

Elementary teachers' beliefs and responses to bullying: An international comparative study

Research that investigates the role of teachers in school bullying remains scarce but existing evidence suggests that educators have the potential to counter peer aggression effectively (Baek et al. 2017; Dedousis-Wallace & Shute 2009; Crothers et al. 2006; Kallestad & Olweus, 2003; Wachs et al. 2019). At the same time, teachers don't always respond to bullying adequately, because they underestimate the scale of it or are completely unaware of it or even deliberately ignore it (Olweus 1991, 1993; Houndoumadi & Pateraki 2001; Mishna et al. 2005). This is not surprising as teachers often have limited expertise to deal with bullying (Yoon et al., 2020). Teachers' empathy and beliefs about the seriousness of bullying situations are some of the best predictors of teachers' likeliness to actively respond to bullying (Yoon, 2004; VanZoeren & Weisz, 2018). Typically, the likelihood of teacher intervening is collected with text-based vignettes (Yoon, 2004; VanZoeren & Weisz, 2018). However, recently comics-based vignettes have been developed as an alternative. Unlike traditional research methods, comics-based vignettes developed by (Khanolainen & Semenova, 2020, 2021) allow space for creativity - the new method combines the aspects of text-based vignettes, narrative inquiry, and graphic elicitation by providing a visual prompt (an incomplete comic strip) and asking participants to develop them into full stories. Emerging evidence suggest that participants' creative outputs might give a unique insight into how bullies, victims, and bystanders are perceived because participants are asked to communicate their perceptions and beliefs without having to verbalize them which might reduce the likeliness of social desirability bias (Khanolainen & Semenova, 2020, 2021). Indeed, social desirability bias represents a serious issue in teacher self-reports about bullying that has recently been acknowledged (Campaert et al., 2017; Colpin et al., 2021; Fischer et al., 2021).

Moreover, research shows that lay people often disagree on what constitutes peer aggression as different personal experiences shape their beliefs and perceptions (Hellström et al., 2015; Maunder et al., 2010). This disagreement has important implications for traditional text-based research methods. Allowing participants to see a specific situation (rather than read questions about bullying) helps researchers ensure that participants react to and assess the same stimuli without relying on one's own concept of bullying. Preliminary findings indicate that comics-based vignettes can be particularly useful in cross-cultural studies as they help overcome conceptual discrepancies stemming from cultural and linguistic differences (Khanolainen & Semenova, unpublished research, to be presented at WABF).

This study has two main research questions: 1) What are teachers' perceptions and understandings of bullying in different countries? 2) What are teachers' practices aimed at bullying prevention in different countries? To answer these questions, we will design new comics-based vignettes and test them in an international quantitative study, as well as employ traditional research methods (Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015). Thus, this study will extend the existing literature in two important ways: 1) we will test a new methodology in a large international sample and 2) conduct an international comparison of teachers' beliefs and responses to bullying and evaluate how different understandings of bullying relate to different responses.

An example of a comics-based vignettes that participants are asked to creatively develop into a full story:



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