

TEACHERS IN BULLYING SITUATIONS (TIBS) design and results of a pilot study (2006 - 2008)

Dr. Heinz Witteriede

(3rd European Conference on Health Promoting Schools: Better schools through health, 15 – 17 June 2009, Vilnius, Lithuania)

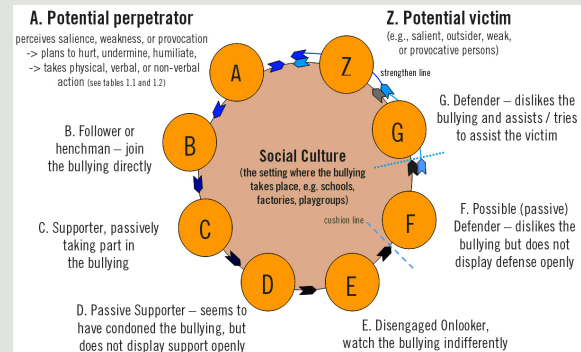
Bullying – some basics

Bullying or mobbing can be defined as an escalating process in the course of which one or more individuals *systematically abuse a power advantage regularly (e.g. weekly) and repeatedly (e.g. over about six months)* for their own gratification or gain, in the form of a series of direct / indirect attempts to inflict physical / psychological / emotional harm on one or more victims who are unable to defend themselves or escape without significant consequences.

The **parties** which can be involved within a bullying-power-cycle are not only *perpetrators* and *victims* but also *witnesses* who often influence the process significantly respectively do have the potential to turn the proceedings to the bad or the good in a certain way (cf. graph, types B to G).

Findings clearly show that bullying is a problem to be taken seriously. There are considerable occurrence rates in different employment sectors and workplaces. It causes serious health impacts and creates great economical cost to organizations and societies. This also applies to the educational sector where the risk of being bullied has been quantified as three-fold by a German study in 2000.

The parties within the bullying-power-cycle and their possible influence



The Tibs-study

Main objectives,

- identification of prototypical bullying situations in teachers' school life ('tsl')
- assessment of the degree of stress caused by those situations and the degree of difficulty encountered by teachers in mastering them,
- rise in awareness regarding the subject matter in schools and organizations pertaining to schools.

Overall this should serve to estimate whether teachers require aid in dealing with bullying in their school lives or not and to deliver a basis for the preparation of an intervention-aid matrix.

Working steps,

- generation of a broad-based theoretical basis regarding bullying in general, at workplaces, in 'tsl'
- ascertainment of the implications of bullying, in particular health impacts
- generation of a systematization of bullying constellations and behaviour forms in 'tsl'
- development of 20 vivid case descriptions of presumably prototypical bullying situations in 'tsl'
- validation of the cases through experienced teachers by the help of a tailored questionnaire
- identification of the levels of their 'prototypical quality' in relation to the responses.

The sample at a glance

Schools addressed	Federal states addressed	Response rate
103	16 (all German states)	41 (39.8%)

The questionnaire collected five types of teacher responses,

1	the situation <i>has been experienced</i> once or several times by the interviewee
2	the situation <i>has been reported credibly</i> once or more often by colleagues to the interviewee
3	the situation <i>has not been experienced</i> but the interviewee allow for the possibility of its occurrence at schools
4	the estimated <i>degree of stress</i> caused by the situation for affected teachers on a scale of 1 to 10
5	the estimated <i>degree of difficulty</i> of coping with the situation for affected teachers on a scale of 1 to 10

Synopsis of possible constellations and analyzed bullying situations

A. Teachers as victims
A.1 Bullied by principal / deputy head
1: 'In the principal's sights – criticised, isolated and degraded'
2: 'Under pressure from the deputy head – picked on for ages'
A.2 Bullied by colleague(s)
1: 'Unworthy successor – being in the crossfire between two sides and solid confines'
2: 'Wrong work background of the new colleague – forced to leave'
A.3 Bullied by school employees
1: 'Unexpected bullying situation – systematically picked on by the caretaker'
A.4 Bullied by pupil(s)
1: 'The new form teacher – targeted by dissatisfied students'
2: 'Bullying teachers – victim of the hierarchy dynamics in classrooms'
A.5 Bullied by parent(s)
1: 'Parents only concerned with good grades - teacher doesn't come up to expectations'
A.6 Bullied by school authority system
1: 'Targeted by the school authorities – worn down by schools inspector'
B. Teachers as perpetrators
B.1 Bullying of principal / deputy head, see case C 1.2
B.2 Bullying of colleague(s), see A 2.1, A 2.2, A 1.1, A 1.2, C 1.1 - C 1.3, C 2.1, C 2.2
B.3 Bullying of pupil(s), see cases C 3.1, 3.3., 3.4
B.4 Bullying of school employee(s) – no case description

in teachers' school life within the Tibs-study

C. Teachers as witnesses
C.1 Principal / deputy head bullies colleague(s) or vice versa
1: 'Abandoned - slandered by the principal'
2: 'Unwelcome head of school – colleagues give them no chance'
3: 'Early retirement – at the mercy of the principal'
C.2 Colleague(s) bullies colleague(s)
1: 'Doubly bullied – vice form teacher as bully and agitator of students'
2: 'Motivated teacher forced into isolation by colleagues'
C.3 Colleague(s) bullies pupil(s) or vice versa
1: 'Collateral damage – unconfident teacher makes student an outsider'
2: 'Targeted by the class - student bullies teacher with the help of his class-mates'
3: 'Kinship expectations – teacher discriminates against family members'
4: 'Too weak and unwilling – 'well meaning' gym teacher harasses frail student'
C.4 Pupil(s) bullies pupil(s)
1: 'Top of the class bullied by class-mates'
2: 'Out of the ordinary – bullied after conversion to a different religion'
C.5 Parent(s) bullies colleague(s) – no case description from the witness perspective, but case A 5.1 provides an example of this bullying constellation
C.6 Colleague(s) bullies school employee(s) or vice versa - no case description from the w- perspective, but case A 3.1 provides an example of the second bullying constellation
C.7 School authority system bullies colleague(s) – no case description from the witness perspective, but case A 6.1 provides an example of this bullying constellation

Teachers in focus of international research, investigating bullying in schools in terms of teachers has barely been focussed on. Although the overall reported data is still insufficient, it sheds growing light on the gravity of the problem and calls for more systematic investigation at all levels. This includes the well covered problem of bullying amongst pupils to which teachers have an ethical obligation to respond. The findings of 'Tibs' clearly support this conclusion.

Main results of Tibs showed that not only are the cases not far removed from school reality, but also, with the exception of one case only (C 4.2), that they can be regarded as typical situations in teachers' school life to varying extents. In all situations a notable degree of stress and of difficulty in dealing with them was indicated.

Conclusions and implications, teachers require systematic aid in dealing with bullying. The results offer a basis, for the preparation of an intervention-aid matrix enabling teachers to deal systematically and specifically with bullying by using the identified situations exemplarily, for shaping teacher trainee and in-service courses. However, these findings are based on a pilot study, hence verification is indicated.

The **Tibs-study** delivered the German contribution to the co-operation project 'Needs assessment and awareness raising programme for bullying in schools' which was carried out in the framework of the European Commissions' Daphne II – programme 'To prevent and combat violence against children, young people and women and to protect victims and groups at risk'

Reference, Witteriede, H. & Paulus, P. (2008). Teachers in bullying situations (Tibs). Final project report. Lueneburg: CAHS (ISBN 3-933791-25-1; <http://www.leuphana.de/zag/tibs2008.pdf>).

Kontakt

Dr. Heinz Witteriede
Leuphana University of Lueneburg - Centre for Applied Health Sciences
Wilschenbruchweg 84a, 21335 Lüneburg
+ 49 4131 677 7717, witteriede@uni.leuphana.de, www.leuphana.de/zentren/zag