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### **OKUL ÇOCUKLARININ ZORBALIK DAVRANIŞLARINI BESLEMEDE AİLE VE KÜLTÜRÜN ROLÜ: OKUL MÜDÜRLERİ VE REHBER ÖĞRETMENLERİN GÖRÜŞLERİ**

#### **ÖZET**

Bu araştırma, okul müdürleri ve rehber öğretmenlerin bakış açısıyla, okullarda zorbalığın azaltılması ve önlenmesi bakımından okulların bulunduğu bölgenin kültürel özellikleri ile ailelerin çocuk yetiştirme biçimlerinin zorbalık davranışları üzerindeki besleyici rolünü ve önemini araştırmayı hedeflemiştir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Doğu Anadolu Bölgesi'nin üç büyük ili olan Erzurum, Malatya ve Van illerinde 2006-2007 eğitim-öğretim yılında seçilmiş bazı lise müdürleri ve rehber öğretmenlerle görüşmeler yapılmıştır. Her bir şehirde, İl Milli Eğitim Müdürlükleri'nin yardımlarıyla farklı sosyo-ekonomik düzeyleri temsil eden üç okul seçilmiştir. Okul müdürleri ve rehber öğretmenlerle yapılan görüşmelerde yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formları kullanılmıştır. Katılımcılar, yanıtlarının gizliliği konusunda mutlak surette temin edilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Okul zorbalığı, Zorbalık ve Kültür,  
Okul Güvenliği, Okul, Öğrenci

### **THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND CULTURE IN FOSTERING BULLYING BEHAVIORS OF SCHOOLCHILDREN: FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND COUNSELING TEACHERS**

#### **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the role of families' child rearing styles and culture in fostering and managing bullying in school setting from the perspectives of school principals and counseling teachers. During 2006-2007 academic year, some selected school principals and counseling teachers of the schools in Erzurum, Malatya and Van, the biggest three Provinces of Eastern Anatolia, were interviewed. In each province, three high schools from different socioeconomic levels were selected by help of Province National Education Directorate. The school principals and the counseling teachers were interviewed using a semi-structured interview form. All subjects were assured of the confidentiality of their responses.

**Keywords:** School Bullying, Bullying and Culture, School Safety, School, Student



## 1. INTRODUCTION (GİRİŞ)

Among the most often cited aspects of children's exposure to violence at school is bullying. Bullying is the unprovoked physical or psychological abuse of an individual by one student or a group of students over time to create an ongoing pattern of harassment and abuse [1, 2 ve 3]. Definitions of bullying vary but common elements in bullying include an imbalance of power, intent to harm the victim, and repeated acts of bullying [4]. This power may be physical strength, social skills, verbal ability or another resource.

Four general forms of school bullying were mentioned in the literature. These are physical, verbal, emotional (social) and sexual. [4, 5, 6, 7 ve 8]. Some researches indicate that bullying can lead to serious mental and physical problems. This is in sharp contrast to the common belief that school bullying is a benign and normal part of the child and adolescent experience. The impact of bullying in the school years also extends beyond the bully and victim to the peer group, school and the community at large in the form of criminality and mental health problems [9].

Several theories examine the roots of bullying. Personality attributes in the temperament of the child as well as socialization and home environmental factors are two possible frameworks espoused in the literature, while social cognitive deficits in studies with aggressive boys have also been undertaken, yielding interesting results. Arguments for a systemic view on factors that lead to bullying are also discussed [10]. The overall family climate appears to be an important factor as well. Research on bullying behavior has identified several links between parenting or family characteristics and bullying behavior. It's been argued that the power and aggression that characterizes bullying is rooted in the family context [11]. It's also been emphasized that bullies generally live in homes that are typified by harsh punishment and a lack of warmth and a child's temperament is often seen as closely linked to their home environment. Bullies are thought to develop anti-social tendencies through the family context, transferring their aggressive behavior patterns from home to the school setting [10].

Bandura's social learning theory has provided a base for studies of how displays of aggressiveness in parents' behavior can serve as a model for children who bully others [12 ve 13]. In a 24-year longitudinal survey of adolescents, Farrington found that adolescent bullies not only tended to grow up to be adult bullies, but also tended to have children who were bullies [12]. Olweus carried out in-depth interviews with parents of victims and bullies. Research questions were related to parenting style and parental interaction with their children. For the mothers and fathers of the bullies (boys), Olweus found high permissiveness toward aggression, harsher discipline, and power-assertive child rearing methods. In bullies families', he also observed more negativism toward the child [3].

In social science research, culture is conceptualized as a set of values, assumptions, belief systems, norms and behavioral patterns that differentiate one human group from another [14]. The norms of one culture can differ extensively from those of another and so radically affect the ways in which young people learn to behave towards one another. For example, one culture may place high value on individual achievement where another may stress the achievements of the group. In one culture it is desirable to be aggressive towards others; in another aggression may meet with disapproval. From the social-cultural perspective, young people are viewed as novice participants in their culture and their induction into the culture is achieved through



shared joint activity. As they come to understand objects and relationships they re-create their culture within themselves [15].

Eastern part of Turkey was selected as the cultural context in this study. Other than being a culture that is familiar to both authors, the choice also reflects the desire to capture how the cultural properties foster bullying behaviours in the region. At this point, it is thought to be useful to mention about some regional properties of Eastern Anatolia. It is the most mountainous, less developed, and sparsely populated region of Turkey. Although they seem to be disappearing slowly, its people have suffered a lot from the problems resulting from regional disparities in socioeconomic conditions. The unfavourable effects of these disparities have been experienced more by women than men. For instance, although primary school education has been mandatory in Turkey since 1927, in 1990 half of the women in eastern Turkey were illiterate. But since then a good deal of improvement has been recorded since the government and civil society associations have been working hard to improve the situation. Semi-feudal structures still constitute the main social framework in the region. A tribal social organization survived longer in this region among the Turkish and Kurdish peoples. The citizens, share a common Turkish culture with some regional, urban-rural, social class, and ethnic variations. There has been a good deal of intermarriage, with different ethnic backgrounds. The state accepts all citizens as Turks and there are no official legal, educational, or employment disabilities associated with ethnicity and no system of ethnic identity cards [16]. Although polygamy has been banned in Turkey since 1926, some people, especially in rural parts of this region, still have polygynous marriages where only one wife has a civil marriage and the others have religious marriages.

Since a sense of personal security is essential to the physical, intellectual, emotional, economic and spiritual sense of well being for a child and no one deserves to be abused at schools, so reducing and preventing bullying should be one of the major concerns of school principals, researchers and legislators. Even though many researches were performed to determine the types, reasons, consequences and prevalence of bullying at schools from different perspectives in different parts of Turkey, there is still a void in the literature in explanations of why and to what extent cultural context and family play a role in fostering, reducing and preventing school bullying [17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22 and 23].

## **2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)**

The present study aims to understand the role of family pattern and culture in fostering bullying behaviors in depth and to further explore the ways to manage and prevent bullying from the perspectives of school principals and counseling teachers.

## **3. METHOD (METOD)**

This is a multiple case study. This design provided the investigator the opportunity to explore a social problem within its natural setting. Creswell suggests that "how or what" questions, as in this study, can best be answered by the qualitative design [24]. Moreover, this design allowed for cross-case analysis [25]. With cross-case analysis, information from each participant was compared, contrasted and synthesized with others.

### **Sample:**

Participants: The participants of the study were nine high school principals and nine counseling teachers. Considering to increase the cultural variety of data, the study was conducted in



three biggest cities (Erzurum, Malatya and Van) which aren't neighborhood each other and situated in different parts of Eastern Anatolian Region. Three schools from three different socioeconomic levels were selected in each city to gather the information in-depth from different levels of the society. The criterion to select the schools was just their socioeconomic level and to identify the socioeconomic level of the schools, Province National Education Directorate records were used. The principal and one counseling teacher from each school were interviewed. Some properties of the participants and the schools were presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Codes and properties of the schools, Principals and Counseling Teachers  
(Tablo 1. Okulların, müdürlerin ve rehber öğretmenlerin kodları ve özellikleri)

Schools	Socioeconomic Level	Principals	Properties Age-Seniority-Sex	Counseling Teachers	Properties Age-Seniority-Sex
S1	Low	P1	58; 27; M	T1	35; 9; M
S2	Middle	P2	50; 21; M	T2	32; 10; F
S3	Upper	P3	50; 26; M	T3	33; 13; M
S4	Low	P4	52; 28; M	T4	30; 7; M
S5	Middle	P5	50; 27; M	T5	31; 8; M
S6	Upper	P6	52; 29; M	T6	26; 1; M
S7	Low	P7	55; 30; M	T7	27; 5; M
S8	Middle	P8	54; 29; M	T8	27; 1; M
S9	Upper	P8	27; 5; M	T9	26; 4; M

### 3.1. Research Instruments (Araştırma Materyalleri)

The information gathered in this study was collected using semi-structured interview forms during 2005-2006 academic year. Interviews also allowed the investigator the opportunity to collect valuable information as well as assure that participants understood the purpose of the study. Prior to each interview, the participants were given the opportunity to consent to the interview and to record the interview process.

### 3.2. Procedure (Çalışma Yöntemi)

The whole interview was recorded by the investigator herself. Each interview took between 45-90 minutes to complete. After the interviews the tape records were typed by the investigator. Then the tape records were listened again and the typed copies were checked.

Prior to collecting the data, the investigator assured all the participants (school principals and counseling teachers) that their identities and schools would be protected with codes as they wished (Table 1).

### 3.3. Data Analysis (Veri Analizi)

Once the information was collected and typed, the investigator prepared it for analysis. The investigator grouped it into two areas. Organizing the information in this matter allowed the investigator the opportunity to filter out nonessential information, while maintaining a focus on the research questions. The information collected was summarized in each of the subsequent areas in order to facilitate organization and analysis. These areas are:

- The role of family pattern and culture in fostering bullying behaviors.



- The role of family and school in preventing and managing bullying;  
While handling the data in accordance with these two areas, socio-economic levels of the schools were considered to make comparisons.

#### 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION (BULGULAR VE TARTIŞMA)

- The role of family pattern and culture in fostering bullying behaviors;
  - **Reasons of Bullying in those Schools:** In the schools of low socio-economic level, major factors triggering bullying behaviors were mainly associated with the socio-economic level of the families that students came from. The school principals (P4, P7) reckoned such regional properties as common in-family violence, marriages with multiple wives and too many children and being economically disadvantaged as the significant factors of bullying in their schools. They also added that violence and bullying were frequently applied as a common problem solving method in school setting since they were commonly used at homes. Similar results were also emphasized in the literature [4]. Counseling teachers also referred to parents with low educational background as one of the biggest regional problems affecting school setting negatively. They persistently emphasized that parents are quite negligent towards the children even when the teachers manage to reach the parents, which is so difficult, and complain about some problematic behaviors of the children. One of the principals (P4) complained about some popular TV series involving and prodding various forms of bullying and violence. He mentioned that the students especially the ones lack of appropriate role models around view those negative and even dangerous film characters as role models. The complaints related to the TV series were shared by almost all the counseling teachers (T1, T4, and T7). The students who view those characters as role models and try to imitate them were reported to change their names and adopt some phrases involving violence from TV series and use them frequently in their daily lives. The findings that confirm the negative effects of TV programs on the children who are exposed to violence are consistent with previous researches. These negative effects have been reported to occur in two ways: Children, who are continuously exposed to violence via TV programs or computer games, begin to perceive those behaviors as normal. So, when they experience bullying or encounter violence, they prefer not reacting against or complaining and expect the others around to behave in the same way [26]. But as recommended by Voroney organizations based on a culture of peace rather than on cultures of conflict and bullying, will not tolerate bullying behaviors [27]. The reasons mentioned in the schools of medium socioeconomic level were not so different after all. School principals and counseling teachers mainly mentioned about the effects of family patterns and low academic success of the students as major factors triggering bullying behaviors. The problems stem from the family pattern are almost the same as the ones mentioned above in



the schools of low socioeconomic level. The school principals stated that one important point that the families had in common in the region was their intolerant approach to the children which was an important factor in explaining the bullying behaviors of the students at school. One of the principals (P8) indicated that families are so indifferent to the children that it is impossible for the teachers and the school principals to reach and communicate with the parents. The counseling teacher of the same school added that he frequently observed that students were affected negatively from the violence applied at home. Those observations of counseling teachers and school principals are consistent with the research findings of Zaklama [10]. Bullies tend to come from families that are characterized as having little warmth or affection. These families are also reported to have trouble sharing their feelings. Parents of bullies also tend to use inconsistent discipline and little monitoring of where their children are throughout the day. Sometimes parents of bullies have very punitive and rigid discipline styles, with common physical punishment. Bullies also report less feelings of closeness to their siblings. In a family setting like this, it is inevitable for the children to have anti-social tendencies and carry the negative atmosphere from home to school.

The reasons mentioned in the school which are at upper socioeconomic level were somewhat different from the others. Such regional properties as tribe system and ethnicity were mentioned here. The principal (P9) and the counseling teacher (T9) of a school attracted attention to a problem which arose from the students whose parents have different cultural background but very similar economical advantages. Some of the students in this school were said to come from parents with a university degree and are not originally from the city but their parents live there just because of government jobs. The parents of some other groups are originally from the city and mostly the members of the tribes in the region. The children whose parents have similar cultural properties were observed to come together and usually tend to generate their own group. He emphasized that especially the tribe's students usually show aggressive and bullying behaviors against others since they feel the tribe's power behind them. In this school both the principal and the teacher complained about the students who trusted their tribes' power excessively and didn't believe in the necessity of education. Besides unmotivated and reluctant students, they also have to deal with the indifferent parents who believe that parents' only job is to provide money the children need. So, the uncontrolled students having a large amount of money are vulnerable to all the adverse affects of outer world.

- **Tackling with Bullying (Parents', Principals' and Teachers' approaches):** All the principals from the low socioeconomic level said that some parents came to school to complain that their children were sometimes exposed to bullying behaviors of others on the way to school or home but not at school. However, attitudes and reactions of principals towards those complaints were found to be different. One principal (P1) expressed that some parents came to school



to complain about sexual bullying that their daughters were exposed to on the way to school and home and some others came to school to complain about some people around the school who got the pocket money of the students very often. It was striking that the principal thought that since those happened outside the school garden it was not his concern at all. One of the principal's (P4) approach was even more striking. He said that he encountered a number of complaints from the parents but he never cared about them since he thought that those were the parts of the students' development process. These attitudes of the principals showed clearly that they had no reason to try to find out or even think about the solutions of bullying problems.

One principal (P7) said that, parents came to school to complain about all kinds of bullying behaviors but unfortunately they were never eager to cooperate for the solution. It was quite interesting that, contrary to the principals, almost all the counseling teachers in those schools said that parents neither came to the school to see a counseling teacher nor complained about any problem. One counseling teacher (T4) underlined his observation that students in his school never shared their problems with adults and they just try to solve those problems in their own way. At this point, it seems that the contradiction between the principals' and teachers' expressions stem from the parents who just apply to school principal but not counseling teacher in case of a problem of bullying. Nevertheless, the principals are always expected to handle those kinds of problems in cooperation with the counseling teachers.

The situation was not so different in the schools of medium socioeconomic level. One of the school principals (P2) said that most parents came to school to complain about the teachers who don't beat the children any more. Some parents wanted the principal and the teachers to beat the children as in traditional education system in which, they believed, children didn't beat each other. It was quite interesting that parents wanted the principals and teachers to use violence to stop violence at school. This request of the parents was thought to be coherent with the fact that using power and aggressiveness gets its origins from the parents' child rearing system and cultural patterns [10]. This principal also emphasized the importance of some cultural properties of the region and underlined that it was not possible for female students to share the problems with their parents. One of the school principals (P5) said, he observed that the communication between parents and children was not good enough to share the problems and most parents didn't enjoy coming to school at all. Agreeing with the principal, the counseling teacher of this school also thought that the parents didn't even know about the problems that students experienced at school setting and mentioned about similar cultural properties of the region. Similar to the one above, one of the counseling teachers from the school of this level (R9) said that neither the students from the region shared their problems with their parents nor the parents came to school for any complaints, in any case.



The students always have their own ways to solve their problems.

- The role of family and school in preventing and managing bullying in their Schools;

- **The role of family:** The principals and counseling teachers of schools from low socioeconomic level were not so hopeful about proper precautions to be taken by parents. But they expected from the parents to see the children as individuals and make them feel to be cared. One principal (P1) highlighted the problem of sex inequality in the region. Agreeing with the principal the counseling teacher (T1) said those parents, who aren't aware of the children who don't go home during the night, never thinks about preventing bullying. He added that if the parents knew where and with whom their children spent time would be a big success let alone getting help or support from them. All the counseling teachers (T1, T4, and T7) agree that parents should be brought to school and informed about the importance of the subject in some ways but unfortunately none of them have tips about how to succeed this with the ones who don't come to the parents-teachers meeting which are held once or twice in a year.

In the schools of medium socioeconomic level counseling teachers and principals indicated that they felt parents expect everything from the school alone. They said that most parents believed and expected that it was only the schools' job to create wise, respectful, honest and moral people whose conducts were good or virtuous. Once they sent the students to schools they felt their responsibility was over and perceived the school like a kindergarten. One counseling teacher (T2) said she observed that some parents had no power to influence the children at all. She also added that some parents were so disturbed from being called to school that they came and reproached even beat the children at school. This is not in fact astonishing for parents who use violence at home as one way of problem solving. One counseling teacher (T8) added those indifferent and neglecting attitudes of the parents are based on the cultural behavioral patterns of the region. Parents are not interested or don't seem to be interested in the children not to spoil them.

The principals and counseling teachers of the schools from upper socioeconomic level dwelled on the quality of the communication between parents and children. Parents are expected to support the children not only financially but socially as well (T3, T6, T9). One of the counseling teachers (T9) insistently emphasized that parents should refrain from talks about ethnicity or sex discrimination when they were with children since the children were affected and certainly carried that atmosphere to school. Almost all the principals and counseling teachers accused the parents of not controlling the students and their environment even though the reasons of this negligence show differences according to the socioeconomic levels of the parents. However they are different from each other, it seems that grounding reason is probably insufficient education level of parents which misleads them about interaction with their children. A number of child-rearing styles have been found to predict whether children will



grow up to be aggressive bullies. A lack of attention and warmth toward the child, together with modeling of aggressive behavior at home, and poor supervision of the child, provide the perfect opportunity for aggressive and bullying behavior to occur [28, 29 and 30]. Modeling of aggressive behavior may include use of physical and verbal aggression toward the child by parents, or use of physical and verbal aggression by parents toward each other.

- o **The role of school:** The principals from the schools of low socioeconomic level underlined that all the personnel at the school should just do their work properly and meticulously especially the guard teachers are expected to control every single place in the school during the day. Some principals (P4,P7) and all the counseling teachers mentioned about the importance of qualified communication which seems to be one of the underlying reasons of bullying. Counseling teachers also claimed that all the school personnel as well as the parents must be trained about bullying to raise the awareness level. One counseling teacher (T4) said that police officers should be employed at schools and school gardens and entrances should be supervised or monitored. Another counseling teacher (R1) expressed that all the personnel should be meticulous about their behaviors in school setting since they were viewed as role models by the students. He added that in their school, unfortunately, the personnel themselves applied violence and physical power whenever they needed instead of trying to communicate or cope with this stressful event and sometimes the students witnessed those behaviors. However, school personnel are expected to send strong messages to the entire school community that bullying is taken seriously and will not be tolerated. As Dupper [31] pointed out it is important that bullies, no matter who they are, receive clear messages from school personnel that bullying will not be tolerated. The principals (P2, P8) of the schools from medium socioeconomic level mentioned about getting to know the students better as a key precaution. The counseling teachers (T2, T5), emphasized the importance of carrying out a needs assessment in the schools. A needs assessment raises school staff awareness about the nature, prevalence, and consequences of bullying [32]. Carrying out a needs assessment is essential in preparing bullying prevention programs in schools. He also added that their students led a nested life within violence because of the cultural properties of the region so it was naturally difficult to create a solely peaceful atmosphere in the school. The counseling teacher believes that since the cultural and regional properties are different, every school is supposed to have its own specific needs and problems. The teacher's sentences vindicate Astor et al. [33] who claimed that a "one-size fits all" approach doesn't address the specific needs of each school in different regions.

One principal (P8) pointed to a more worrying and significant problem of the region on behalf of education. The principal claimed that since the Eastern Part of Anatolia was economically and socially disadvantaged, teachers who were appointed to schools were usually newly



graduated and inexperienced. Those teachers worked in the region as least as possible and tried to find the ways to leave there and never spent enough time in schools to have proper relation neither with students nor with their colleagues. Dupper [31] also reported that frequent staff turnover causes the failure of bullying prevention programs. The counseling teachers especially mentioned about the importance of proper human relation in school setting. The quality of student-teacher relationship was reported to provide a lot to solve the problems which the students experienced at school. It was emphasized that if the students found the teachers friendly or close to them they would feel relaxed to share the problems and feel them important. One of the counseling teachers emphasized that both the teachers and the students should treat the students equally regardless of ethnic identification, religious background and ideology of their parents. One of the counseling teachers emphasized that it was really vital for the school personnel to be appropriate role models for the students. He explained his expressions in those sentences; *"Especially in rural parts of this neighborhood, if one doesn't know to play games in a café or doesn't smoke or doesn't use physical power to solve the problems or count the breads as the symbol of toughness, unfortunately he is not considered or respected as a real man. The fact is that a vast majority of our students come from rural background and different from their non-rural counterparts. They just think of being approved by the society. In this respect they really need appropriate role models to learn true behaviors."* As Neuman and Baron [34] indicated, the appearance of toughness is even celebrated in some cultures. Social learning theory suggests that individuals operating in the cultures where bullying is rewarded, are more likely to engage in similar acts [35].

In the schools of high socioeconomic level the principals (P6, P9) all agreed that the school personnel couldn't be successful and effective alone but the help of family to overcome the problems. The counseling teachers added that it would be helpful to educate the whole school personnel about adolescent psychology and communication skills. Parents should be educated about adolescence psychology as well since they may quite far from this development process and adolescence is the period where autonomy and relatedness dynamics assume special significance [36].

In addition, principals and counseling teachers from all the schools mainly mentioned about increasing the number of the social and cultural activities that would arise the feeling of being a part of a team.

#### **4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS (SONUÇ VE ÖNERİLER)**

The findings of this research do not imply generalizations. What they do is to indicate the similarities that are found within each case. The conclusions derived from thoughts and recommendations of interviewed school principals and counseling teachers are as follows;

It should always be borne in mind that bullying occurs in a cultural context and the problems and solutions cannot be assessed without considering the cultural properties of the students and



region. Even family patterns and their approaches to school and children should be considered in a cultural context.

While anti-bullying programs are being prepared, cultural differences and specific needs of each school must be considered and uniform programs shouldn't be applied to every school in the same way. Nevertheless, when the research was carried out in the region, it was seen that neither of the schools had a program against bullying. However, later on, National Ministry of Education prepared and began to implement "an action plan" adopting "one size fits all" approach and almost ignoring the cultural and contextual properties of the schools and regions, to reduce and prevent violence at schools.

Family-school and parent-child relationship is significantly determined by the education level of the families. Education on the part of family is expected to bring about positive changes in students' behaviors and attitudes towards each other and school. Highly educated parents were reported to be relatively eager to cooperate with the school.

Both the school personnel, families and students need training on communication skills and necessity of interaction so that family-school, parent-child and teacher-student relation will improve. They should also be informed about the reasons and consequences of bullying to raise awareness and to cope with bullying behaviors. Counseling teachers insist that teaching social and interpersonal problem-solving and anger management skills may be helpful for parents as well as students.

Appropriate language, cultural norms and demonstrated socially acceptable behaviors of the school personnel within school boundaries are expected by the school principals and counseling teachers to enhance peaceful atmosphere. Because most of the students lack of proper role models environment, the messages given to the students by school personnel via their behaviors and reflecting their attitudes towards bullying, cultural diversity and ethnicity are essential.

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