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## THE IMPACT OF THE ADOLESCENT-PARENT RELATIONSHIP ON PEER VICTIMIZATION

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### Abstract

*Although the cultural context and accepted understanding of bullying varies across the world, the widespread definition of bullying is the attempt to seek power over others through aggressive behavior and to aim to weaken victims by repeating such behavior in a social, emotional or physical context. This study was conducted to explore the relationship of adolescents with their parents and whether this relationship has an effect on becoming a victim to bullying. The research was carried out in 2011 with pupils, ages 11-14, in the second tier of two primary schools. The research was explained to the students and their families, after which 367 students, with their parents' written permission, consented to participate in the study. Data was collected questionnaire and Parents-Adolescent Relationship Scale. The reports of the adolescent students about their perception of their relationship with their mothers and fathers and their experience with bullying indicated that more than one-fourth had been exposed to peer bullying. It was found that as the students' relationship with their mothers and fathers got poorer, their victimization status increased. The recommendation in the light of these findings might be that school nurses provide families with information about peer bullying and how to approach adolescent children, and that more research be carried out to investigate other factors that may increase the risk of victimization in the face of peer bullying.*

Keywords: *adolescent- parent relationship, victim, school nursing*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Although the cultural context and accepted understanding of bullying varies across the world, the widespread definition of bullying is the attempt to seek power over others through aggressive behavior and to aim to weaken victims by repeating such behavior in a social, emotional or physical context (Ditzhazy & Burton 2003, Smokowski & Kopasz 2005, Vanderbilt &

Augustyn 2010). Victims, not bullies, are the ones that are exposed to abuse by peers. Most victims (about two-thirds) are passive or submissive, the remaining may display an aggressive attitude (Smokowski & Kopasz 2005, Beaty & Alexeyev 2008, Gökler 2009, Kılıç 2009). The victimized child or adolescent may be afflicted with psychosis, depression, a low sense of self-esteem, or indulge in aberrant relationships in adulthood (Connolly & O'Moore 2003, Smokowski & Kopasz 2005, Gökler 2009, Gür & Küçük 2010, Vanderbilt & Augustyn 2010, Lereya, Samara & Wolke 2013). Bullying is a major issue in Turkey. Despite this, however, the matter is not given due attention and incidents of bullying are considered ordinary events. Bullying is mostly encountered in the years of primary school, that is, the first years of adolescence (Kartal 1998).

The period of adolescence is one of the most painful times in an individual's life. According to Erikson, this period is a time in which the individual is required to attain emotional independence, develop social roles appropriate to one's gender, form a system of values unique to the individual, as well as make decisions regarding the realization of the roles dictated by society. The fundamental social elements in the individual's life in this period are peers, teachers and the family (Senemoğlu 2004). The families of adolescent victims generally tend to assume protective attitudes. Researchers report that families are the reason children become victims of bullying in the first place, also asserting that they also act as a safe haven for their children when they are bullied (Smokowski & Kopasz 2005, Beaty & Alexeyev 2008). It is of the greatest importance for a balanced development that families support the free expression of their adolescent children and approach them with a positive attitude. Families teach victims of bullying how to manage the issue by finding solutions using their own skills. The adolescent who is helped by the family develops a sense of trust and this enables the adolescent to feel the self-confidence needed to give bullies the appropriate response (Papanikolaou, Chatzikosma & Kleio 2011).

School nurses play an important role in identifying and preventing bullying (Gür & Küçük 2010). The school nurse is in a position to evaluate both victim and bully, plan an appropriate intervention, and work together with the family, teachers and the school administration. When they notice an incidence of bullying, school nurses can report this to the school principal and teachers and inform the families of the students involved (Muscarì 2003, Selekman & Praefer 2006, Arslan & Savaşer 2009, Karataş & Öztürk, <http://school-nursing.org/bullyindex.html>, date accessed: May 3, 2009). School nurses may be able to create a safe environment for taking action that is suitable to students, families, and themselves (Selekman & Praeger 2006, Gür & Küçük 2010). When bullying incidents take place at school, the school nurse can take part in the wider team that will be providing the family with support, ensuring that this support is given to both families and students (Karstadt & Woods 1999). In order to produce solutions for the problem of bullying, there is a need to gather knowledge about the act of bullying as well as information about the relationships in the family (Lereya, Samara & Wolke 2013). This study was conducted to explore the relationship of adolescents with their parents and whether this relationship has an effect on becoming a victim to bullying.

## **2. MATERIALS AND METHOD**

The research was carried out in 2011 with pupils, ages 11-14, in the second tier of two primary schools operating under the Istanbul/Turkey Provincial National Education Directorate. In choosing the schools, Istanbul was divided into its Anatolian and European banks and a school was selected randomly from each side of the city. The population of the study and study sample comprises all of the students in the chosen schools (583 students). The research was explained to the students and their families, after which 367 students, with their parents' written permission, consented to participate in the study. Five questions were asked to determine the students' sociodemographic status, such as their age, gender, class, and the characteristics of their parents, and after the act of bullying was explained to them, they were asked another question about whether they had ever been bullied in the last six months. The Parents-Adolescent Relationship Scale was used to determine the students' relationship with their parents.

### **Parents-Adolescent Relationship Scale**

The Parents-Adolescent Relationship Scale was developed by Kaner (2000) on the basis of the control theory in order to determine whether parents had an impact on an adolescent's tendency to exhibit deviant behavior. The scale is a Likert-type instrument containing 5 responses. The items in the scale are scored according to the responses of "Always" (5 points), "Frequently" (4 points), "Sometimes" (3 points), "Rarely" (2 points), and "Never" (1 point). The Mother's Relationship Scale has 30 items while the Father's Relationship Scale comprises 37 items. The higher scores on the scale indicate that the mother or father has a high level of control over their child and that there is a strong relationship between parent and child. As the scores on the scale fall, this is an indication of the parent's lesser control over the child and a weakening relationship between parents and child. The Mother's Relationship Sub-scale and the Father's Relationship Sub-scale can be scored separately or be calculated within the total score as two sub-dimensions--Mother's Relationship and Father's Relationship (Kaner 2000).

The construct validity of the two sub-scales of the parent-adolescent relationship scale was tested by Kaner (2000) using principal components analysis. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the Mother's Relationship Scale was found to be 0.92, the Split-half Coefficient for the entire test was 0.83. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient for the Father's Relationship Scale was found to be 0.93, the Split-half Coefficient for the entire test was 0.82 (Kaner 2000). The Cronbach alpha coefficient for the entire mother's relationship test administered in the study was 0.95, the Cronbach alpha coefficient for the entire father's relationship test was 0.96.

The data were evaluated using the SPSS 15.0 program and the one-way ANOVA was used as a statistical test;  $p < 0.05$  was considered significant.

## **3. RESULTS**

Of the students, it was seen that 38.4% were in the 7th grade, 35.4% were in 6th and 26.2% were in 8th grade; 54.2% were girls and 45.8% were boys. Among the students' mothers, 38.7% were primary school graduates whereas 31.1% of the fathers were high school graduates. In terms of who the students lived with, it was observed that 88.2% of the students lived together

with their mothers and fathers. Based on the students' self-reporting, it was found that 28.9% had been exposed to peer bullying (Table 1).

**Table 1. Some Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Students**

		n	%
<b>Class</b>	6	130	35,4
	7	141	38,4
	8	96	26,2
<b>Gender</b>	female	199	54,2
	male	168	45,8
<b>Mother's Education</b>	Primary School or lower	226	62,3
	High School or higher	137	37,7
<b>Father's Education</b>	Primary School or lower	192	53,8
	High School or higher	165	46,2
<b>Parents' Living Situation</b>		321	88.2
	Mother and Father together	29	8.0
	Single mother	7	1.8
	Single father	7	2.0
	Other family elders		
<b>Victimization status</b>	not victimized	251	70.3'ü
	victimized	106	29.7

\* n is variable due to the unanswered questions.

The highest score the students received from the mother's relationship test was 150; the lowest score was 30, and  $\bar{X} \pm ss = 141,476 \pm 20,261$ . The highest score the students received from the father's relationship test was 185; the lowest score was 37, and  $\bar{X} \pm ss = 153072 \pm 30,019$  (Table 2).

**Table 2. Distribution of the Mean Scores on the General Parents-Adolescent Relationship Scale and its Sub-Scales**

	n	$\bar{X} \pm ss$	Points that can be taken	
			minimum	maximum
<b>Mother relationship</b>				
<b>All test</b>	365	141,476 $\pm$ 20,261	<b>30</b>	<b>150</b>
Close communication	365	24,471 $\pm$ 5,965	8	40
Be together	365	21,948 $\pm$ 4,486	5	25
Sensitivity	365	23,139 $\pm$ 3,13	5	25
Love and Trust	365	23,677 $\pm$ 3,061	5	25
Monitoring	365	16,986 $\pm$ 3,014	4	20
Norms regulating	365	13,890 $\pm$ 2,022	3	15
Compensation expectations	365	8,573 $\pm$ 1,945	2	10
<b>Father relationship</b>				
<b>All test</b>	360	153,072 $\pm$ 30,019	<b>37</b>	<b>185</b>
Close communication	360	28,755 $\pm$ 9,234	8	40
Be together	360	20,797 $\pm$ 5,408	5	25
Sensitivity	360	26,875 $\pm$ 4,608	6	30
Love and Trust	360	18,483 $\pm$ 3,058	4	20
Monitoring	360	15,519 $\pm$ 4,09	4	20
Norms regulating	360	25,708 $\pm$ 5,464	6	30
Compensation expectations	360	8,319 $\pm$ 2,138	2	10
Home rules	360	8,613 $\pm$ 2,013	2	10

It was determined that there was no significant correlation between the gender of the adolescents and their relationship with their mothers and fathers or between their relationship with their fathers and their fathers' level of education ( $p > 0.05$ ). There was however a correlation seen between the mother's level of education and the relationship with the mother ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 3).

**Table 3. Comparison of mean scores of parents and adolescent relationships by demographic characteristics**

		n	$\bar{X} \pm ss$	T test		
				sd	t	p
<b>Mother Relationship</b>	Female	197	143,497 $\pm$ 17,027	363	1,579	,115
	Male	168	139,666 $\pm$ 23,417			
<b>Father Relationship</b>	Female	194	151,695 $\pm$ 28,119	358	,940	,348
	Male	166	154,68 $\pm$ 32,11			
<b>Mother Relationship</b>	Primary School or lower	226	140,137 $\pm$ 20,881	359	-2,068	<b>,039</b>
	High School or higher	135	144,5037 $\pm$ 16,664			
<b>Father Relationship</b>	Primary School or lower	222	151,310 $\pm$ 30,789	350	1,044	,297
	High School or higher	135	154,981 $\pm$ 27,801			

The mother's relationship total mean score in the case of the students who had not experienced peer bullying was 142.8; this score for students who had experienced peer bullying was 133.8. The father's relationship total mean score in the case of the students who had not experienced peer bullying was 155.9; this score for students who had experienced peer bullying was 144.8. As the score of the adolescents on the mother's and father's scales increased, their victimization status dropped and this was seen to be statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ).

#### 4. DISCUSSION

In the early days of adolescence, being bullied lowers quality of life and leads to psychological issues (Connolly and O'Moore 2003). Adolescence is a period in which conflicts arise between parents and adolescent children, a time when individuals seek independence. A healthy relationship between parents and adolescent makes it easier to cope with problems (Papanikolaou, Chatzikosma & Kleio 2011). Establishing how the adolescent views the parent-child relationship will ensure the early diagnosis of problems. In this context, it might be useful to help the family and the adolescent to form a healthy relationship. This study asked adolescents about whether they had encountered bullying and to evaluate their relationships with their families. An investigation was conducted into whether the adolescent's relationship with the parents had an effect on being the victim of bullying.

Out of all the students in the present study, 29.7% reported that they had been bullied in recent months. Research carried out in Turkey in different years has revealed bullying rates of 9.7% - 43.0% in the second tier of primary school (Atik 2006, Sipahi-Tıprıdamaz 2008, Çetinkaya et al. 2009, Ergül 2009, Ünalmiş 2010) while studies abroad report rates of 10.9% - 56.5% (Nansel et al. 2001, Karatzias et al. 2002, Baldry 2004, Hokoda, Lu & Angel 2006, Scheithauer, Hayer, Petermann & Jugert 2006, Bauer, Lozano & Rivara 2007, Muula, Herring, Siziya & Rudatsikira

2009). The results of the present study are consistent with those of the mentioned studies, demonstrating that programs to reduce bullying are indeed necessary.

As the scores indicating the adolescents' relationship with their parents got higher, it was seen that their victimization status got lower. Research has shown that adolescents lacking a balanced relationship with their parents are more likely to be mixed up in incidents of bullying (Connolly & O'Moore 2003). At the same time, it has been reported that in male adolescents, a close bond with the family reduces the incidence of being victimized by bullies (Özen & Aktan 2010) whereas in girls, being the object of peer bullying is associated with poor family ties (Rigby 1993); those with poor relationships with parents have been reported to be more likely to be bullied or to act as a bully themselves (Sapounaa & Wolke 2013). Every kind of victimization related to bullying is observed to diminish when there is support from the parents (Wang, Iannotti & Nansel 2009).

It was found that educated mothers had better communication with their children . It may be said that as the level of education rose, the families followed up on their children's development much more closely and gave them their support.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The reports of the adolescent students about their perception of their relationship with their mothers and fathers and their experience with bullying indicated that more than one-fourth had been exposed to peer bullying. It was found that as the students' relationship with their mothers and fathers got poorer, their victimization status increased.

The recommendation in the light of these findings might be that school nurses provide families with information about peer bullying and how to approach adolescent children, and that more research be carried out to investigate other factors that may increase the risk of victimization in the face of peer bullying.

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