



# AN INVESTIGATION OF BULLYING ACCORDING TO CLASSROOM CLIMATE<sup>1</sup>

(ZORBALIK EĞİLİMLERİNİN SINIF İKLİMİNE GÖRE İNCELENMESİ)

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate three types of students' perceptions of classroom climate in primary schools: Bullies, victims, and students uninvolved in bullying. The sample of this research was based on three state schools in Avcılar, Istanbul. Out of all 4th and 5th grade students in these schools, 29 students uninvolved in bullying (18.5 %), 91 victims (58 %), and 37 bullies (23.5 %) participated in this study (N=157). For qualitative data, 15 students from each group as identified below –in total 45 students- were interviewed. The results of the study showed that students uninvolved in bullying had a more positive perception of classroom climate than victims and bullies. These students uninvolved in bullying perceived their classroom teacher as a partner who relaxed and supported them and who shared his own concerns with them. Also, they tended to establish more positive relationships with their teachers. As for students' perceptions of classroom climate, students uninvolved in bullying and bullies stated that they were happy in their classrooms when compared to victims.

**Keywords:** bullying, violence, classroom climate, primary school students

## ÖZ

Bu araştırmada ilköğretim sınıflarında zorbalık eğilimi olan, zorbalığa maruz kalan ve zorbalık olaylarına karışmayan öğrencilerin sınıf iklimini algılama biçimleri incelenmiştir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu İstanbul ili Avcılar İlçe Milli Eğitim Müdürlüğü'ne bağlı devlet okulları içinden 3 ilköğretim okulunun 4. ve 5. sınıflarına devam eden zorbalık olaylarına karışmayan 29 (%18,5), zorba davranışlara maruz kalan 91 (% 58) ve zorba davranışta bulunan 37 (% 23,5) öğrenci olmak üzere toplam 157 öğrenci oluşturmuştur. Nitel verilerin toplanması amacıyla belirlenen çalışma grubundan zorbalığa karışmayan, zorbalık eğilimi olan ve zorbalığa maruz kalan olarak belirlenen gruplardan 15 öğrenci olmak üzere toplam 45 öğrenci ile görüşme yapılmıştır. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre zorbalığa karışmayan öğrencilerin maruz kalan ve zorbalık eğilimi olan öğrencilere göre daha olumlu sınıf iklimi algılarına sahip oldukları görülmüştür. Bu öğrencilerin öğretmenlerini daha fazla rahatlatıcı, paylaşımcı ve destekleyici olarak gördüklerini ve öğretmenleri ile daha olumlu ilişkiler kurma eğiliminde olduğu görülmüştür. Öğrencilerin, sınıf içi ortamı algılamasına ait görüşleri incelendiğinde; zorbalığa karışmayan ve zorba eğilimi olan öğrenciler zorbalığa maruz kalan öğrencilere göre sınıflarında daha mutlu olduklarını ifade ettikleri görülmüştür.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Zorbalık, şiddet, sınıf iklimi, ilköğretim öğrencileri.

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## INTRODUCTION

Bullying at schools has been considered an important problem in educational settings. As well as negative consequences on students' academic, emotional and social development during the school period, negative experiences in this period may lead to unwanted problems in students' adolescence in the long run. Studies have shown that bullying incidents at school have widely been seen in Turkey as in other countries (Kapıcı, 2004; Kartal and Bilgin, 2007; Kepenekci and Çınkır, 2006; Koç, 2006; Pişkin, 2003; Yurtal and Cenkseven, 2005).

Bullying can be defined as continuous negative behaviours by one or more students on another student (Olweus, 1993). It covers aggressive behaviours and happens among people who have verbal or indirect superiority over others (Rigby, 2004). Bullying incidents may affect students in various ways. When students are bullied, they struggle with difficulties and as they are damaged, they may suffer from this. They may be unhappy about coming to school and may lose their self-confidence. Unhappiness may influence their concentration and learning. Some students may suffer from stomachache, headache, nightmares and feel anxious. Students who are faced with long-term bullying may tend to feel more depressed when compared to adults. Also, other students observing bullying incidents around themselves may learn that bullying is the best way to acquire what one wants in a short way. Therefore, bullying may become widespread and may be regarded as a normal behaviour (Sharp and Smith, 1994).

There are research findings showing the correlation between school/classroom climate and bullying. Yoneyama and Rigby (2006) found that students involved in bullying as bullies or victims found the school/classroom climate less positive than other students. Roland and Galloway (2002) investigated a strong correlation among teachers' classroom management ways, social structure of the classroom and bullying. They also added that there was a lack of studies related to this issue.

The term "classroom climate" was first put forth by Moos (1974; in Yoneyama and Rigby, 2006). It is the main structure of students' learning environment where knowledge, skills and attitudes in line with students' education and social developments are acquired. Though researchers have not agreed about what a positive classroom climate is, it can be defined as a constructive surrounding where students are individually supported and respected by teachers, and where positive relationships are established with other students in classrooms. Teachers and students' general profiles are regarded as factors significantly contributing to classroom climate (Yoneyama and Rigby, 2006).

According to the results of a study focusing on teachers' changing role in establishing a response to school violence, teachers stated that violence at

school disrupted normal classroom functioning and students caused discipline problems. Also, they added that they had an active role in protecting students from violence (Patterson, 2006). Learning about bullies' perceptions of school climate, knowing about their expectations, some classroom adaptations may be effective in reducing bullying incidents at schools. A positive classroom climate is important for establishing not only a reliable student community but also character development (Garrity et al., 1997).

Bullying incidents at primary schools may be seriously destructive for both bullies and victims, and the whole class. Therefore; this study investigates classroom climate perceptions of the victims, bullies and students uninvolved in bullying.

## **METHOD**

### **The Model of the Research**

A descriptive survey design was used in this study aiming to examine classroom climate perceptions of students from three different groups: bullies, victims and students uninvolved in bullying. Complementary perspectives of both quantitative and qualitative research techniques were taken into account and both techniques were used simultaneously. Quantitative techniques were preferred for students' classroom climate perceptions and qualitative techniques were used for teacher-student interaction, peer interaction and understanding classroom climate.

### **Participants**

The participants were decided upon in two steps. In the first step, the random sampling technique was used and three state primary schools in Istanbul, Avcılar were determined. Out of four hundred and eighty eight 4th and 5th grade students in these three schools, 29 students uninvolved in bullying (18.5 %), 91 victims (58 %), and 37 bullies (23.5 %) participated in the study (N=157). In determining the groups, the Survey of Bullying Behaviours was administered and then students' marks according to physical, verbal, emotional and sexual bully types were added up and their scores were obtained.

Students having victim behaviour score and bully behaviour score were zero were categorized as uninvolved in bullying.

For the qualitative data of the study, the over-sampling method was used and the form of "who's this?" was administered to all participants. According to the results of this, victims, bullies and the students uninvolved in bullying group were identified. Also, their actual scores were taken into account as well as their classroom teachers' feedback. As a result, 15 students from each group; totally 45 students, were chosen and interviewed.

### Data Collection Tools

In order to differentiate bullies, victims and those uninvolved in bullying, a survey of bullying behaviours developed by the researchers and the form “Who is this?” were used. In addition to these, teachers were interviewed. In order to see how classroom climate was perceived, the Inventory of Classroom Climate, developed by Şeker (2000), and semi-structured interview forms were used.

**The Survey of Bullying Behaviours:** A survey was developed by the researchers in order to determine bullies, victims and uninvolved students in the classroom. The survey developed by Çinkır & Kepenekçi (2003) and Yurtal & Cenkseven (2005) were used as main references. Then, the 46-item-survey used in this study was prepared. The survey was administered to sixty 4th grade students and sixty-eight 5th grade students. Some questions were revised according to the feedback given by the students. Then the questionnaire was finalized and readministered to the same students.

In the first part of the survey, there are 4 categories in each of which there are 23 items about physical actions (pushing, kicking, etc.), verbal (naming, mocking, etc.), emotional (excluding from the group, damaging one’s belongings, etc.) and sexual actions (using sexual words and expressions, etc.). In the second part of the questionnaire, the questions are about which of the behaviours in the same category were performed and how often they were performed. The survey has a Likert scale. Each respondent is asked to rate the choices given as “every day”, “every week”, and every month”. The survey results were used to identify the participant groups.

**The Form “Who is this?”:** The “Who’s this?” technique gives information about how people feel about each other and how they perceive each other in a group whose members know one another (Yeşilyaprak, 2002). In this research, this technique was used to determine the characteristics of the participants as victim, bullies and those uninvolved in bullying. The form was organized by the researchers themselves. The related literature was reviewed as well as experts’ suggestions in deciding the questions to include in the form. The questions in the form were organized in such a way that they directly reflected physical, verbal or sexual bullying.

**The Inventory of Classroom Climate:** This inventory was developed by Şeker (2000) in order to learn about school climate. It has a Likert scale and 24 items. For each item, the participants choose one of the face expressions as “a smiling face”, “an angry face”, or “a neutral face”. The internal validity coefficient of the inventory was  $r=0.87$  and the relationship of each item with other items except itself was between  $r=0,85$  and  $0,93$ . Bilgiç (2007) administered this inventory to sixty-eight students. He found the

internal validity to be  $r=0,83$  and the relationship of the each item with other items except itself to be between  $r=0,79$  and  $0,88$ .

***The Form of Student Interview:*** This was developed by the researchers themselves. First, the related literature and sources about classroom management and classroom climate were reviewed. Then, relevant components of classroom climate, teachers, and students were taken into account and interview questions were prepared. In the interview form, there were questions about how they felt in their classroom and how they perceived their classroom atmosphere, such as in the following: What kind of a classroom do you expect?, Are you happy in your class?, If not, why are not you happy?, How well is your communication with your friends? How do your friends behave towards you?, What does your teacher do when you overcome a difficult task or you behave well? Two students were interviewed by using the draft version of the interview form and then the form was finalized.

### **Data Collection**

The data were collected in the 2006-2007 academic year with the researcher's active involvement in the classroom. The students were given "the Survey of Bullying Behaviours", "the Inventory of Classroom Climate", the form "Who's this?" and "The Personal Information Form" respectively on different days. Before the administration of the inventories, the students were informed about the inventories. They were told that the collected data would be used by the researchers, not by school teachers or family members or the school administration. After the administration of these data collection tools, the students were put into one of three groups as bullies, victims or uninvolved.

In determining the groups, the data based on the Survey of Bullying Behaviours were first used. Then the results of the "Who's this?" form were evaluated and groups were re-arranged accordingly. Lastly, the students who were chosen according to the results of the Inventory of Bullying Behaviours and the form "Who's this?" were decided upon. The final list of students was discussed in the light of class teachers' opinions and the students to be interviewed were chosen. For qualitative data, 15 students from each group, totally 45 students, were interviewed. The interviews were audio-recorded after the interviewees were informed. Each interview session took 15 minutes.

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analysed through one-way variance analysis in the SPSS program (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

The audio-recorded interview sessions were transferred to a computer and transcribed. Then, the transcribed files were coded and common points

were found and categories emerged. The pre-determined codes were relevantly organized. Some excerpts were directly taken from the actual data in order to support the researcher's point of view and to reflect the participants' perspectives. In this research, the letter "K" and a sequence number was given to those involved. For example; K1 means the first uninvolved student. For victims, the letter "M" and a sequence number was given. Finally, for bullies, the letter "Z" and a sequence number was given.

## FINDINGS

### 1. Findings about the perceptions of victims, bullies, and uninvolved students on the classroom climate

The one-way ANOVA was conducted on the data to test if there was a meaningful difference between the classroom climate score averages of victims, bullies and uninvolved students. The results are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Results of one-way ANOVA on classroom climate scores of victims, bullies and uninvolved students.**

Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	Sd	Source of variance	KT	Sd	KO	F	p
Uninvolved students	29	66.24	4.3	Between groups	238.592	2	119.296		
Victims	91	63.68	5.14	Within groups	4456.555	153	29.128	4.096	.019
Bullies	37	62.45	6.6						
Total	157	63.86	5.49	Total	4695.147	155			

As seen in Table 1, the results of the one way ANOVA analysis showed a meaningful difference in terms of the classroom climate total scores between the groups ( $F=4.096$ ,  $p<.05$ ). LSD test of Post-Hoc analysis was used to find out between which of the groups the difference was. According to the results of this analysis, the difference both between the victims and the uninvolved students ( $p<.05$ ), and the difference between the bullies and the uninvolved students are meaningful. According to the results of the analysis, it is found that the uninvolved students' perceptions of the classroom climate are more positive than the victims and the bullies.

## 2. Findings about the views of victims, bullies, and uninvolved students on classroom climate

In this part, the findings about the views of the victims, bullies, and uninvolved students on the classroom climate are given under three headings:

- 2.1. Teacher-student interaction,
- 2.2. Student-student interaction,
- 2.3. Views of the classroom climate

### 2.1. Views about Teacher-student Interaction

The findings about the teacher-student interaction of the uninvolved, the victims and the bullies are presented under two headings, teacher-student interaction and the expectations of the teacher.

**Teacher-Student Interaction:** When the victims, the bullies and the uninvolved students were asked about teacher-student interaction, all of the uninvolved students said that they communicate with their teachers easily in the lesson and most of them (11) said that they communicate with their teachers easily both in the lesson and out of the lesson. Most of the victims (10) said that they communicate with their teachers easily in the lesson and three tenths of the victims said that they communicate with the teacher easily both in the lesson and out of the lesson. 5 of the victims said that they hesitate to communicate with the teacher because of their shyness out of the lesson and in the lesson at times. While 4 of the bullies said that they hesitate to communicate with the teacher because of their shyness out of the lesson and in the lesson at times, 3 of them said that they feel frightened to communicate with the teacher because they think that the teacher will get angry with them.

Most of the uninvolved students (12) said that their teacher treats them in a relaxing, sharing and supportive way and makes them feel important; half of the victims said that their teacher treats them in a relaxing, sharing and supportive way and makes them feel important. 8 of the bullies said that their teacher treats them in a relaxing, sharing and supportive way and makes them feel important. Some sample student statements are given below.

*“I ask a question or about the topic I didn’t understand during the lesson. My teacher explains in a way that I can understand. S/he listens to me when I don’t understand and answers my questions. I share my personal problems with my teacher. I trust my teacher. S/he comforts me. She tries to do his or her best to solve my problem ...”*

*“Yes, my teacher answers my questions. I talk to my teacher when I have problems with my friends. My teacher talks to my friends. S/he comes to*

*my birthday party if s/he is free. S-he says “well-done” when I do something right”*

*Expectations of the teacher:* When the victims, the bullies and the uninvolved students were asked about their expectations from the teacher; 9 of the uninvolved said that they don't want to change their teachers, 4 of the victims said that they don't want to change their teachers, 3 of them said that they want their teachers not to get angry with them and to punish them only when they are guilty, 3 of them said that they want their teacher to love them more, 1 of them said that he wants his teacher not to be angry in the lesson and to punish only the guilty student not the whole class. While 3 of the bullies said that they don't want to change their teachers, 4 students said that they want their teachers to love them more and to punish them only when they are guilty and 2 students said that they want their teachers to love them more, there are single students who said that s/he wants the teacher to say “well-done” all the time, not to let them have breaks late, not to discriminate, to help them all the time and to be angry less often. Some sample student statements are given below.

*“There is no reason to change my teacher. She is really favourable for me”*

*“I want my teacher to love me more. I think she loves some of my classmates more (saying the names of some of his classmates)”*.

*“I want my teacher to say “well-done” to me all the time. I want him to love me more and caress me.”*

## **2.2. Views about Student-student Interaction**

The findings about student-student interaction of the victims, the bullies and uninvolved students are presented under two headings, friendship and reciprocal attitudes and behaviours.

**Friendship:** When victims, bullies and uninvolved students were asked about friendship, all of the uninvolved students said that they are accepted by all of their classmates in and out of the class activities, they are taken care of by their classmates and they collaborate with their classmates, and almost all of them (14 students) said that they shared with their classmates.

6 of the victims said that they are accepted by all of their classmates all the time, 2 of them said that they are accepted by all of their classmates at times, and 2 of them said that they are accepted by some of their classmates. 6 of the victims said that they were sharing with all of their classmates all the time and 7 of them said that they were sharing with some of their classmates.

6 of the bullies said that they are accepted by all of their classmates all the time, 3 of them said that they are accepted by all of their classmates at

times, and 3 of them said that they are accepted by some of their classmates. 8 of the bullies said that they were sharing with some of their classmates. Some sample student statements are given below.

*“My classmates always include me in their games if their games don’t go wrong. We form groups when our teacher gives projects or performance works. My classmates include me in their groups whenever I want. When I have problems, my classmates take care of me and ask about my problem. Most of my classmates come to my birthday party or special occasions.”*

*“My classmates include me in their games. They also include me in their work groups because I’m good at some subjects. Only my close friends take care of me when I’m unhappy. Everybody defends me when I am wronged by somebody else. Only two people come to my birthday party. I think they call me when I am too ill.”*

*“If I don’t include a friend in my game, s/he also doesn’t include me in his or her games. They include me in their work groups. They don’t mind this. Only my best friend takes care of me when I am unhappy. They defend me. They don’t protect me against my friends. Because there are some students who don’t love me...”*

**Mutual Attitudes and Behaviours:** When the victims, the bullies and uninvolved students were asked about their mutual attitudes and behaviours with their friends, most of the uninvolved students (13 students) stated that their friends didn’t complain about them to their teachers, they didn’t fight with their friends because they didn’t treat their friends badly. While 10 of the students said that their friends didn’t mock them, 5 students said that they joked with their friends but they weren’t unhappy with this. More than half of the students (9 students) said that they adopted all of their classmates and some of them (5 students) said that they adopted most of their classmates. All of the non-bullies stated that they behaved friendly to their friends, and so did their friends.

Most of the victims (14 students) said that their friends complained about them to their teachers and they fought with their friends when they behaved badly. While 11 of the victims said that their friends mocked them, 3 of the students said that their friends rarely mocked them. More than half of the students (9 students) said that they adopted some of their classmates, some of the students (5 students) said that they adopted all of their classmates, few of them (2) said that they adopted only one of their classmates. 1 of the victims said that all of their friends behaved friendly to them, 2 of them said that most of their friends behaved friendly to them and 10 of them said that some of their friends behaved friendly to them.

All of the bullies said that all of their classmates complained about them to their teachers and they fought with their friends when they behaved badly, they didn’t include them in their games or they got angry. 11 of these students

said that their friends mocked them. More than half of the students (11 students) said that they adopted some of their classmates, 5 students said that they adopted all of their classmates. 4 of the bullies said that all of their friends behaved friendly to them, 9 of them said that some of their classmates behaved friendly to them. Some sample student statements are given below.

*“...Yes, they complain about me. For example, they complain about me when I fight. They mock me, they use a nickname as lazy for me but I won't tell you what they call me. I don't fight with them. I love four or five of my friends because they don't mock me very often. I love nobody except for these five or six friends. They make me sad...”*

### **3.3. Views about the classroom environment**

The findings of the victims, the bullies and uninvolved students' views about the classroom environment are presented under two headings; perception of the classroom environment and expectations of the classroom environment.

***Perception of the Classroom Environment:*** When the victims, the bullies and uninvolved students were asked about their perceptions of the classroom environment, most of the uninvolved (13 students) said that they were happy in their classroom because they loved their teacher. All of the uninvolved students (15 students) said that they were happy in their classroom because they loved their friends and 14 of them said that they didn't want to be in another classroom. 2 of the victims said that they were happy in their classroom because they loved their teacher, 1 student said that he had some special friends in the classroom, 4 students said that they were happy in their classroom because they had got used to it, and 14 of them said that they didn't want to be in another classroom. Some sample student statements are given below.

*“I'm happy in my classroom because I have good friends. I have a good teacher so I love my teacher. I didn't want to be in another classroom. Because I love my classroom.”*

*“I'm not happy. But I don't want to go to another classroom. I love my teacher very much. There is no reason for my not feeling happy.”*

*“I'm happy in my classroom. My teacher explains the subjects in a way I can understand. I also have some friends that I love. No, I don't want to be in another classroom. Maybe they would treat me badly in another classroom.”*

***Expectations of Classroom Environment:*** When the victims, the bullies and uninvolved students were asked about their expectations of the classroom environment, all of the uninvolved mentioned expectations about

physical features of the classroom. Besides this, most of the students (10 students) mentioned expectations of classroom relationships. 1 of the victims mentioned expectations of physical features, some of them (7 students) mentioned expectations of the in-classroom relationships and 4 of them mentioned their personal expectations. Most of the bullies (10 students) mentioned expectations of physical features, 4 of them mentioned expectations of in-class relationships and 3 of them mentioned their personal expectations.

## **DISCUSSION**

In this research, a meaningful difference was seen between the bullies, victims and uninvolved students' perceptions of school climate. Uninvolved students had a more positive classroom climate perception than both bullies and victims. Also, in the study, the students' points of view were evaluated in relation to classroom climate in terms of three aspects, namely teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, and the perceptual dimensions of the classroom environment. These results supported the quantitative findings of the research as well. In interviews, uninvolved students expressed their positive perspective about classroom climate. However; victims showed a tendency towards a negative viewpoint when compared to the uninvolved and bullies.

The findings in the related literature indicated that victims encounter more problems in their school activities. Students being bullied at school cannot motivate themselves in school activities and they attend school unwillingly or they do not want to go to school (Olweus, 1993 and 1995; Hoover, Oliver and Hazler, 1992; Eslea and Smith, 1998). Students being bullied are generally anxious and sensitive children. In addition, they try to prove themselves in their groups and lack self-confidence (Forero, McLellan and Rissel 1999; Gofin, Palti and Gordon 2002; Muscari, 2002; Eslea, Menesini and Morita 2004; Rigby, 2004; Alikasifoglu, et al. 2007). The findings of this research are also in line with this result. It cannot be expected of victims that they will feel confident and happy at school.

A review of the related literature showed a correlation between bullying/aggressive behaviours and school environment/class level. In explaining bullying and aggressive behaviours, personal and environmental variables were found more important than school and classroom variables, but classroom variables were found more important than school variables (Mooij, 1998). The research findings by Barth et al. (2004) showed a direct relationship between the social structure of the class and bullying behaviours. Also, classroom management and class social structure were found to be directly related to bullying other children in many ways.

The interviews with students indicated that uninvolved students

communicated with their teachers more easily both in classroom and out of classroom when compared to bullies and victims. They also added that their teachers treated them in a supportive, relaxing and sharing manner, so they felt as if they were important individuals. However, victims and bullies said that they did not want their teacher to get angry with them and to punish them only when they were guilty. In addition, they said that they wanted their teacher to love them more. It was found that uninvolved students tended to establish positive relationships with their friends in comparison to victims and bullies. However; victims and bullies had more problems in their communication with their friends.

According to Moos (1974, in Yoneyama and Rigby, 2006), the classroom climate should provide an environment where students acquire knowledge and skills about their educational and social development. A positive classroom climate guides students to think that they are individually supported and respected. Moreover, it should be a supportive atmosphere where there are positive relationships. Especially in the primary school period, conflicts in classroom atmosphere have been known to cause emotional and behavioural problems in both male and female children's development (Somersalo, Solantaus and Almqvist, 2002). Students who were faced with peer bullying were found to avoid participating in classroom activities and in line with this, their academic achievements decreased (Buhs and Ladd, 2001). In a study conducted with students who had just started elementary school, a decrease in academic achievement, an avoidance of school and a feeling of loneliness were seen in students who were faced with peer bullying. Though peer bullying has been accepted as a temporary experience, students' avoidance of school has been found to be long-lasting (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1996).

In conclusion, it can be said that school climate is an important variable in defining victims and bullies. The perception of victims and bullies about the behaviours of their teachers and classmates is different from the perception of uninvolved students. Regarding this, it can be advised that the teacher should be supported in how they can overcome bullying and how they can develop positive classroom climate strategies. School counsellors may organize social skills training sessions on how appropriate behaviours can be developed instead of bullying behaviours. Lastly, the life quality at school can be increased so that students can spend a more enjoyable time at school.

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