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### Psychology of Personality: Real and Virtual Context

# BULLIYNG SEMANTICS AMONG TEACHERS WITH DIFFERENT PROFESSIONAL BURNOUT LEVEL

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### *Abstract*

The article is devoted to the issues of understanding the phenomenon of bullying among the pedagogical community. It is emphasized that the research problem stems from the contradiction between the systematic hetero-aggression intensification in the student environment, on the one hand, and the ignoring the problem by teachers, and the intention for its prevention absence, on the other. The aim of the study is to identify the specifics of the semantic content of the phenomenon of "bullying" among teachers with different professional experience and different professional burnout level. The methodological basis of the study was the provisions of the lexical-semantic approach. The authors concluded that in the semantic space of educators with different lengths of professional activity, the concept of "bullying" has both universal, stereotypic, and specific features associated with the experience of resolving such situations, the degree of proximity / distance from an aggressively configured sociocultural context due to age. The semantics of the concept of "bullying" among teachers with an experience of 1 to 5 years is more complete, reflects the semantic differentiation of the phenomenon signs. For teachers with a low level of professional burnout, the perception of bullying is not associated with a high degree of novelty of the phenomenon and with an association exclusively with the children's community.

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**Keywords:** Bullying, semantics of bullying, experience, teacher's professional burnout, ordinary consciousness.



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## **1. Introduction**

The modern era is a time of great challenges. The intensification of international tension, aggressive competition, global digitalization, cyberattacks escalation, uncontrolled external and internal migration, statuses struggle determine the nature of changes in society, the transformation of social institutions, value orientations, and social relations nature. The growing generation is one of the primary modern challenges addressees and the most sensitive social layer to reflect social risks. Traditionally, a family and a school are considered children's psychological safety guarantors, but nowadays we observe an educational potential weakening of these social institutions, and an intra-school tension increase.

### **1.1. Bullying and socio-cultural context**

Nowadays the concept of "bullying" is firmly established in the practice of research in the field of educational psychology throughout the world. Bullying is a deliberate systematically repeated aggressive behavior that includes inequality in social power or physical strength (Olweus, 1993).

Specialists of the Higher School of Economics note that more than a third of students in the Russian Federation encounter bullying, cyberbullying and other forms of hetero-aggression (Rean et al., 2019). Researchers have proven that the phenomenon of school bullying is associated with social stratification factors (Sobkin & Smyslova, 2003). According to Novikova and Rean (2019) various forms of bullying are highly prevalent among Russian high school students, and various social factors, for example, the school climate and such a significant component of it as teacher-student relationships, affect the involvement in bullying.

### **1.2. Professional burnout and teacher's sensitivity to bullying, behavioral strategies that teachers choose in situations of contact with school bullying**

Today, teachers in Russian schools work in difficult conditions, which lead to a high level of turnover and "aging" of teaching staff (Maslinsky & Ivanyushina, 2016). In turn, a large generational gap between teachers and students can impede communication, establish close trusting relationships, can create inconsistencies within the semantic field of interaction between subjects with different generations (Pinskaya et al., 2015). Many researchers note, which has recently seriously increased the risk of professional burnout among educators, which may reduce the sensitivity of specialists and make them closed to the world of children's experiences (Fedorenko, 2003). Based on constant definitions of professional burnout, we understand that the accumulation of negative stressful experiences associated with work, a high level of workload, staff turnover, negatively affects the interaction of teacher with other subjects of educational activity, leads to deformation of personal characteristics, enhances the egocentric side of personality, helps reduce the level of empathy and motivational involvement of a teacher in the educational process. Cognitive distortions arising from professional burnout can be reflected in those behavioral strategies that teachers choose in situations of contact with school bullying.

This is confirmed by the results of our research hold in 2020 in order to identify the parent's and children's attitude to the bullying and the semantic characteristics of the measures and methods that teachers use in the bullying situation in the school environment problems. According to respondents (100 parents average age 36.7 years and 140 children average age 13.9), 37% of teachers ignore this problem,

respond inadequately, shifting responsibility for what is happening to a victim itself (20%) and its parents (47%). Only about 1/3 of teachers try to understand and solve a difficult situation using exclusively appropriate psychological and pedagogical means, while only 5% try not only to resolve the current situation, but also to prevent such situations in the future. According to respondents, first of all, dispositional factors determine the indifferent, inadequate attitude of a teacher to the manifestation of bullying in the student's environment. So, the personal features of a teacher (emotional callousness, aggressiveness, low social intelligence development level ...) - 71.8%, the level of professional burnout - 56.4% and the professional competencies formation level - 41% took the first three ranking positions, indicating possible the reasons for the low sensitivity of teachers to the signs manifestation of bullying in the children's team. Environmental factors (the psychological climate in educational institution, position of school administration, attitude to bullying in society, etc.) occupied the bottom lines in the hierarchy of probable causes. At the same time, it is worth noting that the experience, age and gender of teachers were not mentioned in this aspect by either parents or children. The results obtained are consistent with a number of recent years studies (Grechishcheva et al., 2015; Timoshenko & Butareva, 2019), which convincingly prove that all teachers at any stage of professional development are subject to professional burnout.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In this regard, we have identified a number of contradictions:

- increased manifestations of systematic hetero-aggression on the part of schoolchildren, bullying, on the one hand, and ignoring the problem by teachers, a low level of development of volitional intentions to prevent bullying in the school environment, insensitivity to bullying among students on the other;
- the personality of a teacher is considered both foreign (Mishna et al., 2005; Swearer & Hymel, 2015; Serdiouk et al., 2016; Troop-Gordon & Ladd, 2015), and domestic scientists (Bochaver et al., 2015; Mitin, 2017) as one of the main determinants of bullying development in the educational environment. At the moment, the correlation between the characteristics of bullying perception by teachers and the age and gender of students has been proven (Shalaginova et al., 2019), but the problem of the correlation between bullying ideas and the level of professional burnout of a teacher and age-related characteristics is not considered.

## **3. Research Questions**

The research question was posed in the work: what are the semantics and bullying perception features among teachers with different professional experience and different professional burnout level?

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

“Bullying” phenomenon semantic content specifics and its perception among teachers with different professional experience and professional burnout level should be revealed. The study was based on the assumption that the insensitivity of teachers to the manifestation of bullying in the educational

environment is directly related to the peculiarities of the semantic content of this phenomenon, which, in turn, is specific for teachers with different levels of professional burnout.

## 5. Research Methods

### 5.1. Empirical study

#### Empirical study I

- At the first stage, to determine the lexical and semantic content of the concept of “bullying,” teachers with different lengths of professional activity were asked to define this phenomenon and name three associations with this concept in the form of adjectives. By means of frequency counting, hierarchies of the most frequently mentioned words were built - associations among teachers of 4 subgroups: with experience of up to one year, from one to five years, from five to ten and more than ten years.

#### Sample

The study involved 150 teachers aged 23 to 59 years. The average age of the respondents is 37.8 years. At the same time, 100 teachers took part in the first part of the study, of which, according to the experience of professional activity: 18.5% with experience less than 1 year, 40.7% - from one to five years, from five to ten years - 18.5% and more than 10 years - 22.3%.

#### Empirical study II

- At the second stage, 50 teachers with high and low rates of professional burnout who were not participating in the first series of studies were offered to fill out a semantic differential containing the 9 most frequently encountered in the first sample and specific to certain groups of lexemes in the form of bipolar seven-point rating scales: cruel - merciful, aggressive - peace-loving, humiliating - exalting, evil - kind, childish - adult, mocking - affectionate, negative - positive, new - old, scary - cute. According to these scales, respondents had to evaluate the concept of bullying. Aggregate data were subjected to factor analysis.

#### Sample

The second part of the study involved 50 teachers with a high and low degree of professional burnout ( $N_1 = 25$ , emotional exhaustion  $\bar{X}_1 = 20.9$ ,  $\bar{X}_2 = 14.8$ ,  $U = 48$  with a significance level  $\leq 0.000$ ; depersonalization  $\bar{X}_1 = 12.8$ ,  $\bar{X}_2 = 3.5$ ,  $U = 0.000$  with significance level  $\leq 0.00$ ; reduction of personal achievements  $\bar{X}_1 = 23$ ,  $\bar{X}_2 = 37.5$ ,  $U = 71$  with significance level  $\leq 0.000$ ; average experience 12.8 years, average age 34, 8 years). By gender the sample is not randomized; it is mainly female in nature (95%). In turn, this is due to the fact that in the current situation, teachers are mainly women.

The theoretical basis of the study was the theses of the lexical-semantic approach, which is characterized by wide opportunities for studying the concepts of bullying in the everyday language picture of the world; a preventive approach that describes the mechanisms for preventing the victimizing factors of society and a phenomenological-existential approach (L.I. Kabanova), which allows us to turn to the primary, the original experience of consciousness.

The combination of qualitative and quantitative, standardized research methods suggests that the study was performed at the junction of nomothetic and idiographic approaches.

## 5.2. Methods and techniques:

- method of corpus linguistics with subsequent processing through content analysis, a modified semantic differential, which allows revealing the semantic content of bullying among teachers with different professional experience and different levels of professional burnout;
- Technique of professional “burnout” diagnostics (K. Maslach, S. Jackson, adaptation by N. E. Vodopyanova)

Statistical processing was performed using the statistical package SPSS 17.0 (discriminative analysis, nonparametric Mann-Whitney test, factor analysis).

## 6. Findings

6.1. After analyzing the data obtained, we came to the conclusion that most teachers, regardless of experience, understand bullying as aggressive pursuit (47% of indicators), humiliation (18%), mockery (10%), intimidation (7%) and hooliganism (7 %), which, in general, is consistent with the classical definition of bullying in the scientific literature (Olweus, 1993; Roland, 1998, 2002). Of the individual definitions, the most interesting are “sport”, “bowling”, “explosion”, “riddle”, “site”, “something that I don’t know anything about,” “something muddy,” indicating ignorance or diffuse the idea of some teachers about this phenomenon.

6.2. A frequency analysis of the lexemes used has shown that the most homogeneous, stereotypically simplified ideas about bullying are typical for teachers with more than 10 years of experience. In this group of respondents, the share of singly used adjectives accounts for only a third of the answers (29.6% of the possible indicators). These educators primarily characterize bullying as an “aggressive (18.5% of indicators), cruel (11.1%), negative (9.3%), new / fresh / unprecedented (9.3%)” phenomenon of the present. The most fragmented representations are observed among teachers with experience of less than 1 year - 53.5% of non-repeating adjectives. In this group of respondents, the leading positions in the rating of adjectives associated with bullying were occupied by the tokens “cruel” (11.1%), “humiliating” (8.9%) and “mocking” (8.9% of indicators). At the same time, these adjectives trace the experience of being in the role of a victim or a direct observer / bullying witness.

6.3. The number of unique lexemes used by teachers with experience from one to five years and from five to ten years is approximately equal (42.6% and 40.2%, respectively). At the same time, semantic analysis showed significant differences in the sets of adjectives used, even with the same three leading positions, namely, “aggressive” (15.1% in the first group and 11.1% in the second), “evil” (6.1% and 6.7%), “cruel” (5.1% and 6.7%). However, the adjective “children’s” (8.9%) in the second ranking position in the group of teachers with an experience of 5 to 10 years is noteworthy. These respondents associate bullying with childhood and the student team, which narrows and distorts the phenomenon, attaches it to a certain social group, equates it with “primitive” (4.4%) forms of aggressive behavior.

6.4. Teachers with an experience of one to five years in the lexemes used most fully convey the meaning of this social phenomenon, that is, they are most sensitive to it. It was these respondents who succeeded in isolating clusters of process characteristics, participants (bullers, victims), causes and consequences of this social phenomenon by combining semantically close tokens into semantic groups.

6.5. *About the victim*: humiliated, harassed, desperate, unsure of himself, cowardly, touchy, incredulous. *About the aggressor*: aggressive, cruel, evil, strong, envious, bad, cowardly, striker, unbalanced, crushing, unpleasant, intimidating, cocky, rude, vile, laughing, mocking. *Reasons*: misunderstanding, accusation, stupidity, hooliganism, tomfoolery. *Characteristics of the phenomenon*: spontaneous, unpredictable, unusual, group, intentional, negative, problematic, dangerous, asocial, scary. *Consequences*: depression, shame, isolation, interfering with life, tempering.

6.6. As a result of teacher's total sample significations average matrix with a high and low professional burnout level (N = 50 people) factorization, four main factors were identified that explain, in total, 64% of the variance. In each of the factors, only variables with correlation load exceeded 0.5 were included. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of selective adequacy is 0.63 (satisfactory). The number of iterations 8, the selected components is 4. The first factor, "Burnout - belonging to a certain social group," is set by combining, on the one hand, a high degree of burnout and the association of bullying with tokens as children's, not aggressive, not mocking, or a low degree of burnout and lexemes adult, aggressive, mocking. The second factor, "Burnout - the "bullying" phenomenon novelty reflects the conjugation of the variables "high degree of professional burnout of teachers and new and not evil tokens" or "low degree of burnout and old and evil tokens". Thus, there is a tendency for the correlation between the high degree of burnout of teachers and the perception of bullying as a new phenomenon, not familiar to them, characteristic of the children's community, not distinguished by signs of pronounced aggression and characterized by primitive forms of expression. The third and fourth factors reflect the universal understanding of bullying by teachers, regardless of the degree of professional burnout: the conjugation of variables in the third factor is "negative, cruel, humiliating" and "humiliating, scary, not new" - in the fourth. Thus, in general, bullying in the perception of teachers appears mainly as a negative, terrible phenomenon, not distinguished by novelty, associated with the manifestation of cruelty and humiliation of another person.

## 7. Conclusion

7.1. In the semantic space of teachers with different professional experience, the concept of "bullying" has both general (universal, reflecting generally accepted interpretations of concepts in society) and specific features, associated with personal practice of encountering this phenomenon, practice in resolving such situations, degree of proximity / distance from an aggressive social and cultural context due to age.

7.2. The "bullying" concept semantics of teachers with an experience of 1 to 5 years is more complete, contains descriptors that reflect the semantic differentiation of the characteristics of the subjects of bullying, the probable occurrence reasons and possible consequences.

7.3. For teachers with a low professional burnout level, the perception of bullying is not associated with a high novelty level of the phenomenon and with exclusively children's community.

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