

A Study on Peer Abuse among Children at Boarding and Day Schools

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Abstract: This study was conducted to compare peer abuse among children attending boarding and day schools. A total of 330 children, 167 of whom were 3rd, 4th and 5th graders at boarding schools and 163 of whom were 3rd, 4th and 5th graders at day schools, were included in the study. Data were collected by using a “General Information Form” and the “Peer Victimization Scale”. Data from these were analyzed by Two-Way analysis of variance and the Scheffe Test. The results showed a meaningful difference between peer abuse among children at boarding and day schools in the dimensions of bullying, overt aggression, teasing, relational aggression and attacks on property, as well as overall peer abuse scores ($p < .01$). In addition, while a meaningful difference was found between the two sexes in the dimension of overt aggression ($p < .05$) and between children attending different grades in the dimension of relational aggression ($p < .01$), order of birth and number of siblings did not make a meaningful difference in any dimension of peer abuse ($p > .05$).

Key words: Peer abuse · Boarding school · Primary school

INTRODUCTION

Peer abuse is a type of violence committed by an individual or group towards a person unable of self-protection, which has physical or psychological consequences and displays continuity [1]. While, until recently, peer abuse was considered a natural part of growing up, recent studies conducted in Turkey and around the world have shown it to be an adverse effect on children’s social, psychological and academic development and their health [2-6]. Previous studies have revealed that peer abuse exists to a serious degree in many countries [7-18]. Recently, many countries around the world have identified peer abuse risk groups and developed appropriate intervention programs considering the characteristics of these risk groups. No study yet exists in Turkey examining particularly whether children at boarding schools, who are away from family supervision and spend most of their times with their peers, constitute a risk group for peer abuse.

While the family environment is crucial in meeting the social needs of belonging to a group, having social security and being independent, the peer group presents

an environment where children can get to know themselves more objectively and learn the truth of interpersonal relationships. The relationships between parents-children and those between peers are important in the acquisition of certain behaviors. A family environment, healthy parent-child relationships and healthy peer relationships contribute to the acquisition of positive behaviors and formation of a healthy personality [19-21]. In Turkey, many children are educated at boarding primary schools due to difficult geographical conditions, socio-economic problems and particularly the limitations of educational possibilities in villages. In these institutions, children who come from a family environment need to adapt to a new unhomelike one with many other children, educators and staff. The scarcity of boarding school staff who are in direct contact with the children, their personal characteristics and the different childcare methods they adopt can have adverse effects on child development. In addition, group life may prevent adults from being close to children and meeting their needs for love and care, thus prioritizing peer relationships. Away from a healthy family environment, these children may display various behavior problems as well as aggressive behavior [22-24].

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An increasing sensitivity has started throughout the world and in Turkey about peer abuse incidents. Recent news reports in Turkish media about school violence show that it has become a serious social issue which warrants deep interest. While there have been studies conducted in Turkey about peer abuse among children at day school, no similar study conducted on children at boarding school seems to exist. Therefore, this study undertakes a comparative examination of peer abuse among children at boarding and day schools, aiming to reveal whether the gender of children, their grades and number of siblings create a difference in their peer abuse scores; identify risk groups; and guide the development of peer abuse prevention programs for boarding primary schools.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Sample: Within the borders of Ankara, there are four boarding primary schools. Following an interview at all of these schools, only the two located in the counties of Nallıhan and Şereflikoçhisar gave their consent to the study. All children who met the limitations of the study in these two schools were included in the study. After collecting data about the study group, randomly selected children who met the limitations of the study and who were attending day schools in the same counties were studied. The study sample comprised 3rd, 4th and 5th graders attending boarding (N: 167) and day (N: 163) schools in Nallıhan and Şereflikoçhisar, Ankara. The limitations of the study were that children did not come from broken families and did not have any disabilities.

Instruments: Data about the children and their families were gathered by a "General Information Form" designed by the researchers and children's experiences with peer abuse were identified by Mynard and Joseph's "Peer Victimization Scale" [25], which was adapted for use with Turkish children and tested for validity and reliability by Gültekin and Sayıl [11]. The Peer Victimization Scale is a self-report measure of 27 items. It may be implemented individually or in groups. The respondents are asked to choose "never", "once" or "more than once" for each item. A higher score from the scale shows that the respondent is frequently a victim of peer abuse, while a lower score denotes rare or no victimization. There are five dimensions to the scale. *Bullying* refers to situations where violence is exerted directly, overtly, physically, purposely and often by a group in order to intimidate the victim. *Teasing* includes belittlement or humiliation

of the victim's physical, cultural or psychological characteristics. *Overt aggression* is similar to bullying but with a lighter version of physical violence. *Relational aggression* includes situations where the victim's social relationships are purposely ruined by the aggressor, thus leaving the victim in an uncomfortable state. *Attack on property* refers to wilful damage to the victim's personal property, as well as theft and/or confiscation of such property [11].

Application: Prior to the implementation of the measurement instrument, twenty students from each age group took this instrument individually in order to reveal its clarity. When no problems were observed with its clarity, the actual implementation was initiated. During the data collection stage, the researchers worked with the children in the classroom environment. Prior to the implementation, the researcher communicated the aim of the study to the students and presented the data collection instruments. Students who volunteered to participate in the study received the General Information Form, followed by the Peer Victimization Scale. The instructions were read aloud to the children, necessary explanations were given and the importance of receiving accurate and sincere responses in reaching accurate results was emphasized. The students were given one class hour to complete the data collection tools in the classroom.

Data Analysis: Data from the study were analyzed by using SPSS 13.00 for Windows. Two-Way Variance of Analysis and the Scheffe Test were used for data analysis [26].

RESULTS

Table 1 shows that there is a meaningful difference at the level.01 between the bullying (B), overt aggression (OA), teasing (T), relational aggression (RA), attack on personal property (APP) scores and the total scores of boarding and day school students (B $F_{1,326}$: 20,67, OA $F_{1,326}$: 85,78, T $F_{1,326}$: 63,78, RA $F_{1,326}$: 21,01, APP $F_{1,326}$: 112,49, total $F_{1,326}$: 91,53). When mean points were examined, it was observed that boarding school students' mean bullying (B \bar{x} : 1,93), overt aggression (AS : 4,13), teasing (T \bar{x} : 3,59), relational aggression (RA :2,81), attack on property (APP \bar{x} : 3,73) and total (\bar{x} : 16,21) scores were higher than those of day school students. Findings related to children's gender revealed that boys' overt aggression (OA \bar{x} : 3,08) scores were higher than girls and

Table 1: Gender-related scores of children attending regional boarding primary schools and other schools

PEER ABUSE SCORES													
Gender n													
General	n	B	OA	X±SS	T	RA	APP						
RBPS													
Girls	64	1.78±2.28	3.78±3.22	3.48±2.39	3.01±2.52	3.95±2.82	16.03±11.10						
Boys	103	2.02±2.97	4.34±3.61	3.66±2.76	2.68±2.24	3.60±2.77	16.33±11.14						
Total	167	1.93±2.72	4.13±3.47	3.59±2.62	2.81±2.35	3.73±2.79	16.21±11.09						
PS													
Girls	77	.51±1.07	.79±1.47	1.31±1.66	1.85±2.03	1.15±1.64	5.63±5.92						
Boys	86	1.00±2.00	1.58±2.11	1.79±1.94	1.58±2.07	.98±1.54	6.94±7.50						
Total	163	.77±1.64	1.20±1.87	1.56±1.82	1.71±2.05	1.06±1.59	6.32±6.81						
OVERALL													
Girls	141	1.09±1.83	2.15±2.84	2.29±2.29	2.38±2.33	2.42±2.64	10.35±10.07						
Boys	189	1.56±2.62	3.08±3.32	2.80±2.59	2.18±2.23	2.41±2.63	12.05±10.71						
Total	330	1.36±2.32	2.69±3.15	2.59±2.47	2.26±2.27	2.41±2.63	11.33±10.46						
ANOVA	df	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p
Group	1	20.67**	0.00	85.78**	0.00	63.78**	0.00	21.01**	0.00	112.49**	0.00	91.53**	0.00
Gender	1	2.09	0.15	4.63*	0.03	1.67	0.20	1.48	0.22	1.03	0.31	0.60	0.44
GroupXGender	1	0.21	0.65	0.14	0.71	0.35	0.55	0.01	0.92	0.13	0.72	0.23	0.63

**p<0.01. *p<0.05

Table 2: Grade level-related scores of children attending regional boarding primary schools and other schools

PEER ABUSE SCORES													
Gender n													
General	n	KS	OA	X±SS	T	RA	APP						
RBPS													
3 rd grade	49	2.02±2.83	4.14±3.11	2.81±2.40	2.40±2.24	3.04±2.74	14.42±10.55						
4 th grade	47	1.17±1.84	3.51±3.08	3.31±2.58	2.36±2.19	3.48±2.63	13.85±9.88						
5 th grade	71	2.38±3.04	4.54±3.90	4.30±2.63	3.39±2.43	4.38±2.82	19.01±11.72						
Total	167	1.93±2.72	4.13±3.47	3.59±2.62	2.81±2.35	3.73±2.79	16.21±11.09						
PS													
1 st grade	52	.88±2.16	1.26±2.05	1.78±2.02	1.71±2.12	1.44±2.12	7.09±8.35						
2 nd grade	49	0.63±1.01	1.14±1.75	1.53±1.67	1.48±1.67	1.08±1.20	5.87±5.19						
3 rd grade	62	0.79±1.54	1.20±1.83	1.40±1.77	1.88±2.26	0.74±1.25	6.03±6.55						
Total	163	.77±1.64	1.20±1.87	1.56±1.82	1.71±2.05	1.06±1.59	6.32±6.81						
OVERALL													
1 st grade	101	1.43±2.56	2.66±2.98	2.28±2.26	2.04±2.20	2.21±2.56	10.65±10.13						
2 nd grade	99	0.89±1.49	2.30±2.75	2.40±2.33	1.91±1.98	2.26±2.35	9.78±8.77						
3 rd grade	133	1.63±2.58	2.99±3.52	2.95±2.69	2.69±2.46	2.68±2.87	12.96±11.62						
Total	330	1.36±2.32	2.69±3.15	2.59±2.47	2.26±2.27	2.41±2.63	11.33±10.46						
ANOVA	df	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p	F	p
Group	1	19.03**	0.00	84.15**	0.00	59.14**	0.00	327.72**	0.00	103.84**	0.00	86.23**	0.00
Grade	2	2.76	0.07	1.09	0.34	2.02	0.13	17.65**	0.00	.70	0.49	2.53	0.08
GroupXGrade	2	1.53	0.22	0.84	0.43	5.24*	0.01	3.53*	0.03	6.10**	0.00	3.41*	0.03

**p<0.01. *p<0.05

Table 3: Number of sibling-related scores of children attending regional boarding primary schools and other schools

PEER ABUSE SCORES												
Gender n												
General	n	B	OA	X±SS	T	RA	APP					
Single child	13	1.30±2.32	4.00±3.13	3.69±3.19	3.15±2.40	3.07±3.12	15.23±11.89					
1 sibling	40	2.02±2.98	4.50±3.28	3.35±2.55	3.02±2.31	4.00±2.59	16.90±10.75					
2 siblings	21	3.00±3.57	4.19±3.35	3.90±3.17	3.00±2.42	3.14±2.32	17.23±11.79					
3 siblings	34	1.85±2.51	4.29±3.67	3.55±2.43	2.41±2.41	3.64±3.24	15.76±11.98					
4=siblings	59	1.67±2.35	3.81±3.66	3.64±2.49	2.76±2.35	3.96±2.75	15.86±10.70					
Total	167	1.93±2.72	4.13±3.47	3.59±2.62	2.81±2.35	3.73±2.79	16.21±11.09					

Table 3: Continued

PS													
Single child	9	0.44±0.52	1.66±2.17	2.11±2.31	1.00±1.00	0.33±0.70	5.55±4.27						
1 sibling	78	0.93±2.07	1.14±1.80	1.46±1.87	1.73±2.14	1.12±1.87	6.39±7.83						
2 siblings	42	0.59±0.96	1.30±2.01	1.71±1.85	2.00±1.98	1.04±1.30	6.66±5.39						
3 siblings	29	0.82±1.41	1.20±1.95	1.62±1.65	1.72±2.21	1.31±1.39	6.68±6.88						
4±siblings	5	0.00±0.00	0.60±0.89	0.69±0.54	0.20±0.44	0.20±0.44	1.60±1.51						
Total	163	0.77±1.64	1.20±1.87	1.56±1.82	1.71±2.05	1.06±1.59	6.32±6.81						
OVERALL													
Single child	22	0.95±1.83	3.04±2.96	3.04±2.91	2.27±2.20	1.95±2.76	11.27±10.56						
1 sibling	118	1.30±2.46	2.27±2.88	2.10±2.29	2.16±2.28	2.10±2.53	9.98±10.19						
2 siblings	63	1.39±2.45	2.26±2.86	2.44±2.57	2.33±2.17	1.74±1.96	10.19±9.45						
3 siblings	63	1.38±2.12	2.87±3.36	2.66±2.31	2.09±2.33	2.57±2.80	11.58±10.89						
4±siblings	64	1.54±2.30	3.56±3.62	3.40±2.53	2.56±2.36	3.67±2.83	14.75±10.97						
Total	330	1.36±2.32	2.69±3.15	2.59±2.47	2.26±2.27	2.41±2.63	11.33±10.46						
ANOVA													
Group	1	16.94**	0.00	47.91**	0.00	37.57**	0.00	20.84**	0.00	63.06**	0.00	58.28**	0.00
No. of siblings	4	1.04	0.38	0.19	0.94	0.57	0.68	0.95	0.43	0.93	0.44	0.50	0.73
GroupXNoS.	4	1.01	0.40	0.17	0.95	0.32	0.86	0.92	0.45	0.61	0.65	0.28	0.89

**p<0.01. *p<0.05

the variance analysis showed that the difference was at a meaningful level (OA $F_{1,326}$: 4,63 $p<.05$). Group X gender interaction was found to cause no meaningful difference in any dimension of peer abuse.

Table 2 shows that the relational aggression (RA \bar{x} : 2,69) scores of 3rd graders were higher than those of 1st and 2nd graders. The analysis of variance revealed that the difference between the grade levels was meaningful in the relational aggression (RA $F_{3,24}$: 17,65 $p<.01$) dimension. The Scheffe Test also revealed a meaningful difference between the scores of 2nd and 3rd graders.

Table 3 presents the findings related to number of siblings. It can be seen that score differences and group X number of siblings interaction was not meaningful in any of the dimensions. Data about order of birth was also analyzed in the study. However, the variance of analysis results showed that score differences and group X order of birth interaction was not meaningful in any of the dimensions.

DISCUSSION

The present study showed that boarding school students scored higher than day school students in all dimensions of peer abuse and that a meaningful difference existed between the two groups in all dimensions. It is true that the most important factors in children's social environment are the family and peers. However, various life circumstances sometimes cause children to leave the safety of their family environment to be cared for by an institution. The rules at these institutions, stricter discipline imposed on the children all make it more difficult

for the child to adapt properly to the new conditions of the institution. The needs for love and care of children at boarding schools cannot be met as if in a family environment [27]. Such an environment may lead to the formation of aggressive behaviors in children who are not loved or cared for properly. This also reflects on peer relationships, leading children to commit or be subjected to peer abuse. Indeed, previous studies have shown that children living at institutions display more behavioral problems [19, 28, 29] and that a meaningful difference exists between the aggression mean scores of children living with their families and those living in institutions [27, 30].

In the present study, boys were shown to have a higher overt aggression score than girls. Owing to social stereotypes, aggressive behaviors displayed by boys to show their physical strength are tolerated and even encouraged by parents. Such behaviors are not encouraged in girls, who are taught to be more gentle, well-behaved and placid than boys. Many previous studies report that boys of all ages exert more physical violence and are subjected to more violence by their peers than girls; male adolescence is marked by an increase in physical aggression from boys to other boys and a decrease in aggression from boys to girls; and boys are generally more satisfied with violent behaviors than girls [31-36]. This study also revealed a meaningful difference between the two sexes in the dimension of overt aggression, which is a direct act of abuse. The literature reports that although boys are more often subjected to direct abuse than girls, girls generally apply and become subjected to indirect abuse such as generating gossip and isolation [37, 38].

Findings about grade level showed that the relational aggression scores of 3rd graders were higher than those of 1st and 2nd graders and that the difference was meaningful. Involving those purposeful behaviors which ruin a victim's social relationships and thus leave her in a difficult position, the dimension of relational aggression includes statements such as "They lie about me", "They try to ruin my relationships with my friends" and "They stop my friends from talking with me". This dimension is a verbal act of violence and may be related to the improvement in verbal skills with age and the realization that words can be as hurtful as physical aggression. Indeed, several studies have shown that the types of verbal peer abuse increases with age [39, 40].

Male 3rd graders at regional boarding primary schools have emerged as a risk group for peer abuse in the present study. The study only examined children's exposure to peer abuse. Future studies may be planned to also examine the characteristics of children who exert such abuse. More comprehensive studies which include all regional boarding primary school in Turkey may be designed to identify the problems and characteristics of these children. Such studies would constitute an important body of data for a country-wide peer abuse prevention program for regional boarding primary schools. The preparation of such a program necessitates the identification of at-risk groups for exposure to and exertion of peer abuse; of the characteristics of children attending regional boarding primary schools; and of the most common places for abuse inside and around schools or at places where children spend their spare time.

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