

Bullying-Related Moral Injury, Educational Anti-Mattering, and Psychological Distress Among Romanian Adolescents: Exploring Interrelationships

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Abstract:

Bullying remains a pervasive concern in educational settings, with growing evidence pointing to its moral and psychological sequelae in adolescence. While research has begun to document the harm caused by bullying victimization, less attention has been paid to the interplay between bullying-related moral injury – the damage to an individual's moral framework resulting from perceived moral transgressions – and educational anti-mattering, i.e., adolescents' belief that they are insignificant or invisible within their school context. The present study aimed to examine the relations between bullying-related moral injury, educational anti-mattering, and psychological distress among Romanian adolescents. The sample included 453 participants aged 11 to 17 ($M = 14.41$, $SD = 0.49$), of whom 50.1% identified as female. Participants completed validated self-report measures assessing bullying-related moral injury, perceptions of educational anti-mattering, and psychological distress symptoms. Results indicated that educational anti-mattering was positively associated with both psychological distress and bullying-related moral injury, suggesting that adolescents who feel overlooked or dismissed in educational contexts are more likely to experience adverse moral and psychological outcomes. Regression analysis further revealed that educational anti-mattering was significantly predicted by both variables, with psychological distress emerging as the strongest predictor, accounting for unique variance beyond the contribution of bullying-related moral injury. These findings highlight the importance of school belonging and perceived significance in adolescent mental health, and suggest that interventions targeting anti-mattering experiences may be a valuable complement to existing anti-bullying programs.

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