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# Investigating faculty-initiated verbal, physical, social, sexual, and cyberbullying: A cross-sectional study from Turkey

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** People have long assumed that bullying does not occur in university classrooms. However, a closer examination of university education reveals that faculty-initiated bullying is a real phenomenon that warrants attention. This study aims to investigate the classical forms of bullying perpetrated by faculty members in the university setting. We examined various types of bullying, including physical, verbal, and social bullying, sexual bullying, and cyberbullying. This paper seeks to address questions about the prevalence of faculty-initiated bullying and abuse against students.

**Methods:** A web-based survey of 12 questions was administered to 2,676 senior university students attending state universities in the West Black Sea Region of Turkey. A chi-square test was utilized to compare the proportions of bullying acts across different groups categorized by types of schools (universities, colleges, vocational schools, and language preparation schools), type of education (daytime and evening education), grade or level of education (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year students), and gender (male and female). We set the significance level at 5% and conducted two-sided tests.

**Results:** The sample of 2,676 students included 1493 (55.8%) females and 1183 (44.2%) males, representing 15.46% of the total university population. 1,642 (61.4%) participants received daytime education, while 1,034 (38.6%) received evening education. The results revealed significant differences in the prevalence of bullying by faculty members among various types of schools. Notably, the significant values were for universities or faculties offering four-year courses, vocational schools/colleges offering two-year courses, and one-year language preparation courses. Additionally, between daytime and evening education, the groups differed only in the dimension of social bullying.

**Discussion:** Bullying and mistreatment are quite common in higher education. Furthermore, male and female students showed only verbal and physical bullying distinctions. Finally, significant differences in physical, verbal, and sexual bullying and cyberbullying were observed in terms of grade levels, whereas no such difference was noted for social bullying.

**Take-home message:** The results indicate that bullying at the university level is a real phenomenon that needs immediate attention. We need to prioritize interventions to increase the education and awareness of faculty members.

**Keywords:** Faculty abuse; faculty bullying; faculty mistreatment; sexual and cyberbullying in higher education; university students and bullying.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Although prior studies have established instructor/teacher bullying patterns in schools [1-9], insufficient resources have been researched in higher education. Higher education often misleads us into believing that such malpractices do not exist. Reportedly, faculty-initiated bullying or mistreatment in varying forms is prevalent in higher education [10]. Universities or higher education institutions implicitly promote specific social norms that create power imbalances between students and instructors. This creates a climate where it becomes easy to subjugate students, propagate unequal gender norms, and promote violence and corporal punishment [11]. While physical bullying is common in the first few years of education, it further manifests itself as emotional or psychological bullying in higher education [12,13]. Despite the progressive culture of universities nowadays and the education system in general, when researching abuse by faculty members or instructors, most universities stay conservative and protective of their institutions' prestige. Instead of addressing bullying issues, university administrators tend not to reveal them.

Violence against students by instructors or faculty members seems too harrowing a thought to have. Instructors are considered persons responsible for imparting knowledge, be it educational or ethical. However, we must acknowledge that teachers or mentors can also initiate aggression and violence [10]. The notion of violence by instructors/faculty members is a complex concept to fathom, given that violence entails a large array of terms. In other words, a particular definition cannot constrict this intricate concept. The term 'violence' can encompass many different acts of cruelty, but to define each one of them would be beyond the scope of this paper. However, we often use broad terms like 'psychological bullying,' 'psychological mistreatment,' 'abuse,' and 'intimidation' interchangeably. Other such terms include 'Gender-based discrimination,' 'favouritism' [14], 'academic abuse' [15], and 'faculty incivility' [4,16]. Faculty members have used all of these terms at various points to define violence against students. Clark further goes on to define this violence as an 'abuse of power' and 'rankism.' As a result, there isn't a single term or definition that describes faculty-initiated violence against students, as are most of the terms mentioned above (abuse/bullying). The authors of this paper have used these terms interchangeably to encompass all possible forms of violence initiated by instructors against their students [16].

The current paper focuses on the concept of faculty-initiated bullying of students. Bullying is the misuse of power and authority to harass or humiliate victims, which undermines their abilities and socially excludes them [11]. As a result, victims experience feelings of hopelessness, vulnerability, and powerlessness [11]. Bullying is a complex phenomenon that is a consequence of several interconnected factors reinforcing each other [9,13,17]. These factors may be psychological or sociological in origin. Therefore, the negative effect of bullying, if left untreated, can affect a person's life in almost all spheres. Moreover, the long-term effects can be as severe as depression and anxiety, which in turn can lead to negative coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse, negative psychosomatic function, suicidality, etc. [18]. Peer and instructor bullying may also affect academic performance, making it challenging for them to concentrate during classes or do well in their studies [19]. The negative effects span a victim's mental health and social relationships, among other dire consequences.

Regrettably, violence (and bullying) in itself is a vicious cycle that continuously feeds itself. Rubin et al. [20] note that violent victimization of university students may cause them to victimize others in

their professional careers. This resembles the transfer of trauma and violence through generations over time. Confirming this result, [21] one study revealed that students who were victims of abuse/bullying during their education were most likely to engage in violent behaviors themselves in their careers. In other words, ensuring a favorable resolution to any form of violence, including bullying, is crucial to prevent the victims from becoming instigators.

Olweus describes what is commonly referred to as classical forms of bullying behaviors, namely physical, verbal, and social bullying [22]. Two other categories of bullying, sexual bullying and cyberbullying, were also investigated in the current paper. Given that the new generation is so adeptly involved with intimacy and technology, they become even more vulnerable to sexual and cyberbullying. Furthermore, prior studies have indicated that students pursuing higher education are increasingly falling victim to cyberbullying [9,13,23]. Therefore, we added these two forms of bullying as variables. Although Olweus's conception of bullying is universal, the concept of faculty-initiated bullying is of particular concern to this paper. In other terms, the paper attempts to apply the essence of Olweus's bullying concepts to understand faculty-initiated bullying against students.

Certain bullying concepts are so intertwined that it becomes difficult to set them apart. For instance, psychological abuse is a broader form of abuse within which lie the concepts of verbal bullying [24] and social bullying, to name a few. Psychological abuse is characterized by subjecting the victim to certain behaviors that eventually lead to psychological trauma, among other mental health disturbances [13,24]. According to Gonzales de Rivera (2002), psychological abuse is the result of a complex interaction within the social group of the abuser and victim. This type of abuse is not uncommon in higher education. Like any organization built on power differences, psychological abuse co-exists with other forms of faculty-initiated bullying [25].

Apart from these, social bullying, or "social violence," as it is sometimes called, is another variable in the outcome of this study. It refers to those indirect forms of bullying that include methods such as social exclusion or social isolation of the victims. MacDonald and Leary conceptualized "social suffering" as separation from a group, being left alone, and public humiliation. In addition to feeling emotionally uncomfortable or vulnerable, students who experience social bullying and group exclusion also experience great shame [26].

Academic literature has reported sexual bullying using a variety of terms. For instance, Skinner and colleagues [27] introduced the concept of "academic sexual intimacy," characterizing it as the intimate relationship between a faculty member and a student. They further noted that academic sexual intimacy has always been ignored by academicians themselves and, therefore, is not overtly visible in the existing literature. Skinner's study revealed that sexual bullying affected 25% to 50% of undergraduate students, with a higher proportion of female students [27]. In a study with two medical schools in the Netherlands, Rademakers et al. [28] discovered that faculty members initiated sexual bullying for 28.1% of the participants. Furthermore, Rautio et al. discovered that sexual bullying or gender-based discrimination affected 21% of female students and 10% of male students in their study [14]. In most institutions, sexual bullying is socially approved, where it is used as a strength indicator among employees [29] and students as well, in this case. In Rautio et al.'s study, female participants reported experiencing high levels of sexual bullying in the faculty of technology, leading them to feel compelled to leave the university [14].

Recent innovations in technology have given rise to yet another type of bullying, known as cyberbullying. This form of bullying involves the use of technology and technological tools to harass, abuse, threaten, or humiliate others [4,30,31]. As is evident from the myriads of different definitions given above, it is challenging to define and differentiate between bullying and abuse, given their overlapping characteristics. However, they all fall under a broader terminology or concept of violence, which is the main focus of the current study.

Numerous studies in the past have shown that bullying is prevalent at universities and in higher education institutions, extending to postgraduate and doctoral levels of education, more so than was initially thought [15,21,32]. Despite the prevalence of peer-inflicted bullying, faculty-initiated bullying often goes unnoticed.

According to a study by Chapell et al., faculty members bullied 19% of the students, and another 44% reported witnessing bullying of other students [33]. In a recent study, Bulut et al. found that 10% of students were threatened to receive lower grades, and 31% of the students witnessed a faculty member's uncivil behavior. Most importantly, 21% reported not believing in a fair investigation in cases of disagreements or complaints. It seems that university students are pretty scared and afraid of their college professors [10].

Faculty-initiated bullying, like general bullying, is based on the power dynamics between instructors and students. An instructor/faculty member in academia sits in a position of certain privilege or power that influences the social climate of the classroom and the university in general [23]. A faculty member's unprofessional conduct feeds into this power struggle, creating an environment unfavorable for learning and any effective solutions to intervene [34]. Faculty members can go as far as humiliating students and being overly defensive or retaliating when in conflict with students. Such behaviors can cause students anger, frustration, or oppression [16]. Instructors who change their teaching methods, assign additional makeup homework, give students a chance to gain extra credit, and apologize when necessary, can have a successful and productive teacher-student relationship [34].

The initial set of studies on abuse or bullying against students by faculty began with the Department of Nursing. The faculty of health sciences, which includes the nursing, dentistry, and medical science departments, has been the focus of most research in this field. Clark [16] conducted a phenomenological study with nursing students, identifying three types of faculty-initiated incivility. These were: 1) having high expectations from students, 2) treating students offensively, arbitrarily, and unfairly, and 3) compelling them to go through with unrealistic requests. Students often become traumatized, hopeless, and angry at the faculty, unable to bear the weight of such expectations or requests. In a large U.S.-based study, including ten medical schools, students reported experiences of bullying in several ways, including humiliation (87%), threats with low grades (35%), threats with physical harm (26%), and sexual harassment (55%) [3]. Another study in the United States reported that 98.8% of students were mistreated, and more than half of them stated that they experienced sexual harassment as well [35]. In Canada, 8.3% of medical students experienced physical assault, while 12.6% experienced sexual harassment [36].

A faculty member intimidated or mistreated 34.6% of the freshmen in the faculty of dentistry, according to a multinational study involving Romania, South Africa, Australia, the U.S., and Malaysia [37]. In Finland, research conducted across five faculties showed that 40% of the students

were subjected to public humiliation, 23% to being shouted at, 17% faced sexual harassment or sexual discrimination, and 13% of them reported that they were assigned duty as punishment [14]. In Jordan, students from across five health science departments reported having been subjected to psychological bullying (52%), physical bullying/abuse (32%), and sexual bullying (33%) [1]. This study also showed how more than half of students lacked trust in the grading system posed by their faculty members [1].

Furthermore, Kobayashi et al. [15] studied assistant doctor students at 37 hospitals in Japan and found the general mistreatment rate was 84.8%. The study also reported that verbal bullying was the most frequent form of violence against students at 72.1%, followed by alcohol-related abuse (51.8%) and sexual harassment of female students at 58.3%. Mukhtar et al. [38] stated that 66% of medical students in Pakistan faced abuse/bullying at the hands of faculty members, with the most frequent type of violence being verbal bullying (66%). What is even more alarming is the fact that more than half of the victims were female students [38].

Scholars have also examined the victims' gender to determine whether it influences their experience of bullying. For example, Chapell et al. [33] conducted a study in the U.S. and found that the rates of bullying experienced by male and female students were similar. A study in Finland reported that the prevalence of faculty-initiated bullying was about 21% and that 40% of the male participants and 55% of the female participants [14]. The same study also confirmed what has been previously established through literature findings, which is that verbal bullying (followed by sexual bullying) is the most observed form of bullying. Culture deeply intertwines with perceptions of bullying, leading to numerous instances where women fail to recognize certain acts as gender-based discrimination or sexual bullying [28]. The same can be applied to male students who undergo sexual bullying but often do not report it for fear of being regarded as “weak” [39].

According to the literature, despite shreds of evidence pointing to the universality of faculty-initiated bullying against students, there is still no proper action or protocol to tackle this issue [40]. What seems to be the common finding across the various literature presented above is that the different types of violence initiated by a faculty member seem to be a “universal phenomenon” that is prevalent in the higher education institutions of many countries. Although verbal bullying or abuse appears to be the most observed type, sexual violence through bullying, abuse, and harassment also seems to occur at higher rates, especially with female students.

### ***Perpetuating violence***

Owing to these concerning statistics about the mistreatment students face by teachers and instructors, it is vital to understand what perpetuates such behaviours. Instructors frequently use intimidation techniques, harassment, and bullying as functional educational tools, despite knowing the non-functional qualities of such actions [41]. Some of these behaviours include coming late and unprepared for class, rudely interacting with the students, and trying to provoke or punish said students [2].

The reasons may vary, as faculty members in higher education are known to exhibit adverse behaviours for a wide variety of unknown reasons, thereby creating a non-viable educational environment for students [12]. Some of the reported reasons for the faculty behaving in such appalling ways are that students are irresponsible, that they are lazy and not interested in studying, or that they are entitled to receive certain privileges even when they do not deserve them [2]. Other

reasons include perceived insubordination and incivility from students, students questioning and mocking the authority and knowledge of the professors, students not attending classes regularly, and instead choosing to criticize the faculty when they cannot understand the lessons or do their assignments on time [42]. Occasionally, students, other instructors, or the administration bully the instructors themselves, projecting their frustration onto the students [43]. Some faculty members choose to resolve these issues constructively. In contrast, others employ passive-aggressive actions, such as making less effort in teaching, lowering grades, or socially excluding the students from other faculty members [42].

To explain the variations observed in bullying culture across faculty and departments, Becher (1989) discussed each department/faculty having its own internalized organizational philosophy that works at a distinct pace, giving way to a distinct bullying culture [5]. What he described as a discipline-based ethical mentality, Rautio et al. [14] explained as the academic socialization that happens, especially in medicine and education. This form of socialization traditionally occurs due to the adoption of the same attitudes and approaches in teaching students, giving way to faculty mistreatment. This may explain why the literature on faculty-initiated bullying frequently focuses on the medical/health science faculty. The distinct characteristics that each faculty carries are what make it vulnerable to a bullying culture.

### ***The present study***

The literature in this area of abuse is exclusively focused on medical students or students initiated by various faculty in health sciences' disciplines. As a result, there is a need to expand the scope of this research to explore the phenomenon of faculty-initiated bullying in other education disciplines. We also tested the applicability of Olweus's [22] concept of bullying and its definition to higher education, but there is currently insufficient evidence of this issue in Turkey. Therefore, the current study is among the first to investigate bullying and uncivil behaviours to which university students are subjected.

### ***Study's aims***

- 1) To determine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the rates of verbal, physical, social, sexual, and cyberbullying reported depending on the faculty, university, college, vocational school, or language preparation school in which the students are enrolled.
- 2) To ascertain whether the enrollment of students in daytime or evening education contributes to a statistically significant difference in the reported bullying rates.
- 3) The aim is to ascertain if genders differ statistically significantly in terms of experiencing bullying and mistreatment from faculty members.
- 4) To determine whether students' bullying experiences depend on their grade(s) or year of education. Is there a general trend that can explain this?

## **METHODS**

### ***Study design and participants***

In this web-based, cross-sectional study, a convenience sample included university students attending state universities in Turkey's West Black Sea Region. The study recruited students enrolled in either daytime or evening education at universities, colleges, vocational schools, or language preparation schools, regardless of the department or faculty they belonged to.

### ***Study instruments***

Inspired by Olweus' concept of bullying, the questionnaire consists of 12 ad-hoc questions designed to capture a comprehensive view of bullying experiences in addition to the demographic questions. This adapted version was created from the previous validated questionnaire that exhibited good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.78 to 0.92 for different bullying dimensions [44].

Students were asked questions about the physical, verbal, and social bullying they may have experienced during their four years of education, and during the last term of their university. In addition to this, sexual bullying and cyberbullying were also asked, which have not been investigated much by previous studies and warrant further exploration. In these 5 items related to different kinds of bullying (indicated above), each question had five options: (1) never experienced, (2) one or two times, (3) happened 2-3 times a month, (4) very frequently, and (5) happened at least three times in the last semester.

The five items are indicated below:

- (a) *"Have you ever experienced physical bullying by your instructor in the last semester?"*;
- (b) *"Have you been socially isolated by your instructor?"*;
- (c) *"Have you been sexually bullied by your instructor?"*;
- (d) *"Have you been cyberbullied by your instructor?"*;
- (e) *"Have you been psychologically mistreated by your instructor?"*

#### ***Study's procedure***

To increase the representation of the sample, senior students enrolled in universities, colleges, vocational schools, and prep schools were chosen as participants, and the questionnaire was handed to them before the final week of the first semester. Data were collected over one year, from July 2020 to July 2021. Students were asked about their experiences regarding bullying and abuse that they had encountered during the four years (or two years for vocational school students and one year for prep students) and the last term of their educational curriculum. The questions were designed to be brief and easy to understand, and it took about 10 minutes (on average) to answer the questionnaire.

#### ***Statistical analysis***

The chi-square test was used in the analysis to determine the association among the nominal variables in this study. The test's significance was set at 5%, and all p-values were two-sided. Categorical variables were represented as frequencies and proportions. All the analyses were conducted using SPSS Version 21 and R [45,46].

#### ***Ethical aspects***

Students were reminded that participation was voluntary and that no financial incentives were offered in this study. Responses to the survey were kept confidential and were only accessible to the investigators of this team. Ethical permission was received by the Institutional Review Board of Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in 2020 (202002.01.353).



**RESULTS**

The sample included 2,676 students, including 1,493 (55.8%) females and 1,183 (44.2%) males. This number represents 15.46% of the total university population. 1,642 (61.4%) of the participants received daytime education, while 1,034 (38.6%) received evening education. Table 1 shows the number of students from different types of schools and the number of female and male students.

**Table 1.** Demographics about participants (N=2,676).

Kind of Faculty & Schools	Total Number of Students		Education Type				Gender			
			Daytime Education		Evening Education		Female		Male	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Education Faculty ****	609	22.8	369	22.47	240	23.21	416	27.9	193	16.3
Business Faculty ****	355	13.3	200	12.18	155	14.99	218	14.6	137	11.6
Arts and Letters Faculty ****	239	8.9	184	11.21	55	5.32	135	9	104	8.8
Engineer. & Architecture Faculty ****	28	1	28	1.71	0	0	24	1.6	4	0.3
Physical Education College****	114	4.3	114	6.94	0	0	34	2.3	80	6.8
Nursing College****	26	1	26	1.58	0	0	22	1.5	4	0.3
Physical Rehab. College****	24	0.9	24	1.46	0	0	11	0.7	13	1.1
Bolu Vocational School **	503	18.8	153	9.32	350	33.85	233	15.6	270	22.8
Gerede Vocational School **	439	16.4	301	18.33	138	13.35	213	14.3	226	19.1
Mengen Vocational School **	25	0.9	25	1.52	0	0	1	0.1	24	2
Mudurnu Vocational School **	21	0.8	21	1.28	0	0	8	0.5	13	1.1
Language Preparation School *	293	10.9	197	12.00	96	9.28	178	11.9	115	9.7
<b>TOTAL Participants</b>	<b>2,676</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,642</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>1,034</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,493</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,183</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note:* \*\*\*\* 4-year schools & 4-year colleges, diploma; \*\* 2-year vocational schools, associate degree; \* 1-year language preparation school, required by some departments.

**Table 2.** Distribution of abuse types by schools and total victimization rates (N = 2,676).

Types of Schools and Faculty	Verbal abuse		Physical Abuse		Social abuse		Sexual abuse		Cyber Abuse		Total Yes	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Education Faculty****	161	26.4	9	1.5	38	6.2	106	17.4	25	4.1	213	35
Business Faculty****	83	23.4	4	1.1	8	2.3	33	9.3	6	1.7	93	26.2
Art & Letters Faculty****	35	14.6	1	0.4	3	1.3	6	2.5	5	2.1	43	18
Engineer. & Architecture Faculty ****	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Physical Education College****	25	21.9	5	4.4	4	3.5	11	9.6	5	4.4	32	28.1
Nursing College****	6	23.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	23.1
Physical Rehabilitation College****	3	12.5	0	0	1	4.2	0	0	0	0	3	12.5
Bolu Vocational School **	75	14.9	18	3.6	18	3.6	27	5.4	14	2.8	101	20.1
Mudurnu Vocational School **	2	9.5	0	0	2	9.5	0	0	0	0	4	19
Gerede Vocational School **	12	2.7	0	0	10	2.3	2	0.5	0	0	19	4.3
Mengen Vocational School **	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Language Preparation *	17	5.8	3	1	3	1	2	0.7	1	0.3	19	6.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>15.6</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1.4</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>533</b>	<b>19.9</b>

Note: \*\*\*\* 4-year schools & 4-year colleges, diploma; \*\* 2-year vocational schools, associate degree; \* 1-year language preparation school, required by some departments.

Generally, high rates of bullying were found in the analysis. Among the participants, 187 students (6.9%) were subjected to sexual bullying and 66 students (2.3%) to cyberbullying, which were tested in addition to Olweus’s sub-concepts of bullying. Among the participants sexual bullying was observed the most at 4-year universities/colleges (11.3%), followed by 2-year universities/colleges (2.9%) and prep school (0.7%), respectively. Similarly, for cyberbullying the data observed was as follows; 3.0% in 4-year universities/colleges, 2.9% in 2-year universities/colleges, and 0.3% in prep school. It was also observed that sexual bullying and cyberbullying were quite prevalent in higher education.

**Table 3.** Comparisons of bullying types across school types, education mode, and gender.

		Kind of Schools and faculty			Education Type		Gender	
		Faculty ****	Vocational Schools **	Language Preparation *	Daytime Education	Evening Education	Female Students	Male Students
Verbal Abuse	n	313	88	17	265	153	220	198
	%	22.4	8.9	5.8	16.2	14.8	14.7	16.8
	P value	<0.001 **			0.075		0.032 **	
Physical Abuse	n	19	18	3	25	15	16	24
	%	1.4	1.8	1	1.6	1.5	1.1	2
	P value	0.785			0.491		0.012 **	
Social Abuse	n	54	31	3	49	41	47	43
	%	4	3.6	1	3	4	3.1	3.7
	P value	0.013 *			0.014 **		0.182	
Sexual Abuse	n	156	29	2	111	76	111	74
	%	11.3	2.9	0.7	6.8	7.3	11.1	6.2
	P value	<0.001 **			0.054		0.054	
Cyber Abuse	n	42	23	1	40	26	45	21
	%	3	2.3	0.3	2.4	2.6	3	1.8
	P value	0.205			0.620		0.302	

Note: \*significant<0.01; \*\* significant<0.05

The chi-square test was used to analyze the frequency of verbal, physical, social, sexual, and cyberbullying victimization observed for the type of school, type of education, gender, and grade level. It was also used to test the question, "Have you ever been bullied by a faculty member?" and to see whether there was a significant difference by type of school, gender, type of education, and grade level (Table 3).

As for the different faculties, total violence and bullying frequencies were found to be 35.0% for the Faculty of Education, 26.2% for the Faculty of Business, 18.0% for the Faculty of Science and Letters, and 0.0% for the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture. Regarding four-year colleges, the rates were 28.1% for the College of Physical Education, 23.1% for Nursing College, and 12.5% for the College of Physiotherapy and Rehabilitation. Considering the two-year vocational schools, the rates were 20.1% for Bolu Vocational School, 19.0% for Mudurnu Vocational School, 4.3% for Gerede Vocational School, and 0.0% for Mengen Vocational School, as shown in Table 2.

When comparing the faculties (4 years), colleges (2 years), and prep schools (1 year), the highest victimization rate was observed in faculties, followed by colleges and prep schools. The rates were 28.0%, 12.6%, and 6.5%, respectively. Whereas physical bullying and cyberbullying were observed a little more at colleges, sexual bullying victimization was found to occur in different faculties about 2.5 times more than at colleges, as shown in Table 3.

The chi-square test showed a statistically significant difference between types of schools (4-year faculties, colleges, 2-year vocational schools, and language preparation schools) for the victimization of verbal, social, and sexual bullying ( $p < 0.001$ , 0.013, and  $< 0.001$ ., respectively). In other

words, verbal, social, and sexual bullying was different in each type of school. No difference was observed between types of schools for the victimization of physical and cyberbullying. Relevant frequency and percentage values can be seen in Table 3.

When comparing the type of education (daytime and evening education) undertaken by the participants, a statistically significant difference was found only in social bullying victimization ( $p = 0.014$ ). No such difference was observed between types of education for verbal, physical, sexual, and cyberbullying victimizations. In other words, students faced the same levels of bullying irrespective of whether they attended daytime or evening classes (Table 3). Moreover, the frequency of students undertaking daytime and evening education was very close (20.3% vs. 19.3%), as reported in Table 2. Rates by types of violence were also very close.

In exploring whether there is any difference in how different genders (male/female) experience bullying, statistically significant differences were found between the male and female students for verbal and physical bullying ( $p = 0.032$  and  $0.012$ , respectively). No such difference was found between the male and female students for social, sexual, and cyberbullying (Table 3). That is, both male and female students were victims of social, sexual, and cyberbullying. The data for the same are presented in the frequency table (Table 3).

Taking gender as an example, the rates of bullying victimization faced by the male and female participants were very close to each other, i.e., 19.3% and 20.7%, respectively. However, the rates differed for certain subtypes of bullying; for example, the rates of verbal and social bullying victimization for males and females were very similar. On the other hand, for physical bullying, the male participants faced two times more bullying than the female participants (2% vs. 1.1%). Similarly, in the case of sexual bullying, the female participants were subjected to sexual bullying two times more than male participants (11.1% vs. 6.2%). Additionally, female participants also experienced cyberbullying two times more than male participants (3.0% vs. 1.8%) (Table 3).

To answer the last question regarding the grade level or year of education, a statistically significant difference was found in the victimization of verbal, physical, sexual, and cyberbullying ( $p = <0.001$ ,  $0.010$ ,  $0.002$ , and  $0.039$ , respectively). In contrast, no significant difference was found in the victimization of social bullying ( $p = 0.186$ ).

In response to the question, "In which grade did you experience this adversity?" 150 participants (5.6%) responded as having experienced bullying in their 1<sup>st</sup> grade/year of education, 109 participants (4.1%) in their 2<sup>nd</sup> grade/year of education, 84 participants (3.1%) in their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade/year of education, 33 participants (1.2%) in their 4<sup>th</sup> grade/ year of education, and 134 participants (5.0%) in more than one grade/year of education.

## **DISCUSSION**

In this study, the general bullying rate was about 20%, consistent with another study in the US, where the rate was about 21% after collecting data from 16 medical schools [46]. Undeniably, the fact that one in every five students goes through such an unpleasant experience is a matter of critical importance; beyond this, stress and mental health problems that victims of bullying experience are also grave concerns that need consideration. Therefore, there is a need to take proactive measures and urgent actions to alleviate issues related to faculty-initiated bullying. There is a need to put certain standard protocols in place that the victims, bystanders, and the college administration can follow when a case of bullying arises.

The current study showed a sharp incline in the rates of faculty-initiated bullying and mistreatment in the faculty of education. The faculty of business and arts and sciences followed suit. Although previous literature points to medical schools as having the highest rates of faculty-initiated bullying [14], the current study showed similar rates (35%) despite not including medical schools. Likewise, the findings observed in this study contributed to confirming the thesis presented by Rautio et al., which states that "each faculty has its atmosphere." And if the atmosphere of a particular faculty is such that it enables bullying, then it becomes a problem. Similarly, Becher emphasized that diverse universities and academic disciplines in the U.S.A. and the U.K. form their own disciplinary cultures [5]. This discipline-based ethical mentality establishes not only different power dynamics but also different bullying cultures. Accordingly, specific departments socially recognize certain types of violence, while other departments may not approve of them or even condemn them. This would explain the differences observed between faculties or departments in the prevalence of a faculty-initiated bullying culture.

The results also showed that bullying victimization increased as the study period increased. 4-year schools, be it a university or college, recorded the highest rate of faculty-initiated bullying, followed by 2-year schools. Preparation schools recorded the lowest rates of bullying owing to just one year of education undertaken in such schools. This establishes a relationship between the duration of education and bullying victimization. It is no surprise that as education increases, the chances of a person experiencing bullying at the hands of faculty members also increase. Studies conducted in other countries also observed an increase in bullying. Further, the study was also instrumental in finding that bullying tends to increase as the relationship between the student (victim) and the faculty member becomes closer. The risk of bullying becomes imminent in such cases as the faculty members and students spend more time together in the same environment. This could also explain why bullying victimization increases as education length increases. On the other hand, this study also discovered that the rate of bullying victimization decreased as grade levels increased, the only exception being sexual bullying. Other studies observed similar findings [32,29,47]. A survey by Rautio et al. [14] also revealed similar results regarding sexual bullying. Consistent with the results from other countries, sexual bullying increases in Turkey as the study period increases. Thus, it is thought to be a universal phenomenon.

The current study also found that there was no difference in the rates of bullying experienced between male and female participants, as both genders reported the same rate (20%) of victimization. This is consistent with previous literature that showed no difference between male and female students in the U.S. [33]. However, the current study found that female participants experienced more sexual and cyberbullying than their male counterparts. This result aligns with the "macho" culture prevalent in cultures like Turkey, where the expectation is for males to be physically and sexually stronger than women, thereby preventing them from experiencing bullying. This socially sanctioned belief could lead to male students shying away from reporting sexual and cyberbullying, or any form of abuse for that matter. Similarly, in Israel, it is normal for males to include sexually explicit content in their conversations [6]. In such cases, would it still be considered sexual bullying if a male professor were to make such comments? Hence, it becomes evident that understanding bullying culture requires a consideration of cultural influences. Although sexual bullying in the current study is

relevant, the rates observed in Turkey are lower than in other countries. For instance, reports of sexual bullying indicate 58% in Japan [30], 33% in Jordan [1], 71% in Sweden [32], and 38% in Australia [29].

Further, this study reports 2.1% of gender-based discrimination by its participants, which is a low rate compared to other Western countries. For instance, this rate was 54 % in Sweden [32]. The low rate can be attributed to gender-discriminatory behaviours encouraged implicitly by Turkish society. Furthermore, a lack of awareness about bullying and gender-based violence among students could also be a major reason why the rates are lower in Turkey. The Turkish education system should include awareness drives and set training protocols in place, aiming to impart information about faculty-initiated bullying and its negative consequences on both perpetrators and victims. Seminar programs, leaflets, introductory texts, movies, and discussions can impart knowledge and awareness. This would help prevent such acts from occurring, as well as assist victims and bystanders in coming forward. Students need to learn how to react to faculty-initiated bullying, where and how to set boundaries and limits so they will not be unnecessarily exploited. We should provide faculty members with sufficient training and support to establish professional boundaries and understand acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. We must provide adequate psychological and legal aid to both victims and perpetrators to ensure their safe navigation through the bullying experience.

Considering the similar rates of bullying victimization found in the literature and the current study, it is normal to assume that faculty-initiated bullying is a universal phenomenon. Even then, cultural dimensions root bullying experiences; for instance, if a particular culture incorporates ideas of power and discipline, the teaching style within that culture would reflect the same notions [23]. In Nigeria, corporal punishment is an integral part of education and is widely accepted as a form of punishment [11]. However, this may not necessarily be the case in other parts of the world. Therefore, approaches to tackling this issue should also cater to the cultural differences of different societies or countries. For example, a recent study in Indonesia revealed that forgiveness and religiosity positively reduce the negative effects of bullying on students. Similar types of intervention programs can be imperative to alleviate the harmful effects of childhood bullying experiences on individuals [13].

Similarly, one must acknowledge that bullying is an interpersonal problem rooted in an organization. However, most universities and academicians tend to focus on bullying as a consequence of organizational issues and find solutions that cater to changing the organizational structure [17]. The human factor, a crucial component of bullying, often goes unnoticed. For example, faculty-initiated bullying does not attack the student's work but the student himself. Bullying is directed at bringing harm or pain to a person, so we must focus on the person more than the organization [48,49]. Interpersonal tension, stress, and conflicts are at the root of bullying and should be emphasized when designing precautionary/preventive protocols. Any stress or tension between the faculty members and students can reduce the efficiency of the teaching process and the quality of education [14]. Universities should strive to achieve sufficient research and academic prowess to generate more knowledge about faculty-initiated bullying culture and its effects on student victims. This may reduce the tension between the two parties, ensuring quality education and job satisfaction. Tiberius and Flak proposed the idea of a teacher-learner alliance to eliminate tensions between students and faculty members and achieve efficient learning. They argued that basic listening skills and empathy can go a long way in understanding each other [50].

This paper explored the bullying occurrences in higher education by faculty members, which were no longer given importance. The results provided significant information and cautioned us regarding the different forms of bullying in university settings. It appears that it has many complex dynamics and various forms of manifestation of bullying and uncivil behavior, even in higher education institutions [51-58]. This can also provide some insight and awareness for the university professors to scrutinize their behavior and understand the underlying dimensions of their rude and uncivil behavior [59-67].

This study is not without limitations. First, this was conducted at a mid-size government university with senior students, which could limit our ability to generalize. We can plan future studies to replicate similar investigations in bigger, smaller, and private universities as well. Different results may be found if this participant is from freshman, junior, or sophomore levels and graduate schools. In other words, the results may have limited external validity. Second, the cross-sectional nature of the data made it impossible to establish cause-and-effect relationships. We developed an ad-hoc survey instrument as a final step. Therefore, we can design future studies to establish the psychometric validity of the survey tools.

## **CONCLUSION**

This is the first study to investigate bullying and uncivil behaviours of faculty members in Turkey, which makes it an invaluable addition to the existing literature about violence [66-75]. The study investigated various types of bullying and compared them by gender, grade level, school, and type of education, resulting in extensive and detailed information. We also addressed the prevalence of various types of violence and bullying and investigated the applicability of concepts mentioned in foreign literature to higher education and their equivalencies.

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