

Greek Adolescents' Victimization Experiences, Reactions, Ability to Cope and Sense of School Safety

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to offer a thorough picture concerning the prevalence of victimization in Greek secondary schools, and the students' reactions on witnessing bully/victim incidents, their perceived sense of school safety and ability to cope with victimization experiences. Over 800 secondary education students participated in the study. 10% of them reported that they were seriously bullied, while victimization was more sharply evident among boys and students whose Greek was not their native language. More than half reported that they were knowledgeable about what they should do for terminating their victimization. One in ten students admitted not feeling safe at school, while a strong negative statistically significant association was identified between students' sense of safety and the reported incidence of victimization experiences. Overall, students reported high levels of coping competence on witnessing bully/victim incidents. Implications of the study for school-wide effective anti-bullying interventions are briefly discussed.

Keywords

Adolescents, Coping, School Safety, Victimization Experiences

1. Introduction

The victimization of adolescent students by their peers has been identified as a serious problem in Greece and other countries over the last few years, and much research has been carried out on its dynamics. The aim of this research has been to facilitate educational intervention aimed at the elimination of this problem (Craig et al., 2009; Mooij, 2005; Psalti, 2012; Smith, Smith, Osborn, & Samara, 2008; Sapouna, 2008). In spite of the fact that the prevalence of at-school victimization has been found to vary widely among different national education systems, nonetheless still remains considerable to be unnoticed. As data of a cross-national study involving forty countries show, victimization between the ages of 11 to 15 ranges widely between 4.8% and 45.2%, with an average of 12.6% of all the participants reporting to have been victimized (Craig et al., 2009). It is pertinent to the present research to note that the Greek adolescent participants of the above cross-national study reported higher rates of victimization than did most of their counterparts from other

national contexts, resulting in Greece being ranked within the top ten of all forty countries. Combining this result with data from a couple of nationally based surveys on victimization in Greek secondary schools (Psalti, 2012; Sapouna, 2008), where averagely six per cent and up to sixteen per cent of the students identified themselves as victims, it becomes clear that this is an increasingly worrisome issue.

In reviewing the relevant data, the variables of the students' age and gender have been found to play a significant role in the extent of all forms of victimization in Greece and other countries, and should therefore be taken into account for any in-depth understanding of this problem. As far as developmental differences are concerned, at-school victimization seems to follow a steady downward trend with increasing age for both male and female students (Frisen, Jonsson, & Persson, 2007; Lester, Cross, Shaw, & Dooley, 2012; Sapouna, 2008).

Regarding gender patterns, a steady trend has been documented for female adolescents to self-report higher rates of victimization than do their male peers in the Greek and in

other national education contexts (Craig et al., 2009; Psalti, 2012). However, inconsistent results have been found regarding the impact of ethnicity on different forms of victimization among adolescents in Greece and elsewhere. Whereas the evidence from some studies indicates that students from ethnic minority groups are at higher risk for being victimized (Kalati, Psalti, & Deliyanni - Kouimtzi, 2010; Strohmeier & Spiel, 2003; Tolsma, Van Deurzen, Stark, & Veenstra, 2013) other studies have found no inter-ethnic differences with respect to the rates of self-reported victimization experiences (Fandrem, Strohmeier, & Roland, 2009; Magklara et al., 2012).

In addition to the individual variables addressed above, much of the research in the field has in recent years focused on exploring wider contextual factors, such as peer-group social processes and mechanisms that may contribute to inner-group harassing interactions and conflicts (Andreou, Vlachou, & Didaskalou, 2005; Espelage, Holt, & Henkel, 2003; Gini, Pozzoli, Borghi, & Franzoni, 2008; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010).

1.1. The Critical Role of Peers and Teachers in the Development of Victimization

The study by Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Kaukiainen (1996), as well as that by Hawkins, Pepler and Craig (2001), have documented the crucial role of peer ecology in the development and establishment of victimization among peers, and their findings have been applied to different education systems including the Greek one (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2008). According to the participant role approach (Salmivalli et al., 1996), many students who are not directly involved as victims or aggressors are present in most of the occurrences by taking on distinct roles that influence the development of the harassing process (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Salmivalli et al., 1996a; Salmivalli, Karhunen, & Lagerspetz, 1996b).

Whereas most children and adolescents in Greece and everywhere else hold negative attitudes towards victimization and report their intention to stop peer harassment and provide support to victims in hypothetical scenarios (Andreou & Metallidou, 2004; Andreou et al., 2005), in real conditions, however, only a small percentage of them (15-20%) actively intervene to assist victims and act as defenders (Craig, Pepler, & Blais, 2007; Hawkins et al., 2001; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004). The passive reaction of onlookers when witnessing incidents of victimization is practically equivalent to approval of the harassment and contributive to its perpetuation. Onlookers may fail to take action and intervene for a variety of reasons including, among others, fear of retaliation and lack of effective skills and strategies to counteract the victimization of their peers (Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005). The active reaction of the bystanders has been found to be closely correlated with the general feeling of well-being at school, as their intervening in defense of the victims is strongly associated with an elevated sense of security among peers (Gini et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the patterns of defending behavior appear to

be strongly associated with the students' age and gender. In particular, girls are more likely to intervene and help victims during episodes than boys, while defending behavior and assisting victims follow a downward tendency with increasing age (Caravita, Di Blasio, & Salmivalli, 2009; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010). Overall, the defending behavior of adolescents is the outcome of a dynamic interplay among individual variables such as personal attitudes towards victimization, sense of personal responsibility to intervene, perceived efficacy for intervening, and social dimensions like social behavior expectations and pressures exerted by peers.

Apart from the students, it has been documented that teachers likewise exert a key role in the development of the harassment process among peers (Kochenderfer - Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Nikolaidis, Toda, & Smith, 2002; Yoon & Kerber, 2003). This evidence has led researchers in recent years to focus on how educators respond when witnessing harassing behavior (Kochenderfer - Ladd & Pelletier, 2008; Maunder & Tattersall, 2010). The aversive attitudes that teachers generally hold towards peer harassment are not always consistent with their responses on detection of such incidents. As findings indicate, teachers often avoid intervening to prevent or terminate victimization incidents, thereby contributing indirectly to their perpetuation (Dake, Price, Telljohann, & Funk, 2003; Stockdale, Hangadumbo, Duys, Larson, & Sarvela, 2002).

1.2. School-Based Interventions Against Victimization

Recent approaches to victimization in schools have informed education policies and legislations in many national systems, and have initiated the provision of guidance sessions to teachers in order to encourage the development and implementation of proactive school-wide interventions against peer harassment (Ball, Hoskins, Maguire, & Braun, 2011; Carey, 2003; Marczak & Coyne, 2010; Nicklett & Perron, 2009). Despite the public concern about the prevalence of victimization in Greek secondary schools, to date no national policy has been developed against victimization for them to implement (Athanasziades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzi, 2010; Kalliotis, 2000; Smith, Nika, & Papisideri, 2004). The establishment of school-based policies targeting the students' behavior has not been among the priorities of the various educational reforms undertaken over the last years in Greece, and so there is kept in unchallenged operation an outdated schooling culture and system (Didaskalou, 2002; Vlachou, 2006). The secondary education students' academic performance is still being overemphasized at the expense of their social and personal development, with the teachers having to remain rigidly focused on their role as transmitters of stale knowledge (Athanasziades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzi, 2010; Koulaidis, Dimopoulos, Tsatsaroni, & Katsis, 2006; Koutrouba, 2011) while, at the same time, educators usually lack any culture of collaboration with their colleagues (Koutrouba, Antonopoulou, Tsitsas, & Zenakou, 2009; Koutrouba, 2011).

Within the educational context outlined above, the Greek

Ministry of Education made recently, for the first time, a step towards providing some guidance and advice to teachers on the prevention and elimination of victimization. More specifically, the ministry sent out to schools a one-page circular letter proposing ten action steps to be taken for the effective management and prevention of at-school victimization. Despite their air of ambition, the proposed guidelines to be followed by institutions leave much to be desired as far as their clarity of aims and outcomes is concerned. They have not been followed up by any teacher-training actions or even pronouncements on the part of the ministry on how to realize the proposed objectives. If Greek schools are to move towards the realization of any victimization - combating interventions, it must be investigated whether some institutions on their own have been inspired by and acted upon these sketchy guidelines, whether and how they have managed to communicate them to their students and to reduce peer-harassment incidents. Within the educational context above, the present article attempts to offer a thorough picture concerning the prevalence of victimization in Greek secondary education institutions, the reactions of teachers and students on witnessing such incidents, the latter's perceived sense of safety against victimization and ability to cope with victimization experiences. It also examines whether schools have developed specific formal procedures for adolescents to follow in order to tackle peer harassment. More specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- to establish the frequency of victimization among Greek adolescents, identify forms of victimization and

differentiations by gender and age;

- to explore the Greek students' perceived sense of safety against being victimized by their peers and their ability to cope with such experiences when they arise;
- to examine whether Greek secondary education students know precisely what they can do to stop their being victimized;
- to investigate how Greek teachers and student peers react when witnessing incidents of victimization, and to explore whether and how the students' reactions are differentiated by their age and gender as well as the reasons that may make them reluctant to defend the victims;
- to explore whether Greek secondary schools have in place specific formal procedures and practices for reporting current or past incidents of victimization by the students.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

872 students (435 boys and 425 girls), from 15 secondary schools in central Greece participated in the study. As shown in Table 1, ages ranged from 11-to 17, with age 13 overrepresented in the sample. Ages 11, 16 and 17 were excluded from the analysis as representing extreme cases in the sample that holding possible maturation effects that could not be sufficiently controlled due to small sample size.

Table 1. Distribution of the Participants According to Age and Gender Variables

Gender	Age (in years)							Total
	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Boys	2 g(0.5%)	70 (16.1)	166 (38.2%)	112 (25.7%)	66 (15.2%)	14 (3.2%)	5 (1.1%)	435 (100%)
Girls	1 (0.2%)	53 (12.5%)	172 (40.5%)	115 (27.1%)	67 (15.8%)	17 (4%)	0 (0%)	425 (100%)
Total	3 (0.3%)	123(14.3%)	338(39.3%)	227 (26.4%)	133 (15.5%)	31 (3.6%)	5 (0.6%)	860(100%)

2.2. Measures

Data were collected via questionnaires in electronic mainly form (printed was also available in some cases). The questions were retrieved from the "Living and Learning at school: Bullying at School" (Skrzypiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey, & Pereira, 2011) aiming at collecting data about:

- Demographic issues: gender, age, mother language (question: do you speak other mother language at home?).
- Self-referenced bullying experience, frequency of bullying victimization experience, form of bullying, previous prolonged exposure to bullying and perceived safety at school.
- Overall perception of competence in coping, knowing of what to do.
- Perceived teachers' and other students' reactions to bullying,
- Major reason for not helping a victim
- Issues of policy and grievance procedure to deal with

harassment/bullying and their perceived efficacy

The questionnaire items were divided into 3 measure types:

- multiple response items (e.g. various forms of bullying, major reason for not helping someone being victimized),
- categorical variable items (e.g. demographic data, seriously / moderate / non bullied group, feeling safe and non feeling safe at school groups, knowing and knowing what to do in case of being bullied, reactions of teachers witnessing bullying incidents, knowledge / use / and finding helpful the school grievance procedure) and
- scale variable items (e.g. frequency of being bullied, previous prolonged experience, degree of safety at school, degree of coping ability in school).

Mean scores and F statistics were calculated for scale variables, whereas frequencies and χ^2 statistics were used in the analysis of multiple response and categorical variable items.

3. Results

Concerning our first research question, the frequency of

victimization was directly located by asking the students the question: “Over the last term, how often have you been bullied or harassed by a student or students at this high school?” 1.5% reported being victimized every day, 2.9% most days of the week, 1.8% one or two days a week, 2.8% about once a week, 23.2% less than once a week and 67.8% never. Mean scores and standard deviations are presented in Table 2, where low scores indicate more serious bullying, revealing slight ($\eta^2=.02$) gender effects, where boys seem to report being more often bullied than girls.

Frequencies of bullying were further calculated, resulting in three levels of bullied, (up to once a week as seriously bullied, less than once a week as moderately bullied and the never being bullied category). These three categories were further kept in the χ^2 and ANOVA analysis along with the

categories of gender, age and language.

As presented on Table 3 more boys reported as being seriously and moderately bullied than girls. No differences were found among children of different age. Children who speak a second mother language reported a little higher levels of being moderately bullied.

As shown in Table 4 the most prevailing forms of bullying are “called names” and “not talked to”. Other forms are “hit or kicked”, “left out of things” and “cyberbullied”. 5.7% of the adolescents reported other forms of bullying. Boys reported higher frequencies of being “hit or kicked” than girls and “called names”, while “not talked to” is more frequently reported by girls than boys. It’s worth mentioning here that “called names” and “not talked to” were also reported by the non-bullied individuals.

Table 2. Mean scores and (standard deviations) for each group on questions concerning bullying, safety and coping

Question	Total	Gender		Age			
		Boys	girls	12	13	14	15
Over the last term, how often have you been bullied or harassed by a student or students at this high school	5.47 (1.03)	5.34 (1.14)	5.59 (.90)	5.51 (.92)	5.44 (1.04)	5.48 (.99)	5.46 (1.17)
F		F=12.31**** df=1. 814 $\eta^2=.02$		n.s.			
Previous prolonged exposure to bullying was tapped in the question: If you have been bullied or harassed this year ... about how long the bullying or harassment lasted	1.70 (1.64)	1.82 (1.74)	1.57 (1.51)	1.38 (.97)	1.78 (1.72)	1.67 (1.59)	1.82 (1.91)
F		F=4.37* df=1. 793 $\eta^2=.005$		n.s.			
How safe do you feel from being bullied or harassed at school?	3.39 (0.82)	3.39 (.83)	3.38 (.81)	3.46 (.69)	3.35 (.80)	3.35 (.87)	3.45 (.89)
F	n.s.			n.s.			
Over the last term, how well have you been coping with bullying or harassment at school?	6.09 (1.41)	6.07 (1.43)	6.11 (1.40)	6.02 (1.37)	6.07 (1.45)	6.11 (1.40)	6.14 (1.41)
F	n.s.			n.s.			

Table 2. Continued

Question	Total	Other Language		Bullying type		
		Yes	No	seriously	moderate	Non bullied
Over the last term, how often have you been bullied or harassed by a student or students at this high school	5.47 (1.03)	5.37 (1.11)	5.50 (1)	-	-	-
F		n.s.				
Previous prolonged exposure to bullying was tapped in the question: If you have been bullied or harassed this year ... about how long the bullying or harassment lasted	1.70 (1.64)	1.69 (1.60)	1.70 (1.65)	3.30 (2.38)	2.28 (1.94)	1.26 (1.11)
F		n.s.		F=77.99**** df=2. 788 $\eta^2=.165$		
How safe do you feel from being bullied or harassed at school?	3.39 (0.82)	3.24 (.95)	3.43 (.77)	2.43 (.97)	3.20 (.83)	3.58 (.68)
F	n.s.	F=7.98*** df=1. 814 $\eta^2=.01$		F=84.66**** df=2.809 $\eta^2=.173$		
Over the last term, how well have you been coping with bullying or harassment at school?	6.09 (1.41)	5.89 (1.58)	6.15 (1.36)	4.29 (1.81)	5.70 (1.46)	6.49 (1.03)
F	n.s.	F=4.88* df=1. 793 $\eta^2=.006$		F=114.132**** df=2. 788 $\eta^2=.225$		

*p≤.05, ** p≤.01, ***p≤.005, ****p≤.001

Spearman's rho was calculated between present and previous degree of victimization, and resulted in very high coefficient, 0.52, confirming our hypotheses that victimization is an ongoing situation.

Students' perceived safety from being bullied or harassed was reflected in the question: "*How safe do you feel from being bullied or harassed at school?*" 4.3% students reported "not at all safe", 8.9% reported as "only safe sometimes", 30.7% as "usually safe" and 55.5% as "always safe". For further statistical analysis answers, the first two categories were coded as reflecting the not feeling safe group, and the other two as the safe group. So, these coding resulted as 13.2% of the students reported not feeling safe at school whereas 86.8% reported feeling safe. Perceived safety was also calculated as a scale variable with mean score as 3.39 and standard deviation as .82 (see Table 2). No gender or age effects were found, but students speaking and another mother language seem to report somewhat being less safe. Levels of bullying was strongly connected (as shown in effect size $\eta^2=.173$) with levels of safety as the seriously bullied children reported very low levels of safety. More than half of the children who reported being seriously bullied, reported also not feeling safe (52.7%). There is also a number of student 6.4% who doesn't feel safe while not being bullied as well.

The coping ability with bullying was investigated directly by asking the students "*Over the last term, how well have you been coping with bullying or harassment at school?*" As their answers ranged from 1= "not well" to 7= "very well", the mean score was 6.09 (SD=1.41), showing that students generally feel confident about their coping capacity (Table 2). There were no gender or age differences. Students who speak a second mother tongue appear less confident than others, although this effect is very slight ($\eta^2=.006$). Coping ability was very strongly associated ($\eta^2=.225$) with the bullying

victimization experience, as the seriously bullied children scored low on this scale. Finally, 'safe' children reported higher levels of coping competence than the 'non-safe'.

Our next aim was to examine whether Greek secondary education students know precisely what they can do to stop their being victimized, which was directly reported to the question "*If you were being harassed/bullied do you know how to stop it happening?*" 58.6% of the students reported "yes", 36.1% "perhaps" and 5.3% "no" (Table 3). Boys appeared more confident than girls. The statistical analysis showed also that this confidence is increasing with age. As expected, the highest frequencies of lack in knowing how to stop it were found among seriously and moderately bullied children. Half of the students who were seriously bullied were also uncertain about what should they do (47.3%). The high χ^2 value shows a strong connection between reported not knowing precisely what they can do and bullying victimization.

Table 5 presents students' perceptions of others intervening in bully/victim incidents. The vast majority of students (65.2%) reported that teachers "always try to stop it" and only a small minority reported "never try to stop it" (3.4%). No gender differences were found, but reported frequencies decline with age. Children who speak a second mother language reported less frequency of teachers' involvement in stopping bullying. Bullied children also perceived less their teachers as trying to stop it.

On the other hand, concerning peers involvement, most students reported as "sometimes try to stop it" (40.6%), or "hardly ever try to stop it" (33.9%). Girls seem to perceive more of their peers as supportive and older children to perceive less of their peers as supportive. Moderately bullied children perceive less of their peers as supportive in comparison to seriously bullied and non-bullied children (see Table 5).

Table 3. Students' frequency on questions concerning degree of bullying and knowledge of how to stop attacks.

QUESTIONS		bullied			safe		If you were being harassed/bullied do you know how to stop it happening?		
		seriously	moderate	non bullied	not safe	safe	Yes	Perhaps	No
Total		9.1	23.2	67.8	13.2	86.8	58.6	36.1	5.3
Gender	Boys	11.9	26.2	62	13.6	86.4	62.8	30.6	6.6
	Girls	6.2	20.1	73.7	12.9	87.1	54.3	41.7	4
N=816		$\chi^2=14.56^{****}$ df=2			n.s.		$\chi^2=12.25^{****}$ df=2		
Age	12	9.1	22.3	68.6	9.8	90.2	48.3	46.7	5
	13	10.4	22.8	66.9	13.7	86.3	55.7	38.4	6
	14	6.7	27.7	65.6	14.2	85.8	61.9	34.5	3.5
	15	9.8	17.3	72.9	13.6	86.4	69.7	23.5	6.8
		n.s.			n.s.		$\chi^2=18.23^{***}$ df=6		
language	Yes	8.9	30.4	60.7	19.2	80.8	59.4	34.9	5.7
	No	9.1	21	69.9	11.4	88.6	58.4	36.5	5.1
N=816		$\chi^2=4.42^*$ df=2			$\chi^2=7.76^{***}$ df=1		n.s.		
Bullied	seriously	-	-	-	52.7	47.3	37.8	47.3	14.9
	moderately	-	-	-	16.9	83.1	51.1	38.8	10.1
	non bullied	-	-	-	6.4	93.6	63.9	33.8	2.4
N=816					$\chi^2=126.57^{****}$ df=2		$\chi^2=43.44^{****}$ df=4		

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .005$, **** $p \leq .001$

Table 4. Frequency on questions concerning forms of bullying and reasons for not intervening.

		Forms of Bullying(%)					
		hit or kicked	called names	left out of things	cyber bullied	not talked to	sth else
Total (%)		58 (7.1)	246(29.9)	29 (3.5)	24 (2.9)	124 (15.1)	47 (5.7)
Gender	Boys	11.4	33.8	4.1	3.1	12.1	5.8
	Girls	2.7	26	2.9	2.7	18.2	5.7
$\chi^2(df=1)$		23.4****	5.91**	n.s.	n.s.	$\chi^2=5.96^{**}$	n.s.
Age	12	5.7	20.3	4.9	0	13.8%	7.3
	13	7.4	30.1	3.5	4.1	14.7	7.1
	14	5.7	31.3	3.5	0.9	15.4	5.3
	15	9.8	36.1	2.3	6	16.5	1.5
$\chi^2(df=3)$		n.s.	$\chi^2=8.02^*$	n.s.	$\chi^2=13.28^{***}$	n.s.	
Language	Yes	5.2	37.6	4.6	3.1	20.1	6.2
	No	7.7	27.6	3.2	2.9	13.6	5.6
χ^2		n.s.	$\chi^2=7.11^{***}$ df=1	n.s.	n.s.	$\chi^2=4.95^{**}$ df=1	n.s.
Bullied	Seriously	28.4	64.9	6.8	12.2	20.3	18.9
	Moderate-ly	13.8	56.6	9.5	4.8	20.1	7.4
	non-bullied	1.8	16.3	1.1	1.1	12.7	3.3
$\chi^2(df=2)$		$\chi^2=88.27^{****}$	$\chi^2=156.11^{****}$	$\chi^2=156.11^{****}$	$\chi^2=30.91^{****}$	$\chi^2=7.82^*$	$\chi^2=31.55^{****}$

Table 4. Continued

		What is the major reason that would prevent you from helping another student who is being victimized...(%)					
		fear of being picked on in return	it's none of my business	the other student should stick up for him/herself	the teacher should stop the bullying	some other student/students should stop it	sth else
Total (%)		401 (48.8)	119 (14.5)	100 (12.2)	236 (28.7)	58 (7.1)	61 (7.4)
Gender	Boys	39.4	14.7	12.1	30.2	8.9	9.2
	Girls	58.5	14.3	12.3	27.3	5.2	5.7
$\chi^2(df=1)$		$\chi^2=29.98^{****}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$\chi^2=4.46^*$	$\chi^2=3.71^*$
Age	12	53.7	16.3	13	30.9	3.3	12.2
	13	49.3	11.8	10	33	7.7	7.1
	14	50.2	11	16.7	22	7.9	6.6
	15	40.6	25.6	9	27.1	7.5	5.3
$\chi^2(df=3)$		n.s.	$\chi^2=17.68^{****}$	n.s.	$\chi^2=8.52^*$	n.s.	n.s.
Language	Yes	44.3	10.8	13.4	27.3	10.3	9.3
	No	50.2	15.6	11.8	29.2	6.1	6.9
χ^2		n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$\chi^2=4.07^*$ df=3	n.s.
Bullied	Seriously	56.8	18.9	24.3	24.3	14.9	10.8
	Moderate-ly	50.8	13.8	10.6	29.1	5.8	5.8
	non-bullied	47.8	14.1	11	29.3	6.5	7.4
$\chi^2(df=2)$		n.s.	n.s.	$\chi^2=11.37^{***}$	n.s.	$\chi^2=7.52^{**}$	n.s.

* $p \leq .05$, ** $p \leq .01$, *** $p \leq .005$, **** $p \leq .001$

The most prevailing reason that may makes them reluctant to defend the victims is the “fear of being picked on in return” (48.8%), a fear that is strongly reported more frequently by girls than boys. 28.7% of the students reported that “the teacher should stop the bullying”, 14.5% that “it's none of my business”, 12.2% that “the other student should stick up for him/herself”, 7.1% that “some other student/students should stop it” and 7.4% reported another reason, as shown in Table 4. Keeping distance from helping the victim (“none of my business”) seem to increase with age (more frequent in the very young and the older students), whereas such expectations from the teachers seem to slightly decline with age. Only the seriously bullied children reported higher frequencies in that the other student should stick up for him/herself, and that some other student should stop it.

The final aim of the study was to explore whether Greek secondary schools have in place specific formal procedures and practices for reporting current or past incidents of victimization by the students. The majority of students (69.9%) reported unsure whether the school has a policy and grievance procedure to deal with bullying, 18.2% reported “yes” and 11.9% reported “no”. Uncertainty seems to decrease with age. Moderately bullied children show greater awareness about the school policy and grievance procedure. Only 9.7% of the students reported use of formal procedure, but only 25.2% found it helpful. Boys reported to have slightly more frequently than girls used formal procedures. The use of these procedures increases as children get more seriously bullied, but no differences in efficacy were found among groups (see Table 5).

Table 5. Frequency on questions concerning intervention and anti-bullying school policy

		Questions							
		<i>What do teachers at your school usually do when they see bullying?</i>				<i>What do students at your school usually do when they see bullying?</i>			
		always try to stop it	sometimes try to stop it	hardly ever try to stop it	never try to stop it	always try to stop it	sometimes try to stop it	hardly ever try to stop it	never try to stop it
<i>TOTAL</i>		65.2	22.1	9.3	3.4	14	40.6	33.9	11.5
<i>Gender</i>	<i>boys</i>	63.3	22.4	10.7	3.6	15.6	37.1	32.2	15.1
	<i>Girls</i>	67.1	21.9	7.9	3.2	12.3	44.1	35.7	7.9
χ^2		n.s.				$\chi^2=14.09****$ df=3			
<i>Age</i>	12	68	25.4	4.1	2.5	12.4	48.8	29.8	9.1
	13	66.8	23.7	6.5	3	16.9	38.9	34.7	9.5
	14	66.5	16.7	11.5	5.3	12.4	42.5	33.6	11.5
	15	56.1	24.2	17.4	2.3	10.6	34.1	36.4	18.9
χ^2		$\chi^2=26.46****$ df=9				$\chi^2=16.63*$ df=9			
<i>language</i>	<i>Yes</i>	58.8	26.8	9.3	5.2	15.5	34	39.7	10.8
	<i>No</i>	67.1	20.7	9.3	2.9	13.5	42.6	32.2	11.7
χ^2		$\chi^2=6.34*$ df=3				n.s.			
<i>Bullied</i>	<i>seriously</i>	51.4	23	16.2	9.5	21.9	31.5	32.9	13.7
	<i>moderately</i>	58.7	27.5	10.6	3.2	8.5	35.4	43.9	12.2
	<i>non bullied</i>	69.5	19.8	8	2.7	14.6	43.7	30.6	11.1
χ^2		$\chi^2=22.50****$ df=6				$\chi^2=19.46****$ df=6			

Table 5. Continued

		Questions							
		<i>Do you know if your school has a policy and grievance procedure to deal with harassment/bullying?</i>			<i>Have YOU ever used the grievance procedure</i>		<i>If you used the grievance procedure was it helpful?</i>		
		Yes	No	Unsure	Yes	No	Yes	No	
<i>TOTAL</i>		18.2	11.9	69.9	9.7	90.3	25.2	74.8	
<i>Gender</i>	<i>boys</i>	19.4	13.8	66.7	12.7	87.3	26.5	73.5	
	<i>Girls</i>	17	9.9	73.2	6.8	93.2	23.5	76.5	
χ^2		n.s.			$\chi^2=7.28***$ df=1		n.s.		
<i>Age</i>	12	15.4	11.4	73.2	8.5	91.5	33.3	66.7	
	13	16	7.4	76.6	9.6	90.4	26.3	73.7	
	14	22.5	15.4	62.1	10	90	21.3	78.7	
	15	19.1	17.6	63.4	10.6	89.4	21.1	78.9	
χ^2		$\chi^2=20.45****$ df=6			n.s.		n.s.		
<i>language</i>	<i>Yes</i>	21.1	15.5	63.4	12.4	87.6	28.4	71.6	
	<i>No</i>	17.3	10.7	72	8.9	91.1	24.1	75.9	
χ^2		$\chi^2=5.53*$ df=2			n.s.		n.s.		
<i>Bullied</i>	<i>seriously</i>	19.2	17.8	63	18.2	81.8	27.1	72.9	
	<i>moderately</i>	24.9	9.5	65.6	14.3	85.7	28.4	71.6	
	<i>non bullied</i>	18.3	11.7	70	7.2	92.8	23.5	76.5	
χ^2		$\chi^2=10.70**$ df=4			$\chi^2=13.08****$ df=2		n.s.		

*p≤.05, ** p≤.01, ***p≤.005, ****p≤.001

4. Discussion

The findings shed light on some important aspects of harassment amongst groups of Greek adolescents, the formal procedures that secondary education institutions follow to manage such occurrences and the strategies that students and teachers employ for coping with incidents of victimization. It is quite disturbing that approximately 10% of all students reported being constantly and frequently the targets of victimization by their peers. The findings here appear to corroborate with previous data from Greece (Sapouna, 2008) and elsewhere (Craig et al., 2007; Cross et al., 2009; Frisen et al., 2007; Erentaite, Bergman, & Zukauskienė, 2012; Undheim & Sund, 2010), which documented a high incidence of self-reported victimization among young

students. Consistent with previous studies (Craig et al., 2007; Erentaite et al., 2012), these harassment experiences, inflicted by peers, are reported to be more of a long lasting nature than an occasional occurrence, resulting in a negative impact on both the academic progress of those involved as well as on their psycho-social adjustment at school and mental health in later life (Skapinakis et al., 2011).

The findings lend credence to previous evidence indicating that the gender of the adolescent student constitutes a variable that exercises a significant impact on the overall prevalence of their victimization and its various forms. Consequently, male participants reported that they were more frequently the targets of peer aggressiveness, particularly of a physical and verbal nature, compared with their female counterparts, who were more often than not victims of

aggression related to relationships. These gender differences concur with data from research carried out both in Greece (Andreou, Didaskalou, & Vlachou, 2013; Athanasiades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzis, 2010) and abroad (Undheim & Sund, 2010; Craig et al., 2007; Frisen et al., 2007) concerning the distinct forms of victimization that boys and girls endure. In contrast to girls, the victimization of boys may serve as a sanction to a physical or verbal challenge or an attack on peers (Andreou et al., 2013; Athanasiades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzis, 2010). Accordingly, boys are more likely to employ aggressive means for defending themselves or fighting the aggressor as compared with the means girls employ for dealing with the situation (Craig, et al., 2009; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010). These differences may therefore explain the reported heightened awareness of male participants regarding what to do when facing harassment.

An additional variable to that cited above concerns the students' ethnic origins and their mother tongue. Although recent studies have identified students coming from ethnic minority groups (Athanasiades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzis, 2010; Junoven, Graham, & Schuster, 2003; Kalati et al., 2010) to be at a higher risk of being victimized, any comparison with past research is filled with limitations due to the inconclusive outcomes available. Notwithstanding these constraints, the higher risk that this particular group of students faces should be considered within the context of the recent remarkable demographic change in the Greek student population as a result of immigration from other Balkan nations and of the former Soviet Union (Psalti, 2012). Such a change is particularly evident at secondary education level, where peer groups are more likely to be formed on the premise of ethnic origins. It is commonly thought in Greece and particularly in schools that the majority of immigrants come from countries considered to be of a lower societal status. This may be a contributing factor in the social marginalization of young people within secondary institutions and the reason for their being targeted as victims (Psalti, 2012).

The substantially statistically significant association that emerged between the extent of victimization experiences and participants' perceived sense of safety demonstrates the adverse effect of peer harassment on students' psychosocial adaptation and well-being at school and further validates pertinent past evidence (Gini et al., 2008). Additionally, the association between the extent of participants' victimization and their perceived coping competence and mindfulness about what they ought to do in order to prevent harassment by peers, suggests that those who bear the brunt of severe victimization are likely to be ensnared in a negative vicious circle. Thus, in spite of the fact they are constantly being bullied by their schoolmates, they are, however, at the same time unaware about what they should do to assuage their peers' aggressiveness towards them. They generally have limited confidence in their own ability to cope with, and put an end to, traumatic experiences. These particular characteristics may subsequently contribute to further victimization.

4.1. Teachers' & Students' Responses on Witnessing Victimization

In accordance with earlier evidence, participants report that in most instances when teachers witness altercations among peer groups, they intervene in an attempt to defuse the situation (Kochenderfer - Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). It is likely that Greek teachers consider that younger students may frequently need more guidance and direct support in order to deal with any episodes of victimization compared with older students, who are generally more adept and experienced in handling such occurrences. This may, therefore, account for the increased number of reports pertaining to teacher intervention where young pupils are involved (Kochenderfer - Ladd & Pelletier, 2008). On the other hand, the relatively low rate of teacher intervention, as reported by those students who are either at higher risk or constantly bullied, appears to concur with previous evidence suggesting that Greek secondary education teachers are commonly perceived by their students as being indifferent when they witness instances of harassment among students, or they are thought of as being ineffective in dealing with such occurrences (Athanasiades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzis, 2010).

Regarding students' self-reported intentions when witnessing harassment among peers, common parallels can be identified between the evidence here and that of other studies in Greece (Psalti, 2012) and elsewhere (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Gini et al., 2008; Rigby, 1996) suggesting that roughly less than 50% of the students sampled reacted in an anti-bullying way. It is the subject of some concern that approximately one-third of participants reported that during instances of harassment onlookers took a passive stance and did not attempt to aid the victims. This response has to be viewed both in relation to the limited number of educational programs aimed at raising awareness of victimization and also the fact that policies for dealing with bullying within Greek secondary education institutions are non-existent.

In accordance with previous studies, students' gender, age and extent of victimization were identified as variables that exercise a significant impact on their reporting of the apparent reactions of their peers witnessing incidents of bullying. In particular, girls tend to have more pro-victim attitudes (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Rigby & Slee, 1991), demonstrating more willingness to intervene (Rigby & Johnson, 2006) and displaying a perceived sense of responsibility to defend the victims (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010). They are more susceptible to pressures exercised by peers towards reacting in anti-bullying ways when witnessing episodes of victimization (Prinstein & Dodge, 2008) than are boys. Such attitudes and characteristics are likely to influence the expectations of young girls as regards their schoolmates' obvious reactions on encountering incidents of harassment. This may explain why female participants are perceived as being more supportive towards victims than their male counterparts. On the other hand, the pro-victim attitude has been found to diminish as the students get older and is especially so during the years of secondary education.

Students expect victims to stand up for themselves and deal with bullying on their own, without relying on any intervention from peers or adults (Rigby & Johnson, 2006; Rigby & Johnson, 2005; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010). These views are cited as reasons for the lack of support given to those bullied and reduced intervention on the part of teachers. Furthermore, those students who are constantly bullied over long periods of time are likely to have passively accepted their misfortune and thus do not rely on support from their schoolmates. However, those who are less frequently victimised may still anticipate getting support from peers. This group may, in this way, be more prepared to remark and report on the counterproductive reactions of their peers during episodes of harassment and this may explain why they regard them as being less supportive than other participants.

According to studies, the reasons that participants reported for their lack of intervention, related not only to their fear of retaliation and the fact that they thought it the obligation of teachers to stamp out bullying, but also their belief that students should defend themselves, thus absolving themselves of any personal or moral responsibility (Frisen & Holmqvist, 2010; Lodge & Frydenberg, 2005; Rigby & Johnson, 2005). These views may, at least partially, clarify why the majority held reservations concerning whether or not schools had put in place formal concrete procedures to be followed when addressing incidences of peer harassment. Their responses further endorse past findings suggesting a distressing absence of reliable policies and procedures being communicated to students and others within the school community concerning the approach adopting in dealing with bullying in Greek schools (Athanasziades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzis, 2010, Psalti, 2012). Having more experience of school life, senior students are likely to be more aware of precisely what they should do concerning the reporting of incidents of harassment and of seeking support from academic staff if and when they are victimized. Correspondingly, those who are moderately harassed still tend to rely on any sort of formal procedure available for getting aid, when compared to their more seriously harassed mates who are more likely to have already conceded defeat and passively accepted their misfortune.

4.2. Conclusions and Implications

Greek students' accounts, add weight to current public and professional concerns over the alarming incidence of victimization within secondary education institutions, by showing that some particular groups of students, such as those from ethnic minorities, may be at higher risk. The extent of victimization among Greek adolescents should be viewed as being the outcome of the interplay among students' individual characteristics and the wider ecology of schools. The restricted sense of safety and perceived competence in resolving bullying issues that are prominent among those participants who are seriously harassed by their peers are generated and developed within a school setting that tolerates aggressiveness as a means for establishing dominance among student groups. These institutions have failed to develop an

inclusive learning community that encourages collegiality and respect for diversity (Athanasziades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzis, 2010, Psalti, 2012; Andreou *et al.*, 2013). Drawing from the evidence of this study, we could accordingly argue that late policy advice provided to schools has not yet been elaborated on nor successfully communicated to students, who still report being uninformed about what they should do in cases of harassment. They remain uncertain about whether or not their school has implemented formal anti-bullying procedures. Given that a considerable number of students report not intervening in cases of harassment, informing them about the impact that their reactions are likely to have on the development and escalation of such episodes should be a core component of any prospective anti-bullying initiatives to be undertaken by Greek schools. Additionally, serious consideration ought to be given by educators to the development of a school climate that raises student's awareness against violence and promotes respect towards individual differences (Andreou *et al.*, 2013).

Apart from the attention being paid to students, policy makers as well as school support services ought to place special emphasis on the provision of adequate procedures for institutions to follow in instances of victimization. The issue of professional training for instructors as to their role in the escalation of bullying and appropriate intervention on their part should also be a consideration. Even though participant adolescents assign teachers a critical role in eliminating bullying, educators themselves may be ignorant of the responsibility that they are charged with, or feel ill-equipped to manage aggressive interactions among peers (Athanasziades & Deliyanni - Kouimtzis, 2010, Psalti, 2012); hence they are considered as non supportive, particularly by those students who are at a high risk and constantly victimised. The alarmingly high rates of victimization that Greek adolescent students reported certainly exert pressure upon schools and teachers to expand beyond their role as mere transmitters of academic knowledge and address the current social issues and the needs of their students (Koutrouba, 2011; Psalti, 2012).

The data presented here has to be viewed under the limitations that some methodological issues are likely to impose in terms of their generalization. More specifically, one main limitation of the study is that the assessment of the incidence of victimization was based solely on students' self-reports. Given that social desirability factors are likely to be involved when using self-report instruments (Andreou *et al.*, 2013), prospective research should address this issue by incorporating complementary data that include behaviour-indexes of bullying/victimization, as well as direct observations. Within this context, student reports concerning their own and that of their teachers' response on witnessing harassment among peers, focused on hypothetical scenarios rather than real occurrences. Consequently, we argue that future researchers conduct a more in depth-analysis of these issues by incorporating supplemented observational data that correspond to real circumstances. Additionally, teachers' accounts regarding the extent of victimization within their

institutions are likely to provide new insights on this phenomenon and certainly should be taken into consideration in future research.

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