

Peer Bullying and Mentalization from the Perspective of Pupils

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Abstract : Bullying among peers is not uncommon; however, adults can notice only a fragment of the cases of harassment during everyday life. The systemic approaches of bullying investigation put the whole school community in the focus of attention and propose that the solution should emerge from the culture of the school. Bystanders are essential in the prevention and intervention processes as an active agent rather than passive. For combating exclusion, stigmatization and harassment, it is important that the bystanders have to realize they have the power to take action. To prevent the escalation of violence, victims must believe that students and teachers will help them and their environment is able to provide safety. The study based on scientific narrative psychological approach, and focuses on the examination of the different perspectives of students, how peers are mentalizing with each other in case of bullying. The data collection contained responses of students (N = 138) from three schools in Hungary, and from three different area of the country (Budapest, Martfú and Barcs). The test battery include Bullying Prevalence Questionnaire, Interpersonal Reactivity Index and an instruction to get narratives about bullying, which effectiveness was tested during a pilot test. The obtained results are in line with the findings of previous bullying research: the victims are mentalizing less with their peers and experience greater personal distress when they are in identity threatening situations, thus focusing on their own difficulties rather than social signals. This isolation is an adaptive response in short-term although it seems to lead to a deficit in social skills later in life and makes it difficult for students to become socially integrated to society. In addition the results also show that students use more mental state attribution when they report verbal bullying than in case of physical abuse. Those who witness physical harassment also witness concrete answers to the problem from teachers, in contrast verbal abuse often stays without consequences. According to the results students mentalizing more in these stories because they have less normative explanation to what happened. To expanding bullying literature, this research helps to find ways to reduce school violence through community development.

Keywords : bullying, mentalization, narrative, school culture

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