

School Belongingness and Coping with Bullying: Greek Adolescent Students' Experiences

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Abstract : There has been growing interest lately, in the study of victimization among adolescent students in Greece and elsewhere with a view to improve school policies concerning anti-bullying practices. Researchers have recently focused on investigating the relationships between the extent of students' victimization and the distinct mechanisms that they employ for coping with this particular problem. In particular, the emphasis has been placed on exploring the relationship between the coping strategies students use to counteract bullying, their sense of belonging at school, and extent of their victimization. Methods: Within the research framework outlined above, we set out to: a) examine the frequency of self-reported victimization among secondary school students, b) investigate the coping strategies employed by students when confronted with school bullying and c) explore any differences between bullied and non-bullied students with regard to coping strategies and school belongingness. The sample consisted of 860 from fifteen secondary public schools in central Greece. The schools were typical Greek secondary schools and the principals volunteered to participate in this study. Participants' age ranged from 12 to 16 years. Measures: a) Exposure to Victimization: The frequency of victimization was directly located by asking students the question: 'Over the last term, how often have you been bullied or harassed by a student or students at this high school?' b) Coping Strategies: The 'Living and Learning at School: Bullying at School' was administered to students, c) School belongingness was assessed by the Psychological Sense of School Membership Scale, that students completed. Results: Regarding the frequency of self-reported victimization, 1.5% of the students reported being victimized every day, 2.8% most days of the week, 2.1% one or more days a week, 2.9% about once a week, 22.6% less than once a week and 68.1% never. The coping strategies that the participants employed for terminating their victimization included: a) adult support seeking, b) emotional coping/keep away from school, c) keeping healthy and fit, d) demonstrating a positive attitude towards the bully, d) peer support seeking, e) emotional out bursting, f) wishful thinking and self-blaming, g) pretending as if it is not happening, h) displaying assertive behaviors and i) getting away from the bullies. Bullied from non-bullied children did not differ as much in coping, as in feelings of being rejected in school. Discussion: The findings are in accordance with accumulated research evidence which points to a strong relationship between student perceptions of school belongingness and their involvement in bullying behaviors. We agree with the view that a positive school climate is likely to serve as a buffer that mitigates wider adverse societal influences and institutional attitudes which favor violence and harassment among peers.

Keywords : school bullying, school belonging, student coping strategies, victimization

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