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## Assessment of school bullying in Turkey: a critical review of self-report instruments

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### Abstract

In the last decade, school bullying has attracted the attention of academicians, mental health professionals, educators, and policy makers. Although there has been an increase in the number of bullying studies that have been published, the essential point – the accuracy of bullying assessment – is being ignored. Therefore, the aim of this critical review is to describe self-report instruments commonly used in Turkish schools, and to evaluate them with respect to the conceptual elements of bullying (repetition, intentionality, and power imbalance) and their psychometric properties. Implications for researchers and school counselors are also provided.

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*Keywords:* Bullying, victimization, assessment, self-reports, school counselor

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### 1. Introduction

School bullying is known to be a prevalent and significant concern influencing students' well being and social functioning (Due, Holstein, & Soc, 2008; Nansel et al., 2001). In the past ten years, researchers, mental health professionals, and educators have devoted extensive attention to this issue in the effort to understand its nature and prevalence, and to cope with it effectively. An increase in the number of published articles over time is evidence of this extensive attention. Using the keywords “bully or bullying and schools,” the PsycINFO database produced 1703 peer-reviewed articles fully published in journals from 1975 to 2010. Interestingly, most of papers (1458) were published after 2000. Similarly, a review of published articles and unpublished theses and dissertations in Turkish literature indicates that approximately 82 studies on bullying at school appear after 2001. Almost 88% ( $n = 72$ ) were published and defended after 2005, an indication of growing attention to this concern in Turkey as well.

Although there has been a notable increase in the number of bullying studies in the literature, little attention has been paid to its accurate assessment. A few studies do discuss concerns regarding the assessment of bullying and evaluate the current measurements (Cornell, Sheras, & Cole, 2006; Furlong, Sharkey, Felix, Tanigawa, & Greif-Green, 2010; Greif & Furlong, 2006; Griffin & Gross, 2004). An accurate portrayal of bullying is associated with how effectively it is assessed. Therefore, the accurate assessment of bullying is very crucial in order to gain a more precise understanding, develop more effective intervention and prevention strategies, and increases the comparability of research findings (Grief & Furlong). The literature emphasizes using a comprehensive approach to measure bullying (Crothers & Levinson, 2004; Griffin & Gross). In fact, there are many ways to assess bullying (teacher-reports, peer-reports, etc.). The most common procedure is using self-report instruments because it is a practical method for researchers to collect data (Furlong et al.). Today, most research findings have been obtained based on these self-reports.

There have been some concerns regarding self-reports for assessment of bullying (Cornell, Sheras, & Cole, 2006; Greif & Furlong, 2006). The first is the variation in an operational definition of bullying. Greif and Furlong define bullying as a special form of peer victimization. They emphasize that bullying is differentiated from other types of peer victimization by its special nature. They believe that most bullying measurements in the literature evaluate peer victimization rather than bullying victimization. Additionally, the uncertainty in the conceptualization of bullying may also lead to different prevalence rates. For instance, Table 1 indicates different prevalence rates for bullying in Turkey that may be related to the utilization of different instruments.

A second concern is the use of an a priori definition at the beginning of an instrument and use of the term “bullying” within the sentences. While some authors prefer to use an a priori definition (Olweus, 1996; Solberg & Olweus, 2003), some of them argue that such a use may create limitations that result in underreporting of bullying experiences (Furlong et al., 2010). Kert, Codding, Tryon, and Shiyko (2010) found that respondents who completed a measure that included a definition of bullying and used the term “bully” within the items reported less bullying behaviors than those who completed a measure that did not include a definition or use the term “bullying.”

A third concern is how adequately measurement tools evaluate the conceptual components of bullying. There is currently a consensus among some researchers on the definition of bullying: that it is a form of aggression and includes some core elements, such as repeated incidents between the same people over a considerable period, intentionality, and imbalance in power relationship (Furlong et al., 2010; Greif & Furlong, 2006). Although researchers have long struggled to reach a consensus on a bullying definition, the reflection of these efforts on the measurement of bullying is not satisfactory (Greif & Furlong). Regarding timeframe of the measurements, Griffin and Gross (2004) point out that many bullying instruments do not specify a clear time frame for participants’ responses and this reduces the comparability of the findings across studies. With regard to assessment of the repetition of bullying, Greif and Furlong raise the point that some measurements do not consider bullying as a process and ignore the point of who did the bullying. Is this the same person or not? Students are asked to respond to specific bullying behaviors without any consideration of these factors, which eventually provides a general perspective about peer victimization rather than an evaluation of bullying victimization. Another essential element of bullying is the intention to be hurtful. Greif and Furlong indicate that it is sometimes difficult to understand the intention of children’s acts or whether the hurtful intention of behaviors changes how they are perceived by respondents. However, this element, overlooked in many instruments, needs to be embedded into the measurement in some way, such as adding an explanation for it or writing items including intentionality of being hurtful. The third core element, power differential between bully and victim, is considered a main difference distinguishing bullying from aggression (Greif & Furlong). Therefore, respondents need to be aware of this balance issue while completing the instrument.

The fourth concern is whether the measurement covers different forms of bullying (Greif & Furlong, 2006). Bullying occurs in a number of typologies, such as physical (e.g., hitting, kicking, punching), verbal (e.g., teasing, taunting), social exclusion, and indirect (e.g., spreading nasty rumors, telling others not to play with someone) (Smith & Ananiadou, 2003). In order to reach an accurate assessment of bullying, different forms of bullying need to be considered in the measurements. The last concern, discussed by Griffin and Gross (2004), is that the current bullying instruments do not have norm studies across developmental levels. Similarly, Greif and Furlong argue that bullying measures should be developed with consideration for the developmental stages of respondents. For instance, long sentences and explanations may not be appropriate for small children who may have difficulty comprehending them. All of these concerns indicate that the measurement of bullying is a challenging process and requires extensive consideration regarding methodological and conceptual issues.

Although some instruments currently available for measuring bullying in Western cultures have been evaluated by some authors (Greif & Furlong, 2006; Griffin & Gross, 2004), no attention has been paid to measuring bullying in Turkey. Therefore, it is expected that the current study will provide a critical perspective regarding assessment of bullying in Turkish samples, utilizing self-reports. With this objective, the current study first addresses common self-report measures developed in Turkey or adapted for use with Turkish students. Each measure is briefly described and evaluated based on the conceptual components of bullying (repetition, intentionality, and power imbalance) and psychometric properties. Lastly, implications for researchers and school counselors are discussed.

## **2. Self-Reports for Assessment of Bullying in Turkey**

As mentioned at the beginning, school bullying studies in Turkey have appeared on the scene since 2001. In order to measure bullying, researchers have used different methodologies. Some preferred to adapt popular bullying

instruments for use with Turkish samples (e.g. Dölek, 2002), whereas others preferred to developed new bullying instruments with consideration for the relevant literature and characteristics of Turkish culture (e.g. Kutlu, 2005). Information about the instruments was obtained by a search of databases of the Turkish Academic Network and Information Center (ULAKBIM), Turkish National Theses and Dissertation Center (YOK), and Google Scholar. The bullying instruments commonly used for academic studies in Turkey are described below and summarized in Table 1.

*Bully Scale (BS)*. Kutlu (2005) developed the BS to evaluate physical, verbal, and relational forms of bullying among sixth and seventh grade students. It is a 19-item self-report instrument with responses ranging on a five-point Likert scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The BS consists of three dimensions, namely, bully (6 items), victim (8 items), and pleasure in life that includes buffer items (5 items). The total score of sub-dimensions is calculated by summing all of the items in each dimension. Students are also assigned into bully, victim, and bully/victim categories using bully and victim scores. Identification of categories is accomplished by establishing a cut-off point based on mean and standard deviation. The BS does not include any definition of bullying or the term “bullying” within the items. Cronbach alpha coefficients were found to be .83 for bully, .86 for victim, and .70 for pleasure in life dimensions (Kutlu & Aydın, 2010). The strengths of this scale are that it is reliable and tries to cover different forms of bullying. However, it has some limitations in that it does not take into account the conceptual elements of bullying, and it is designed as a checklist of bullying behaviors that does not allow for the evaluation of bullying as a process.

*Bullying Survey (BSu)*. Kepenekci and Çınkır (2006) developed this survey to assess bullying experiences of high school students. It includes 19 items related to different forms of bullying (physical, verbal, emotional, and sexual) and some additional questions about bullying incidences. Respondents are asked to rate how often they have experienced any form of bullying on a five-point scale: “everyday,” “every week,” “every month,” “once in a term,” and “every academic year.” Kepenekci and Çınkır reported that they provided a definition of bullying in the last version of this survey. The bullying items in the survey do not include any “bully” term. The favorable aspects of this measurement are that it assesses different forms of bullying and explores more information about bullying incidences. There are, however, some limitations regarding assessment of core elements of bullying, psychometric properties, and evaluation of bullying as a process. Although it considers the timeframe of bullying by referencing one academic year, this could be a long time period for respondents to remember bullying incidences.

*Colorado School Climate Survey (CSCS)*. The CSCS was developed by Garrity, Jens, Porter, Sager, and Short-Camilli (2000; as cited in Kartal, 2009) to assess students’ bullying experiences, safety in school, and school climate. The Turkish version of this survey was used in different studies (Kartal; Kartal & Bilgin, 2009) to evaluate victimization experiences of elementary and middle school students. It includes 6 items for bullying behaviors, 5 items for school safety, and 14 items for school climate (Kartal & Bilgin). The bullying section involves a checklist of specific bullying behaviors responded to on a five-point scale: “never,” “less than once per week,” “once per week,” “2 to 4 times per week,” and “5 or more times per week.” Respondents are asked to consider their experiences during the past month. The survey does not contain any definition of bullying or the word “bullying” within the items. The internal consistency for the bullying items was found to be .71 (Kartal). The practical characteristics of this measurement are that it is a brief survey and provides additional information about incidences of victimization. However, there are several limitations of this instrument. Since it is a brief checklist of bullying behaviors, it is unable to capture all relevant experiences and may lead to inaccurate estimates of incidences. Further, it is apparent that fewer numbers of bullying items influences the internal reliability of this section. With regard to repetition of bullying incidences, “the last month” is used as a timeframe of reference that forces students to focus on more recent experiences. Students may have had some experiences in the last term rather than in the last month, but these incidents would be missed. Another limitation is that this measurement does not cover other conceptual elements of bullying (intentionality and power imbalance). Lastly, given that it is a checklist, it restricts the ability to evaluate bullying as a process.

*Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (MPVS)*. Mynard and Joseph (2000) developed the MPVS to assess direct and indirect forms of peer victimization among secondary school students. This scale was adapted by Gültekin and Sayıl (2005) for use with Turkish students whose ages range from 11 to 16. Gültekin and Sayıl reported that they used the item pool of the original study of MPVS. In the adaptation study, they obtained new factor solutions for the Turkish version and named it as “Peer Victimization Scale.” The Turkish MPVS includes five dimensions: terror, overt victimization, teasing, relational victimization, and attacks on property. The scale consists of 27 items responded to on a three-point scale (“not at all,” “once,” and “more than once”). Students are asked to consider their experiences during the school year. Categorization of the victims is accomplished by

establishing a cut-off point based on mean and standard deviation. The scale does not include any definition of bullying or the word “bullying” in the items. Internal consistency was found to be .86 for the entire scale, with a range from .67 to .73 for the subscales. The significant strengths of this scale are that it covers different forms of peer victimization and its reliability value for the entire scale. However, it has some limitations. Regarding the time reference of bullying, the scale asks students to focus on the events during the school year, which is a long time. In that case, respondents may report incidences from recent past, which they remember quickly, or some rare incidences from this period, but have not repeated. Moreover, there is no indication in the scale whether the bully and the victim are the same. Respondents simply rate how often they experience specific bullying behaviors. Another limitation is that it does not measure the other core elements of bullying (intention and power imbalance).

*Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ)*. Olweus (1983; as cited in Solberg & Olweus, 2003) developed this questionnaire to assess students’ experiences of bullying and victimization for a nationwide campaign. After 1983, the instrument underwent a number of revisions (Solberg & Olweus). This measure is a self-report questionnaire assessing the frequency and types of bullying, the location where the bullying takes place, who bullies, how often children report bullying to teachers or their family, and whether the teacher intervenes and his or her actions to stop the bullying. The questionnaire begins by providing a definition of bullying. Participants are asked to select one of five possible responses: “never,” “only once or twice,” “2 or 3 times a month,” “about once a week,” or “several times a week.” The first Turkish translation of this instrument, a revised version (Olweus, 1996), was provided by Dölek (2002). In addition, Tıprıdamaz-Sipahi (2008) translated and adapted another version of the OBVQ for use with Turkish students. The version translated by Dölek (2002) is composed of 40 questions. The internal consistency of this version was found to be .71 for the items of victimization and .75 for the items of bullying (Atik, 2006). Another version of the OBVQ includes 39 items and its internal consistencies were .82 for the victimization items and .80 for the bullying items (Tıprıdamaz-Sipahi, 2008). The strength of this instrument is that it assesses all conceptual elements except for evaluation of bullying as a process (Greif & Furlong, 2006). It also includes different forms of bullying. The main limitation of the instrument is that it has no indicators for assessment of bullying as a pattern or process. In addition, some researchers (Cornell, Sheras, & Cole, 2006) criticize Olweus for not providing the complete psychometric properties of the instrument. Lastly, the instrument begins with a long explanation of bullying that may be difficult for children to read and comprehend.

*Peer Bullying Scale (PBS)*. This scale was prepared by Pekel (2004) as a minor revision of the Turkish MPVS (Gültekin & Sayıl, 2005) in order to assess bullying behaviors among fifth and sixth grade students. Different from the MPVS, it asked students to consider how often they have engaged in bullying behaviors toward other students. It includes 28 items responded to on a three-point scale: “not at all,” “once,” and “more than once.” It consists of five dimensions: terror, overt bullying, teasing, relational bullying, and attacks on property. Respondents are classified as bullies by establishing a cut-off point based on mean and standard deviation. The internal consistency coefficients were .92 for the entire scale, .66 for terror, .74 for teasing, .84 for overt bullying, .60 for relational bullying, and .62 for attacks on property subscales. The strength of this instrument, similar to the MPVS, is that it measures different types of bullying and has good reliability for the entire scale. However, it still suffers from the absence of core elements in assessment of bullying. It also ignores the assessment of bullying as a process.

*Peer Bullying Survey (PBSu)*. Pişkin (2003, 2010) developed this instrument for measuring bullying among students from fourth to eighth grades. It consists of 35 single and multiple-choice questions. It has two subscales, namely, bully and victim. The PBSu begins with a short explanation of bullying, including Olweus’s (1993) definition. The survey contains two main questions: “Have you ever been victimized at school at least once by the behaviors mentioned in the explanation?” and “Have you ever bullied another student(s) at school at least once?” Following these questions, five specific questions for bullying and victimization are asked with five possible response options: “almost every day,” “at least once a week,” “once a month,” “once a term,” or “once a year.” These questions include different forms of bullying (physical, verbal, isolation, rumor spreading, and attacks on property). The survey also contains some questions about experiences, feelings, and thoughts of the victims and bullies. The response option “at least once a week” is taken as the cut-off point to classify respondents as bully, victim, or bully/victim. Pişkin (2010) calculated the test-retest reliabilities of bully and victim subscales with a one-week interval. For the bully subscale, the test-retest reliability coefficients were .82 for primary and .85 for middle school students. For the victim subscale, they were .77 for primary and .79 for middle school students. The content validity of the survey was ensured by obtaining 80% expert agreement on the items. Assessing different forms of bullying and providing detailed information about bullying incidences are considered strengths of this instrument. However, measurement of the definitional core elements (intention and power imbalance) and the process of



bullying are ignored. In addition, the time reference for bullying incidences is considered a long time, which respondents may consider that the researcher is exploring the rare incidents (Greif & Furlong, 2006).

*Scale of Peer Bullying (SPB)*. Pişkin and Ayas (2007, 2007a) developed child and adolescent forms of this instrument. Each form obtains responses on two separate columns considering the same items. One column is for the dimension of bullying; it asks how often the respondent behaved like this with other student(s). The other is for the dimension of victimization and asks how often it occurred to the respondent. Students are asked to respond on a five-point scale for each column: “almost every day,” “at least once a week,” “once a month,” “once a term,” or “never.” The child form consists of 37 items and both dimensions (bullying and victimization) have five sub-dimensions (physical, verbal, isolation, rumor spreading, and attacks on property). The adolescent form consists of 53 items, and both dimensions (bullying and victimization) have six sub-dimensions (physical, verbal, isolation, rumor spreading, attacks on property, and sexual). Neither scale includes any bullying definition or the word “bullying” in the items. The internal coefficients for the child form were found to be .90 for the dimension of victim and .87 for the dimension of bully. The internal coefficients for the adolescent form were .93 for the victim dimension and .92 for the bully dimension. The strength of this scale is that it covers different forms of bullying and victimization, and it is psychometrically well developed. In addition, it takes into account the timeframe of bullying and victimization. However, the other core elements of bullying (intention and power differential) and the process of bullying are not measured.

*School Bullying Inventory (SBI)*. This measurement, developed by Çalık (2007; as cited in Eşici, 2007), assesses the perceptions of middle school students about bullying incidences. It is a 32-item self-report responded on a five-point scale from “never” to “always.” It includes two subscales: bullying others (18 items) and being bullied (14 items). The internal consistency was reported as .90 for bullying others and .85 for being bullied (Eşici, 2007). The SBI does not contain any bullying definition or the word “bullying” within the items. The strength of this instrument is that it has good reliabilities for the subscales. On the other hand, the essential elements of bullying definition, is the process of bullying, and the timeframe for bullying are not taken into consideration.

*Student Relations Attitude Scale (SRAS)*. Koç (2006) developed the SRAS for assessing bullying among students from ninth to eleventh grades. It is a 21-item self-report instrument consisting of three subscales: bully personality (10 items), self-confidence (6 items), and avoiding bullying (5 items). The bully personality subscale evaluates some specific bullying behaviors. The avoiding bullying subscale assesses how respondents cope with bullying. Participants are asked to respond on a five point Likert-type scale from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The scale does not include the definition of bullying or the word “bullying” in the items. The Cronbach alpha coefficients were found to be .86 for bully personality, .69 for self-confidence, and .57 for avoiding bullying. The limitation of this instrument is that it does not have any ability to assess the core components of bullying or the process and different forms of bullying.

*Teasing and Bullying Survey—School Form (TBS)*. This instrument, developed by Bodin (2006; as cited in Bektaş, 2007), was adapted into Turkish by Bektaş (2007) to evaluate the frequency and prevalence of bullying among students from fourth through twelfth grade. The Turkish TBS is a 58-item self-report responded to on a five-point scale: “once a week,” “1 or 2 times,” “3-5 times,” “6-10 times,” and “11 or more times.” Respondents are asked to focus on experiences that happened in the last month. The odd-numbered items refer to being bullied, whereas the even-numbered items refer to bullying others. The instrument provides the definition of bullying at the beginning. The internal consistency was found to be .92 for the entire scale, .93 for the victim subscale, and .92 for the bully subscale. The strengths of this instrument are its great internal reliability and that it covers different types of bullying and victimization. The limitations of this instrument are that it does not evaluate the core elements of bullying and it evaluates students’ experiences occurring in “the last month,” which is considered a very short time for accurate assessment of bullying. Lastly, it ignores the dynamic of bullying as a process.

### 3. Conclusion

The assessment provides a baseline for understanding the nature of bullying and the development of strategies for bullying prevention and intervention. Thus, the accurate measure of bullying will influence the degree of understanding and effectiveness of these strategies. Considering the importance of accurate assessment, this study aimed to provide a critical review of the instruments commonly used for assessing bullying incidences in Turkish schools. It is apparent that despite increased attention to the topic of bullying in Turkey, the precise measurement of this phenomenon has been overlooked. This review indicates that most of the instruments are not capable of assessing the core definitional elements of bullying and the dynamic of the bullying process. Most of the

assessments are considered measurements for the evaluation of peer victimization rather than bullying victimization. Greif and Furlong (2006) pointed out that bullying assessment could be improved by considering all of the core elements, different forms of bullying, and the dynamic of the bullying process. Therefore, new measures that incorporate all these essential points need to be developed in further studies.

The important point for the practitioners, especially for school counselors, is the consideration of intention in assessing bullying (Furlong et al., 2010). For instance, if the purpose is to get detailed information about students' bullying experiences and to help students in risky groups, school counselors need to evaluate bullying incidences at the individual level, which assesses the components and process of bullying. If the purpose is to develop a bully prevention program that includes all students, it may require an assessment at the school level that focuses on prevalence and general bullying experiences. The current instruments in Turkey might be a good choice in terms of providing a general perspective about the peer victimization incidences. However, they are unable to accurately distinguish the risky groups (bullies, victims, bully/victims, etc). Lastly, it is recommended that multiple assessment methods (self-reports, peer ratings, teacher reports, etc.) should be used in order to enhance the validity of the data (Crothers & Levinson, 2004).

**Table 1. Evaluation of Bullying Self-Report Instruments Used in Turkey**

Measurements	Construct measured	Prior definition of bullying	Different forms of bullying	Repetition	Intention	Power imbalance	Prevalence
Bully Scale (Kutlu, 2005)	Frequency of bullying others and being bullied	No	Yes	No	No	No	33% bully, 31% victim, 12% bully/victim (Kutlu)
Bullying Survey (Kepenekci & Çınkır, 2006)	Frequency of being bullied and bullying incidences	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	All participants victimized at least once during the academic year (Kepenekci & Çınkır)
Colorado School Climate Survey (Garrity et al., 2000; translated by Kartal & Bilgin, 2009)	Frequency of being bullied, school safety, school climate	No	No	No	No	No	3.3% bully, 41.3% victim, 29.9% bully/victim (Kartal & Bilgin)
Multidimensional Peer Victimization Scale (Mynard & Joseph, 2000; adapted by Gültekin & Sayıl, 2005)	Victimization	No	Yes	No	No	No	13.9% victim (Gültekin & Sayıl)
Olweus's Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996; adapted by Dölek, 2002 and Tıpırdamaz-Sipahi, 2008)	Frequency of being bullied and bullying others, bullying incidences	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	4.6 bully, 21.3 victim, 6.5 bully/victim (Atik, 2006)
Peer Bullying Scale (Pekel, 2004)	Bullying behavior	No	Yes	No	No	No	7.6% bully (Pekel)
Peer Bullying Survey (Pişkin, 2010)	Frequency of being bullied and bullying others, bullying incidences	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	6.2% bully, 35.1% victim, 30.2% bully/victim (Pişkin)
Scale of Peer Bullying (Pişkin & Ayas, 2007; Pişkin & Ayas, 2007a)	Frequency of being bullied and bullying others	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	---
School Bullying Inventory (Çalık, 2007; as cited in Eşici, 2007)	Frequency of being bullied and bullying others	No	Yes	No	No	No	---
Student Relations Attitude Scale (Koç, 2006)	Bullying behavior, avoiding bullying	No	No	No	No	No	---
Teasing and Bullying Survey (Bodin, (2006; adapted by Bektaş, 2007)	Frequency of being bullied and bullying others	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	---

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