GENDER DIFFERENCES BETWEEN TEENAGERS REGARDING VERBAL BULLYING: AN ALBANIAN CASE

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ABSTRACT

In the last twenty-five years, the phenomenon of verbal bullying has been identifies as an issue in Albania, and in the last ten years this issue seems to have grown into a real problem. This article has presented the general perception of teenage students about verbal bullying and has examined the differences that exist between boys and girls regarding verbal bullying. This phenomenon is handled starting from the students' perception of senior year in High School. The approach of this study was quantitative and the sample extraction is carried out through the stages sampling technique. For the data collection a Likert scale was used, with a Cronbah alpha coefficient reported of .71. The results from Mann-Whitney U test revealed significant difference between teenage boys and girls about verbal bullying. From the findings of this study, $p = .000$, $r = .60$, or 60 % of the variance of the perception of the students about verbal bullying is explained by gender, and boys are more exposed to verbal bullying than girls.

Keywords: Students, verbal bullying, gender, quantitative study.

INTRODUCTION

Verbal bullying is recognized as one of the growing problems facing Albanian schools today. In the news broadcasts, especially during the last years, are transmitted hundreds of cases of verbal violence which later have degenerated into physical violence, injury or, in some cases, this conflicts have resulted to death. This phenomenon is found in almost all cases in the adolescent boys.

There are few research studies regarding bullying in Albania, and, more specifically, regarding verbal bullying, and this paper seeks to fill this vacuum about verbal bullying across contexts that has been conducted with participants in some of high schools in Albania. The main aim of this paper is to present the perception of high schools senior year students about verbal bullying and to explore the existence of statistical difference of verbal bullying between adolescents, boys and girls.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Different authors define bullying in different ways. Thus, according to Herbert (1996), bullying is a way of being horrible and cruel to another child or group of children. It might happen just once or it can be repeated. The victim may find the behavior embarrassing, hurtful or humiliating, and be frightened or threatened by it. The bully may not realize this. Rigby (1996) defines bullying as a repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by more powerful person or group of persons.

Bullying seems to be a clash between the powerful and the powerless, but power is an inacceptable feature of many aspects of human behavior. Bullying can be viewed as part of a

normal process of socialization, in which the group establishes its identity, which is reinforced by the exclusion of others. The strength of the group lies in its sense of cohesion; without somebody being out-grouped – that is, visibly outside the group – the boundaries are hard to define. Whatever the reason, we take the view that we have bullies and victims in school, and that this is not a healthy situation. We need to provide a safe environment for all, and we need to question our solutions to the problem. The use of power to stop the bully may confirm to the bully how power can be used to intimidate the weak, and to suggest to victims that they need to be more powerful may leave them feeling even more powerless. The crucial element that we feel is overlooked in much of the research is the potentially proactive role of those who observe and collude (Robinson & Maines, 2008).
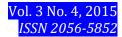
Bullying can be direct or indirect form. Direct bullying can be verbal— name-calling, insulting, teasing, or threatening— or it can be physical— pushing, tripping, hitting, or otherwise attempting to harm the victim physically. Indirect bullying, on the other hand, is less visible but just as painful to the victim. Indirect bullying is also called "relational" or social bullying. It includes social actions such as purposely excluding someone from a group or spreading rumors about someone (Murphy, 2009).

In this context, peer characteristics associated with bullying, have a great importance. According to Rodkin, 2010, children sort themselves and are sorted by adults into distinct groups in which children selectively affiliate with one another. Children within a group can be or become similar upon an unlimited array of attributes, but three classes of similarity (or homophile) are most common. First, children who behave similarly and/or share key goals and beliefs are more likely to be in the same group. Friendships and groups become established along concordances in aggression, shyness, depressive symptomlogy, academic motivation, and prosaically behavior among other characteristics (Haselager, Hartup, van Lieshout, & RiksenWalraven, 1998; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001 in Rodkin, 2009). Second, groups form along demographic lines, including gender, race and ethnicity, age, and social class. Third, groups form because of shared interests and pastimes, including participation in the same extracurricular activities and common enjoyment of particular places, parks, and establishments. More distal contexts can also influence determinants of similarity. Community characteristics and school policies such as tracking, degree of racial integration, and special education practices can have a top-down effect on peer ecologies (Kubitschek & Hallinan, 1998 in Rodkin, Ph, 2009).

Group influence may seem like an adolescent phenomenon, but relevant points of origin lie as early as the toddler years, and are squarely in place by middle childhood. Aggression is particularly dependent on the operation of social networks: interpersonally contagious, easy to spark in group situations, and connected to social identities like gender and ethnicity. This review is directed towards the broader issue of childhood aggression, but investigations that deal specifically with bullying are noted (Rodkin, 2009).

Furthermore, Lee (2005) emphasizes that are three different forms of bullying, physical bullying, verbal bullying and social bullying.
1. Physical bullying. Physical bullying is more than punching and kicking and can assume indirect forms, including taking possessions, damaging property or school work with a view to disempowered, i.e. there is a physical manifestation of the bullying but no physical pain.
2. Verbal bullying. This is one of the most common forms of bullying as it can have an immediate impact, often in front of an audience, with very little effort on the part of the

perpetrator. Name-calling and offensive, threatening and insulting remarks are all forms that this can take and can be directed at or seek to create vulnerable groups. Sexual orientation, ethnic group and learning difficulties are all catalysts for those seeking power at the expense of others. The advent of bullying by mobile phone and computers provides new means by which verbal bullying can be carried out away from the physical presence of the victim.

3. Social bullying. This form of bullying incorporates deliberate exclusion from social groups or intimidation within the group. Like other forms it can be direct, with exclusion experienced by the victim, or it can be indirect, that is, carried out away from the victim and not experienced by them until they are informed of it or they attempt to join the group (Lee, 2005).
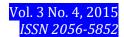
According to some authors the core of bullying it is also, closely related with the fact of being aggressive. But who are more aggressive girls or boys? According to Block (1983), boys are more aggressive than girls. Crick and Grotpeter (1995), emphasizes that "relational aggression" emerged as a form of aggression thought to be more characteristic of girls in whom the goal is to hurt others by damaging their reputation or their relationships. What quickly ensued was a flurry of research on this new form of "female aggression." These two trends have, at least in part, contributed to what we see as a dichotomous view of aggression—male versus female aggression—that has prevented us from understanding the complexity of these behaviors in all children and adolescents. Furthermore, according to Loeber & Kennan, (1994), the "gender paradox" provides further support for the need to study aggression and bullying among both males and females. The gender paradox postulates that although females have lower prevalence rates of aggression and antisocial behavior than males, they are in fact at greater risk for psychological maladjustment (Espelage, Melbane, & Swearer, 2009).

When researchers challenged the traditional view that boys are more overtly aggressive than girls by broadening the definition of aggression to include less overt forms of aggression, the result was an explosion of important research exploring the gender differences that traditionally emerged in the study of aggression. In the short time that has followed, studies on relational aggression have made invaluable contributions to the body of knowledge on aggression in youngsters. Findings from these studies support the idea that relational aggression is a form of aggression that is distinct from overt aggression and plays a unique role in youth psychological and social adjustment. However, from a review of the literature it is clear that there is still much that we do not know about relational aggression, as evidenced by the often-conflicting findings in different studies on relational aggression. In addition to contradictory findings, there are also a number of new directions in which to take the study of relational aggression. Thus, exploring relational aggression has played, and should continue to play, an important role in advancing our understanding of gender differences in aggression (Espelage, Melbane, & Swearer, 2009).

METHODOLOGY
Procedure and Sample

For this study a quantitative research design was used. Gathering the data was done through a survey process. According to Creswell, (2003), a survey is a process that is used to collect data form a sample or a population in order to describe the attitudes, opinions, behaviors, or characteristics of the population under investigation.

The general population that served for this sample is made of senior year students who were attending the full-time 2014-2015 academic years from High Schools of Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Durrës and Korça. From this population it was extracted a sample of 400 participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005).

The stage probability sample is used to select the sample from this population. It involves selecting the sample in stages; that is, taking sample from sample. Firstly it was selected a number of cities at random. Then within the selected cities, it was randomly selected a number of schools. Within selected schools were chosen senior years. Finally, it was selected randomly a number of students out of the students of the senior year. The sample of 400 students is composed from 168 boys and 232 girls, or 42% were boys and 58 % were girls. The largest number of participants, 79% was 18 years old, followed by the students who were 19 years old, which comprise 21 % of the entire sample.

> The most important inclusion criteria in the sample were:
> -Being a senior year student in the high school in these cities.
> - Being really willing to participate in the research project.

Instrument and its Reliability

The instrument used for the gathering of the data was a questionnaire made of some rubrics. The questionnaire was filled in by 400 respondents and it took from 20 to 25 minutes to complete it. Initially participants were informed about the aim of the study and clarified that all the data will be used only for academic purposes. Given that the perception of senior year students for the verbal bullying and their gender are the only focus of this article, only these elements of the questionnaire will be represented. A retrospective bullying questionnaire is designed to measure the perception for verbal bullying of high school senior year students (National Centre for Injury Prevention and Control). Referring to this questionnaire a Likert scale was designed, where students should circle the answer from 'never happened', 'rarely happened', 'sometimes happened', 'frequently happened', and 'constantly happened' according to their level of agreement. Thus, item such as, "I was called by the nicknames", "I was threatened with words", "I was called by the bad names", "Some students often laughed at me", "Some students make gossips about me", "Some students make rumors about me", are used to measure the perception of students about being verbal bullied during school years. From the score calculations, for a seven item scale, using a response scale from 1 to 5, the minimum value would be 7 and the maximum value would be 35. A mean score of 28.8 or higher indicates a high level of perception of senior year students for verbal bullying. A mean score between 16.4- 25.7 indicates a mild level of perception of senior year students for verbal bullying. A mean score below 16.3 indicates a low level of perception of senior year students for verbal bullying. Cronbach's alpha analysis was run in order to assess internal consistency reliability for the scale used to collect the data. This scale, has an acceptable internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha coefficient reported .71.

Data Analysis

The data gathered from the survey was transported into the computer statistical package SPPS, Version 16. Prior to reviewing the data, assumptions for the statistical analyses were assessed. A two –tailed alpha level of .05 was set and used for all statistical tests.

Descriptive statistics, such as sample size, frequency and mean, were used to describe the characteristics of the sample and the perception of the senior students from the high school

about verbal bullying. Preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. From the analyses of the dependent variable that is perception of the students about being verbal bullied it has resulted a non-normal distribution. In this case the data did not meet the assumption of the parametric techniques, and for this reasons there were used non-parametric techniques. (Pallant, 2010). To investigate if there is a statistical difference in the scores of verbal bullying between adolescent boys and adolescent girls, the Mann-Whitney U test was used.

The following table provides a summary of variables and the analytic procedures related to the paper question.

Table 1. Paper question, variables, and analytic procedures

Paper Question	Variables	SPSS Procedures
What are the perceptions of high school senior year students according verbal bullying and if there is a statistical difference between adolescent boys and adolescent girls regarding verbal bullying?	- Perception of the students of the senior year about being verbal bullied. -gender	General descriptive statistics Mann -Whitney U Test

Research Ethics

During the application of this study all the stages of research ethics have been followed. It has firstly been taken the permission of the levels in charge of the schools where the instrument was conducted. Subsequently, a sensitization of the goal of the study was done to the participants before they filled the instrument. They were guaranteed absolute anonymity and asked whether they wanted or not to participate voluntarily in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSION

Table 2 illustrates the mean scores and standard deviation regarding the general perception of students about verbal bullying. Thus, the general view of the perception of the senior year students of some high schools about verbal bullying was (M = 18.99, SD = 6.92). As we can see, from the data the mean scores of perception for verbal bullying is 18.99 and this mean score is between 16.4 - 25.6. This data indicates a mild level of perception of senior year students for verbal bullying.

Table 2. General descriptive statistics about student's perception vs. verbal bullying

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception of students Vs. Verbal Bullying	388	7	35	18.99	6.92
Valid N (listwise)	388				

Table 3 shows descriptive statistics about students' perception versus verbal bullying sorted by gender. So, the situation for adolescent boys was (M = 24.31, SD = 6.23). Mean scores for perception of verbal bullying for the boys is 24.31 and this mean score is between 16.4-25.6. This figure indicates that adolescent boys have a mild level of perception of being verbally bullied. Mean scores for perception of verbal bullying for the girls was (M = 15.41,

SD = 4.71). Mean scores for perception of verbal bullying for the girls is 15.41 and this mean score is between 7 – 16.3. In this case it is evident that adolescent girls have a low level of perception of being verbally bullied.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics about students' perception vs. verbal bullying sorted by gender

Descriptive Statistics

Gender		N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Boys	Perception of students Vs. Verbal Bullying	156	12	35	24.31	6.23
	Valid N (listwise)	156				
Girls	Perception of students Vs. Verbal Bullying	232	7	28	15.41	4.71
	Valid N (listwise)	232				

To address the paper questions, if there is a statistical difference between adolescent boys and adolescent girls regarding verbal bullying, Mann-Whitney U test was performed. Table 4 and table 5 show the results from this analysis.

Table. 4 Results of Mann-Whitney U test

Test Statistics [a]

	Perception of students Vs. Verbal Bullying
Mann-Whitney U	4927.000
Wilcoxon W	31955.000
Z	-12.180
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

[a]. Grouping Variable: Gender

Table 5. Results of medians for sorted cases

Report

Perception of students Vs. Verbal Bullying

Gender	N	Median
Boys	156	25.00
Girls	232	15.00
Total	388	18.00

A Mann-Whitney U Test was conducted to compare the students' perceptions versus verbal bullying scores for adolescent boys and adolescent girls. This test revealed a significant difference in the student's perceptions versus verbal bullying scores for boys (Md = 25, n =156) and girls (Md =15, n =232), U = 4927, z = -12.180, p = .000
To see the effect size according to Cohen (1988) criteria, it is used the formula:
$r = z/\sqrt{N}$ (Pallant, 2010)
In this case z = -12.180 and N =400; therefore the r value is 0.60. This would be considered a large effect size using Cohen (1988), criteria of .1 = small effect, .3 = medium effect, .3 = large effect. For this result it is evident that the effect size of .60 it is large. Expressed as a percentage, 60 % of the variance in the perceptions of the students versus verbal bullying is explained by gender. From this result it can be concluded that adolescent boys in this schools are more exposed to verbal bullying that adolescent girls.

CONCLUSION

In summary, some results can be concluded at the end of this paper. From the population of the senior students who attended high schools in Tirana, Shkodra, Elbasan, Durrës and Korça, it is drawn a sample of 400 students through the stages sampling method. Out of 400 senior students of the high school of the sample, just 168 were boys and 232 girls, or 42% boys and 58 % girls. The largest number of participants, 79% was 18 years old, followed by the students who were 19 years old, which comprise 21 % of the entire sample.

To answer the question, if there is a statistical difference between adolescent boys and adolescent girls regarding verbal bullying, a Mann Whitney U test was conducted. From the statistical analysis it was revealed that there was a significant difference in the students' perceptions versus verbal bullying scores for boys (Md = 25, n = 156) and girls (Md =15, n = 232), U = 4927, z = -12.180, p = .000, r = .60

RECOMMENDATION

According to literature some steps can be taken to prevent bullying and especially, verbal bullying in schools. Thus, teacher can design prevention and intervention strategies. A first step toward reducing verbal bullying in the classroom and in school involves awareness of the teachers and school administrators not to stay indifferent in front of this phenomenon. Teachers should investigate relational victimization too, as a possible source of social difficulties and school maladjustments among students, and they should learn how to identify relational aggressors in their classrooms.

Schools should make more efforts to build school-wide prevention and intervention strategies. Peer relationships characterized by relational aggression must be viewed from the perspective of the bully and the victim, and therefore, interventions must be developed and implemented to address both parties in the interaction. Too often, prevention and intervention strategies focus only on changing the behavior of the bully, yet it is the bully-victim and occasional witness relationship that must also change. (Yoon, Barton & Taiariol, 2004)

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