SELF-EFFICACY AND COLLECTIVE EFFICACY AS PREDICTORS OF ASSISTANT BYSTANDER BEHAVIOR IN BULLYING SITUATIONS

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doi: 10.18355/PG.2026.15.1.7

Abstract
Bullying is a serious social phenomenon that negatively affects the psychological development of children and adolescents. Despite growing interest in the issue of bystanders in bullying, the question of the factors that influence assisting behavior toward the aggressor remains under-researched. The aim of this study is to analyze the role of self-efficacy and group efficacy in the context of assiting behavior toward the bully in bullying among elementary school students. The research sample consisted of 377 elementary school students (M=13.45, SD=4.02). The research battery consisted of the following instruments: Scale of Bystander Behavior in Bullying (Thornberg et al., 2017), General Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwarzer, Jerusalem, 1995), Collective Efficacy Scale (Barchia &Bussey, 2011a,b) , and the Student Bullying/Victimization Questionnaire (Olweus, 1996). Self-efficacy was negatively correlated with assisting behavior toward the bully. Self-efficacy and collective efficacy emerged as significant predictors of assisting behavior toward the bully. The results highlight the need for intervention programs that simultaneously develop students' individual self-efficacy and the group cohesion of the class as a whole.

Key words
bullying, self-efficacy, collective efficacy, assisting bahavior , bullying prevention

1. Introduction

Bullying is a serious social phenomenon that has an impact on the psychological development and overall well-being of children and adolescents. The professional literature pays more attention to the actors of bullying themselves, i.e. aggressors and victims, but also to the roles of bystanders, whose reactions can follow the course and especially bullying behavior. The key behavior that can determine bystanders is self-efficacy and effectiveness. Despite considerable interest in this issue, the relationship between self-efficacy, collective efficacy and assisting behavior of bystanders towards students remains insufficiently explored. The aim of the presented study is therefore to analyse the role of these factors in the context of bullying among elementary school students.

2.Theoretical definition of the issue

During school years, bullying is one of the most common forms of peer violence. Bullying is a serious problem in schools that affects social, emotional, and academic development (Kolář, 1997, 2005, 2011; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Modin, Låftman, Östberg, 2015; Leříčan , Janošová, Sapouna, 2010). According to Olweus, bullying is as follows: "A student is bullied or victimized when he is repeatedly and over a long period of time exposed to the ultimate actions of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1993: 9). Olweus (1993) refined the conceptualization of bullying through *three defining criteria*, namely (a) *an asymmetrical power relationship between the aggressor and the victim*, (power imbalance), as a result of which the victim has difficulty defending herself and is quite helpless against the student or student who is approaching her, (b) causes *the intention or intention* or intention or intention or intention or intention or intention to harm, because someone can cause another situation. (c) *repetition* of aggressive behavior.

Bullying is understood as a group process in which students establish individual role groups. Ch. Salmivalli identified various types of bullying behavior, labeled as "participant roles" (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, Voeten, Poskiparta, 2011). These are role groups *of aggressors, victims, aggressor assistants* , *aggressor boosters* , *victim defenders* , *outsiders* . Thornberg further specified these roles and described *4 types of bystander behavior* : passive bystander, defender, assistant, reinforcing bystander. Victimization among peers in the school environment most often occurs in the presence of bystanders (Sjögren, Thornberg, Pozzoli, 2024). A specific group is the aggressor assistants, i.e. assistants who assist the aggressor in bullying behavior.
In the context of bullying behavior, self-efficacy plays a significant role. Self-efficacy represents an individual's belief in their ability to handle a particular task, situation, or activity more successfully (Bandura, 1993, 1994, 1997). It is a key mechanism that influences behavior, decision-making, and coping strategies. Individual self-efficacy also plays an important role in group activities, reflecting the group's belief in its ability to reliably support bullying behavior (Barchia & Bussey, 2011a, b; Hymel et al., 2015). Collective efficacy represents the characteristics of the environment that directly influence bullying behavior (Williams & Guerra, 2011). Higher levels of self-efficacy, collective efficacy, and meaning predict levels of victimization and bullying among elementary and middle school students (Gini et al., 2008; Thornberg, Wänström, Hymel, 2019). Research suggests that a stronger and more cohesive school environment acts as a protective factor that ensures the occurrence of peer victimization (Sapouna, 2010).

3. Research focus of the current study

Following the theoretical definition, the aim of the current study is to determine: (a) the occurrence of individual role groups - aggressor, victim, defender; b) the occurrence of gender differences within individual role groups - aggressor, victim, defender; c) the relationship between self-efficacy and assisting behavior; d) the relationship between collective efficacy and assisting behavior; (e) to what extent self-efficacy, collective efficacy contribute to assisting behavior.

4. Research hypotheses and questions

Given that the concept of assisting behavior in relation to self-efficacy and collective efficacy has not been studied in Slovakia to date, we set the following research questions:
VO1 What is the occurrence of individual role groups - aggressor, victim, defender?
VO2 What is the incidence of men and women within individual role groups – aggressor, victim, defender?
VO3 Is there a significant relationship between the level of self-efficacy and the level of assisting behavior in bullying among students?
VO4 Is there a significant relationship between the overall level of group effectiveness and the level of assisting behavior in bullying among students?
VO5 To what extent do self-efficacy and collective efficacy predict bullying behavior?

5. Research methods

Scale of considerate behavior of students during bullying (Thornberg et al., 2017)

This is a 15-item large scale measure of bystander behavior in bullying situations. The scale maps 4 types of bystanders in the bullying process: passive bystander, defender bystander, assisting bystander, and reinforcing bystander. In our research, we used only theassisting behaviorof the bullying aggressor.
The scale begins with an introductory instruction: "Try to remember situations in which you saw a student being bullied (e.g., ridiculed, physically attacked). What do you usually do?"

Assisting bystander behavior was measured with 5 items. Respondents respond on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = agree, 4 = strongly agree). According to Thornberg et al. (2017), the assisting bystander behavior scale achieves adequate psychometric quality, with Cronbach's α = 0.86 in our study . In our study, bystander roles in peer victimization were conceptualized as dimensional (see also Levy & Gumpel , 2017).

General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES, Schwarzer & Jerusalem , 1995; translation Košč & Heftyová , 1993)

The scale consists of 10 items (e.g., "I can find a way out of almost any problem if I put in the necessary effort"). The scaling is implemented using a 4-point Likert scale, from 1 (does not describe at all) to 4 (completely necessary). The reliability of the scale is in the range α=0.76 - 0.90 (Schwarzer & Jerusalem , 1995; Juárez & Contreras , 2008; Košč & Heftyová , 1993).

Group Effectiveness Scale (Barchia & Bussey, 2011a, b)

The scale was designed to measure perceptions of school group effectiveness. It measures how well teachers and students can provide peer bullying support in the school context. The scale includes 10 items, with respondents answering on a 5-point scale (from 1- very well to 5- not at all).

Student Bullying/ Victimization Questionnaire* (*Revised Olweus Bully / Victim Questionnaire* , OBVQ-R, *Olweus , 1996)

The Bullying Questionnaire is a self-report questionnaire with 42 items, in our research 3 questions were used with the focus on the analysis of aggressors, victims of bullying and defenders. The answers were recorded on a 5-point scale from 0 to 4, 0 = it has not happened to me in the last two months, 1 = it has happened to me once or twice, 2 = it has happened to me 2–3 times a month, 3 = it has happened to me once a week, 4 = it has happened to me several times a week. The cut-off point for bullying was determined as behaviour that occurs '2–3 times a month' (Solberg , Olweus , 2003).

6. Research file

The research sample includes 377 students (47.5% boys and 52.5% girls). The average age of the respondents was 13.5 years (SD=4.02). The research sample includes schools from different socioeconomic areas and socio-geographic locations. These were students in the seventh and eighth grades of primary schools in 23 schools in the Trnava, Trenčín, Žilina, Nitra and Bratislava regions. Students who had written informed consent from all parents (granted in Edupage) and oral consent from all students participated in the research . Participation in the research was voluntary, anonymous, and students could discontinue the research at any time without notice.

7. Research results

One of the objectives of the research was to analyze the prevalence of bullying behavior. We set research question No. 1: *What is the prevalence of individual role groups - aggressor, victim, defender?* The results are shown in graph No. 1.

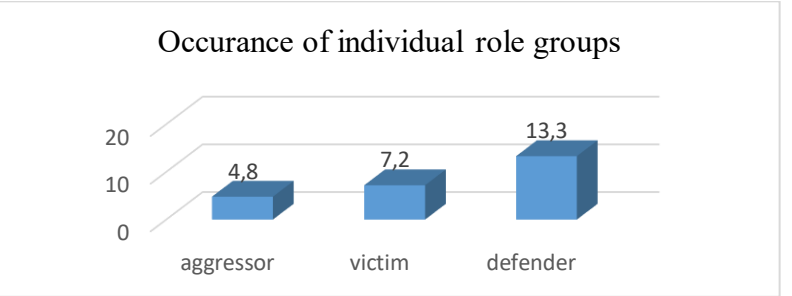


Chart No. 1 Occurrence of aggressor, victim and defender

Within the research set, respondents were assigned to role groups based on their behavior. The criterion for assignment to individual role groups was the occurrence of bullying behavior, with the boundary point of bullying behavior being determined to be the behavior of students that occurs 2-3 times per month (Solberg , Olweus , 2003). Of the total number of respondents, 18 students identified themselves as **aggressors** , which represents **4.8%** of the set. The role **of victim** was played by 27 respondents **(7.2%)** and the role **of defender** by 50 respondents **(13.3%).**

When analyzing role groups in the bullying process, we also monitored their distribution by gender of respondents. In research question no. 2, we asked: *What is the incidence of men and women within individual role groups - aggressor, victim, defender?* The results are clearly shown in graph no. 2.

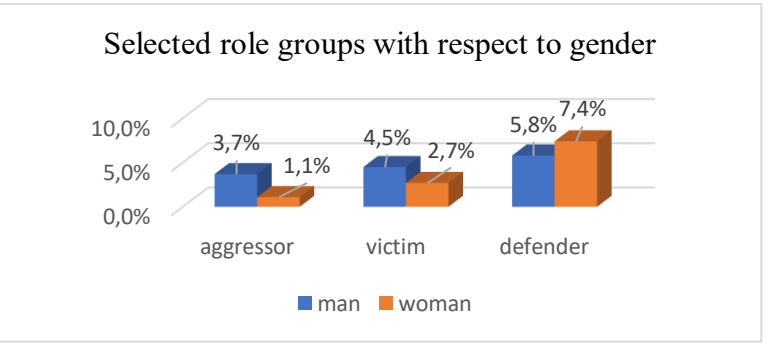


Chart No. 2 Differences between men and women with respect to individual role groups

The analysis of gender distribution across role groups revealed interesting differences. The aggressor group was dominated by boys, who made up 14 respondents (3.7%), while girls were represented in a significantly lower number, 4 female respondents (1.1%). A similar trend was confirmed in the victim group, in which boys again outnumbered girls 17 (4.5%) compared to 10 (2.7%). A significantly different picture was presented by the defender role group. In this case, girls were represented in greater numbers than boys, specifically 28 female respondents (7.4%) compared to 22 boys (5.8%). This finding caused girls to be more inclined to adopt a defensive attitude towards victims in the context of bullying than boys.

In research question 3, we asked: *Is there a significant relationship between the level of self-efficacy and the level of assisting bystander behavior in bullying among students?* The results are shown in Table 1.

Table No. 1 Correlation between self-efficacy and assisting bystander behavior

Report of observing students		Self-efficacy
Assisting bystander behaviour	Spearman's rho	-,104 *
	Sig . (2-way)	,043
	N	377

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

Normality was tested using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which showed that the distribution of the self-efficacy variable (p <0.05) for all respondents was not normally distributed. Spearman correlation was used to verify the relationship between self-efficacy and assisting bystander behavior, due to the violation of the assumption of normal distribution of the self-efficacy variable.
A significant and helpful relationship was found between the self-efficacy behavior of students towards the aggressor (rho = -.104, p = .043), which means that higher self-efficacy is associated with a lower tendency to support the aggressor. Despite the statistical significance of the relationship, it is necessary to obtain that the correlation coefficient has low values (rho < .20), which indicates a weak strength of this relationship.
In research question 4, we found: *Is there a significant relationship between the overall level of group effectiveness and the level of assisting bystander behavior in bullying among students?* The results are presented in Table 2.

Table No. 2 Correlation between group effectiveness and students assisting bystander behavior

Report of observing students		Collective efficacy
Assisting bystander behaviour	Spearman's rho	-030
	Sig . (2-way)	561
	N	377

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

The relationship between collective efficacy andassisting behaviortowards the aggressor (rho = -.030, p = .561) did not reach statistical significance .
In research question 5, we wanted to find out: *To what extent do self-efficacy and collective efficacy predict bullying behavior? ?* The results are shown in Table 3, which presents the results of a hierarchical linear regression analysis focused on **predictors of assisting bystander behavior.**

Table No. 3 Predictions of students assisting bystander behavior

	B.	SE	t	p
1 model , R2 = 0.019, p = 0.007				
Self-efficacy	-094	,035	-2,694	007
2 model , R2 = 0.029 p = 0.004				
Self-efficacy	-095	,035	-2,739	006
Collective efficacy	-078	,039	-2,006	046

Note . The values in Model 1 represent results from the first block predictors-self-efficacy . Results after average group efficiency are shown in Models 2.
Model 1 included only self-efficacy and explained 1.9% of the variance in the dependent variable (R^2 = .019, p = .007). Self-efficacy was shown to be a statistically significant predictor (β -.094, p = .007). The negative sign of the coefficient indicates that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with lower levels of supervised behavior. **Model 2** was expanded to include collective efficacy and explained a total of 2.9% of the variance (R^2 = .029, p = .004) in assisting bystander behavior. Both predictors reached statistical significance – self-efficacy (β = -.905, p = .006) and collective efficacy (β = -.078, p = .046). The negative coefficients of both variables indicate that higher perceived efficacy, whether individual or group, is associated with lower levels of assisting bystander behavior.

8. Discussion
One of the objectives of the research was to analyze **the prevalence of bullying behavior** . The subject of the analysis was three role groups: aggressor, victim and defender. We set ourselves the research question No. 1 *What is the incidence of individual role groups - aggressor, victim, defender?*. The results of the research suggest that out of the total number of students, **4.8% were aggressors** , **7.2% were victims** and **13.3% defenders** . The results show that the most numerous role of persons within the studied group was defenders , while the least represented group was aggressors .
When analyzing **role groups** in the bullying process, we also monitored their distribution **by gender** . In research question no. 2, we asked: *What is the incidence of men and women within individual role groups - aggressor, victim, defender?* In the **aggressor** role group , boys predominated, numbering 14 **(3.7%)** , while there were significantly fewer girls, 4 **(1.1%)** . We also noted a similar distribution in the **victim group** , where boys comprised 17 respondents **(4.5%)** and girls 10 respondents **(2.7%)** . A different trend was seen in the **defender group** , where, on the contrary, **girls were more likely to think so,** 28 respondents **(7.4%)** compared to 22 boys **(5.8%)** . This result means that girls are most often willing to adopt defensive behavior towards victims in the bullying process. Overall, it can be stated that boys were more significantly represented in the roles of aggressor and victim than girls, while girls dominated in the prosocial role group of defenders.
In the next part of the work, we focused on the analysis of the interrelationships between the selected variables. Specifically, we examined the connection between **sufficient self -efficacy of students and assisting behavior in bullying situations** . *VO3 Is there a significant relationship between the level of self-efficacy and the level of assisting bystander behavior in bullying situations in students?* The results of the analysis confirmed that a higher level of self-efficacy is related to a low level ofassisting behaviorin students. Students with a developed sense of self-efficacy are less often interested in behavior that would help and legitimize bullying behavior towards victims. The obtained findings are in line with the conclusions of foreign research. Bandura (1997) in his theory of self-efficacy requires that individuals with a high level of self-efficacy offer an increased tendency to act even in challenging and socially uncertain situations, which corresponds to our finding of passivity in students with higher self-efficacy . Despite statistical significance , the correlation coefficient reaches a low value, which indicates a weak significance of the relationship under investigation.
We focused on examining the interrelationships between the overall **level of collective efficacy and assisting behavior in bullying situations** . We formulated the research question *VO6 Is there a significant relationship between the overall level of collective efficacy and the assisting behavior in bullying situations ? A significant relationship*

between collective efficacy and assisting behavior towards the aggressor was not confirmed . The findings can be interpreted in accordance with the findings of Thornberg et al. (2020), that the importance of collective efficacy on individual types of considerate behavior of students is differentiated and may be mediated by other variables.

In research question 5, we wanted to find out *to what extent self-efficacy and collective efficacy predict bullying behavior. ?* The first model includes self-efficacy as the only predictor , which turned out to be a significant predictor . The model explained 1.9% of the total variation in assisting behavior. Although the explained variation is relatively low, the statistical significance of the predictor suggests that higher levels of self-efficacy are associated with lower levels of assisting behavior toward the bully aggressor. This result is consistent with Albert Bandura's (1997) theory, according to which self-efficacy functions as a protective factor that allows for better coping with stressful situations. The second model was expanded with the variable collective efficacy, which increased the explained variation to 2.9%. Self-efficacy remained a successful predictor , while collective efficacy also proved to be a significant predictor. The addition of collective efficacy thus increased the explained variation by 1%, which means that the receptive ability of the group to bully along with teachers has an independent, albeit modest, contribution to explaining considerate behavior of students.

8.Conclusion

The presented study brought important knowledge about the distribution of role groups in the bullying process and factors related to the behavior of bystanders. The results confirmed that bullying is a complex social phenomenon, in which not only aggressors and victims are involved, but also defenders, who formed the most numerous group. The research also points to the important role of self-efficacy as a protective factor that reduces the tendency of students to support bullying behavior. These findings have a direct impact on pedagogical practice - educators should strengthen students' self-efficacy, build a positive classroom climate, and develop empathy and assertiveness. Effective prevention of bullying should not be focused exclusively on the aggressor and the victim, but should actively involve the entire class and the joint collective responsibility of students.

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