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**BULLYING AWARENESS LEVEL AMONG TEACHERS IN  
ROMANIAN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION**

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**Abstract**

Bullying is a complex phenomenon that the school constantly faces, whether it is known and identified or not. It is about what we call teasing or repeated harassment applied to others verbally, emotionally and physically. Because bullying represents an asymmetric relationship between the aggressor and the victim and because those involved are children and teenagers, it is necessary that the adults in their lives, i.e. teachers and parents, are well informed about this phenomenon, in order to stop it and to find then the best ways of change and training. This paper aims to identify the level of knowledge and awareness regarding bullying among pre-university teachers. The exploratory research presented in this article is based on the application of an online questionnaire, composed of 10 questions, to a number of 55 teachers from pre-university education. The questions asked required both open and closed answers. Thus, the article presents synthetically the answers given by the surveyed teachers, to the following aspects: what do the teachers know about bullying, respectively how do they represent this concept if they do not know exactly what it means; which signs confirm the presence of this phenomenon; what type of behavior qualifies as bullying; how do they define bullying; where he considers that most forms of bullying take place; where and when he considers that such acts of aggression take place most often; forms of bullying known and observed in the school where I teach; how they experienced any of the bullying situations as teachers.

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## 1. Introduction

It is known that bullying occurs in every school, regardless of the type of bullying behavior or the scale at which it occurs, but what matters and what differs significantly between schools is how they handle it in everyday practice. In order to build or create a successful response to bullying, it is important that teachers help to focus, reflect and discuss the understanding of bullying and attitudes towards it in the school where they teach. By doing this together with colleagues, school management, students and parents, teachers will thus have at their disposal united efforts for a truly collaborative school approach. This approach allows for commitment and views from multiple angles, assessing the needs and resources of each employee group.

## 2. Problem Statement

Bullying is one of the most complex forms of aggressive behavior and violence. However, not every act of violence is bullying. According to the World Health Organization's study on healthy behavior in school-aged children, bullying occurs when a student is: repeatedly teased in a way that he does not like. But it is not bullying when two students of similar power or authority argue or fight. It's not bullying either when a student is teased in a friendly and joking way (Craig et al., 2009).

A student is bullied when he/she is repeatedly exposed to actions over time negative action by one or more students. A negative action is a situation in which a person intentionally causes, or intends to cause, physical pain or discomfort to another person, through physical contact, words, or in other ways (Olweus, 1993). The most characteristic feature of bullying is the asymmetrical and unbalanced power relationship between those who bully and those who are bullied. Furthermore, it is not occasional or a singular event, but a pattern of behavior that repeats itself over time against the same person with an obvious difference in power. Through various acts of bullying, the stronger student systematically, intentionally and cruelly aims to hurt, frighten or intimidate the weaker person. As mentioned above, this is no mere teasing. Contrary to widespread myths about victim self-defense, the victim cannot defend himself through his own efforts. Bullying does not stop by itself without outside intervention (Gugel, 2014).

Olweus (1993) differentiated between three basic types of bullying behavior:

- i. physical: hitting, pushing, snapping, pinching, forcing the other student through physical contact;
- ii. verbal: threats, teasing, insults, mockery, blackmail, nicknaming, spreading rumors and lies;
- iii. emotional/psychological: intentionally excluding someone from a group or activity, manipulation, ridicule.

According to the international organization Ditch the Label (2019), there are five basic factors that favor bullying, so that those who practice this type of aggressive behavior are:

- i. students who face trauma and a lot of stress;
- ii. children who were taught to respond through aggressive behaviors;
- iii. students who have low self-esteem;
- iv. students who are themselves victims of bullying;

- v. children who have a difficult situation at home.

According to Woody (2022), girls who resort to bullying do so especially in relationships with others. It's called relational aggression and it's aimed at whispering little secrets, gossiping, throwing malicious looks, exclusion, with the aim of making other girls feel bad. On the other hand, boys are more inclined towards physical bullying, towards physical aggression, hitting or dressing others. In other words, according to this author, there is a general tendency to practice bullying differently depending on gender.

In a study carried out by the National Center for Educational Statistics in the USA (2019), girls who declared that they were victims of bullying at school, indicated that such acts happened mainly in the hallways, on the stairs, in the toilet or in the canteen.

Another research found that teachers perceived meaningful differences between victim groups on academic (e.g., problems paying attention), social (e.g., popularity, liked by peers), behavioral (e.g., aggression), and psychological (i.e., internalizing) indices as well as students' involvement in bullying (Dawes et al., 2019).

According to a study conducted by Dawes et al. (2022) few preservice teachers understand the hallmarks of bullying. In terms of their attitudes toward bullying, most preservice teachers report they are concerned about bullying, but some still believe it to be a normal part of growing up. Preservice teachers tended to view different forms of bullying as more serious than others, with many considering physical bullying to be the most serious form. Most preservice teachers report feeling responsible for dealing with bullying, yet many do not feel confident in their ability to do so.

Regarding the consequences of bullying, Sanders and Phye (2004) provided an extensive review of the multiple bullying consequences, by mentioning: peer rejection, delinquent behavior, crime, mental disorders, subsequent school violence. Children who act as bullies are at greater risk for antisocial and delinquent behavior as adolescents and young adults and for involvement in criminal offenses as adults (Olweus, 1993). Bullied children are disadvantaged, unhappy and suffer from self-esteem and self-confidence issues. They often feel anxious, feel shame and even feel guilty about what happened to them. In school, they are usually friendless, lonely, and abandoned outsiders (Olweus, 1993). Their relationships are often affected because of a increased fear of trusting others. The negative consequences affect not only their mental health, but also their academic results and may decrease their motivation to attend school and to learn.

### **3. Research Questions**

- i. Studying the bullying perception among teachers in pre-university education.
- ii. Identifying the teachers knowledge level on this phenomenon: behaviors qualified as bullying, physical and mental signs of the presence of bullying, forms of bullying known and observed in the school where they teach, experiencing as teachers the poses of bullying.
- iii. Awareness level of the bullying phenomenon in school and the deep implications it can have.

## 4. Research Methods

To achieve these objectives, we applied the survey method based on a questionnaire, by applying an online questionnaire, to which answered 55 subjects, teachers in pre-university education, in the counties of Alba, Hunedoara, Cluj, Sibiu. The questionnaire was developed by us, based on specialized literature and consists of 10 questions, 2 of which have open answers, and 8 with multiple choice answers.

## 5. Findings

The processing of the data, obtained as a result of the application of the questionnaire, was carried out based on the frequency of the chosen answer, then establishing the weight of the answer in relation to the number of subjects of the study. Thus, we present below the descriptive statistics of our study.

The first question addressed to pre-university teaching staff, concerned whether or not they had contact with the term bullying, as well as knowledge of the concept of bullying, by providing a brief description. Thus, Table 1 provides information about the answers given by the research subjects to this subjective item.

**Table 1.** The degree to which the teachers have made contact with the concept of bullying, respectively they can provide a description of this concept

Teachers' answers	N	f	%
YES I heard about bullying	55	53	96.36%
I have NOT heard of bullying	55	0	0%
<b>The subjective description of the concept of bullying</b>	55	49	89.09%
It is more and more widespread in school	55	9	16.36%
It involves humiliation, harassment, intimidation, exclusion	55	12	21.81%
Presupposes repeated verbal, physical, emotional, sexual aggression/abuse through social networks	55	14	25.45%
It is a physical, verbal, emotional aggression	55	16	29.09%
Influence on a weaker person	55	3	5.45%
It is the relationship between the aggressor and the victim	55	3	5.45%
It exists between students, between teachers and students	55	2	3.63%

Being an open answer item, I grouped the answers given by the teaching staff according to the predominant themes. Thus, we established the frequencies and percentages of these themes that were repeated in the answers given by the teachers. As can be seen from Table 1, 53 teachers answered affirmatively to this question, while 2 subjects did not provide an answer. Likewise, 4 teachers answered only that they had heard of this concept, while 49 indicated what they considered this concept to mean.

Thus, 16.36% of teachers consider that bullying is more and more widespread in school. Among the surveyed subjects, 21.81% indicate that it involves humiliation, harassment, intimidation, exclusion, while 25.45% consider that it involves repeated verbal, physical, emotional, sexual aggression/abuse through social networks. Also, 29.09% answer that it is a physical, verbal, emotional aggression, and

5.45% consider that bullying represents the influence on a weaker person. Among the teachers surveyed, 5.45% say that bullying is the relationship between the aggressor and the victim, while 3.63% say that it exists between students, respectively between teachers and students.

The next question concerned naming the signs that confirm the presence of bullying in school or in general. Because this was also a question with open answers, we decided to group the answers given by the teachers, according to two criteria, which were the most present, within the answers given by the subjects, namely signs in the case of the victim, respectively signs in aggressor. Therefore, Table 2 presents these results.

**Table 2.** Teachers' opinion regarding the signs that confirm the presence of bullying in the victim, respectively in the aggressor

<b>Signs that confirm the presence of bullying in the victim</b>	<b>Signs that confirm the presence of bullying in the aggressor</b>
Torn clothes, wounds, bruises, malaise, headaches, stomachaches, enuresis, sleep disorders, crying	Hitting, nicknames, hugs, threats
Personal items destroyed	Request for money, objects
Social withdrawal, isolation, self-isolation	Teasing, ignoring, dominating, devaluing, discrimination
Aggressive, vulgar language, insults	Aggressive, vulgar language, insults
Refusal to participate in activities, low motivation for school, absenteeism, dropout	Repeated intentional challenges
Low school results	Conflicts with others
Intense and prolonged sadness, anger, shame, fear	
Low self-esteem	
Conflicts with colleagues	
Substance use	
Anxiety disorders, depression	

We consider that these signs indicated by the questioned teachers can also be grouped according to their presence at the physical level, in the case of the victim: torn clothes, wounds, bruises, sickness, headaches, stomach, enuresis, sleep disorders, crying, personal items destroyed, respectively in the case of the aggressor: hitting, nicknames, insults, threats, requests for money, objects. At the behavioral level in the case of the victim, the signs can be: social withdrawal, isolation, self-isolation, aggressive, vulgar language, insults, refusal to participate in activities, low motivation for school, absenteeism, abandonment, low school results, conflicts with colleagues. In the case of the aggressor at the behavioral level, the following signs may appear, according to the subjects of the study: teasing, ignoring, dominating, devaluing, discrimination, aggressive, vulgar language, insults, repeated intentional provocations, conflicts with others, substance use. On an emotional level, in the case of the victim, the signs mentioned by the teachers are: intense and prolonged sadness, anger, shame, fear, low self-esteem, anxiety disorders, depression. Table 3 shows the types of behavior qualified as bullying, by pre-university teachers.

**Table 3.** Teachers' opinion regarding the types of behaviors qualified as bullying

<b>Response options</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
fight, insults, fights	55	53	94.6%
kiss, touch, hugs	55	0	0%
threw planes, pebbles on the window, etc.	55	2	3.6%

Thus, we can observe the fact that the majority of teachers surveyed, 94.6%, consider scolding, insults and fights as bullying behaviors, while only 3.6% consider throwing planes, stones, etc. on the window, would represent such behavior. It seems that the surveyed teachers manage to correctly identify these types of behaviors, which we believe is a first step in stopping them.

Table 4 highlights the types of aggression involved in bullying and the way in which teachers view this continuous aggression.

**Table 4.** The teachers' opinion regarding the types of aggression involved in bullying

Response options	N	f	%
verbal or physical aggression only within the school premises	55	3	5.5%
verbal or physical aggression in the street	55	0	0%
continuous mental, physical, family, street or school aggression	55	52	94.5%

As can be seen in Table 4 only 5.5% of the surveyed teachers consider that bullying involves verbal or physical aggression only in the school premises, while 94.5% see bullying as continuous mental and physical aggression, which can take place both in the family, on the street and in school.

Regarding the environments in which most forms of bullying take place, the surveyed teaching staff indicated the following:

**Table 5.** Teachers' opinion regarding the environments where most forms of bullying take place

Response options	N	f	%
only in school	55	10	18.2%
only at home	55	0	0%
just on the street	55	0	0%
wherever there is a reason for conflict	55	45	81.8%

The teachers' opinion regarding the environments where most forms of bullying take place, is summarized in Table 5 and indicates that 81.8% of the subjects consider that everywhere there is a reason for conflict, while 18.2% consider that only in school. No teacher chose the options: only at home or only on the street.

Regarding the place in the school where such acts of aggression take place most often, Table 6 indicates the following:

**Table 6.** Teachers' opinion regarding the place in the school where such acts of aggression most often take place

Response options	N	f	%
in class	55	11	20%
on the hallway	55	5	9.1%
to smoking	55	0	0%
in the locker room	55	1	1.8%
to the toilet	55	2	3.6%
in the schoolyard	55	36	65.5%

According to the teachers, the place in the school where such acts of aggression take place most often is the school yard, indicated by 65.6%, followed by the classroom with 20%, then the chosen

corridor with 9.1%, the toilet with 3.6 % and locker room with only 1.8%. Table 7 presents the teachers' opinion regarding the type of interaction considered a form of bullying.

**Table 7.** Teachers' opinion regarding the type of interaction considered a form of bullying

<b>Response options</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
the chance interaction between two students	55	27	49.1%
occasional aggressive interaction between student and teacher, regardless of who the aggressor is	55	8	14.5%
continued aggressive interaction between school staff and students	55	12	21.8%
aggressive interaction continues between parents and teacher or between parents and other students	55	8	14.5%

Thus, as can be seen in Table 7 the majority of teachers 49.1%, consider the fact that the type of interaction considered a form of bullying is the accidental interaction between two students, followed by 21.8% by the continuous aggressive interaction between the school staff and students, and on par with 14.5% by the punctual aggressive interaction between the student and teacher, regardless of who is the aggressor, that is, the ongoing aggressive interaction between parents and teacher or between parents and other students. Teachers' perception regarding what bullying entails is presented in Table 8.

**Table 8.** Teachers' opinion regarding what bullying entails

<b>Response options</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
a conflict between two people	55	7	12.7%
a repeated and amplified conflict	55	47	85.5%
a conflict between a person and a group	55	1	1.8%
a conflict between two groups	55	0	0%

This question from the questionnaire sought to identify the perception of the teaching staff participating in the study, on what bullying entails. It can be seen in table no.8, the fact that the majority of teachers, 85.5%, consider that bullying involves a repeated and amplified conflict, followed by 12.7% of the choices, by the option of a conflict between two people, respectively by 1.8%, by the option a conflict between a person and a group. No subject of the study chose the answer a conflict between two groups.

The answers to the penultimate question of the exploratory study are summarized in Table 9 and presents the opinion of the teachers regarding the relationships in the school, in which bullying is manifested.

**Table 9.** Teachers opinion regarding the relationships in the school where bullying is manifested

<b>Response options</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
only between students	55	35	63.6%
between students and teachers	55	1	1.8%
between teachers	55	0	0%
there is widespread bullying	55	18	32.7%
between teachers and parents	55	1	1.8%

According to Table 9 the teaching staff surveyed in the study, perceive the fact that the relationships in the school where bullying is manifested, are primarily those between students, indicated

by 63.6%, followed by 32.7% of the response option, there is bullying generalized. Equally, with the fewest choices, 1.8% of teachers consider that bullying manifests itself in the relationships between students and teachers, and in the relationships between teachers and parents.

The last question of our study concerned the teachers' opinion regarding the situations in which they felt bullying, and the results are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10.** Teachers' opinion regarding the situations in which they felt bullying

Response options	N	f	%
in class	55	25	45.5%
on the hallway	55	20	36.4%
in the principal's office	55	2	3.6%
between teachers	55	8	14.5%

The surveyed teachers declare that they predominantly felt bullying in the classroom 45.5%, in the corridor 36.4%, but also between teachers 14.5% and last but not least in the director's office, say 3.6% of the subjects. Thus, we can affirm the fact that not only students are exposed to bullying, but also the adults in the school, even if this phenomenon is less perceptible and less recognized.

## 6. Conclusions

The conclusions drawn from this study reveal the fact that the overwhelming majority of the surveyed teachers have heard of bullying and consider it an increasingly frequent phenomenon in schools. Also, most of the subjects know well enough the fact that bullying represents repeated, continuous aggression, both physically, verbally and emotionally, and they are also able to recognize the signs that can appear in the victim but also in aggressor We also present some conclusions drawn from this study, namely the fact that most of the teachers surveyed consider teasing, insults and fights as bullying behaviors. Most teachers see bullying as continuous mental and physical aggression, which can take place both in the family, on the street and in school. Regarding the environments where most forms of bullying take place, most subjects consider that wherever there is a reason for conflict.

According to the teachers, the place in the school where such acts of aggression take place most often is the school yard. The majority of teachers, 49.1%, consider the fact that the type of interaction considered a form of bullying is the accidental interaction between two students. The majority of teachers, 85.5%, consider that bullying implies a repeated and amplified conflict. The teaching staff questioned in the study, perceive the fact that the relationships in the school where bullying manifests are primarily those between the students, and most of the teachers questioned declare that they predominantly felt bullying in the classroom.

We consider the initial and continuous training of teaching staff very important, in order to bring more knowledge and awareness to the phenomenon of bullying in schools, as well as to develop the skills necessary for teachers in order to stop this phenomenon and last but not least, to train students assertive communication and negotiation skills, and social-emotional skills.



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