

“My teacher does not care”: impact of teacher non-intervention towards bullying on students’ behavior

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Introduction

- Teachers are key actors to stop bullying among students (Troop-Gordon, 2015). Indeed, their behaviors could influence students’ aggressive and defending behaviors (Yoon & Bauman, 2014).
- Teachers could adopt several reactions in response to school bullying, from non-reaction (e.g., ignoring) to active reaction (e.g., sanctioning the bully) (Bauman & Del Rio, 2008). Many studies have highlighted the importance of these interventions and the detrimental consequences of non-intervention (Demol, Verschueren, Jame, Lazard, & Colpin, 2021; Campaert, Nocentini & Menesini, 2017).
- However, previous studies assessing the effects of perceived teacher reactions have usually not considered personal student characteristics like empathy, attitude or self-efficacy to defend, that could also explain social behaviors.
- Aim of this study:** To assess the effects of perceived teacher reactions toward bullying while controlling individual characteristics (empathy, anti-bullying attitudes and self-efficacy to defend).

Method

Sample and procedure : 472 students in 29 classes from primary school filled in a paper questionnaire. Age ranged from 8 to 13 years old (mean = 10). All data was collected in May 2021 and came from the first wave of the evaluation of KiVa in the French-speaking part of Belgium.

Measures. All measures except defending are self-reported.

Scale	Examples of items	Source	Number of items	Alphas
Covariates	Gender and age	/	/	/
Defending	Peer reported	Adapted from Salmivalli & Voeten (2004)	1	/
Bullying	Peer reported		1	/
Bullying (self-reported)	Since Christmas vacations, I have insulted another student.	Galand & Hospel, (2013)	7	.731
Basic Empathy scale	When others feel happy, I feel happy too.	Bensalah et al. (2016)	13	.736
Anti-bullying attitudes	Bullying is stupid.	Adapted from Salmivalli & Voeten (2004)	6	.649
Self-efficacy to defend	I’m able to telling off/standing up to students who are mean toward another student	Thornberg et al. (2017)	5	.853
Teacher non-intervention	When a student is getting bullied, my teacher does not intervene.	Campaert et al. (2017)	3	.645

Hypothesis : teacher non-intervention has a greater impact than individual mechanism on bullying and defending.

Results

- Analysis :** we conducted 3 multiple linear regression analysis.
- Dependent variables : Defending & bullying.
 - Control variables : gender, age, empathy, anti-bullying attitudes and defending self-efficacy
 - Independent variable : Teacher non-intervention

We did all our analysis using IBM SPSS Statistics 27.0

Table 1 : effect of teacher non-intervention controlling for gender, age, anti-bullying attitudes empathy and defending self-efficacy on bullying and defending.

		Bullying (self-reported) (β)	Bullying (peer-reported) (β)	Defending (peer-reported) (β)
Bloc 1	ΔR ²	,022**	,038***	,070***
	Gender	,053	,158***	-,184***
	Age	-,105*	-,077	,106*
Bloc 2	ΔR ²	,072***	,026**	,060***
	Attitude	-,235***	-,103*	,046
	Empathy	-,088	-,067	,144**
	D. self-efficacy	,107*	,151**	,119*
Bloc 3	ΔR ²	,028***	,001	,010*
	Teacher non-intervention	,169***	,035	-,102*

Note. *p<0,05. **p<0,01. ***p<0,001.

Discussion

Our research highlights the association between teachers’ perceived reaction towards bullying and students’ behaviors.

- Concerning defending, we can see that if a teacher doesn’t react to bullying, students are less likely to be a defender. Even if they feel competent and empathic.
- Concerning bullying, the results didn’t completely confirm our hypothesis. Indeed, teacher non-intervention towards bullying doesn’t predict the probability of being nominated as a bully by his/her peers. On the contrary, teacher non-intervention has an impact on self-reported bullying. We could interpret that if the teacher doesn’t react to bullying, students are more likely to say they engaged in this type of aggressive behavior.
- More surprisingly, defending self-efficacy was significant for both bullying measures. This could indicate that students who feel more confident to defend others hesitate less to engage in bullying.

Limitation and future research

- Because our results are cross-sectional, they must be interpreted with caution. Indeed, we could oppositely interpret them: being involved in bullying could increase the student’s perception of teacher non-intervention. In the same way, bullying others could increase self-efficacy to defend others.
- Future research should investigate longitudinally the effects of teacher’s reaction. This would clarify the role of teachers in the prevention of school bullying.

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