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SCHOOL BULLYING

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Abstract

The bullying phenomenon taking place in schools has become a major issue that calls for measures both in the psycho-pedagogical area and the social area. We consider the term „violence in schools” to be more suitable than the one that is the politically, behavioral and antisocial behavior correct term. We must ask ourselves the question whether students and adults in an educational institution view violence in the same manner and to which level they perceive this violence. Exposing an individual willingly, intentionally and repetitively to physical and psychological negative actions, by one or more people and establishing a state of discomfort in various ways (offensive words, chicaneries, humiliations, insults and name-calling, inappropriate touching, offences, admonishing, mocking, screaming, teasing, bragging, hitting, hurting, harassment, mocking mimicry, destruction of goods, choking with different objects etc.) is deemed to indicate the use of bullying. The current study, based on the on-site investigation, aims to investigate the dimensions and features of the bullying phenomenon in schools in Bistrița-Năsăud, România. The findings indicate that this phenomenon occurs mainly around the age of 13, with girls being the victims, while boys taking the aggressor persona and causes are related to the peer group, respectively to an unbalanced family environment. Consequently, it is necessary to step up in order to improve the quality of relations and communication among all individuals engaged in the educational activity.

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1. Introduction

Bullying has been present for a long time, but its sporadic and isolated occurrence has not been viewed as a real danger for the individual and society. Nowadays, according to specialized literature, the occurrence of bullying is accelerated, which could lead to a generalized and permanent phenomenon (Stan, 2013; Stan & Dobrean, 2012). Becoming aware that the bullying phenomenon is active calls for an organized and systematic intervention in order to minimize its negative effects. To be effective in this intervention, it is necessary to identify the causes, the size of the phenomenon and its way of manifestation. Various studies only partially explain the issues, with answers focusing on the surveyed elements and environments, which does not imply positive responses for all specific cases. Questions such as: What do we have to know about bullying and how do we act? What are the features of students who are likely to be aggressors or victims of harassment, intimidation, abuses? are still in need of answers.

2. Problem Statement

Bullying represents a type of violence that occurs between two or more individuals: it is not a game and no cognitive feature can justify this phenomenon. In schools, apparently harmless behaviors, but taking place repetitively, such as: throwing away others' personal belongings (notebooks, schoolbags, pens, the lunch box etc.) hair pulling, or plucking someone's sleeve, scratches, pinching, tearing objects that are of value to others, mimicry, making a mock of others are bullying manifestations. School violence had an increased influence over the violent behavior that teenagers have outside schools, through the manifestation of skills that are already achieved or through mimicry of the negative behavior they use in the school environment. At the same time, teachers' violence is the most significant indicator of depression by self-isolation/loneliness, and it enables the classmates' victimization and the occurrence of an aggressive behavior (Oriol et al., 2017). Some studies indicate a higher frequency in boys as compared to girls regarding the exposing of elementary school students to aggressive stimuli (theft of personal belongings, violence, constraint, mockery, shocks), respectively the acknowledgement of the victim status (theft of belongings, constraints). Moreover, there has been a positive correlation between the parents' educational level and the children's being exposed to victimization, with students/daughters of highly educated mothers being more often subject to constraint (they perceived that they were forced to do something they did not want to), whereas the daughters of not so educated mothers faced more frequently verbal abuse (Polovina & Deric, 2009). After reviewing a considerable number of studies, Rajhvajn Bulat & Ajduković (2012) claim that bullying victims often tend to internalise problems and difficulties (health-related difficulties and psycho-social deficiencies, such as: sleeping, feeling issues, high/low-blood pressure, fatigue, dizziness, tendency towards depression and anxiety). At the same time, the results of the study "The relation between school bullying and victimization disorder (ADHD)" show a significant correlation between being a victim and being the one who causes the bullying. Bullying may have multiple psycho-social effect, as well as effects upon mental health and academic performance of both victims and bullies (ŽicRalic, Cvitkovic, & Šifner, 2016). Because of fundamental problems associated to the issue of school bullying, most countries demand school units to approach this matter systematically

and to establish an accurate policy in view of fighting violence. One solution might be education in the spirit of positive-centered tolerance. This depends, first and foremost, on the way in which the teacher will react to different conflicting and/or controversial situations. “Students are deeply influenced by the teacher’s attitude, his/her character and fondness” (Manea, 2019, p. 430). Therefore, the teacher, as part of a particular structure and as attitude transfer towards the student, is one of the most important agents in the school environment of education for tolerance and acceptability. The school policy against violence needs to be an issue of the needs in a certain school, under the scrutiny of a panel of experts (teachers, students’ representatives and parental committee) based on specific information (amount of violence, type of bullying, where, when, how bullying is manifested...) and in cooperation with the extended community (local community, NGOs, institutions). The document should be a mandatory part of the real operational plan of educational activities in accordance to the principle of school autonomy (Berčnik & Tashner, 2018). Likewise, at a personal level, according to specialized studies, increasing the positive social interest could determine the individual to create a certain lifestyle that is based on empathy, responsibility, cooperation, as these might increase the probability of success in social and life-related problem-solving issues (Poorseyed, Alizadeh, Kazemi, Borjali, & Farrokhi, 2016).

3. Research Questions

The starting question that determined the investigation of students’ opinion regards the identification of the extent to which they are aware of the occurrence of bullying in the school they attend and what effects it has upon them.

4. Purpose of the Study

Our aim is to suggest a field investigation inquiry, as a result of the fact that specific administrative institutions (Police Inspectorate, School Inspectorate, County Center for Assistance and Educational Resources) have been notified regarding several violent and aggressive manifestations, and to investigate the dimensions and features of the bullying phenomenon in schools from Bistrița-Năsăud County, Romania.

5. Research Methods

The chosen research method is the survey, namely the opinion survey, using as instrument the questionnaire we created. The 24 questions were either closed ones or with multiple choice options. The questionnaire was applied to 854 students in secondary education, between December 2018 and May 2019, the sample unit being multi-layered. Regarding the gender structure of the sample unit, 52% represents girls and 48% is made of boys. At the same time, 45% of the subjects come from the rural area, whereas 55% from the urban area.

6. Findings

Due to space limitations of the current article, we will present and analyze only part of the items in the questionnaire, which we considered to be more relevant to the objective of the study. The first question was regarding the awareness over the bullying concept (Table 1).

Table 01. Knowledge of the bullying concept

Provenance	No. of answers			Total
	YES	NO	YES, but I don't know exactly what it means	
Urban	422	26	18	466
Rural	305	49	34	388
Total	727	75	52	854

The analysis of the answers indicates that a high percentage, namely 85% of respondents claim they understand and know what bullying means, as compared to the number of those who say they don't know what it (8%) or saying they had heard of it, but that they don't know what bullying means (6%). At the same time, there are slight differences between students coming from the urban area and those in the rural area. This way, students in the rural area are less informed (79%) regarding the bullying phenomenon as compared to those living in towns, where 91% of those who answered mentioned they are aware of what bullying is. Likewise, 12% of them have never heard or don't exactly know what bullying is (9%), in comparison to those in the urban area, where only 5%, respectively 4% have never heard of or don't exactly know the meaning of this concept. We reckon that these differences according to the area where the school unit is located is not necessarily due to the lack of information (it is known that the technological influences put their mark on the relations through a fair connection of the individual with the social realities (Manea, 2019), but rather because of the fact that interactions are deeper in the rural area, they are more intense, an element that is specific to smaller communities, where the tolerance level is increased.

The second item of the questionnaire was meant to identify the level at which students are aware of the manifestation of bullying in schools (Table 2).

Table 02. Bullying manifestation in schools

Students' age	No. of answers		Total
	YES	NO	
10-year old	0	1	1
11 -year old	1	1	2
12 -year old	17	15	32
13 -year old	161	149	310
14 -year old	119	139	258
15 -year old	103	148	251
Total	401	453	854

The analysis of answers indicate that nearly 44% of respondents, a significant percentage, claim that there are bullying manifestations within their schools, the age of 13 being the most critical one from

the point of view of identifying the phenomenon, a fact that may be explained by the correlation with the beginning of puberty, when psychosomatic changes and events that the individual perceives are increased.

Another item of the questionnaire was meant to investigate the manifestation of bullying in schools where we conducted the surveys. The answers are presented in tables 3 and 4.

Table 03. Bullying manifestations (violence threats, verbal attacks)

Subject's gender	No. of answers		Total
	YES	NO	
Boy	76	339	415
Girl	57	382	439
Total	133	721	854

The answers indicate that 15% of the total of surveyed participants confirms manifestations of bullying as verbal attack or violence threats, and most of them are boys.

Table 04. Bullying manifestations (name-calling, nicknaming, scolding, irony)

Subject's gender	No. of answers		Total
	YES	NO	
Boy	146	267	413
Girl	159	282	441
Total	Total	549	854

Verbal offence and nicknaming represent another form of bullying display. The fact that more than one quarter of the school population under scrutiny admits that verbal abuse exists is not an aspect that should be neglected, but rather it calls for an issue that needs to be handled.

The question "Have you been insulted or nicknamed lately?" there were 36% positive answers, which is a worrying aspect that confirms the occurrence of bullying in schools. We may explain this behavior through the association of verbal abuse that mass-media promotes and the increased tolerance that society has towards this behavior.

Table 05. Frequency of bullying manifestations (offences, name-calling, ironies, scolding)

Frequency	Daily	Wee	Less than once a week
Answer percentage	26%	24%	50%

The analysis of the data indicated in Table 5 shows that one quarter of the surveyed students feel/ encounters on a daily basis the verbal attack as offences, irony, name-calling or scolding, which proves there is an increased frequency of the phenomenon. Regardless of where these attacks are coming from, namely, who the aggressor is (the adult a teacher, a school employee or the student), the situation is just as severe and calls for specific intervention, according to the case (educational, administrative, legislative).

Other items such as " How upset are you when somebody at school uses verbal attack upon you (teasing, name-calling, irony, and scolding)?" and " How angry are you when you are being threatened or

physically hurt?" allowed us to see the effects that bullying has upon students. Their answers are shown in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 06. Bullying effect: being upset

Subjects' gender	No. of answers			Total
	I don't mind at all	Slightly upset	Very upset	
Male	192	161	60	413
Female	112	205	124	441
Total	304	366	184	854

The analysis of the above data lets us notice that on a personal and emotional level, both girls and boys experience strong negative effects of bullying, in over 60% of the cases, girls being the ones who are most affected.

Table 07. Bullying effect: anger

Subjects' gender	No. of answers			Total
	I don't mind at all	Slightly angry	Very angry	
Male	157	179	69	405
Female	169	195	85	449
Total	325	374	154	854

The fact that anger as effect of bullying is highly perceived in participant subjects-12 /5 of them having claimed they experience anger, raises a few questions about safety in the educational environment and calls for urgent measures at the level of school units. Tension, frustration and conflicting state of minds cannot be tolerated in a normal environment, but, on the contrary, peace and security need to be provided for each and every student.

In order to establish the aggressor, victim and witness position at the level of the gender variable, we asked respondents to state the position they find themselves most of the time when they are at school.

Table 08. The position students hold with regards to bullying

Subjects' gender	Number of answers			Total
	Victim	Aggressor	Witness	
Male	79	26	115	270
Female	112	20	121	313
Total	191	46	236	583

Regarding the level of intimidation, respectively the perception of the posture in which the investigated subjects are found, according to the data presented in Table 08 we observe that The answers indicate that 6% admit to be in the aggressor position, 21% are victims, 27% are witnesses, whereas 46% claim not to be in any of these situations, which, together with the answers explained before confirms that school bullying does indeed exist, but it is perceived by less than half of the school population. The number of boys who admit to be causing bullying is slightly higher than that of girls, while there are more girls who confess they were victims than boys. We reckon that for the witness position, the number of girls is equal to that of boys. The fact that nearly half of the number of respondents don't appreciate to be in any of the positions associated to the bullying phenomenon correlates with the answers we received in

item no.2, where the awareness of bullying manifestations accounts for 44%. We gladly identify a high level of honesty and fair appreciation of the posture in which responders are found, as the number of witnesses is nearly equal to the sum of those who claim to be aggressors and victims. It is however worrisome that there were witnesses to various bullying display episodes, who either reacted or couldn't react, hence the need to take measures in order to correct or eradicate the phenomenon.

7. Conclusion

The consequences of violence and bullying can be identified at the level of three dimensions: institutional- with reference to the corporate climate and culture, social- changes in interpersonal and personal relationships and personal- regarding personal development.

The analysis of the results we may observe that:

- The bullying phenomenon within the school unit under our scrutiny is present both in the rural and urban environment, frequent episodes (on a daily basis: 26%) being verbal aggression: threats, nicknaming, verbal offences, irony, scolding.
- The critical age for the manifestation of bullying appears to be around 13;
- More than half of the school population develops one of the positions associated with bullying: victim, aggressor or witness.
- Girls are more often placed in the victim position, while boys develop the aggressor one, the causes being associated with the peer group, namely the lack of harmony in the family core.

We reckon, based on the results of the study that it is necessary to step in and improve the quality of relations and communication among all individuals engaged in the educational act.

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