

# Teachers and social pedagogues as victims of bullying

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## Summary

### Introduction

Most studies of school (Smith, 2011) and workplace (Coyné, 2011) bullying define bullying by means of three criteria: bullying is when someone directs aggressive behaviour towards another or intentionally hurts and harms a target person; bullying occurs repeatedly over a lengthy period of time; and there exists an imbalance of power with the person being subjected to bullying who cannot defend him or herself.

Workplace bullying in schools overwhelms complex dynamics (Parsons, 2005): on one side, teachers may be bullied by other teachers, students, staff, principals, parents; and on the other side, teachers may bully other teachers, staff, principals, parents and students.

Bullying against teachers in the workplace is an issue of international studies providing evidence about its nature and prevalence all around the world (e.g. Benefield, 2004; Cemaloğlu, 2007; De Wet & Jacobs, 2013; Jennifer et al., 2003; Kõiv, 2011; Malinauskienė et al., 2005; McMahan et al., 2014; NASUWT, 2012; Pyhältö et al., 2015). Despite differences in victimization rates of teachers bullying due to methodological differences between studies, the workplace bullying among teachers is a problem which is quite widespread, but has received relatively little attention to teachers as multiple targeted victims in the school settings (e.g. Benefield, 2004; Kõiv, 2011; McGuckin & Lewis, 2008; Riley et al., 2011; NASUWT, 2012) compared with teacher-targeted bullying from pupils (e.g. De Wet, 2006; Dzuka & Dalbert, 2007; James et al., 2008; Kauppi & Pörhölä, 2012; Khoury-Kassabri et al., 2009; Kõiv, 2011; Pervin & Turner, 1998; Terry, 1998).

The teacher-target bullying from students, parents, staff, and principals is a cross-bordered problem in schools, whereby the assessment of this problem mostly focuses on victimization by students compared with other school staff members' (e.g. non-teaching and education support professionals) victimization experiences generated by other perpetrators in the workplace (Bradshaw

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et al., 2013) and also among social workers (Koritsas et al., 2010; van Heugten, 2010; Whitaker, 2012).

These challenges suggest that there is a need to gather data from teachers' and social pedagogues' self-reports about their experiences of victimization based on multiple perpetrators (children and adults), and assess the prevalence of various types and categories of victimization. The following two key research questions were formulated:

1. What is the extent of different types of bullying experienced by teachers and social pedagogues in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships?
2. What is the extent of different bullying categories (threat to professional status, threat to personal standing, isolation, and physical aggression) experienced by teachers in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships?

The aim of the study was to compare the extent and nature of bullying experienced by teachers and social pedagogues in teacher-pupil, teacher-teacher, teacher-school administrative staff, teacher-school maintenance staff, and teacher-parent relationships in Estonian schools.

It was hypothesized that victimization of teachers by pupils and parents in the area of verbal threat to personal standing would involve a greater proportion than the victimization of social pedagogues.

### **Study design and selection of subject**

In 2016 a cross-sectional survey consisting of two nationwide separate samples – teachers and social pedagogues, was conducted in Estonia. A systematic random sampling was used to select two schools from all separate districts, whereby the ratio of different types of schools (basic schools versus gymnasium) among sample of schools corresponded to the countrywide school sample. All teachers from randomly selected schools were included in the research sample and personal e-questionnaires were sent by the author. Participant rate was 54.7%. The first sample consisted of 567 teachers: 502 females (88.5%) and 65 males (11.5%). The average age of the subjects was 46.29 years ( $SD = 11.7$ ). The youngest subject was 20 years old and the oldest was 71.

Personal e-questionnaires were sent by the author to all social pedagogues working in Estonia at different institutions (mostly at schools). Participant rate was 58.8%. The second sample consisted of 153 social pedagogues: 147 females (95.4%) and 7 males (4.6%). The average age of the respondents was 41.3 years ( $SD = 8.5$ ). The youngest subject was 23 years old and the oldest was 59.

## Instrument

A self-report instrument for the measurement of prevalence of different types of bullying of teachers by students and by adults (other teachers, administration parents and maintenance staff) in school context was used (Kõiv, 2011) consisting of 15 items which described acts of harming or hurting the target person. The bullying-type experiences based on categorization of general workplace bullying (Rayner & Hoel, 1997) including: (1) threat to professional status: accusation regarding lack of effort, belittling opinion, public humiliation; (2) threat to personal standing: devaluation, insults, intimidation, name-calling, offensive remarks, shouting, slandering; (3) isolation: physical isolation, withholding of information. Physical aggressive behaviour as a category of bullying was also included and one item regarding cyberbullying was added to the instrument. Participants indicated how often they had been bullied at school during the last six months using a 4-point Likert scale (never, often, very often) after a definition of bullying by following the pattern established by Olweus (1999). A person was considered a victim when he/she reported being bullied “often” or “very often” at least one out of a list of bullying items.

## Results

This article reports on the results from a cross-sectional study of Estonian teachers' and social pedagogues' victimization by students and adults (other teachers, students, staff, principals, parents) from three areas of study: general prevalence of victimization of teachers and social pedagogues viewing them as targets of children and adult bullying in schools; how commonly four broad categories of victimization from bullying were experienced by the two samples of respondents in different types of relationships in school; and thirdly, we will focus on specific acts, listed under each of the four types or categories (included also cyberbullying) of victimization among teachers and social pedagogues. The results were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis and Chi-square test for comparison of frequencies and are discussed with reference to other studies.

This study exposes the commonness of victimization among participating teachers and social pedagogues and showed that 35% of teachers and 17% of social pedagogues were victims of students bullying, and 25% of teachers and 46% of social pedagogues were victims of adult bullying.

Research results indicated that more teachers were victimized at colleague-on-teacher level and more social pedagogues were victimized at adult-on-adult level, whereby it was found that social pedagogues were more victimized by parents and other school staff members.

Consistently, by far the most bullying reported by teachers was from students, followed by parents, management, other teachers and then, to a far lesser extent, from other staff members at school. For social pedagogues, the most frequent perpetrators of bullying were parents, then principals, followed by students, teachers, and to a lesser degree other staff members at school.

The analysis of the categories of teachers' and social pedagogues' victimization rates in different relationship levels indicated that teachers as victims of bullying experienced a significantly greater threat to personal standing and to professional status in the interpersonal relationships with pupils and with parents compared with social pedagogues.

Teachers' and social pedagogues' victimization forms were examined across the five perpetrator categories (student, parent, other teachers, administrative staff and school maintenance staff) and it was revealed that verbal direct and indirect forms of victimization (e.g. accusation regarding lack of effort, slandering, intimidation, shouting, name-calling, belittling opinion) in teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships tended to be more prevalent among teachers compared with social pedagogues.

Thus, the hypothesis that victimization of teachers by pupils and parents in the area of verbal threat to personal standing would involve a greater proportion than victimization of social pedagogues was confirmed.

Different types of isolation (physical isolation, withholding of information) were relatively prevalent across five perpetrator categories (student, parent, other teachers, administrative staff and school maintenance staff) among two study group members, whereby social pedagogues' victimization experiences were more frequently connected with withholding of information in relationships with parents and other school staff members; and teachers were more frequently victims of other teachers and administrative staff aggression in the area of physical isolation. Additionally, it was revealed that more social pedagogues than teachers reported being victimized by students in the area of cyberbullying.

Results indicated that not only teachers, but also social pedagogues, were victimized by multiple individuals within the school ecology.

*Keywords:* bullying, prevalence of victimization, teacher, social pedagogue, Estonia