

## Pressemitteilung

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## Social exclusion: Teachers would rather help girls

**A recent study examined the role of gender for teachers' responses to social exclusion among their students. 101 teachers in Germany were asked about a fictitious situation. According to the study, they would be more likely to help an excluded girl than a boy. Another result: female teachers reject social exclusion even stronger than their male colleagues, but would still not intervene more often. The study was conducted by the DIPF | Leibniz Institute for Research and Information in Education, the University of Konstanz and the University of Mannheim.**

Students recurrently experience social exclusion. This can range from being laughed at, to not being part of a group, to deliberate bullying. As a result, one of the basic psychological needs of children and young people is affected: the sense of belonging. This, in turn, can have a negative impact on their development. Teachers can help and mediate by intervening in situations of social exclusion, but they do not always intervene.

But under what conditions do teachers decide to intervene? This question has already been addressed by a number of studies. In order to deepen these existing findings, the new study of the DIPF and the Universities of Konstanz and Mannheim examined the role gender plays for intervention. The focus was on both the gender of the teachers and the gender of the excluded students. "Since boys and girls are socialized differently and thus are confronted with different social expectations, we wanted to find out whether teachers' reactions differ depending on the gender of the teacher or student," explains Dr. Hanna Beißert from the DIPF. The educational scientist is the lead author of a recent article in the scientific journal *Frontiers in Education*, in which the new study is presented.

Lukas and Julia are being excluded

The responsible scientific team examined these questions with a sample of 101 participating teachers from different school tracks and with differing professional experience. They were all presented with a text about a fictitious social exclusion scenario, in which a study group does not want a classmate to participate. However, for about half of the participants in the study, the excluded student in the scenario was named Lukas. The remaining teachers read about a Julia who is being excluded. Subsequently, all teachers answered a set of questions. Among other things, they were asked to rate on scales how they evaluate the exclusionary behavior of the group of students and how likely they were to intervene in the situation.

One finding was particularly striking: On average, all teachers tend to intervene in the situation. However, in the case of an excluded boy, teachers are considerably more indecisive than in the case of girls, where teachers have a very strong tendency to intervene. "It is striking that these different reactions are in line with typical social expectations," says Beißert. Such stereotypes include, for example, that girls are more vulnerable and boys are more robust.

Another notable result of the study: although all teachers clearly rejected social exclusion, this was even more pronounced among women. Interestingly, these gender differences on the attitudinal side, did not lead to different reactions: Female teachers would nevertheless not intervene more often than their male colleagues. According to Dr.

Beißert, the socialization of the teachers may also play a role here, although this cannot yet be proven by the current findings.

#### Future research and practical implications

The reasons for the gender-specific differences in teachers' reactions and the role of socialization and social expectations need to be explored in further studies. Also, the validity of the current study is limited because the results are based on a fictitious scenario and on teachers' self-reports about their anticipated reactions. The findings could, for example, be strengthened by observational studies in real everyday school life.

Nevertheless, the DIPF researcher believes that the current findings already provide valuable implications for school practice: "The different reactions of teachers regarding girls and boys are often not intentional, but unconscious. Therefore, it can be helpful to sensitize to the fact that also boys suffer from social exclusion. Teachers should be encouraged to treat both genders equally and to intervene more consequently also when boys are excluded."

The article in which the responsible scientific team describes the study is published in open access and therefore freely available:

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2022.819922/full>

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