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The Effect of Group Psychological Counseling Based on Solution-Focused Psychological Counseling Approach on the Level of Peer Bullying Experienced by Primary School Students Who have Experienced Peer Bullying

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Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine the effect of solution-focused psychological counseling based group counseling on primary school students. Data was collected from 95 students. As a result of the analyses, a randomly selected experimental group of nine people and a control group were formed. In the study, the Child Form of the Bullying Determine Scale was used as a data collection tool. The data was analyzed using the independent and paired sample t-test. The analyses were conducted using SPSS 26 at a significance level of .05. As a result of the analyzes made, it was found that the group counseling sessions based on solution-focused counseling applied to students who were exposed to peer bullying made a statistically significant difference in favor of the experimental group. In the control group, in which no counseling session was held, no change occurred. The findings obtained in the research were discussed in the context of the relevant literature.

Key Words
Solution-focused psychological counseling • Peer bullying • Primary school students

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Bullying is characterized by repetition of behavior and power imbalance in its most general form, and is defined as a sub-dimension of aggressive behavior (Olweus, 1999). The definition of systematic abuse of power also includes these two features (Smith & Sharp, 1994). In addition, the victim cannot protect himself/herself for one or more reasons. The bullied person may be smaller, weaker or psychologically weaker than the bullied person (Smith & Brain, 2000).

Studies conducted to date accept that bullying can occur in all schools as a reasonable generalization, even though there are different levels of bullying. Schuster (1999) found evidence of an identifiable victim in all classrooms in German schools. The national awareness that develops as a result of studies on bullying not only allows schools to accept the problem without being judged as a bad school, but also encourages school and outside authorities to take active steps to reduce the repetition of bullying. Bullying includes relational/social aggression (making rumors about the person, social exclusion), physical behaviors (kicking, hitting, damaging the belongings of the person), verbal attacks (calling and threatening) (Monks & Smith, 2006; Olweus, 1999). As a result of the developments in the internet and technology, a new field of bullying has emerged as a field of cyber bullying in recent years. Peer bullying; bully, victim, bully/victim, and nearly half of school-age children are exposed to bullying at some point in their school life (Karatoprak & Özcan, 2017).

Among the important causes of physical and verbal bullying, bullying students see themselves as superior to others; violent bullying behavior takes place as a method used by the victim to find a solution with the thought that he deserves it (Genç, 2007). Occurrence of peer bullying; It can be in the form of different psychological and physical symptoms depending on the situation in the roles of bully, victim or bully/victim (Karatoprak & Özcan, 2017). Juvonen and Graham (2014) state that 20-25% of school-age children can be directly associated with bullying situations as victims, bullies or both. Studies conducted in Europe show that 4-9% of young people exhibit bullying behaviors and 25% are victims of bullying. When the studies are examined in general, the prevalence of traditional bullying is 35% and the prevalence of cyberbullying is 15%.

When the research was examined, it was seen that there were significant differences between the age groups of the prevalence and forms of bullying, although not directly. Cook et al. (2010) analyzed the results of 153 studies conducted in the past with meta-analysis method. Accordingly, the effect size of age has various levels of effect on bully, bully/victim and victim roles. Bullying reaches its peak in the middle school years (ages 12-15) and tends to decrease towards the end of high school (Hymel & Swearer, 2015). When examined as a form, it is seen that there is a transition from physical bullying to indirect and relational bullying with increasing age (Rivers & Smith, 1994).

The widespread peer bullying in schools is an issue that should be dealt with by school officials and education circles. Considering the effects of bullying on children, it is expected that the school community will carry out studies to define the frequency and nature of bullying, to prevent bullying and to fight bullying. Considering the large number of students in schools, the lack of time and the ease of implementation, it is thought that a solution-focused short-term approach will be effective in the fight against bullying (Öztürk Çopur, 2019). At the same time, Gençdoğan (2014) states that classroom or branch teachers, especially psychological counselors and guidance teachers, conduct in-depth interviews about the problems experienced by students and intervene; he states that it is

not possible due to reasons such as lack of time, excess number of students or insufficient number of personnel. Most counselors stop doing therapy altogether because of the many limitations in their school setting. From the point of view of students in schools, Doğan (2000) is of the opinion that students will have difficulty in concentrating on a long-term counseling process in terms of cognitive development and that long-term counseling approaches cannot give effective results on students. Solution-focused short-term therapy is an approach that can be easily used in school environments as an alternative approach to such problems experienced by clients in school environments (Doğan, 2000).

Solution-focused therapy based its philosophy on the search for a solution (Bannink, 2007; Bavelas et al., 2013). Therefore, their techniques are directly focused on solving the person's problem. The miracle question reveals the behavioral purpose of the person and allows him to clarify (De Shazer et al., 2021). Rating questions give the client a chance to discover the point they are at, help them discover the factors that they are affected by, help the person to focus on their success, help embody the goals that are thought to be acquired in the future (Bannink, 2007; Bavelas et al., 2013; Sharry, 2017). Solution-focused short-term therapy emphasizes that, no matter how rare, there is of course an exception to the situation in life. At this point, the function of the counselor is to discover and reveal these exceptional moments that the client does not bring forth in counseling (Berg & Miller, 1992). Coping questions, on the other hand, are another technique that allows the client to discuss the successes and solutions applied to the problems in life in depth during the consultation (Luthar, 2003). Davis and Osborn (1999) draw attention to the fact that the school counselor expresses his belief that students can create change, especially by using their own resources, in the work done with students in solution-focused short-term counseling. By emphasizing the strengths of the students, the school counselor tries to channel the students towards their behavioral goals, which enables students to gain skills to cope with their problems faster than other approaches, especially in issues such as peer bullying.

Çitemel (2014) carried out a study aiming to reduce peer bullying in high school students by preparing a group counseling program that includes the philosophy of solution-focused short-term approach. When the pre-test, post-test and follow-up measurements in the experimental and control groups as a result of the psychological counseling process with the 6-session group are examined, it is seen that there is a significant difference between the averages of the obtained scores. This situation reveals that solution-focused short-term counseling applied to students is effective on reducing peer bullying. Özbay (2017) carried out an experimental and control group psycho-education program based on short-term solution-focused psychological counseling for adolescents who were exposed to cyberbullying to cope with psychological symptoms and cyber victimization. The study is structured so that each session will consist of 90 minutes and last 8 sessions. When the findings are examined, it is seen that there is no significant change in the psychological symptoms and virtual victimization levels of high school students in the control group, while there is a decrease in the psychological symptoms and virtual victimization levels of high school students in the experimental group. As can be seen, these studies examined the effectiveness of solution-focused short-term counseling approach in reducing and correcting the problems that adolescents experience at school. However, such a study has not been encountered with primary school students within the framework of the resources available both in the country and abroad. From this point of view, the aim of this study is to examine the effect of group counseling

based on solution-focused short-term counseling on the level of peer bullying of primary school students who are bullied.

Methods

Research Design

This research is an experimental study. The independent variable of the study is group counseling based on solution-focused counseling, and the dependent variable is the level of peer bullying. In the research, a 2x2 design with pretest-posttest measurement, experimental and control groups was used.

Data Collection Tools

Peer Bullying Scale-Child Form: It was developed by Pişkin and Ayas (2011). The scale consists of five factors in which 37 items are distributed in two parallel forms in order to identify the students who are "bullied" and "who are bullied". The distribution of the items on the five factors is explained as follows; 1-10 items are physical bully and victim, 11-16 items are verbal bully and victim, 17-21 items are isolation bully and victim, 22-28 items are rumor spreading bully and victim, 29-37 items damage to property bully and victim. The scale was designed as a five-point Likert type. The lowest score a person can give to an item in the scale is zero (I never encounter it), and the highest score is four (I encounter it every day). The lowest score that can be obtained from the bully and victim dimensions of the scale is 0, and the highest score is 148. The higher the score, the higher the level of being a bully and a victim. In the bully scale, the participants are asked to mark how often they do the said words and actions, and on the victim scale, how often they are exposed to these words and actions. In this study, only the form of the scale to identify victims was used. The Cronbach alpha internal consistency coefficient of the victim dimension of the scale was found to be .90. The internal consistency coefficients for the victim subscales of the scale are as follows: .74 for the physical subscale, .66 for the verbal subscale, .68 for the isolation subscale, .79 for the rumor subscale, and .76 for the damage to property subscale (Pişkin & Ayas, 2011).

Table1

The Results of Internal Consistency Analysis for the Collected Data

Variables	General	Physical	Verbal	Isolation	Rumor	Damage Property
Results	.938	.822	.759	.676	.720	.899

Process

The sessions here were structured and implemented by three different group leaders. At the beginning of each session, the relevant group leader introduced himself to the group and met the group members. In the last session, the leaders managed and ended the process together.

Session 1: In this session, the group leader introduces himself to the group members. Warm-up activity is done for group members to get to know each other. The leader shares the predetermined group rules with the group

members in order to make the group members feel comfortable and to create an appropriate group counseling environment. The leader explains the general purpose of the group and states that each group member may have different individual goals in line with this purpose. The leader shares his feelings and thoughts about being in the group in line with the goals. The rating scale is filled in by group members. A session summary is made by the group leader and homework is given.

Session 2: The session is started by reminding the homework given by the group leader in the previous session. The rating scale completed by the group members in the previous session is evaluated. Leader defines bullying to group members and applies its effectiveness. The leader explains what can be done when bullying behaviors are encountered and ensures that individual goals are more concrete and understandable and compatible with the general goals of the group. The self-rating technique is applied and after the session is summarized, the session is ended by giving homework.

Session 3: The leader receives feedback from the group members regarding the assignment given in Session 2. The leader asks the group members how they have felt since the last session and makes an overall assessment of the sessions. The leader implements the revival event and the magic globe event. Makes a re-evaluation of the members' self-rating technique. The session is summarized and the session is ended by giving homework.

Session 4: Each group leader makes a general summary of his session. It is forwarded to the group members where it was the last session. Feedback is received from the group members about how they felt as it was the last session. Feedback is received from group members about the situations they have faced with bullying in the last week and their reactions. Anti-bullying case studies are implemented and answers are received. The love bombardment technique is applied and the session is terminated.

Study Group

The study group of the research consisted of students continuing their education in a primary school located in Pamukkale district of Denizli province. In this context, the peer bullying scale was applied to 95 students attending the fourth grade in the relevant primary school. After the application, the scores were ordered from high to low to form the experimental and control group members. Then, two different groups of 10 students were randomly formed, one for the experimental group and one for the control group. The work group is comprised of 10 boys and 8 girls. Additionally, 7 people from the age group of 9, 12 people from the age group of 10, and 1 person from the age group of 11 are participating in the work. However, due to the negative attitudes of a student in the experimental group towards the group and negatively affecting the counseling process with the group, this person in the experimental group was excluded from the group. Accordingly, one person from the control group was reduced, and the experimental and control groups consisted of nine people. Statistical analyzes of the research were carried out on nine people.

Table 2

Demographic Information Related to the Participants of the Study

Variables		Experimental	Control	Total	
		Frequency(n)	Frequency(n)	Percentage(%)	Frequency(n)
Gender	Girl	5	5	55.6	10
	Boy	4	4	44.4	8
Age	9	5	2	38.9	7
	10	3	7	55.6	10
	11	1		5.6	1

Data Analysis

Firstly, an independent samples t-test was deemed appropriate to determine whether there was a difference in peer victimization between the experimental and control groups in the pre-test results. To examine the final results, dependent sample t-test was deemed appropriate, but since the data was collected at different times, the results of the dependent sample t-test increase the error rate. To reduce the error rate, the use of the two-way mixed ANOVA test is considered appropriate, and the study was conducted using the two-way mixed ANOVA. The fact that the model had a 2x2 structure.

SPSS 26 program was used in the analysis of the data. Independent samples t-test was applied to see whether the situation of the victim of peer bullying differentiated in the first place of the experimental and control groups. Afterwards, Two-Way Mixed-Design ANOVA was applied in order to examine the difference between the pre-test and post-test results in the experimental and control groups. The statistical significance level was taken as .05 in the study.

Results

Preliminary analyses

Before analyzing the data, extreme values were examined in each of the scale items and item combinations, and the missing values in the data set were examined, and it was revealed that the missing values in all data sets were below 5% and did not display any pattern. Then, the normality assumptions of the data were checked first. When the normality values of the data set were examined (Skewness coefficient= 1.20; Kurtosis coefficient= 0.63), it was seen that the values met the normality criteria suggested by Finney and DiStefano (2006). When the data were analyzed, no extreme values were encountered. The victimization of peer bullying is measured at a continuous level and our two within-subject factors involve relevant groups. When the conducted analyses were examined, no significant outlier was found in any combination of the relevant groups. For parametric tests such as ANOVA to be applicable, the dataset must satisfy the assumptions of normality and homogeneity (Kalaycı, 2014). When examining the results of the Levene test, it can be observed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances is satisfied (p>0.05).

Table 3

t-Test Results of Comparison between Pretest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	X̄	St.Dev.	t	*p*
Experimental	9	58.33	12.13	.809	.430
Control	9	53.61	12.62		

In order to examine whether the experimental and control groups formed from primary school students differ in terms of being bullied, the independent sample t-test was applied to the collected pre-test results. No significant difference was observed in the independent sample t-test result (p > .05).

Table 4

Mean and Standard Deviation Scores for Level of Peer Bullying Experienced Pretest and Posttest Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Group	Pre-Test			Post-Test				
	N	X	S	N	X	S	F	N^2
Experimental	9	58.3390	12.136	9	34.5556	15.914	15.063	.485
Control	9	53.6127	12.629	9	61.6667	29.924		

***p<.0.05

Two-Way Mixed-Design ANOVA was applied in order to examine whether the students' scores of being bullied differed as a result of group counseling based on solution-focused counseling. As a result of the analysis, a significant difference is observed between the pre-test and post-test scores of the students participating in the study (p < .05). Accordingly, the average score of being bullied decreased from 58.33 to 34.55. In order to examine the effectiveness of the group based on solution-focused counseling, pre-test and post-test applications were applied to the control group. According to the results of the Two-Way Mixed-Design ANOVA performed on the control group, no significant difference was detected (p > .05).

As seen in Figure 1, the pre-test and post-test results of the experimental and control groups differentiate over time. According to this figure, while the bullying victimization of the individuals in the experimental group decreases, a slight increase is observed in the bullying victimization of the individuals in the control group.

Figure 1

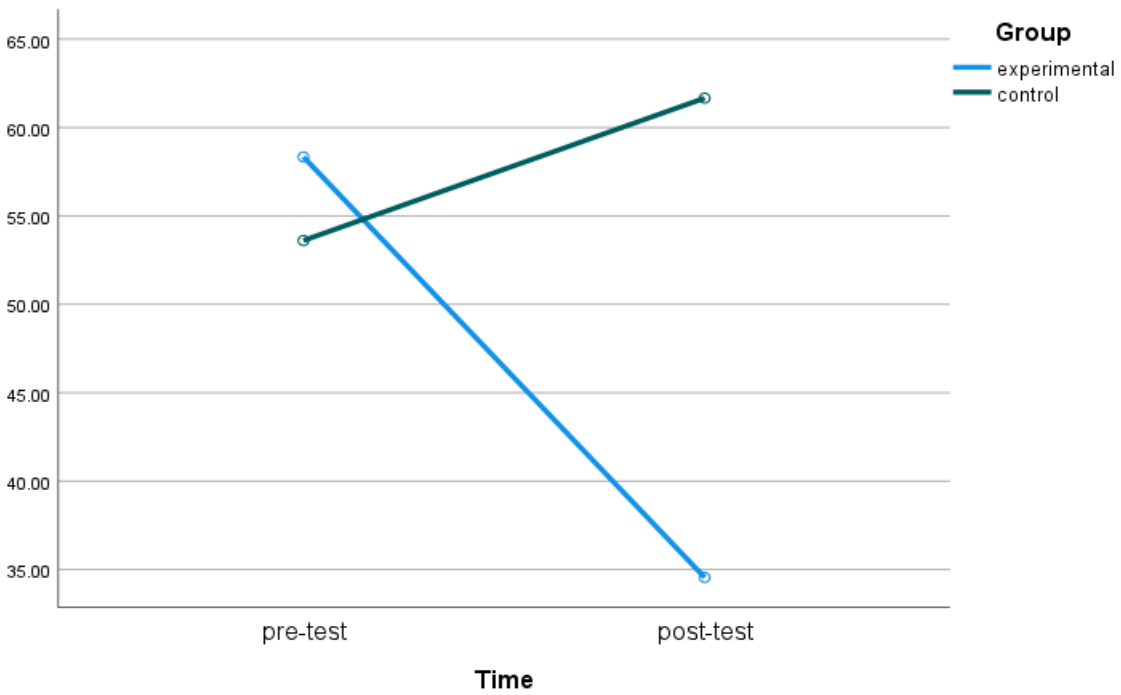*Two Way Anova Graph of Experimental and Control Groups for Level of Peer Bulying Experinced Scores*

Table 5

ANOVA Results of the Pretest and Posttest Scores of the Experimental and Control Groups for Level of Peer Bullying Experienced

Source of the Variance		Sum of Squares	Sd	Mean Square	F	Sig (p)
Level of Peer Bullying Experienced	Time	556.684	1	556.684	3.677	.073
	Time*Group	2280.649	1	2280.649	15.063	**.001**
	Error	2422.476	16	151.405		

When the results of the two-way ANOVA test were examined, it was observed that the level of bullying victimization did not change over time. However, when the experimental and control groups were formed, it was observed that the victimization level of the experimental group differed significantly in a meaningful way. To examine in which sub-dimensions this differentiation occurred, different analyses are needed.

Table 6

ANOVA Test Results for Pre-Application and Post-Application Sub-dimensions of the Experimental Group According to the Time*Group Variable.

Dimension	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.(p)	N^2
Physically	28.171	1	28.171	2.347	.145	.025
Verbal	87.044	1	87.044	11.317	.004	.414
Insulation	94.303	1	94.303	15.077	.001	.500
Rumor	162.337	1	162.337	14.603	.002	.477
Damage to Property	113.778	1	113.778	44.507	.129	.138

When the sub-dimensions of the scale applied were compared with the pre-test and post-test results, significant differences were detected in the experimental group participants, except for physical bullying and damage to property, and no difference was observed in the results of the control group, except for spreading rumors.

Discussion

Group counseling based on solution-focused short-term counseling is used in various fields (Dielman & Franklin, 1998; Franklin et al., 2001; Franklin et al., 2008; Gingerich & Wabeke, 2001). One of these areas is its use in schools. According to Meydan (2013), solution-focused psychological studies in schools seem to be effective. When the literature is examined, within the framework of available resources, group counseling based on solution-focused short-term counseling of peer bullying was carried out at secondary and high school levels, but not at primary school level. This constitutes a limitation as the studies cannot be generalized to all levels. At this point, it is thought that group counseling based on solution-focused counseling for the victims of peer bullying contributes to the literature.

In this study, the effect of group counseling based on solution-focused short-term counseling on the level of peer bullying of primary school students who are bullied is examined. When the results of the research are examined, there is a significant difference in other dimensions, except for physical bullying, in the participants in the study. When the results of the control group are examined, no significant difference is observed in any sub-dimension except for spreading rumors. When the results of the analysis in the control group are examined, it is seen that this difference differs in the negative direction, that is, in the form of an increase in rumor spreading. According to these results, group counseling based on solution-focused counseling significantly reduces the level of peer bullying of primary school students who are bullied.

According to Selekman (2005), solution-focused short-term counseling is one of the appropriate choices for families because families want quick solutions to their children's psychological problems and do not want to see their

children experience emotional difficulties. When the process is examined in terms of children, it is argued that long-term psychological counseling sessions cannot be supported by the cognitive development of their children, and therefore an effective result cannot be obtained (Corcoran, 1998; Doğan, 2000). This idea is supported by MacDonald's (2007) view that traditional counseling practices and techniques for adolescents will be limited. In addition, it is presented in the literature that the process of gaining awareness and insight becomes very difficult for a person who cannot reach the abstract operational stage (Birdsall & Miller, 2002). Solution-focused counseling, on the other hand, overcomes this limitation because it is action-focused. In addition, since the technical language is not preferred in the solution-focused counseling process (Lethem, 2002; MacDonald, 2007), it is thought that it will be easy to apply to primary school students. Group counseling based on solution-focused counseling applied here is the strength of the study by overcoming these limitations. On the other hand, it has been observed that solution-focused counseling programs have positive effects on the strengths of the clients. In researches in this direction, the counselor programs based on solution-focused counseling have; It has been found that it increases self-esteem and self-efficacy (Kvarme et al., 2013), hope levels (Smock, 2009), and academic achievement (Daki & Save, 2010).

Young and Holdorf (2003) revealed that the effect of solution-focused short-term approach on bullying is effective at primary and secondary school levels. When the literature is examined, it is seen that solution-focused short-term approach-based group counseling programs; in reducing peer bullying in high school students (Çitemel, 2014) and secondary school students (Banks, 1999), in reducing psychological symptoms and cyber-victimization in adolescents exposed to cyberbullying (Özbay, 2017), in increasing adolescents' coping skills against peer bullying (Öztürk Çopur & Kubilay, 2022), making victim students feel happier and safer (Kvarme et al., 2013), reducing behavioral problems in the classroom (Franklin et al., 2001, Franklin et al., 2008) and increasing academic achievement (Newsome, 2004). At the same time, according to Gingerich and Wabeke's (2001) study, solution-focused short-term counseling practices carried out in schools have effective results in different mental health areas such as substance use, attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, conduct disorders, anxiety and depression. Due to the results of the research, the outputs of the applied group work are supported by the literature.

This study was carried out with data obtained from 95 students in a primary school in Denizli city center. At this point, it creates a limitation in the generalization phase of the data. The study should be re-applied in different sample groups and the results should be examined. In this way, a more comprehensive result can be obtained. The applied group psychological counseling program covers children between the ages of 9-11. Children in this age group can very quickly accept what the group leader says and accordingly reflect this on the test results. In order to avoid this situation, it is a limitation for the study that people do not internalize what they have learned in the group counseling practice by conducting a follow-up session. Due to its structure, solution-focused counseling does not aim to bring about a structural change in people. At this point, although the group counseling work gives meaningful results, it is not known what kind of result it will show in the future (Selekman, 2010). At this point, longitudinal studies are needed. Bullying is associated with physical violence, verbal violence, isolation, damaging property, spreading rumors and cyberbullying. The scale applied in the research measures other sub-dimensions except for cyberbullying (Monks & Smith, 2006; Olweus, 1999). At this point, the field of cyberbullying, which has been

popular in recent years, is not within the scope of the scale. Group counseling sessions based on solution-focused counseling about cyberbullying can be prepared and applied to students of similar ages. This study has important implications for school counselors. Students who are exposed to and practice bullying at schools can be identified by psychological counselors and used to cope with this problem in schools. Thus, preventive studies can be applied regarding the problems caused by students who are bullied or who practice bullying.

Ethic

We declare that the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Author Contributions

This article was written with the joint contributions of four authors.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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