



## Research article

### EXPLORATION STUDY ABOUT BULLYING AMONG GREEK TEACHERS IN HIGH SCHOOLS

Eleni Stathopoulou, Ph.D. Student

\*Department of Psychology, SWU "Neofit Rilski", Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

Email: [elestathopoulou@yahoo.gr](mailto:elestathopoulou@yahoo.gr)

#### Abstract

*The present research aimed to investigate the bullying experienced by Greek secondary education teachers in their workplace. 105 participated in the research teachers working in Secondary Education in schools in Greece. The aim was the examination of two research questions was to investigate whether the teachers are subjected to school bullying and whether bullying among teachers is correlated with their demographics. The NAQ-R questionnaire was used and bullying was separated and studied in terms of the three dimensions of work-related bullying, person-related bullying and physical bullying. The results have shown that participating teachers have experienced work-related bullying while there was no effect of their demographics to school bullying. As the Greek and international literature presents a limited number of researches and findings on this multidimensional and disturbing phenomenon, the present research hopes to effectively contribute to highlighting the phenomenon of school bullying.*

**Keywords:** *bullying, work-related bullying, teachers, Greek schools, demographics.*

#### Introduction

The investigation of the phenomenon of bullying in the Greek context that takes place in the school environment usually concerns the students and the negative effects on them. On the contrary, in the international literature, research has been carried out that focuses on the investigation of the phenomena of bullying related to the working environment. In the Greek educational workplace, bullying in the school workplace is rarely studied and is generally underestimated to the point of being taboo, despite the research data that show that a large percentage of teachers are victims of bullying behaviors (Riley et al., 2011) with negative effects at the individual and organizational level (Matsela & Kirsten, 2014). The present research seeks to fill the literature and research gap in the Greek educational context and will examine the extent to which teachers are victims of bullying and the extent to which the phenomenon of bullying is influenced by their demographic characteristics. The findings of the present study can be used to sensitize and mobilize the educational policy makers, the education executives, the teachers and school principals to identify the causes of the phenomenon and thereby prevent its occurrence.

#### Background

Work-related bullying is a globally recognized problem with negative effects, which can take many different forms (Bradshaw & Fiegel, 2012), such as verbal violence, non-verbal violence, physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological bullying and cyberbullying. Finally, it can manifest itself "vertically", where the bully has a higher strategic work position and uses bullying in order to exhaust the victim, or "horizontally", i.e. with bullying behaviors between colleagues of the same hierarchical level (Forssell, 2018). Moreover, upward harassment comes from the subordinate to the superior. Although less frequent, the phenomenon carries the same damaging effects on the people involved and on the organization

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(Hirigoyen, 1998). For a behavior in the workplace to be characterized as bullying, it must be characterized as negative and unwanted by the victim, be systematic and over time, and take place in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997).

The dimensions that bullying has taken in the workplace against teachers are alarming. It includes actions, such as malicious actions aimed at the moral and professional discredit and weakening of teachers, psychological abuse by using insults, ridicule and belittling of teachers in public or in private, the manifestation of indifference by the Administration, colleagues, the parents or the students, the destruction of personal belongings, the dissemination of false news and rumors, the sending of video recording material without the consent of the teacher (De Wet, 2019).

Teachers' exposure to workplace bullying is associated with adverse effects, such as lack of job satisfaction, the development of health problems and increased stress and anxiety, and even suicide attempts (Gray & Gardiner, 2013). In surveys that have been carried out in the Greek context on the issue of work-related bullying, teachers express their disappointment at the absence of support from the educational unit and the educational system. They believe that they are struggling to find ways to deal with it on their own as there is no written policy that frames the phenomenon of bullying, nor methods of recording bullying incidents, nor definition of responsibilities and management procedures. At the same time, in the Greek educational context there is, according to the opinion of the teachers, a lack of knowledge about the phenomenon of workplace bullying, as a result of which the teachers themselves do not have the tools and knowledge required to deal with incidents of bullying (Andreadakis et al., 2007).

### Methodology of Research

#### Sample

The research sample was 105 teachers working in Secondary Education in schools in Greece. The sample was pooled using the ratio method. 49 (46.7%) men and 56 women (53.3%) participated. The age range was between 27 and 63 years. The mean age was 42.22 (SD=8.75). The educational units served by the research teachers were from various parts of Greece, with the most prevalent being the Region of Attica (47.6%) and Thessaloniki (26.7%).

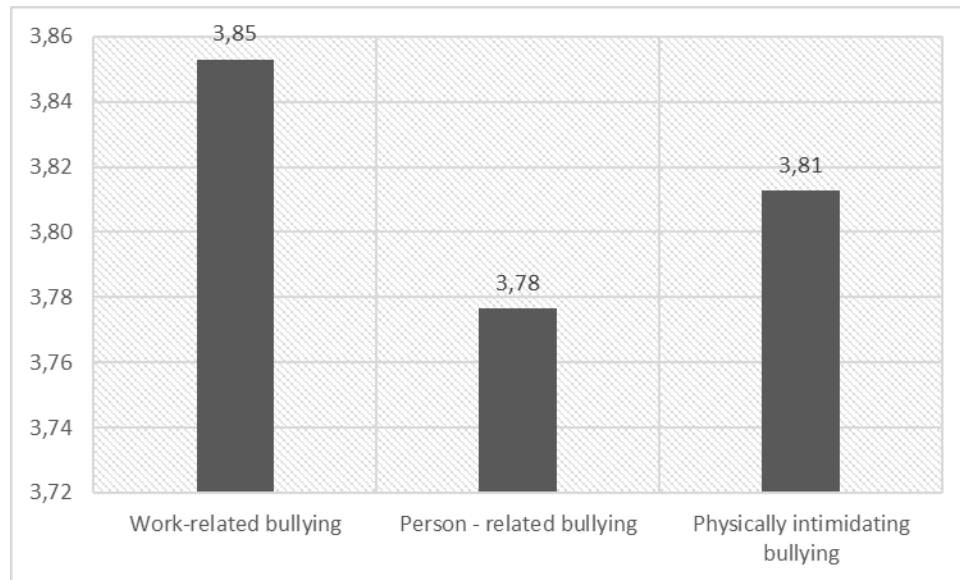
The level of education of approximately half of the teachers (50.5%) is master's degree, while 17 (16.2%) teachers have a doctorate and 35 (33.3%) teachers have a degree in technological education. Most (53.3%) are new teachers with less than 5 years of service in education. Seventy-seven (73.3%) are employed as a deputy and 28 (26.7%) in a permanent position. 62 (59%) work in a general education high school, 7 (6.7%) in a vocational high school, 15 (14.3%) in a music high school and 21 (20%) in a night high school. 23 (21.9%) work in schools with less than 60 students, 28 (26.7%) work with 60 – 200 students and 54 (51.4%) work with more than 200 students. The specializations of the research teachers are varied, with sociology, economics, mathematics, English, philology, music and physics being the most prevalent.

### Methods of Research

The NAQ-R questionnaire (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Salin, 2001) was used, which consists of 22 questions and measures the phenomena of bullying situations experienced or perceived by teachers in the last 3 years. Responses were graded on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Never to 5: Daily). Bullying was separated and studied in terms of the three dimensions of work-related bullying, person-related bullying and physical bullying. The Cronbach's alpha reliability test resulted in a value of 98.5% indicating excellent internal consistency making the questionnaire a reliable research and analysis tool. The statistical program IBM SPSS Statistics V21 was used for the statistical analysis of the data. Spearman's nonparametric test was used to correlate age with the three dimensions of bullying assessment. For the comparisons between the three dimensions of bullying with the categories of gender and work relationship (2 categories) the Mann Whitney test was applied, while for the remaining demographic variables (more than two categories) the Kruskal Wallis test was applied. All quantitative tests were applied with a significance level of  $\alpha=5\%$ .

## Results of Research

The results of the discrimination of the phenomenon of bullying among high school teachers in Greece were obtained for the dimension of work-related bullying with a mean value of 3.85 (SD=1.11), bullying related to the person with a mean value of 3.78 (SD =3.78) and physical bullying with a mean value of 3.81 (SD=1.15) (Figure 1). Bullying phenomena seem to occur on a monthly basis.



**Figure 1.** Bullying incidents in three dimensions (overall mean value)

The comparison of bullying discrimination for the dimension of work-related bullying ( $Z=-0.184$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), person-related bullying ( $Z=-0.37$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and physical bullying ( $Z=-0.081$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) did not indicate any difference between men and women (Table 1).

The correlation test of age with the three dimensions of bullying in Greek high schools indicated that there is no statistically significant correlation between them (Table 2).

The comparison of bullying discrimination for the dimension of work-related bullying ( $Z=0.184$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), person-related bullying ( $Z=0.628$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and physical bullying ( $Z=1.146$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) did not indicate any difference between technology school graduates, master's degree holders and PhD holders (Table 3).

Controlling the comparison of means on the three dimensions of bullying with the teachers' years of service in the schools they serve did not indicate a statistically significant difference on any discrimination dimension of bullying ( $p>0.05$ ). However, a marginal p-statistic value was observed in the person-related bullying dimension ( $p=0.058$ ). Observing the distribution of the means, it appears that teachers with more than 20 years of experience experience significantly less bullying related to their person than teachers with less than 20 years of experience (Table 4).

The comparison of means between tenured and associate professors on the three discrimination dimensions of bullying did not indicate a statistically significant difference on the dimensions of work-

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related bullying ( $Z=-0.184$ ,  $p=0.854$ ), person-related bullying ( $Z=-0.37$ ,  $p=0.711$ ) and physical bullying ( $Z=-0.081$ ,  $p=0.935$ ) (Table 5).

The test comparing the means of discrimination of bullying in its three dimensions with the types of schools did not indicate a statistically significant difference for any of the four schools (Table 6).

Similar conclusions emerged from the comparison of means for the three discrimination dimensions of bullying with school sizes in terms of students. No statistically significant differences were noted ( $p>0.05$ ) (Table 7).

Finally, the comparison of means of distinguishing bullying in its three dimensions did not show a statistically significant difference in any of the teachers' specialties ( $p>0.05$ ) (Table 7).

Table 1. Comparison of means across genders on the three discrimination dimensions of bullying

	Sex	N	Mean Rank	Z	p
Work-related bullying	Man	49	52,42	-0,184	0,854
	Woman	56	53,51		
Person - related bullying	Man	49	51,83	-0,37	0,711
	Woman	56	54,03		
Physically intimidating bullying	Man	49	53,26	-0,081	0,935
	Woman	56	52,78		

Table 2. Correlation of three discrimination dimensions of bullying with age

	Work-related bullying	Person - related bullying	Physically intimidating bullying
Age r	-0,091	-0,094	-0,07
p	0,359	0,346	0,485

Table 3. Comparison of means across education levels on the three discrimination dimensions of bullying

	Level of education	N	Mean Rank	U	p
Work-related bullying	University or technical education degree	35	52,37	0,749	0,688
	Master's degree	53	55,07		
	Ph.D	17	47,85		
Person - related bullying	University or technical education degree	35	52,9	0,628	0,73,1

Physically bullying	intimidating	Master's degree	53	54,68	1,146	0,564
		Ph.D	17	47,97		
		University or technical education degree	35	52,6		
		Master's degree	53	55,38		
		Ph.D	17	46,41		

Table 4. Comparison of means between years of experience in education with the three discrimination dimensions of bullying

		Years of teaching experience in a school	N	Mean Rank	U	p
Work-related bullying		Up to 5	56	54,48	8,316	0,081
		6-10	25	57		
		11-15	5	54		
		16-20	5	71		
		More than 20	14	33,14		
Person - related bullying		Up to 5	56	54,04	9,142	0,058
		6-10	25	57,12		
		11-15	5	65		
		16-20	5	67,6		
		More than 20	14	32		
Physically bullying	intimidating	Up to 5	56	53,62	6,748	0,15
		6-10	25	57,3		
		11-15	5	62,2		
		16-20	5	65,4		
		More than 20	14	35,14		

Table 5. Comparison of means between tenured and substitute teachers on the three discrimination dimensions of bullying

Employment N Mean Z p

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		Relationship		Rank		
Work-related bullying		Permanent	28	46,38	-1,348	0,178
		Deputy	77	55,41		
Person - related bullying		Permanent	28	46,54	-1,314	0,189
		Deputy	77	55,35		
Physically intimidating bullying		Permanent	28	47,14	-1,2	0,23
		Deputy	77	55,13		

Table 6. Comparison of means across school types on the three discrimination dimensions of bullying

		Kind of school		N	Mean Rank	U	p
Work-related bullying		General High School		62	57,77	5,107	0,164
		Vocational School	High	7	56,43		
		Music High School		15	40,27		
		Night High School		21	46,88		
Person - related bullying		General High School		62	58,07	5,052	0,168
		Vocational School	High	7	54,5		
		Music High School		15	41,8		
		Night High School		21	45,52		
Physically intimidating bullying		General High School		62	57,33	3,967	0,265
		Vocational School	High	7	55,64		
		Music High School		15	42,97		
		Night High School		21	46,5		

Table 7 Comparison of means across school sizes (in students) on the three discrimination dimensions of bullying

	Size of school unit in which you serve			N	Mean Rank	U	p
Work-related bullying	Fewer than 60 students	than	60	23	46	1,806	0,405
	60-200 students			28	52,68		
	More than 200 students	than	200	54	56,15		
Person - related bullying	Fewer than 60 students	than	60	23	47,83	0,998	0,607
	60-200 students			28	52,68		
	More than 200 students	than	200	54	55,37		
Physically intimidating bullying	Fewer than 60 students	than	60	23	47,98	1,246	0,536
	60-200 students			28	51,38		
	More than 200 students	than	200	54	55,98		

Table 8. Comparison of means across teacher majors on the three discrimination dimensions of bullying

	Specialty	N	Mean Rank	U	p
Work-related bullying	Economist	16	60,69	7,66	0,264
	English teacher	14	47,29		
	Mathematician	16	61,72		
	Musician	12	35,17		
	Philologist	14	54,96		
	Physician	9	45,89		
	Sociologist	23	53,7		
Person - related bullying	Economist	16	60,09	5,634	0,465
	English teacher	14	47,54		

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		Mathematician	16	58,22		
		Musician	12	38,17		
		Philologist	14	55,11		
		Physician	9	44,5		
		Sociologist	23	55,28		
Physically bullying	intimidating	Economist	16	58,56	6,207	0,4
		English teacher	14	45,57		
		Mathematician	16	59,19		
		Musician	12	36,83		
		Philologist	14	55,04		
		Physician	9	47,83		
		Sociologist	23	56,3		

### Discussion

The results of the present research regarding the first research question showed that the participating teachers have experienced work-related bullying. The findings of the present research regarding the second research question showed that there is no correlation between the demographic variables and bullying in all three of its forms. There was no difference between the two races, while age, educational level, years of service, work status, type of schools and number of students did not seem to influence the phenomenon of bullying. However, the statistical analysis showed that teachers with more than 20 years of experience, experience significantly less bullying related to their person than teachers with less than 20 years of experience. Previous research has found that years of service seem to influence exposure to school bullying. Teachers with less work experience are more exposed compared to their colleagues with more work experience (Gerberich et al., 2011; Gocmen & Gulec, 2018; Akgün & Temli-Durmuş, 2020). These findings are consistent with the findings of the present study.

In their recent research, Zapf et al (2020) report that the exposure of teachers to bullying behaviors in their workplace exceeded 3%, a finding quite worrying as the effects of bullying can be devastating for the school organization (de Wet & Jacobs, 2018). In previous Greek research studies, it has been found that secondary education teachers have experienced 11.6% work-related bullying (Dolkera, 2017), while in the study by Kakoulakis et al (2015), a rate of 14.4% was identified. In studies of the international literature, the percentages of teachers who have fallen victim to workplace bullying are even higher. In the study by Gerberich et al (2011), where the results were about the last working year, 38.4% of teachers who received psychological bullying and 8.3% were victims of physical violence. In the survey by Kleinheksel & Geisel (2019), during the last seven months of their work, teachers stated that they had fallen victim to workplace bullying at a rate of 27.8%.

Although the present study did not confirm any effect of demographic characteristics on school bullying, past studies have shown that gender affects teachers' exposure to bullying. Results of related research show that male teachers accept verbal bullying to a greater extent than female teachers (Ervasti



et al., 2012; Akgün & Temli-Durmuş, 2020). On the contrary, other studies have documented that female teachers are at greater risk of exposure to both verbal bullying and physical violence against them (Gerberich et al., 2011; Williams & Ernst, 2016). Gender also seems to have an effect on the different forms of workplace bullying, where women usually fall victim to physical violence and verbal attacks, while men accept the undermining of their work and personal reputation. Contrary to these findings and in agreement with the findings of the present research, Greek past studies have also confirmed that the gender of teachers does not differentiate their exposure to school bullying (Kakoulakis et al., 2015; Dolkera, 2017).

In terms of age, teachers between 23-31 have an increased probability of exposure to school bullying compared to older teachers (Gocmen & Gulec, 2018), a finding that was not found in the present research. Regarding the comparison between tenured and substitute teachers, substitute teachers, who constitute a large part of the educational community, are at increased risk of exposure to school bullying compared to tenured teachers (Wei et al., 2013). As far as the educational level of the teachers is concerned, the findings of the related studies are contradictory. Similar to the present study, Dolkera's (2017) study found no effect on exposure to school bullying. On the contrary, in other studies teachers with a bachelor's degree compared to teachers with postgraduate studies receive more school bullying in the form of psychological violence (Gülşen & Kiliç, 2014). On the other hand, in the study by Wei et al (2013), teachers with postgraduate degrees received more school bullying.

## Conclusion

According to the results of this study, the participants have experienced bullying in their workplace and the incidents of bullying are not influenced by the demographic characteristics of the teachers. As the Greek and international literature presents a limited number of researches and findings on this multidimensional and disturbing phenomenon, the present research hopes to effectively contribute to highlighting the phenomenon and to contribute with the research findings to individual as well as collective efforts to prevent, deal with and suppression of the phenomenon.

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