The influence of parental style and socioeconomic circumstances on school bullying: A systematic review

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Abstract. The phenomenon of school bullying is linked to family characteristics. The way in which parenting is exercised and the socioeconomic circumstances affect students' involvement in school bullying for the victims and bully/victims, are reviewed. We conducted a systematic review of the published literature from 1982 until 2020 by using Google-Scholar, PsycINFO, Scopus and PubMed on the following words and phrases: "school bullying", "parenting", and "socioeconomic factors". Prospective cohort, cross-sectional and meta-analytic studies were included. The review results showed that the quality of parental management and the inappropriate parental style, i.e. the authoritarian, the overprotective and the indifferent, influence negatively the students in bullying, in all roles. Also, the low socioeconomic level was associated with the involvement of students in school bullying in all roles. It was found that adverse economic conditions and low educational attainment they are correlated not only with the students involved in school bullying but also with the parenting style. In conclusion, important correlations between school bullying, parenting style and socio-economic conditions emerged.

Keywords: School bullying, parental style, socioeconomic circumstances.

INTRODUCTION

School bullying is a problem that concerns the whole world. It is a subcategory of aggressive behavior. It is determined by three criteria, the intentional, aggressive behavior to cause damage, the repetitiveness and the imbalance of power of the more powerful towards someone weaker. The imbalance of power may refer to physical, psychological or social strength (Hemphill, 2014), which may or may not be conscious (Olweus, 1993). Bullying can be physical, verbal, psychological, social or cyber in nature. It manifested in direct and indirect ways of behaviors. Bullying has serious short- and long-term consequences. Among them are reported problems, such as physical health problems, depression (Arseneault, 2018), anxiety (Kelly *et al.*, 2020; Proyer *et al.*, 2020), suicides (Skapinakis *et al.*, 2011), problems with externalization behavior problems, adjustment difficulties, crime and substance use (Kretschmer *et al.*,

2018).

The phenomenon of school bullying, primarily relates to individual characteristics of the temperament and personality. A broader approach and ecosystemic perspective demonstrate in addition to individual-internal factors and other factors of intermediate and external systems beyond and outside the individual, which influences the manifestation of school bullying and victimization behaviors (Guckin *et al.*, 2014). Family is the first external system that is affected the most extent. The family is the first natural community and social framework for the individual and has an important role in the development of personality and behavior. The problem of school bullying and victimization has a multi-level connection with the family in many and varied ways (Espelage, 2014).

The family has a direct and indirect influence in obvious

and unseen ways and procedures for the involvement of students in the phenomenon and, on the roles which they are involved with in school bullying. Parenting style functions as a psychological construct that represents standard strategies with which parents are nurturing their children. In this study the parenting style was chosen to capture roughly all the factors and processes by which the family responds to school bullying.

The term socioeconomic refers to the economic situation, the education and occupation of parents, which they affect in a dual way. On one hand, it affects the parenting style and parental management, whereas on the other it has been associated with the involvement of children and adolescents in school bullying.

This systematic review aims to present some of the important elements that have been discussed in the international literature on the link between school bullying, parenting style and socio-economic factors. In addition, it aims to show the influence of the socioeconomic circumstances in a two-way direction; directly in the involvement of students in school bullying and indirectly through the influence on parenting style.

METHOD

The study was carried out in April and May 2020. The review of research data was implemented through the following information bases: Google scholar, PsycINFO, Scopus and PubMed. We conducted a systematic review of the published literature from 1982 through 2020 on the words ´´School bullying, parenting, Socioeconomic´´.

During phase one, the search on the words ´´bullying and parenting´´ gave many results.

During phase two, we first searched for the words´´bullying and parenting´´ and, once the screening for the title and the abstract was completed, 54 studies were selected. Our search for the words "bullying and socioeconomic" leads us to 38 studies, two of which were meta-analyses. Additionally, 1 bi-national study which did not arise from the automatic search was also used.

During phase three and once the full text screening was completed, a total of 35 studies which met the criteria of our search were selected. 18 studies examined the relationship between school bullying and parenting style, whereas 16 studies on the relationship between school bullying and socio-economic circumstances.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Parenting style

Scholars of the phenomenon of school bullying link the bullying and victimized behavior of children and adolescents at school with the quality of parental care.

Parenting style shapes family function and correlates with the behavioral problems of children and adolescents involved in school bullying and victimization (Querido *et al.*, 2002; Hart *et al.*,1998; Camey, 2001; Juvonen, 2003; Flouri and Buchanan 2003; Bowes *et al.*, 2010).

A better understanding of the subject requires the presentation of the classification of the style of parental responsibility. The classification of parental style in four categories was introduced by MacCoby and Martin (1983) and Baumrind (1967). This classification shall be based on two criteria (a) response/acceptance and (b) the requirement/control. In other words, the classification takes into account (a) the parents' response to the needs of the child identified with the parents' absolute acceptance of the child and (b) the control of the parents towards the child, the establishment of limits on children and the expressed demands of the parents towards the children. According to these criteria, the distinction was made into four types/styles of parental responsibility: 1) valid parental responsibility (responsive and demanding), 2) parental responsibility with approval or overprotection (responsive, but not demanding), 3) authoritarian (demanding but not responsive), 4) neglected or infertile (neither responsive nor demanding).

Parenting style is associated with children's psychosocial and emotional functioning both positively and negatively (Brand *et al.*, 2009).

One meta-analysis in 70 studies (Lereya *et al.*, 2013) and cross-sectional studies (Kokkinos *et al.*, 2013; Hart 1998) confirm the general finding that the involvement of students as bullies and being victimized in school bullying is associated with parenting and the characteristics of rejection and lack of warmth.

The authoritarian parenting style uses methods of discipline that contribute decisively to the vulnerability of personality and aggressive/intimidating behavior or victimization (Bach *et al.*, 2018).

The bullying behavior expressed by some students has been associated with the parental education that follows the authoritarian style. In this case parents use violence as a means of education. It is often claimed that the father of the students they bullied was himself bullied during his schooling (Gkatsa, 2015).

According to Olweus (1993), the parenting style of indifference and neglect has also been linked to the bullying behavior of students. In particular, bullying behavior has been associated with a lack of parental supervision, parental neglect and hostility. In their entirety, the above are characteristic properties and basic features of the indifferent parent style. At the same time, it is found that children who are bullied come from families which are unable to offer them care, interest and recognition. They live in a dysfunctional family environment and have experienced conflicts. As a natural consequence of the above, the loss of interest in school subjects arises. They have low school performance and overall academic failure in the future. They feel threatened and as compensation they adopt the role of a

strong bully in school.

Some other studies suggest that bullied students come from a family with overprotective parents. In particular, the victimization of the boys was associated with the mother's overprotective attitude. This attitude appears to be both a cause and a result of victimized behaviour. In particular, in the early years of victimization the child's degree of dependence on the mother also seems to determine the likelihood of victimization (Camey, 2001).

"Provocative or aggressive victims" are students involved in incidents of school bullying in both roles. They alternate in roles sometimes as a bully and sometimes as a victim. This category is characterized as the most disturbed compared to the other roles of involvement in the phenomenon. Students who are in the category of "bully/victim," come from families in which punitive manner is used, demonstrate cruelty in their treatment of children and hostility (Gatsa 2015; Juvonen 2003).

Children who have been victimized have been interlinked a) with the parenting style of authoritarianism, critical attitude and strict rules, b) with the parenting style of overprotection and elasticity (Holt *et al.*, 2008). As mentioned above, the victimized have been associated especially with the mother's overprotective attitude towards the son. The mother limits the autonomy of the boy and the "bonding" that the boy will develop in other relationships. This attitude of the mother causes the victimization of boys, due to the lack of conflict resolution skills and social skills. From the girls' point of view, maternal hyper-pronation causes their victimization, due to emotional insecurity and lack of communication skills (Dunkan, 2004). In addition, the research data suggest that the overproduction of the mother is related to the exercise of power, the victimization of children, and the lack of expectations of the child (Bowes *et al.*, 2010).

A perspective on the study of victimization is its association with domestic abuse and domestic violence events. Scientific studies argue that family environments that apply the methods of corporal punishment and psychological violence act as intermediary mechanisms that shape those personality traits and they are prone to exhibit aggressive behavior and victimization (Holt *et al.*, 2008).

According to the fundamental principles of social-cognitive theory, parental behavior is a model of imitation. According to the principles of social-cognitive theory, parental behavior is the subject of observation, education and learning for children and adolescents. Invalid parental behavior is a model of imitation for children who exhibit aggressive behavior and engage in bullying and victimization in the school environment (Lereya *et al.*, 2013).

In conclusion, based on our review, it seems that bullying behavior is mainly associated with authoritarian, indifferent parenting style and hostility (Olweus, 1993; Camey, 2001). Bullying/victimization were associated with punishment and cruelty, which are also characteristics of the authoritarian parenting style (Lereya, 2013). Victimization is associated with the parenting style of overprotection and authoritarianism. As for the gender factor, it seems that the overprotective style of parenting and victimization affect both sexes in the same way. However, boys in adolescence are particularly influenced by their fathers and the paternal role model (Holt *et al.*, 2008; Dunkan, 2004; Bowes *et al.*, 2010).

Contrary to what has been mentioned above, it seems that the valid parenting style is a protective factor for school bullying. According to this parenting style, when parents show acceptance, respond to needs, exercise control and set boundaries to their children, the risk of children getting involved in school bullying with any role is reduced.

Socio-demographic factors

The results of the surveys agree that socioeconomic circumstances, such as the economic situation, education and occupation of parents mediate and also shape the characteristics of the family related to the involvement of pupils in school bullying and the roles with which students are involved in the phenomenon (Due *et al.*, 2009; Elgar *et al.*, 2009).

Socioeconomic circumstances and the low educational level of parents influence the manifestation of bullying behavior (Nansel *et al.*, 2001).

At pre-school age, the study of socioeconomic associations showed that the low educational level of parents affects children's involvement in bullying and victimization behaviors at school. In particular, it shows that the lower educational level of the family, the greater the involvement (Perren, 2009).

In a meta-analysis by Tippett and Wolke (2014), 28 studies on childhood students captured by the majority of studies that involve with the role of victim and bully/victim was associated with a low socioeconomic level. The same study claims that bullying behavior was associated with a higher socioeconomic level of the family.

Similarly, research results in adolescents describe how the behavior of bullies is significantly influenced by the family's financial difficulties and father's unemployment. Also, the type of professional employment of the father as a freelancer was associated with the behavior of the bully (Gkatsa *et al.*, 2015). Analyzing the data shows that economic difficulties, job insecurity and father's unemployment, bring about family stress. The result of the emotional burden is that parental support and the quality of parental interaction are reduced. The same factors, economic difficulties, and unemployment seem to function most of the time as the main cause of parents' punitive practices towards children. Then, forced parental management educates children in aggression, hostile treatment of others and anti-social behavior (Magkara *et al.*, 2012; Veenstra *et al.*, 2005).

The addition of a recent study of Dietrich and Ferguson (2020) on teenage students is important. Their findings

are consistent with the above and support that lower socioeconomic level of the family affects the behavior of adolescents and their involvement as bullies in the phenomenon. With their results they interpret the mechanism by which lower socioeconomic level influences and directs adolescents to engage in the role of bully. In particular, the Dietrich and Ferguson study (2020) shows that adolescents from low socioeconomic levels are bullied without being able to justify their behavior. When asked why they reacted with this behavior, they could not give an answer. The scholars interpreted this reaction of the students with the correlation of lower socioeconomic levels of the family with the low self-esteem and belief of low self-efficacy that these students have, which act as mediator mechanisms in intimidating behavior.

Similarly, the victimization of children and adolescents was associated with the family's financial difficulties, which affect parental behavior and the management of children and adolescents by parents. Due *et al.*, (2009) in a survey in 40 countries investigated victimization and found that adolescents who were most victimized came from the lower socioeconomic level. Elgar *et al.* (2009) reinforces this view with the findings of the transnational study. The research results of the above-mentioned study showed that the countries with the highest income disparities also experienced greater involvement in school bullying. Based in the above, it appears that the financial difficulties in the family bring about conflict, problematic and aggressive management of disputes and issues. The hostility, cruelty and inconsistent punishments experienced by children and adolescents in their families cause high anxiety, which is linked to the difficulty that children have in facing aggressive and intimidating behaviors at school (Peterson 1982).

Research by Whitney and Smith (1993) suggests that the elementary and high school students from lower socioeconomic levels have a high rate of involvement in school bullying. This research reinforces the view that pre-school and childhood pupils are decisively influenced by lower socioeconomic level and the educational level of parents. In many cases and in adolescence, students who exhibit bullying behavior are likely to be affected by low socioeconomic level. Especially, boys seem to be more vulnerable and more affected by the father's profession. However, in some other cases in adolescence bullying behavior, is also likely to manifest itself in adolescent pupils from families with a high socioeconomic level (Gkatsa *et al.*, 2015).

The survey results also suggest that the family's low socioeconomic position has a decisive effect not only with the involvement but also on the retention (Kumpuainen *et al.*, 1999) of involvement in incidents of school bullying.

Based on the aforementioned discussion, it is argued that the educational level of parents was associated with involvement in school bullying, especially in preschool (Perren, 2009) but also in childhood and adolescence (Whitney and Smith, 1993).

It is also argued that the low socioeconomic circumstances of the family are associated with bullying and victimization behavior at school (Tippett and Wolke, 2014). More specifically, the family's financial difficulties and unemployment lead to stressful conditions, which make it difficult for quality parent-child interaction and parental support. In some cases, the family's financial difficulties create fear, insecurity, low self-esteem, and negative future predictions that lead some adolescents and children to bullying behaviors (Gkatsa *et al.*, 2015; Magkara *et al.*, 2012; Veenstra *et al.*, 2005; Dietrich and Ferguson, 2020). Financial difficulties also seem to affect victimization in different ways. Negative family conditions, such as hostility, conflict and cruelty, cause increased stress which makes it impossible for children to cope with bullying behaviors (Due *et al.*, 2009; Elgar *et al.*, 2009).

Concluding, socioeconomic factors have a mediating function and affect the students' involvement in two ways. On the one hand, adverse socioeconomic factors influence the formation of an invalid parenting style. On the other hand, lower socioeconomic level, financial difficulties, unemployment, economic insecurity and low educational level were associated with victimization and bullying. In conditions of intense socioeconomic inequalities, it seems that a high socioeconomic level also reinforces bullying behavior.

CONCLUSION

The advantage of our review paper is that it presents data from selected and influential studies in a short and substantial way. Based on these studies, it is claimed that socioeconomic circumstances and the quality of parental behavior play an important role in the phenomenon of school bullying. More specifically, it appears that the parenting style - authoritarian, indifferent and overprotective - negatively affects children, adolescents and leads to bullying behavior and Victimization (Parenting punishment 2006). In addition, the educational level of parents mainly is associated with preschool bullying whereas the difficult socioeconomic circumstances with bullying in adolescencents.

The disadvantage of this review is related to the fact that it does not delve into more detailed processes which mediate between the investigated variables.

However, useful conclusions that may contribute to the effectiveness of school bullying prevention and intervention are reached. To this end, it is appropriate to activate protective factors, such as socioeconomic and parenting support, psychological training of parents as well as reinforcement of children's and adolescents' self-esteem and self-worth (Connolly and O'Moore, 2003; Lereya *et al.*, 2013).

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