



‘Like father, like son’ - Parental education and Augmented Reality to prevent bullying among children

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Introduction

Bullying is a phenomenon that received a lot of attention the past years, as it has serious consequences on children's lives, and has been recognized as a worldwide issue. In this context, the European Project 'Like father, like Son' aims to support families become more aware of the issues around bullying, and through the use of an AR game to provide resources for promoting prevention.

As part of the desk research conducted, an overview of the prevalence of this phenomenon in Cyprus has been discussed, along with available research in regards to risk and protective factors, but also the various consequences of bullying on both victims and bullies. Additionally, a collection of good practices addressing the needs of parents and guardians of children in Cyprus has been presented. This report aims to add to the information already collected through desk research, by involving directly parents of children between 9-15 years old, with the goal to share their needs, stories and experiences regarding bullying.

Methodology

Field research: aim and objectives, interviews limitations and sampling procedures, data collection and data analysis.

In order to identify the needs and experiences of parents in relation to bullying, a mixed-method approach was used – firstly, an online focus group was organized with 15 parents, along with 3 additional individual interviews. In total, 18 parents from Cyprus took part in the data collection process. The methods selected are considered effective to collect richer source of information. However, a potential disadvantage of this method is the small number of people involved, but considering the fact that the aim here is to explore further the experiences and needs of parents, these methods allowed us to explore further participants' opinions, behaviours and experiences in relation to bullying.

Firstly, in order to reach the participants an event was created in social media inviting parents to attend to the online focus group organized on the 7th September 2022. A poster was also designed with the information of the event. Additionally, an email invitation for the focus group and interviews were sent to parents and parent associations. The participants were notified that all answers will be anonymous and confidential and will only be used for the research of the project, the participants of the focus group provided their consent by register to the event and verbally at the beginning of the focus group. For the interviews, the three participants provided a written consent.



Figure 1: Poster Invitation for Parents

The online focus group was conducted with one moderator and another member of staff who was responsible for technical support and to take notes from the discussion. In regards to the interviews, they were planned as a 1-1 discussion between an interviewer and an interviewee. Both focus group and interviews results were analysed, and a detail report can be found in the following section.

Results from Interview

The main themes discussed can be divided into the following categories:

- Knowledge regarding Bullying
- Personal Experience of Bullying
- Ability to deal with bullying incidents
- Needs about training and skills development
- Tools and Resources

Knowledge regarding Bullying

To assess the participants' knowledge around bullying the discussion focused around the main reasons behind bullying incidents, the impact of bullying on children and what are the signs that a child is a victim of bullying.

In terms of the reasons behind bullying, participants covered a variety of possibilities. Specifically, one of the participants stated that bullying occurs when a child becomes a target by other children (teasing and making fun) due to their physical appearance or financial status. Another participant added that bullying can also be physical, not just verbal with the aim to scare and frightened the other person. Additionally, one of the participants added that bullying is a result of the lack of respect, empathy and self-esteem for the students that engaging in such behaviours.

Some signs that participants will look for to identify bullying incidents are:

- changes in the behaviour of the child,
- isolation,
- poor academic performance,
- aggression
- self-harming behaviour.

Additionally, participants suggested that bullying can affect children in many ways. One way identified by the majority of the participants is the impact on mental health – that bullying can lead to depression, anxiety and isolation. Also, the impact on the social life of the children was mentioned as children might become more isolated from friends and family, and their academic performance at school might impacted as well due to missing classes and school days because of bullying.

Personal Experience of Bullying

When asked about personal experiences in relation to bullying, all the participants were aware of incidents of bullying either through personal experience or from someone else they knew. One of the parents stated that as a child she was getting bullied at school because she was from another country and she had an accent. Another parent shared a personal past experience of her daughter who was bullied at school from her best friend 10 years ago, and the bullying incident was escalated involving the whole school. The parent said that the parents of the other girl was not willing to discuss it or do anything, neither the school was willing to acknowledge the problem. As a result, the child was suffering from anxiety which resulted to missing classes and in the end to change school. A similar case was shared by another participant, about her nephew who was a victim of bullying due to his appearance which resulted in calling him names and getting abused physically – who ended up switching school but the abuse continued also to the second school.

Ability to deal with bullying incidents

Regarding the participants' ability to deal with bullying incidents, various responses have been recorded. Some participants stated that they would try to provide reassurance to the child that it is not their fault, and they would try to communicate these issues with the school and the other parents. Similarly, some of the participants mentioned that they would communicate with the parents first, since everything starts from home. A few participants also shared that they would feel angry and sad – one participant also mentioned that he would feel the need to revenge for his child. Moreover, another participant said that he is not sure how he would have reacted in such situation, but he would appreciate advises from experts on how to recognize it and handle it effectively.

In relation to the question if their child was the bully, the majority of the participants shared the view that they would feel disappointment and shame because as parents they should be the role model for their children. One participant commented that she would try to explain to her child the consequences of his actions and work with him in order to avoid future incidents, if needed with the help from an expert. Another participant said that she would try to communicate with the child, but personally she would feel like she did something wrong in the upbringing of her child in order to be involved in such situation.

Respondents were asked on how they would advise their child to react if they witness bullying incidents –here are some of the advices mentioned:

“I always say to my child to respect everyone regardless of their appearance or status, and stand of what he feels is right – for this case my advice would be the same”

“I would advise my child to report it immediately to a teacher and ask for help”

Needs about training and skills development

All the respondents shared their need for more training on the topic of bullying and how to approach this topic with their child. Specifically, the following needs for training were expressed:

- How to cultivate empathy, resilience and self-esteem to children as a parent
- What procedures should be followed by parents and the school in such cases
- What our rights are and what is the legal framework around it

Tools and Resources

Finally, none of the respondents used any tools or resources to inform their children about bullying. However, the majority of the respondents shared the view that an educational game would be a great tool to use with their children.

Here are some of the suggestions made from the respondents:

- A game where the player can see the point of view of both the bully and the victim depend on the character they would pick.
- A role-playing game would be interesting where children can follow the story of a protagonist dealing with different situations
- Depend on the age of the child, for a teenager online games would be great, for children I would recommend using tales and books.

Conclusions and recommendations

To sum up, the field research conducted as part of the project LFLS, provided useful information about the needs of parents and guardians of children in Cyprus that complement the desk research conducted.

Overall, parents appear to have a good understanding about the signs and the impact of bullying on their children. Additionally, almost all the respondents were aware of incidents of bullying either through personal experience or from someone else in their social circle. In regards to dealing with bullying incidents, respondents provided mix answers in the case their child was a victim of bullying, but they agreed on the fact that more training is required in relation to approach this topic with their child. Finally, a game would be a useful tool in the hands of parents, according to the respondents, and specifically in the form of a role play using various scenarios.

Annexes

Annex 1

Interview Questions

1. Assessment of knowledge regarding the phenomenon

- Are you aware of the most common reasons for bullying (concerning the perpetrator or the victim)?
- What are the most important factors in combating and preventing bullying?
- Are you aware of the impact of bullying on children and the signs of bullying?

2. Assessment of personal experience with the phenomenon

- Has your child ever been directly or indirectly involved in any bullying incident (as a victim/perpetrator /bystander)?
- Do you have knowledge of any bullying incident at your child's school?
- How was it handled?

3. Assessment of needs regarding the ability to deal with bullying

- What would you do if your child reported being bullied?
- What would you do if your child started bullying other children?
- How would you advise your child to act, in case they witnessed bullying behavior?

4. Assessment of needs regarding training participation

- Have you participated in any training for combating and preventing bullying?
- What would you expect to learn from a bullying combating and prevention training?

5. Assessment of tools and resources needed

- Are you aware of any tools that that you can use to educate your child about the phenomenon?
- What resources would help you and your child learn more about combating and preventing bullying incidents? (Specify some resources)
- What graphic environment would you like to see in an AR Game? Would you prefer a more serious or more childlike environment?
- What kind of games do you like play with your children?