examined for our study dealt with bullying among children or adolescents and the items we used in our study were prepared in the light of these studies. However, we expected that the severity of behaviors in each subscale for university students would be different from the severity of these for children and adolescents. We prepared an equal number of items for each of the four types of bullying (physical, verbal, relational/emotional, and cyberbullying) for both bullies and victims but the results of the factor analysis revealed differences in some perspectives.

In the bully perspective, we discarded the physical bullying items, as they did not achieve a sufficient loading. In order to eliminate the possibility that the bullies among our participants chose not to confess that they physically bullied others, the physical bully items should be reworded and examined by experts and these changed physical bullying items should be reanalyzed in a second pilot of the study. However, we assumed that the form that bullying takes might change as people mature. As Sharp and Smith (1994) also reported, for children and adolescents, the physical form of bullying is dominant; whereas, for people approaching adulthood and adults, verbal bullying, particularly emotional/relational bullying, is more common than the physical type. Our results in this study supported this assumption in that the items we prepared for verbal and emotional/relational bullying reached loading scores sufficient to show validity and reliability for the scale. On the other hand, at the beginning of the study we expected to find more cyberbullying items loaded on the factor. The results did not meet our expectations. But in today's technological world we assumed there

would a tendency towards more cyberbullying. Therefore, the cyberbullying items we prepared should also be reexamined and reworded items that had been accepted by the experts should be included in a second pilot study in order to determine whether these items really were not valid and reliable for use in examining bullying or whether the participants did not understand them.

When bullying occurs, the victims are the subjects and they suffer the severe consequences of it. Our results in this study showed that the participants who were victims answered that they had experienced the situation described more often for the emotional/relational and verbal bullying items than for the physical and cyberbullying items. This result also supported our assumption that, as people mature, verbal and emotional/relational bullying are more severe than physical or cyberbullying, and are experienced more often. For physical and cyberbullying items - in order to ensure that the items were not chosen by the participants because of problems in how the items were worded – we intend to reword some of the items and, after these changed versions have been accepted by the experts, we will reanalyze the related items in a second study.

When the issue of bullying is studied, the importance of the bystanders should not be underestimated. We developed a scale without a measurement for the position of bystanders and this was, therefore, an incomplete scale. In order to develop more valid and reliable scale items, a measurement for the bystanders' involvement also needs to be added to our scale before we conduct a second study.

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