

WCES 2012

The effect of peer bullying education on adolescents' knowledge, attitudes and behaviors towards bullying

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Abstract

The study was of quasi-experimental design. It was conducted to determine the effect of peer bullying education given to adolescents on their knowledge, attitude and behaviors. Adolescents between 12-15 years of age who are all studying at a primary school, 141 adolescent were included in training. The 26 questions were asked to adolescents that measure knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. Training lasted for 5 weeks and meeting was held with students one hour each week. Increasing in knowledge, attitude and behaviour scores of adolescents before and after education were found statistically significant. When viewed in scores of knowledge between the classes, knowledge score was statistically increased in all grades. However, in 6th grades scores were lower compared to the other classes.

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Keywords: peer bullying, peer bullying education, school health nursing, adolescents

1. Introduction

Peer bullying is one or more students' acting negatively to another student such as repeatedly, intentionally and harmfully disturbing him/her (Olweus, 1993). Bullying is defined as trying to gain power via aggression and aiming to repeatedly pulling the victim down socially, emotionally and physically (Smokowski, & Kopasz, 2005, Vanderbilt, & Augustyn, 2010).

Bullying is an important problem for adolescents in the world. In a study conducted with 53.2494 adolescents from 40 countries, it was observed that 26% of them are involved in bullying. Bullying involvement exceeds geographical and cultural limits. In these countries, it was observed that bullying involvement is around between 28.7% and 36.4% among adolescents who are 11, 13, and 15 years of age. It was found that boys are more likely to bully than girls, and girls are more likely to be the victims of bullying than boys (Craig et al.; 2009). In other studies, it was shown that bullies and victims are mostly boys who are between 11 and 15 years of age (Chapell et al.; 2006, Frisen, et al.; 2007, Pişkin, 2006). In studies conducted in Turkey, it was identified that 6% of students have bullied and 35% of students have been repeatedly bullied (Pişkin, 2006).

Bullying, which is a global problem, is increasing rapidly and it affects both bully and victim physically, psychologically, socially and with respect to educational matters negatively. It causes many negative occurrences from short-term happiness and depression to death. Studies, which investigated bullying behaviors in terms of developmental and socio-cultural factors (e.g., personality, gender, age, location and time, etc...), identified that bullying has many negative effects on children who bully and children who are the victims of bullying with respect to physical, psychological, social and educational matters (Smokowski & Kopasz 2005, Vanderbilt & Augustyn 2010). Decrease in self-esteem, lack of concentration, learning difficulty, unwillingness to go to school and psychosomatic problems have been observed in victims (Smokowski, & Kopasz, 2005, Jacobson et al.; 2011). Problems such as hyperactivity, deficiency in attention and depression have also been observed in children who bully (Smokowski, & Kopasz, 2005, Vanderbilt, & Augustyn, 2010). Headache, stomach upset and insomnia are physical problems which are commonly observed among bullies and victims (Beaty, & Alexeyev, 2008). Children who bully continue to attain what they want by bullying unless they are thought to oppose.

Students reported that teachers either did not intervene at all or intervene little to bullying events happening in school. It was determined that teachers don't realize some bullying events, they accept them as normal or they respond inconsistently to bullying events (Beaty, & Alexeyev, 2008).

Since school bullying negatively affects children's physical and psychological health, school health nurses together with other staff in school have active responsibilities in generating and applying bullying prevention program (Arslan-Özdiñer, & Savaşer, 2008). School nurses have important roles in caring of bullying victims due to nurses can have a good communication with students. Since school nurses do not take part in discipline committee students tell nurses their secrets more comfortably. Therefore, nurses can help bully and victim more when a bullying event happens at school (Arslan-Özdiñer, & Savaşer, 2008, Karstadt, & Woods, 1999, <http://school-nursing.org/bullyindex.html>, <http://www.nasn.org/Default.aspx?tabid=279>).

Various studies suggest that when intervening to bullying the whole school system should be covered. For studies conducted in schools, adolescents need education to increase their knowledge about bullying and to change their attitudes and behaviors positively.

The aim of the study was to determine the effect of peer bullying education given to adolescents on their knowledge, attitude and behaviors.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and consent

The study was conducted with pre-test, post-test without control semi-experimental design in a primary school in Istanbul, Turkey. Written consent was obtained from County's National Educational Headship and from the director of the school. Study population consisted of 161 students with the age of between 12 and 15. Study was completed with volunteer 141 adolescents whose parents gave written consent form. 53.9% of the adolescents were females and 46.1% were males. Mean age of the adolescents were 13.0 ± 0.8 and 29.1% of them were attending 6th grade, 44.0% were attending 7th grade and 27.0% were attending 8th grade. Before education, 28.5% of the adolescents reported that they were bullied within the past months and 71.5% reported that they weren't bullied.

2.2. Instruments

Demographic Questionnaire

Questionnaire form consisted of 10 questions including asking information related to adolescent's gender, grade, witnessing violence in the family, exposure to violence, witnessing violence at school and exposed to violence by teachers.

2.3. Peer Bullying Education Content

To provide positive progress on peer bullying knowledge, attribute and behaviors peer bullying education was planned. Cognitive, sensorial and behavioral objectives of the education were determined. Education content and question format which were related to those targets were prepared.

Peer Bullying Education Assessment Question Form

Question form, which measures adolescents' knowledge, attitude and behaviors related to peer bullying was developed by the researcher via related literature and asking experts' opinions (Kartal, & Bilgin, 2007, Yurtal, & Cenkseven, 2006). The form included total of 26 questions; 7 multiple choice questions that assess knowledge and that identify what bullying means, types of bullying, differences between normal peer conflict and peer bullying, where bullying occurs, 15 multiple choice questions that measure attitude and that are related to bully's and victims opinions about bullying, and 4 multiple choice and example event questions that measure behaviour and that determines what adolescents would do when they witnessed or were involved in bullying.

6 experts' opinions were asked to assess the validations of education content and scope and content of the question form. Experts were asked whether education content and question form are appropriate for objectives by choosing one alternative from "appropriate" "a little bit correction" "a lot of correction" "not appropriate" options and were asked to write their suggestions, if any, for each step. Based on experts' suggestions education objectives, content and question form were prepared.

Procedure

Peer bullying education lasted 5 weeks and weekly meetings, each of which took one hour, were conducted with students. The content of these meetings can be summarized in this way:

First session:

Basic information about peer bullying; informing about the definition of bullying, who bully/bullies, reasons for bullying, types of bullying, characteristics of bullies and victims, etc...

Second session:

In order to change the attitude and behaviour related to bullying; determining rules to be obeyed in the classroom, writing mottos for desired behaviors in the classroom and hanging up these mottos to the classroom, monitoring of the decisions and explaining their influence on decreasing bullying.

Third session:

Identifying what witnesses and victims should do in response to bullying, and teaching tactics that they could use (e.g., asking for help, self-defence, kidding, avoiding).

Forth session:

Identifying how people who are exposed to peer bullying receive help and how they can put the tactics in practice that they can use when they are bullied.

Fifth session:

Issues such as sharing of experiences about bullying and asking for a response to the question “what could be done in this situation?” were introduced.

Education assessment form together with question form was applied to adolescents a week before the education and two weeks after the education.

2.4. Data analysis

Frequencies of socio-demographic variables were investigated. Adolescents’ responses to questions measuring knowledge, attitude, and behaviour were assessed separately out of a score of 10. The data were recorded to SPSS 13 program and pre-post education score differences were analyzed by Paired Samples t Statistics and differences between grades were analyzed by analyses of variance. Pot-hoc analysis was conducted to identify the group causing the difference.

3.Results

The effect of peer bullying education on adolescents’ knowledge, attitude and behaviors was evaluated by applying question form before and after education (Table 1). Accordingly, adolescents’ post-education scores on three domains significantly increased as compared to their pre-education scores ($p < 0.05$).

Table 1 Comparison of pre and post education scores of adolescents’ knowledge, attitude and behaviour related to bullying (n=141)

Scores	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Statistics	
	$\bar{X} \pm sd$	$\bar{X} \pm sd$	t*	p
Knowledge	7.0 ± 2.4	8.1 ± 2.4	16.9	0.00
Attitude	7.6 ± 1.2	8.4 ± 1.6	5.1	0.00
Behavior	6.5 ± 2.6	7.4 ± 2.8	3.1	0.00

* Paired Samples t Statistics

It was shown in Table 2 that peer bullying education did not differ between gender and grade. While there was no difference between pre-test knowledge scores of females and males ($p > 0.05$), post-test knowledge scores of females were significantly higher than those of males ($p < 0.05$). Peer bullying attitude and behavior scores of females were significantly higher than those of males for both pre and post-test scores ($p < 0.05$).

While pre-test knowledge and attitude scores of students were different among grades ($p < 0.05$) behavior scores were not different ($p > 0.05$). While post-test knowledge scores of students were different among grades ($p < 0.05$) attitude and behavior scores were not different ($p > 0.05$). As a result of post-hoc analysis conducted to identify the group causing the difference, it was found that pre and post-test scores of 6th grade adolescents' knowledge, attitude and behaviors were lower than those of other grades.

Table 2. Distribution of Pre and Post-test Education Scores of Knowledge, Attitude and Behaviors related to Peer Bullying as a function of Gender and Grades

Gender	Pre-test scores			Post-test scores			
	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior	Knowledge	Attitude	Behavior	
	N	$\bar{X} \pm sd$	$\bar{X} \pm sd$	$\bar{X} \pm sd$	$\bar{X} \pm sd$	$\bar{X} \pm sd$	
Female	76	7.1 \pm 2.3	7.8 \pm 1.1	7.3 \pm 2.5	8.4 \pm 1.8	8.5 \pm 1.3	8.2 \pm 2.2
Male	65	6.8 \pm 2.5	7.4 \pm 1.2	5.6 \pm 2.5;	7.6 \pm 2.5	8.0 \pm 1.3	6.4 \pm 2.8
Statistics		t*=0.7; p=0.45	t*= 2.0; p=0.04	t*=4.0; p=0.00	t*=1.9; p=0.04	t*=2.3; p=0.02	t*=4.2 p=0.00
Grades							
6	41	6.3 \pm 2.4	7.1 \pm 1.3	6.6 \pm 2.9	6.8 \pm 2.6	8.0 \pm 1.4	7.6 \pm 3.0
7	62	7.0 \pm 2.2	7.7 \pm 1.1	6.6 \pm 2.2	8.5 \pm 1.8	8.4 \pm 1.4	7.3 \pm 2.5
8	38	7.6 \pm 2.4	8.0 \pm 1.0	6.3 \pm 3.0	8.8 \pm 1.8	8.5 \pm 1.0	7.1 \pm 2.5
Statistics		F**=2.7; p=0.04	F**=5.4; p=0.00	F**=0.1; p=0.89	F**=9.5; p=0.00	F**=1.3; p=0.35	F**=0.2; p=0.70

* Paired Samples t Statistics

** one-way ANOVA

4. Discussion

This study showed that peer bullying education program for adolescents, which consisted of five sessions, produced positive improvements for adolescents' knowledge, attitude and behaviors about bullying. Adolescents' score in all three domains significantly increased as compared to pre-education. In Turkey, it was shown that bullying education given to 1st grade of primary schools decreased bullying ratios to great extent (Kartal & Bilgin 2007).

In this research, there was a gender difference between peer education scores. Female adolescents, except from their scores on pre-test knowledge, scored higher on both pre- and post-tests of knowledge, attitude and behaviour areas than males. Studies conducted to determining peer bullying, it was shown that male students bully and are exposed to bullying more than female students (Kartal, & Bilgin, 2007, Akduman, 2010, Ayas, & Pişkin, 2011). In this study, it was also observed that male adolescents showed bullying behaviors more than female adolescents, and they scored less on knowledge and attitude areas.

In this research, 6th grades' pre-education knowledge and attitude scores were lower than those of 7th and 8th grades, and their pre-education behaviour scores were similar to those of 7th and 8th grades. After education, 6th grades' knowledge scores were lower than those of 7th and 8th grades, and their attitude and behaviors scores were similar to those of 7th and 8th grades. In other studies it was shown that being bully and victim were most common at the ages between 11 and 15 (Chapell et al.; 2006, Frisen et al.; 2007). With increasing age, expose to bullying decreases (Yurtal, & Cenkseven, 2006, Şırvanlı-Özen, 2006, Pişkin, 2006). In this research, it was also observed that before education knowledge and attitude scores were different among grades, after education only knowledge

scores of 6th grades were lower than those of other grades. There was an increase in knowledge scores of 6th grades after education. It can be said that knowledge, attitude and behaviour scores will increase with education.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

This study showed that peer bullying education can improve adolescents' knowledge, attitude and behaviors about bullying positively with five sessions. It was determined that male students had lower mean scores on knowledge, attitude and behaviour than female students, and 6th grades had lower scores on all domains than other grades for both pre- and post-education measures.

Based on these results, it can be suggested that education sessions designed to change male students' attitude and behaviors should be longer than those designed to change female students' attitude and behaviors, and that education sessions given to 6th grades should be longer than those given to other grades, and that programs designed to change attitude and behaviour should be developed in education.

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