

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEER BULLYING AND FRIENDSHIP QUALITY
IN SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN****Tarik TEKÇE**

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Abstract

In this study, the relationship between bullying and victim status and friendship qualities was investigated for the students in subgroup of bully and victim selected among 590 elementary school students in Sanliurfa city in Turkey. “The Identification of Peer Bullying Inventory-Child Form” was used to determine the participants' situations of bullying and being exposed to bullying and “The Friendship Attribute Questionnaire” was used to figure out the friendship qualities which the participants had. As a result, it was observed that the quality of friendship has a significant relationship with the variables of bullying and being exposed to bullying. The quality of friendship shows that it negatively predicts bullying and being exposed to bullying.

Keywords: Peer Bullying, Bullying, Victimization, Friendship, Friendship Quality**OKUL ÇAĞI ÇOCUKLARINDA AKRAN ZORBALIĞI İLE ARKADAŞLIK
NİTELİĞİ ARASINDAKİ İLİŞKİ****Özet**

Bu çalışmada, Şanlıurfa ilinde 590 ilköğretim öğrencisi arasından seçilen zorba ve kurban alt grubundaki öğrencilerin zorbalık yapma ve zorbalığa maruz kalmavdurumu ile arkadaşlık nitelikleri arasındaki ilişki araştırılmıştır. Katılımcıların zorbalık yapma ve zorbalığa maruz kalma durumlarını belirlemek için “Akran Zorbalığı Belirleme Ölçeği-Çocuk Formu”, arkadaşlık niteliklerini belirlemek için ise “Arkadaşlık Öznitelik Anketi” kullanılmıştır. Sonuç olarak, arkadaşlık kalitesinin zorbalık yapma ve zorbalığa maruz kalma değişkenleri ile anlamlı bir ilişki içinde olduğu görülmüştür. Arkadaşlığın kalitesi, zorbalık yapma ve zorbalığa maruz kalmayı olumsuz yönde yordadığını göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Akran Zorbalığı, Zorbalık Yapma, Mağduriyet, Arkadaşlık, Arkadaşlık Kalitesi

Bullying affects millions of individuals' social, emotional, psychological and educational development every year and it has become a widespread and dominant problem which researchers, the media, governments, local education authorities and schools keep abreast of (Collins, McAleavy, & Adamson, 2004; Pişkin, 2002; Rigby, 2004). The report which was prepared by UNICEF about the prevalence of bullying drew attention on the fact that two thirds of the students around the world are exposed to peer bullying at or around school. The same report also presented that nine out of ten individuals expressed that bullying was a common problem in their community (UNICEF, 2018). Moreover, 38 countries such as the USA, England, Japan, the Netherlands, Canada and Scandinavian countries experienced an average

of 32% high levels of bullying (Lereya, Samara, & Wolke, 2013; Olweus, 1997; Pişkin, 2010).

Bullying restrains the free learning environments of individuals and it results in a multidimensional case which is between individuals' social environment, family relationships, school community and peer relationships (Swearer, Collins, & Berry, 2012).

Every individual has the right to receive education in an equal, safe and peaceful environment (Garcia & Pham, 2015). Individuals' feeling free and safe is the most basic condition for effective and efficient learning and reaching the educational goals which were set in advance (Alper İlhan, 2008; Koç, 2006). Bullying is a problem that negatively affects this whole process. It also requires dealing with the phenomenon of school community which is intertwined with bullying in order to provide a positive atmosphere in schools (Papanikolaou, Chatzikosma, & Kleio, 2011).

Bullying is defined as a student's being exposed to repeated, negative, and systematic actions over time by other strong students against their peers (Olweus, 1996). On the basis of this definition, it can be said that bullying behaviours occur in friendship behaviours as they appear between peers (Eleni, 2014; Volk et al., 2014). Conducting the necessary studies to protect individuals against the destructive effects of bullying, a global threat in both short and long term, such as low self-esteem, depression, social anxiety, academic failure, health problems and addiction, primarily requires the investigation of their peer relationships and friendships as a whole (García & Margallo, 2014; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005).

Friendship is the connection between two individuals who consider themselves as equal or less equal to each other (Howes, 1983). However, friendship is an individual's most important social relationship and it is the most important need in every period of life (Öztürk & Kutlu, 2017). Friendship is an important factor that not only affects our health, well-being and happiness (Dunbar, 2018) but also plays an important role for all children to organize their social lives (Heiman, 2000). The friendship quality, on the other hand, expresses the success level, in other words the excellence level, of friendship, which is dealt with both its positive and negative aspects (Berndt, 2002). There are some evidences in the literature that individuals who have weak peer relationships will experience deep adaptation problems, depression, stress, timidity, low self-esteem (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005) and social skills deficiencies in their future lives (Asher, Hymel, & Renshaw, 1984). Therefore, when it is considered that individuals' experiences, especially in childhood, will shape their lives in the future (Öztürk, 2016), knowing their relationship with bullying that affects their friendship qualities is very important in providing preventive help services and developing friendship relationships (Grotperter & Crick, 1996; Kaya, 2005).

While bullying is not a synonym of aggression or violence, it is a special form of both aggression and violence (Bauman & Del Rio, 2005) and a subcategory of aggression (Olweus et al., 1999). Although bullying has various types, no consensus has been reached about the best conceptualization and classification of it (Flisher & Protogerou, 2012). However, the common classification of bullying generally involves physical attack such as direct physical bullying (pushing, kicking, bearing down on, choking, taking something from the victim by seizing, hitting, damaging personal belongings of the victim etc.). It includes verbal harassment and intimidation such as direct verbal bullying (giving nicknames, playing games in an annoying way, psyching the victims out, threatening and mocking, etc.). Indirect bullying (rumours, ignoring, social exclusion, encouraging others to play with some of the children,

etc.) primarily includes relational aggression and social exclusion by giving harm to the reputation of the victims socially. (Craig, 1998; Kashahu, 2014; Olweus, 1994; Shetgiri, 2013; Smith et al., 1999; Tharp-Taylor, Haviland, & D'Amico, 2009; Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009).

Students can undertake various participatory roles in the process of bullying (Salmivalli, Huttunen, & Lagerspetz, 1997). The children displaying such behaviours to students who are less powerful than their peers are called bullies (Piskin, 2002), the students who are exposed to bullying are called victims (Aluede et al., 2008), the students who were both engaged in and exposed to bullying are called bully-victims (Pişkin, 2002) and the students who do not display any bullying behaviours at all are called bystanders (Carney & Merrell, 2001).

Friendships and the effects of friends are issues on which researchers have been studying for decades. Discussions on topics such as “do good friendships improve the social development of children?” and “do bad friendships and wrong behaviours cause social psychological problems and aggressive behaviours?” have increased in recent years (Berndt, 2002).

When the related literature is reviewed, it is observed that high quality friendship has been reported to be a protective factor against bullying and being exposed to bullying (Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand, & Amatya, 1999; Cuadros & Berger, 2016; Jantzer, Hoover, & Narloch, 2006; Kawabata & Tseng 2019; Wei & Jonson-Reid, 2011). These results show that the relationships between the quality of friendship and bullying and being exposed to bullying in primary school children were investigated in this study.

METHOD

Participants

This study was conducted with totally 290 students consisting of the third grade students ($n = 272$) and fourth grade students ($n = 318$), 298 of them were girls and 292 of them were boys, during the 2018 and 2019 academic years. The students were studying at schools in one of the districts of Sanliurfa province, which is located in the south-eastern part of Turkey and the schools were selected by simple random sampling method from among the schools with students from low, medium and high socio-economic levels.

Instruments

Identification of Peer Bullying Inventory was developed by Pişkin and Ayas (2011). There are two parallel forms of the scale that consists of 37 items and 5 factors (physical bullying, verbal bullying, and isolation, spreading rumours, damaging the personal belongings). These forms were developed to determine the students who “bully” their peers and the victim students who are exposed to bullying. In the bully scale, the students are asked to mark the option showing how often they use the words and they display the behaviours which are mentioned in the scale. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was implemented for the scale which was developed in line with five sub-dimensions. At the first level, fit index was found as $\chi^2 = 1422.14$ ($sd = 616$, $p = .00$), $\chi^2/sd = 2.30$ RMSEA = 0.056, GFI = 0.85, AGFI = 0.82, CFI = 0.92, NFI = 0.87 and NNFI = 0.91 as a result of CFA. At the second level, it index was found as $\chi^2 = 1471.43$ ($sd = 621$, $p = .0000$), $\chi^2/sd = 2.36$, RMSEA = 0.057, GFI = 0.84, AGFI = 0.82 CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.87 and NNFI = 0.91 as a result of CFA. The results of confirmatory analysis showed that that the fit value of the scale was quite good. Internal consistency

coefficient of the scale's victim test was found to be .90. These values showed that the psychometric qualities of the scale were within the acceptable limits.

Friendship Quality Questionnaire was adapted into Turkish by Öztürk and Kutlu (2017) from "Friendship Quality Questionnaire" which was developed by Parker and Asher (1993) to measure the friendship qualities of the students at between 3rd and 6th grades. The scale consists of 40 items and 6 dimensions. These dimensions are friendship and accompaniment, affirmation and support, help and guidance, sharing secrets / opening oneself, resolving conflicts and betrayal. The high score which were got from the scale is an indication of high quality friendship. At the end of the adaptation process, 7 out of 40 items (2, 30, 32, 18, 28, 9, 11), factor loads of which were lower than .40, were excluded from the scale. The final form of the scale consisted of 33 items and 6 factors, in parallel with the original form. The findings obtained from the distinctiveness study of the scale showed that the correlation between the friendship quality and solitude scale for children was -.48. The results of reliability analysis showed that internal consistency of the scale was .89 for the all scale and test-retest reliability coefficient was calculated as 0.92.

Procedure

The scales which were used in this study were administered to the classes by visiting the schools and the process took approximately 30 minutes. As a result of the implementation, bully and victim students were found by using the method of determining bullying status according to the results of the Identification of Peer Bullying Inventory from among 590 students (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Students who bullied at least once a week or more were considered as bullies, and the students who were exposed to bullying at least once a week and more were considered as victims. It was concluded that 10 students were bullies and 132 students were victims. The relationship between these students' bullying and being a victim of bullying scores and their friendship quality scores was investigated.

RESULTS

Friendship Quality and Bullying

Simple Linear Regression Analysis was conducted to determine whether the friendship qualities of the students who participated in the research were significant predictors of the scores of bullying and Pearson Moment rank-difference correlation coefficients were calculated to find the direction of the relationship. In line with this purpose, friendship quality was considered as the predictive variable while bullying and being exposed to bullying were considered as predicted variables. The results of the analysis were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Friendship Quality Scores and Bullying Scores

Variable	Coefficient	S. Error	Beta	95% Confidence Intervals for the Coefficients	t	p
Fixed	47,281	9,792	-	24,702 - 69,861	4,829	,015*
Friendship Quality	-,381	,124	-,763	-,666 - ,095	-3,072	<0,05
N=10 R =0,763 R ² =0,541 F (1-8)= 9,438 ; p<0,05				Correlation (Pearson): -,763		
*p<,05						
Predictive (Independent) Variable: Friendship Quality Scores						
Dependent Variable: Bullying Scores						

As seen in Table 1, a significant relationship was observed between friendship quality and bullying scores according to the results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis which was conducted to determine whether students' friendship quality scores predicted bullying scores ($R = 0.736$, $R^2 = 0.541$) and it was seen that friendship quality was a significant predictor of bullying scores $F(1,8) = 9,438$; $p < 0,05$). Friendship quality scores explained 54% of the change between bullying scores. Moreover, the significance value of the coefficient of the predictive variable ($B = -,763$) related to the regression equation also indicated that friendship quality was a significant predictor ($p < 0,05$). When Pearson's Moment correlation value (friendship-bullying = $-0,763$) was considered, it can be said that there was a negative relationship between friendship quality and bullying, and bullying scores decreased as friendship scores increased.

Friendship Quality and exposure to bullying

In order to determine whether friendship quality predicted the scores of exposure to bullying, regression analysis was conducted between victim students' scores of being exposed to bullying and friendship quality scores, and Pearson Moment rank-difference correlation was calculated to determine the direction of the relationship. The regression analysis and correlation results which were revealed were presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The Results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Friendship Quality Scores and Scores of being exposed to bullying

Variable	Coefficient	S. Error	Beta	95% Confidence Intervals for the Coefficients	t	p
Fixed	37,422	3,785		29,934 - 44,909	9,888	,000**
Friendship Quality	-,184	,046	-,334	-,274 - -,094	-4,038	$P < 0,05$
N= 132 R =0,334 R ² =0,111 F (1-130)= 16,305 ; $p < 0,05$				Correlation(Pearson): -,334		
** $p < ,001$ ve * $p < ,05$						
Predictive (Independent) Variable: Friendship Quality Scores						
Dependent Variable: Scores of being exposed to bullying						

As seen in Table 2, a significant relationship was observed between the scores of friendship quality and being exposed to bullying according to the results of Simple Linear Regression Analysis which was conducted to determine whether students' friendship quality scores predict the scores of being exposed to bullying ($R = 0,334$, $R^2 = 0,111$) and it was seen that friendship quality was a significant predictor of the scores of being exposed to bullying ($F(1-130) = 16,305$; $p < 0,05$). Friendship quality scores explained 10% of the change between the scores of being exposed to bullying. In addition, the significance value of the coefficient of the predictive variable ($B = -,334$) related to the regression equation also indicated that friendship quality was a significant predictor ($p < 0,05$). When Pearson's Moment correlation value (friendship-bullying = $-0,334$) was considered, it can be said that there was a negative relationship between friendship quality and exposure to bullying, and bullying scores decreased as friendship quality scores increased.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to reveal the relationship between the friendship quality of third and fourth grade students in elementary schools and the variables of bullying and exposure to

bullying. The findings of the research presented that there was a significant relationship between students' bullying and exposure to bullying and their friendship qualities. The friendship quality predicts the situation of bullying and being exposed to bullying. It was seen that there was a negative relationship between friendship quality and bullying and being exposed to bullying. Similar with the findings of this study, Boulton, Trueman, Chau, Whitehand and Amatya (1999), Bollmer, Milich, Harris and Maras (2005), Wei and Jonson-Reid (2011), Serdiouk, Berry and Gest (2016) and Kawabata and Tseng (2019) reported that successful friendship relationships were a protective factor against peer bullying in their studies. Obtaining similar results may be due to the benefits of friendships such as meeting social emotional needs, building a bond of sincerity and love, and developing social skills (Hodges, Boivin, Vitaro, & Bukowski, 1999). Similarly, considering that friendship is defined, understood, organized and experienced in all societies and cultures (Caine, 2014), it can be seen that friendship is a universal situation.

Individuals' experiences, especially in their childhood, shape their lives in the future (Öztürk, 2016). There are some evidences that weak peer relationships have serious adjustment problems and social skills deficiencies in their later lives (Asher, Hymel & Renshaw, 1984). As this study was carried out with elementary school children, it will contribute to the literature with the results it obtained.

In this research, the friendship quality explained bullying and being exposed to bullying at different levels. The friendship quality explained bullying at a higher level, while it explained being exposed to bullying at a lower level. As bullying is guided by impulses, bullies do not have any sense of sympathy and they lack the ability to understand the perspectives of other people, which is called social blindness, against the victim (Sanders & Pbye, 2004) in dominating others. As bullies perceive that they confirm their behaviour and they are right in their actions, this perception prevents them from building sympathy (Batsche & Knoff, 1994). When these features of bullies are considered, friendships are expected to affect the bullies less. On the other hand, it is thought-provoking that friendship quality explains bullying at a higher level. This may be due to the fact that the number of bully students is lower. Research has often stated that if victim individuals have friendships, they are unable to provide the necessary support to prevent the attacks of bullies as their friendships are also often inclined to internalize victims' weak symptoms (Bollmer et al., 2005). The fact that friendship qualification explains being exposed to bullying at a lower level supports this situation.

Bullying constitutes a multi-dimensional phenomenon between social environment, family relationships, school community and peer relationships (Swearer, Collins, & Berry, 2012). It should not be forgotten that peer bullying and friendship quality have an impact not only on each other but also on the individual's experiences, anxieties, physical ailments, family life and social environment.

The results revealed negative relationships between friendship quality, bullying and being exposed to bullying. The findings showed that friendship quality affected bullying and being exposed to bullying. Furthermore friendship quality can create ideas for improving friendship relationships and struggling against bullying.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE APPLICATIONS

It may be suggested that further studies should be conducted with larger generalizable samples. The research is limited to the data which were provided by the scales that were used in this study. Similar studies can be carried out by using different data collection tools. In subsequent studies, it can be investigated to what extent the different dimensions of friendship affects bullying and being exposed to bullying.

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