Bullying and peer problems in young people with and without migration background

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Offen im Denken

Theoretical background

In a 2019 newspaper article, a mother describes her son's schooling in drastic terms. He was repeatedly subjected to physical and verbal attacks by his classmates and called "gay." Because he did not actively practice his Muslim faith, he was also attacked by his Muslim classmates. According to the mother, the school said there would be no such incidents there and that the son was over-anxious and should change his behaviour (Tagesspiegel, 2019). This example describes a phenomenon called bullying. This covers the entire society and thus also the school sector (Gollnick, 2016). It shows that students with and without a migrant background can be perpetrators and victims. The example also hints at certain behaviors but does not make it clear whether they are also related to the migration background (Kux, 2019; Tagesspiegel, 2019). Its origins were scientific bullying research in Scandinavia in the 1970s. There Olweus conducted the first study on this topic (Melzer, Schubarth & Ehinger, 2004). In Germany, research into violence and bullying related to the school sector was only intensified in the 1990s. On this basis, a detailed picture of the general school situation can be drawn (Schubarth, 2013). Pupils with a migrant background appear as perpetrators and victims during bullying. These findings are based on studies from the English- and Dutch-speaking language area. For the German-speaking language area, there is hardly any knowledge of this (Strohmeier, Atria & Spiel, 2005; Strohmeier, 2017).
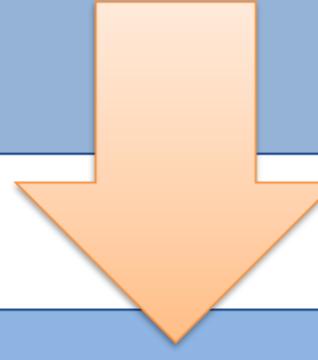
Question and method

Question: Are young people with or without a migrant background more likely to be affected by bullying or peer problems?

Procedure:

A total of 405 pupils were interviewed, 206 have a migrant background, 197 have no migrant background. The survey was carried out at Hauptschule (108 pupils), Realschule (148), Gesamtschule (80) and Förderschule (59).

Distribution of pupils by school type
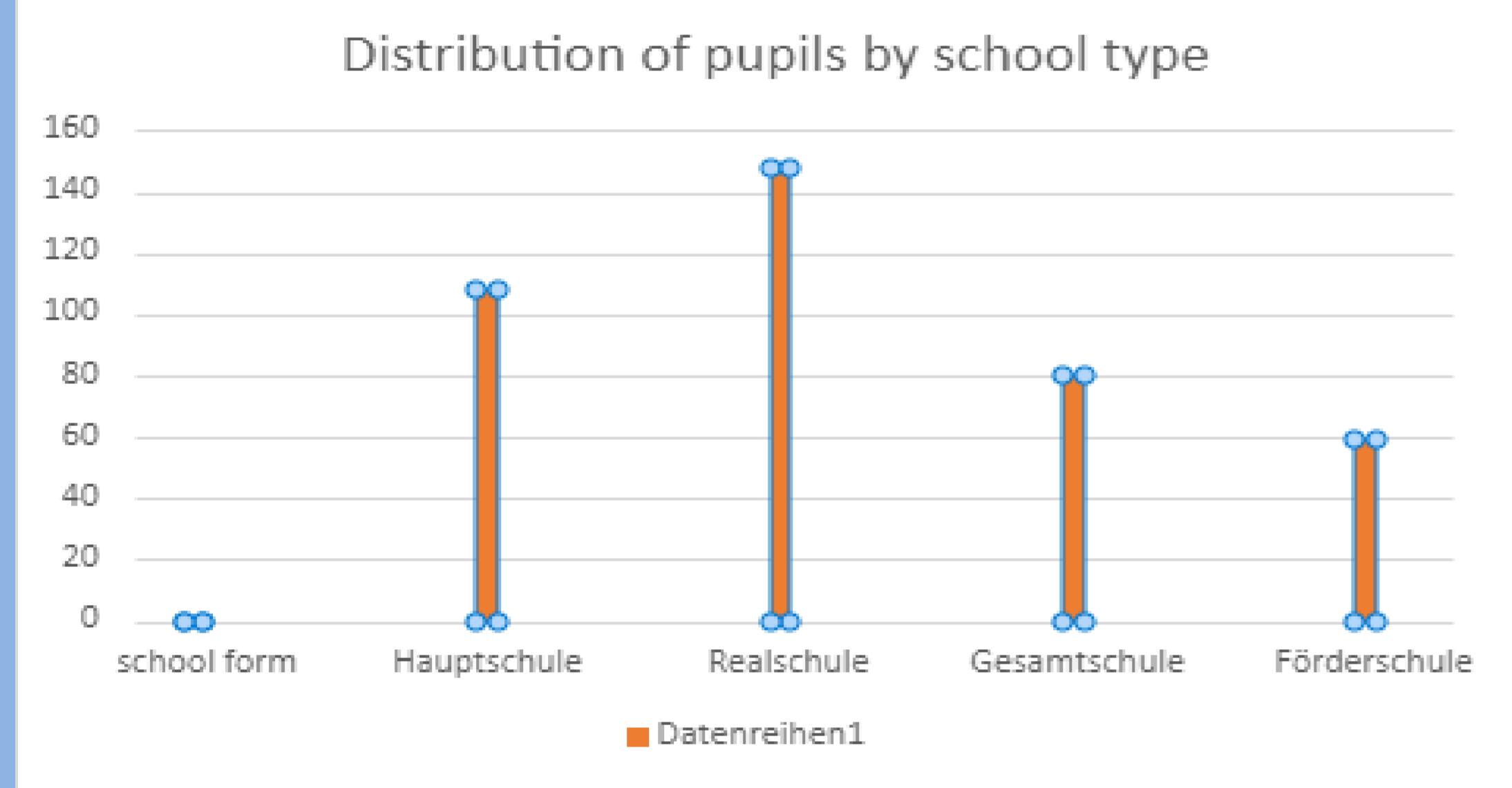
The students were between the ages of 14 and 17. 204 female students and 197 male students. A questionnaire consisting of several questionnaires was used as an instrument: DISYPS-II, SPAIK and SDQ-EU.

The DISYPS-II (diagnostic system for mental disorders) has been given the scales "social phobia" and "self-assessment". This instrument is used for recording of mental disorders in childhood and adolescence on the basis of the diagnostic criteria of ICD-10 and DSM-IV.
This following item should be listed as an example: "I have little contact with boys and girls of my age".
Each item is accompanied by a four-step Likert scale for self-assessment: 0 = not at all; 1 = a little; 2 = largely; 3 = special (Adornetto & Schneider, 2009; Döpfner, Lehmkuhl, Görtz-Dorten & Breuer, 2008).

SPAIK (SPAI-C) is a questionnaire used to treat social phobia in diagnose children from the age of eight.
Example for an used item: "I'm afraid, if I have to answer questions before the class or in front of a group, even if I know the answer".
Three-level Likert scale for self-assessment: 0 = never or rarely; 1 = sometimes; 2 = mostly or always (Büch, Höpfner & Petermann, 2015; Melfsen, Warnke & Florin, 2001).

SDQ-DEU = „Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire". The scales of "prosocial behaviour" and "Behavioural peerproblems" were also identified for the questionnaire used here.
This following item shoud be listed as an example, too: "In general, I am loved by peers".
Three-stage Likert scale forself-assessment attached: 0 = not applicable; 1 = partially applicable; 2 = unique (Hilti, 2012; Klasen, Woerner, Rothenberger & Goodman, 2003).

The evaluation of the questionnaire was carried out by an independent t-test (Kux, 2019).
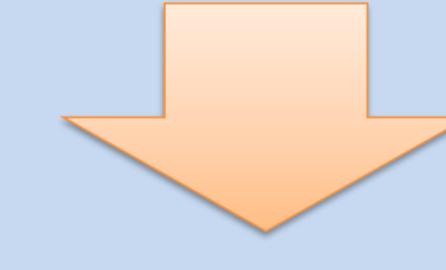
Results

Significant	Non-significant
Significant difference in peer problems. This affected more young people with a migrant background ($M = 0.97$, $SD = 0.40$) than young people without a migrant background ($M = 0.88$, $SD = 0.34$), $t(396) = 2.30$, $p < 0.05$, d = 0.24.	There was no significant difference in victimisation, social phobia, social interaction, performance anxiety and prosocial behaviour (Kux, 2019).
Again, more young people with a migrant background ($M = 0.26$, $SD = 0.38$) are affected to be perpetrators than the group without migrant background ($M = 0.19$, $SD = 0.33$), $t(391) = 2.03$, $p < 0.05$, $d = 0.20$.	

Discussion of the results

There are many possible explanations for the available results. Young people with a migrant background may become perpetrators because of the traditional education they have experienced. Respondents may have learned that conflicts can be resolved by force and that learned behaviour can be transferred to the school sector. This behaviour can result from peer problems, which is why parental education can also be used as an explanation for this significant difference (Kux, 201; Olthof, 2015; Uslucan, 2009). The lack of significance with regard to victimization can be explained, for example, by the fact that a heterogeneous class can have some kind of protective effect. Such a protective effect is envisaged in a Swedish study, but no reliable evidence is available yet. No significance in performance anxiety and social phobia could be related to the lack of significance in victimisation. Good parent-child bonding as a protection mechanism that exists regardless of migration background (Büch, Höpfner & Petermann, 2015; Kux, 2019; Sturzbecher & Dietrich, 2007). However, the available results are subject to possible limitations. Thus, the sole self-judgment of the students can be cited. Such self-judgment often does not determine the extent of the impairments, such as social anxiety. As with the dark field studies, the status of victims can be concealed. In this context, it should also be pointed out that the students felt the same way, despite their anonymity. The SDQ-EU could be extended to include the questionnaire for teachers. This could provide a more realistic picture (Schneider, 2009; Öst, 2009; Wyl, Sabatella, Zollinger & Berweger, 2018). The master's thesis shows that there are still many unresolved questions that require further research. As an aspiring teacher, I am particularly interested in this topic. For this reason, I would like to contribute with my doctoral thesis to fill existing gaps.

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