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Bullying and Harassment of Trainee Teachers

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Abstract

The present study describes the prevalence of trainee teachers being victims to bullying and distinguishes between different types of bullying within a cross-sectional design. Moreover it shows interrelations between bullying and outcomes (intention to leave, job satisfaction, general health state, burnout, cognitive stress symptoms and satisfaction with life). The data was collected by means of the Negative Acts Questionnaire R (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers 2009), which contains work-related bullying, personal bullying and physically-intimidating bullying. The outcomes are measured by means of the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ, Nübling et al., 2012). 342 German women and men (female = 81,9%. male = 18,1%; age: M = 28, SD = 4) in their second phase of the teacher-training participated online. First results show that 37,4% have experienced at least one negative weekly. The most common type of bullying is the work-related type (median: 14) followed by personal bullying (median: 9). The prevalence rates are higher among men (35,5%) than among women (16,8%). Correlations between bullying and worse outcomes on all variables were found. In summary the results are alarming and point out that there should be a greater focus on this topic, especially on prevention and intervention.

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1. Theoretical Background

During the last decades bullying and harassment at the job have increasingly been taken into account in science works (f. e. Zapf, 2004; Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009, Leymann, 2009). Bullying is defined as the feeling of a person (or a group of people) to be the aim of a series of negative acts, performed with relatively high frequency (f.

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e. weekly) and over a period of time (>6 month) (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009). Bullying on teachers was found with a prevalence rate of 16% (Jäger, 2016). Moreover, the working situations for teachers and their state of health also met with a high degree of public and individual interest, as being discussed as a reason for early retirement and absenteeism (Weber, Weltle & Lederer, 2003). At the same time it is quite surprising that there are hardly any published studies on bullying and the working situations of trainee teachers.

In Germany educational students have to complete a first examination after university education (4-5 years). The first examination is followed by a period of practical training in schools accompanied by educational seminars (1,5 years) and a second examination. A few studies pointed out that the trainee teachers' state of health is worse than the teachers' (Christ, van Dick & Wagner, 2004; Schubarth, Speck & Seidel, 2006; Drüge, Schleider & Rosati, 2014). International research has shown that stress, depression and anxiety are also reported by trainee teachers (Chaplain, 2008; Mundia, 2010). Richter et al. (2011) stressed the importance of informational and emotional support provided by mentors, which is associated with an increase in the trainee teachers' self-efficacy beliefs and a decline in their emotional exhaustion.

Maguire (2001) examined bullying of trainee Teachers and found a prevalence rate of 18%. Chyra and Czerkawski (2011) found in their poll research that impersonal allusions, criticism of the work performed, lowering of professional competences and self-esteem, overburdening with tasks and taking back the previously ordered work were the most common acts of bullying in novice teachers. In order to develop and to implement appropriate support as prevention and intervention, it is inevitable to describe characteristics and manifestations of bullying of trainee teachers and to show interrelations with resulting strains. It is the aim of this research paper to conduct a grass-roots survey on trainee teachers in Germany when being victims of bullying and to examine interrelations with outcomes.

2. Aims of the Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a grass-roots survey on bullying and harassment of trainee teachers in Germany. In detail, the aims of the study are :

- (1) to describe the prevalence of bullying and harassment,
- (2) to analyse different types of bullying (work-related, person-related, physically-intimidating),
- (3) to compare men and women,
- (4) to examine interrelations with outcomes.

3. Methods

The data was gathered through an online-questionnaire. The German version of the Negative Acts Questionnaire R (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers 2009), which contains 22 items with three underlying factors: work-related bullying, personal bullying and physically-intimidating bullying was used to measure bullying and harassment. Seven Scales (intention to leave, job satisfaction, general health state, burnout, cognitive stress, satisfaction with life) of the German version of the Copenhagen Social Questionnaire (COPSOQ: Kristensen et al., 2005, German version: Nübling et al., 2005) including socio demographic data (e.g. gender, age, type of school, marital status) were used to measure outcomes.

For sample recruitment all the 19 state seminars for didactics and teacher education in Baden-Württemberg were asked to pass on a letter including the link to this study, 15 participated. The sample consists of 342 German women and men (female = 81,9%. male = 18,1%; age: M = 28, SD = 4) in their second phase of the teacher-training.

Sumscores were formed for the NAQ R (e.g. prevalence rate, the types of bullying) according to Einarsen et al. (2009) and the COPSOQ (e.g. intention to leave, job satisfaction, general health state, and burnout) according to Nübling et al. (2005). The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and non-parametric techniques with SPSS 22 depending on the data volume. Correlations were used to analyze links between bullying and the outcomes.

4. Results

To describe the prevalence of bullying and harassment, prevalence rates were formed. First results show that the prevalence of bullying is high: 37,4% have experienced at least one negative act weekly. Some authors used a more rigid definition of bullying: the bullied person has to be aimed at with at least two different negative acts weekly. Still 20,1% have experienced bullying according to this definition (see Figure 1).

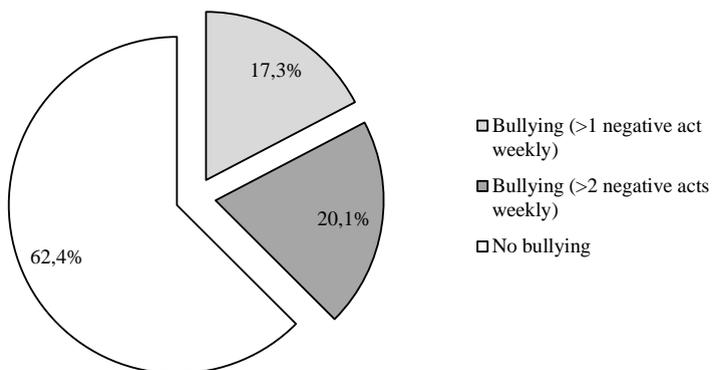


Fig. 1. Prevalence of Bullying.

To analyze different types of bullying, the medians were compared. The most common type of bullying is the work-related type (median: 14), followed by personal bullying (median: 9) and physically intimidating bullying (median: 3).

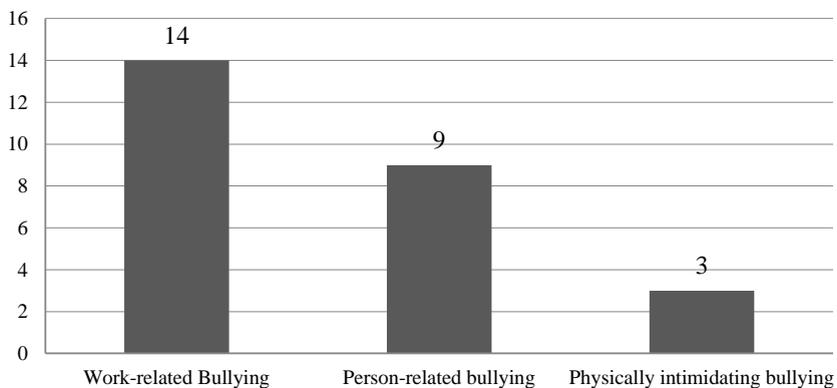


Fig. 2. Types of bullying.

To compare bullying among men and women, the data was split into the two groups. The differences in the prevalence were analyzed by the chi-square test. The prevalence rates are descriptively higher among men (35,5%) than among women (16,8%). Though, this effect wasn't found significant (see Table 1).

Table 1. Frequencies of bullying in men and women.

	bullying	no bullying	total
female	91	189	280
male	25	37	62
total	116	226	342

Interrelations with outcomes were analyzed using correlations; the calculation of correlation coefficients was done according to Pearson. Bullying correlated positively with the intention to leave (.41), burnout (.37) and cognitive stress symptoms (.32) as well as negatively (job satisfaction (-.51), general health state (-.39) and satisfaction with life (-.26) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Intercorrelations with outcomes.

	COPSOQ item MI	NAQ R
intention to leave	.29**	.41**
job satisfaction	-.37**	-.51**
general health state	-.26**	-.39**
burnout	.25**	.37**
cognitive stress	.19**	.32**
satisfaction with life	-.19**	-.26**

Note: **. The correlation is significant at the 1 %-level.

5. Discussion

First results show that the prevalence of bullying is comparatively high: 37,4% have experienced at least one negative act weekly and 20,1% have experienced two different acts weekly. In contrast to the results presented in this study, Maguire (2001) found a prevalence rate of 17%. Jäger (2014) found a rate of 16% of bullying in teachers, which may lead to the hypothesis that the prevalence of bullying is higher in trainee teachers than in teachers and should be examined in further studies. In spite of some studies having pointed out that women are more frequently affected as men (Jäger, 2014; Meschkutat, Stackelbeck & Langenhoff, 2002), the prevalence rates are surprisingly higher among men (40,3%) than among women (32,5%). In accordance with the findings of Chyra and Czerkawski (2011), we found work-related bullying as the most common type of bullying.

Bullying correlated positively with the intention to leave, burnout and cognitive stress symptoms as well as negatively with job satisfaction, general health state and satisfaction with life, which underlines the topic's significance for well-being.

Still there are some limitations to this study: The study used a local area sample from the German federal state "Baden-Württemberg". It is important to remind that the findings in this study can by no means be generalized to other states, as the federal states' educational policy differs. Women are overrepresented among the sample as female participants made up 81,9% of the sample. So far the NAQ-R was only used in work contexts rather than in contexts of training.

6. Conclusion

The study reveals that bullying is not only a phenomenon that can occur among pupils. The results reveal that more than a third of the trainee teachers have experienced bullying (at least one negative act weekly). Work-related bullying was found as the most common type. The prevalence rate was higher in men than in women. Bullying correlated positively with the negative outcomes (e.g. burnout) as well as negatively with the positive outcomes (e.g. satisfaction with life), from this, it could be derived that bullying is accompanied by a potential risk to health. The effect of bullying should be analysed in further studies. In summary the results are alarming and indicate that there should be a greater focus on this topic. In practical terms, the findings from this study suggest that bullying and psychosocial strains may be a problem for trainee teachers and that there is a need to develop tools and guidelines for prevention and intervention.

The relatively high prevalence rate and the interrelations with the outcomes lead to the conclusion that there is a need for research, on the one hand, and a need for action, on the other hand. Further research could investigate the phenomenon of bullying among trainee teachers in general and causes or the differences in gender. In practice, it is important to create awareness of the topic to qualify both teacher trainees and teachers trainers. Furthermore this study has implications for the reform of teachers` training; as social relations may be strengthened. Further the results lead to the need to develop and evaluate specific measures of prevention and intervention. There are many limitations to the study, however, despite these limitations, the results of the study are noteworthy and offer interesting starting points for both practice and research.

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