

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bullying is not an isolated aggressive action between a “bully” and a “victim”. It is rather a dynamic, social relationship problem which is, often, due to hectic human relations involving more participants. As such, it is influenced by peers, families, schools, and communities. Consequently, the phenomenon of bullying should concern the entire school population and all the factors that are responsible for the quality of education. In this context, the overall objective of this project was to develop an evidence-based and theory-driven approach to deal with bullying in schools by integrating research on bullying with a theoretical model which provides a dynamic perspective on the functioning and effects of education. This dynamic approach emphasizes the use of a whole-school approach to face bullying which is concerned with factors that contribute in the improvement of the quality of the school and the classroom environment such as student behaviour outside the classroom, the partnership policy, and collaboration between teachers. Research has shown that these factors have both direct and indirect effects on student achievement in different outcomes of schooling. School policy on opportunity to learn is also taken into account and it is stressed that the policy should refer to aims associated with bullying (e.g., understanding of social values, emotional recognition, developing positive attitudes towards the school). School policy should also include rules for handling and sanctioning bullying when it occurs. In this approach, emphasis is also given to the development of school self-evaluation mechanisms which help schools identify priorities for improvement and develop their strategies and action plans to face and reduce bullying.

During the first phase of the project, a pre-measure with respect to the bullying and the factors included in the proposed framework was conducted in each participating country (i.e., Belgium, Cyprus, England, Greece, and the Netherlands). Analysis of the data collected during this phase revealed the existing anti-bullying techniques in different schools and the functioning of schools in relation to the factors related to the school and classroom learning environment included in the framework. In the second phase, we established a network of schools within each country which were willing to establish strategies and actions to face and reduce bullying by using the proposed dynamic approach. Training and provision of guidelines by considering the different national contexts was provided to the participating schools within each country. A handbook was also produced presenting the theoretical framework and providing suggestions to schools on how to build school self-evaluation mechanisms aiming to prevent bullying and improve the educational practices at school and classroom level. The research team provided feedback to each school on its priorities for improvement that could be considered in establishing their strategies and actions to face bullying. Support was also provided to the schools in order to establish their school self-evaluation mechanisms and develop and implement their strategies and actions to face bullying. This phase lasted for approximately 13 months and researchers provided support to the schools by acting as critical friends. This was achieved by providing school based in-service training to the staff of each school to help them face difficulties in implementing their action plans. Moreover, schools established continuous formative evaluation mechanisms which helped them modify their strategies and plans according to the circumstances and specific needs of different groups of the school population. In addition, in each country, the research team provided feedback to a second group of schools about the results emerged from the pre-measure and these schools developed their own strategies and actions to face bullying without using the proposed dynamic approach (control group). In order to evaluate the impact of the dynamic approach, the Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ) and a questionnaire measuring the quality of school life as perceived by students were administered to each group of schools both at the beginning and at the end of the intervention. Since in most countries schools were randomly allocated at the experimental and control groups, at the end of the intervention, we administered a social cognition test to students of each group of schools.