



New Trends
in Psychology

The Bullying Phenomenon in Romanian Schools

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Abstract: Bullying is generally characterized as intentional aggressive behavior, meant to cause suffering. It always involves an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim, manifesting itself repetitively, regularly, in a group of children. Bullying also has effects on the aggressors, not just on the victims. Thus, children who systematically assault their colleagues are likely to be alcoholics and other adults at high risk for their physical and emotional health, violent and delinquent behaviors (vandalism, extreme physical violence, domestic violence, theft), drop out of school, get involved prematurely in risky sex, become adults with skills minimum job retention. In this article we will refer to the psychosocial peculiarities of the manifestation of children's aggression and we will propose anti-bullying measures that the family and the school, teachers should adopt them in order to reduce this phenomenon.

Keywords: bullying; violence; aggressive behavior; family; school

Introduction

Violence is diverse and very common in educational institutions. It manifests itself in the form of singular violent actions, permanent intimidation, harassment and humiliation. Violence can be physical and verbal, it can have a pronounced or

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unpronounceable emphasis on the gender dimension, it can manifest itself through violent actions and sexual statements and it always causes psychological trauma to all those involved.

Violence is complicated to detect, usually those who initiate such actions actually act when they are not under the observation and control of adults. Many times, the victim prefers not to notify his parents, family, teachers, as he is afraid of the situation getting worse.

Violence in educational institutions is a global problem and has serious consequences, it leaves traces throughout life, influencing the emotional, physical, psychological development, and behavior of the person.

In relation to one and the same person, violent actions, regardless of type and form of manifestation, can be singular or regular. The term “bullying” or “harassment” is used when the violence becomes systematic and pursues the purpose of strengthening the power and authority of the abuser / aggressor against humiliating and devaluing the victim in his own eyes and in the eyes of others. Bullying always pursues the goal of harassing the victim, of causing fear, demoralizing, humiliating, subduing. Bullying never stops on its own: victims, the initiator (aggressor / abuser) and witnesses of bullying always need protection and help).

Bullying is manifested by the repeated application by a person or group of persons of various types of violence and intimidation against a person who cannot defend himself. When two students with equal physical abilities quarrel or fight, make jokes in a friendly and playful way, it is not about bullying. Bullying always pursues the purpose of harassing the victim, to provoke her fear, to demoralize her, to humiliate her, to subdue. In most cases, bullying is consciously planned physical and / or psychological violence, which takes place over a period of time, the interruption of which requires the involvement of third parties: the principal, teachers, other employees of the institution, students, parents, and sometimes and representatives of law enforcement agencies.

Some Specific Aspects of Bullying

- *bullying is asymmetric*: on the one hand there is the abuser / aggressor, who has power in the form of physical and / or psychological force, and on the other hand - the victim, who does not have such power and has acute need for the support and help of others.

- bullying is applied to the person chosen as a target intentionally and is aimed at causing physical and emotional suffering.
- bullying undermines the victim's self-confidence, destroys his health, self-esteem and human dignity.
- bullying is a group process, which involves, in addition to the abuser / aggressor and the victim, witnesses to the violence - the whole class or the whole group where it takes place.
- bullying never stops on its own: victims, the initiator and witnesses of bullying always need protection and help.

Bullying manifests itself differently. In some cases, it can take the form of insulting words, nicknames or systematic ridicule for some special characteristics of the person: appearance, manner of speaking, dressing, walking, facial expressions, gestures, including caused by illness or disability (stuttering, limping) . In other cases, intimidation may take the form of beatings, pushing, dispossessing or damaging property, humiliation (for example, by forcing a person to commit humiliating acts or acts of violence against third parties). Such physical and verbal actions characterize direct bullying.

Indirect bullying is manifested by less visible actions - manipulative behavior: dissemination of false information, gossip, rumors, exclusion of the person from the communication circle, from common activities and games, rejection, ignorance, boycott.

Until it becomes a systematic and long-lasting bullying, often applied by a group of people, bullying goes through several stages:

- **first stage**: formation of the group. In the group of children and adolescents can form a group of "supporters" of a "leader" who tends to self-affirmation by demonstrating physical strength or other violent actions. "Supporters" also tend to dominate or seek the defense and protection of the "leader." If the first manifestations of violence have not been firmly and severely suppressed, the initiator ("leader") is convinced of his own impunity, which raises his authority among supporters and strengthens the group.
- **the second stage**: the conflict heats up. The non-involvement of teachers, the indifference of classmates allow the repetition of violent actions, while the abused

student gradually loses the ability and willingness to resist. The victim's vulnerability causes subsequent attacks.

- **the third stage**: destructive behavior. The victim status is definitively determined by the student who is systematically attacked. Those around her, getting used to the permanent insults against the person, blame her for the situation created. The victim herself begins to believe that she is guilty because she is mocked, she can no longer cope with the situation on her own, she is depressed, scared and demoralized.

- **fourth stage**: expulsion. The victim, brought to the brink of despair and feelings of loneliness, tends to avoid meetings with the aggressor / abuser and additional trauma, begins to miss episodes from class or no longer attends the educational institution in general. This phenomenon has been called "academic bullying damage".

When adults (parents, teachers, school administration) intervene in bullying situations, the affected student may be transferred to another class (group) or school (college), but often does not provide the necessary psycho-social help. The deep trauma acquired as a result of long-term abuse can prevent the effective integration of the victim into the new group of students and can serve as one of the causes of repeated bullying at the new place of study.

Without receiving support and if he does not find a way out of the situation of violence, the victim can harm himself, think about suicide and even implement it. The form of emotional bullying is more common among girls, while the form

Physical bullying is found among boys.

More than 90% of victims in Europe have indicated schoolmates as aggressors and more than 10% of these situations included friends. In another 4% of cases, teachers are charged.

Types of bullying

- **verbal bullying**: teasing, insults, inappropriate sexual comments, use of sarcasm, threats;

- **social bullying**: with implications on someone's reputation and relationships with others: abandoning a person with bad intentions, convincing other children not to be friends with a certain person, spreading malicious rumors about someone, making someone he feels embarrassed in public;

- **physical bullying**: hitting, pinching, spitting, obstructing, pushing, taking or destroying someone's things and other rude physical gestures.

These types of behavior can be encountered during school hours or even after school, in playgrounds, on the sports field, in public transport, on social networks, etc.

-**hazing** is one of the types of bullying, related to the phenomenon of initiation rituals. For the most part, such informal and violent rituals are characteristic of closed institutions (military, boarding, penitentiary), but are also found in regular schools and colleges, especially if they have dormitories for students from other localities. Classmates or older students force novices to do various humiliating actions. Hard physical and even sexual abuse can be committed against them. Hazing, like bullying in general, often has a hidden character or obvious gender substrate.

With the development of modern information technologies, another type of bullying has spread, namely:

- **cyberbullying**: the use of mobile phones, e-mail, internet, social networks, blogs, chats in order to track the person, share confidential information, rumors, derogatory and offensive messages about him. Cyberbullying differs from other forms of violence in that it allows the perpetrator to remain anonymous and thereby avoid responsibility for his or her actions.

Factors Influencing Bullying

Exposure to violence by a person can lead, like the "butterfly effect", to other bullying phenomena, both on the part of the aggressor and on the part of the aggressed. Many times, the aggressor adopts violence as the last possibility of outburst and expression, being in turn abused or neglected. The most common causes that determine such behaviors of the aggressor can be lack of empathy, egocentrism, pride, superficiality of human relationships, and, especially, exposure and taking over similar patterns of behavior.

Bullying is not a normal stage in the development of children and adolescents and is considered a phenomenon that precedes aggressive behaviors with even more serious consequences. Bullying can also help create and maintain an environment of fear and intimidation in school. Almost ten years of research show that the phenomenon in question can seriously affect the psychosocial functioning, learning and health of those who fall victim to it. Bullying, as well as any other form of violence, often

interferes with learning. Bullying usually takes place away from the eyes of teachers or other responsible adults. Consequently, if adults do not intervene, do not take immediate and prompt action, a climate of fear dominates children who are bullied.

Bullying can lead to physical harm, social and emotional suffering, self-harm and even death. It also increases the risk of depression, anxiety, difficulty sleeping, less success in learning and even dropping out of school.

Children who are bullied can suffer much more than because of the actual physical harm they cause:

- Notes may suffer because attention is removed from learning;
- Fear can lead to absenteeism or abandonment;
- They may lose or fail to develop self-esteem, to experience feelings of isolation and may become withdrawn and depressed;
- I may be reluctant to take social, intellectual, emotional or professional risks in quality of students and, later, of adults;

They sometimes feel compelled to take drastic measures, such as revenge or even suicide, in case the problem persists;

They are more likely than non-victims to grow anxious and insecure social view, showing more symptoms of depression than those who were not victimized in childhood;

Colleagues of children who are the target of bullying face many obstacles:

- they are afraid to associate with the child being bullied, for fear of losing their own status or for fear of revenge on the child who manifests bullying behavior, becoming themselves the target of bullying;
- they are afraid to report cases of bullying, because they do not want to be called “woodpeckers” or “informants”;
- they are afraid to experience feelings of guilt or helplessness;
- they are afraid to be attracted to bullying behavior by group pressure;
- feel insecure, unable to take action or lose control.

The Consequences of Bullying on Children

It is important to consider its effects on children in general and not just on direct, abused and stigmatized victims. There is a danger that people who only have the quality of witnesses, of supporters, who witness such behaviors, the more as far as personalities in the process of formation are concerned, to accept that aggressions and the imposition of points of view through violence are normal forms of conducting social life, to the detriment of gaining through arguments and asserting real skills.

Permanent exposure to such manifestations can generate routines that assert themselves as role models, which can distort the real values of society, with great potential to form a large number of violent subcultures.

The family and the school contribute to the perpetuation of the bullying phenomenon. Regarding the contribution of the family to the perpetuation of the phenomenon, it is quite precarious, the family environment, through non-involvement, favoring the development of such behaviors, the educational climate in children's families is generally characterized by:

- lack of explicit, sincere discussions with one's own children, regarding the valorization of certain types of behaviors;
- to promote nonviolent attitudes and behaviors, through the lack of concern for consistent involvement in school life;
- by open and sincere discussion about the acts that their children commit or to which their children are subjected;
- through faulty relationships with children, through inappropriate patterns of behavior to which children are exposed - both aggressors and victims;
- by not expressing values about violence;
- by not being involved in the school life and in the school activity of the child;
- excessive parental authority, which induces similar behaviors in peer groups, on the one hand, and on the other hand, it inhibits the sincere relationship of children with their own parents, in the sense of holding them back in recounting the experiences they face at school;

- manifesting aggressive behaviors in the family, with a high risk of being copied;
- lack of affectivity and progressive involvement, at the level of children's ability, in activities; non-involvement of children in useful activities carried out with the family;
- promoting by parents of deficient behaviors that become destructive models for the formation of children's personality, children take over models from the family;
- prepared education of parents or advice of their own children to fight back to avoid the victim situation they have experienced themselves;
- defective parental style, characterized by exaggerated indulgence and pampering of the child or by his opposite, excessive criticism, exaggerated criticism; permissive or authoritarian parenting style, lax or aggressive parents.

Anti-bullying Measures to be Taken at the Family Level

Ensuring an adequate, secure family environment, built by family members explicitly and deliberately, by their concern to be continuously informed and to call on specialists.

Valuing the child in the family: emphasizing the idea that he has qualities, he is able to develop them in the sense he wants; open, supportive communication; consulting the child in making all decisions; permanent relationship with the school; opportunities to get to know as many types of groups and activities as possible in order to be aware of the diversity of human qualities and become tolerant; specialized assessment of the child's skills to cultivate and develop them properly; unity in the application of the rules within the family, on the one hand and, in the family, in relation to the school.

Providing a pleasant, calm, balanced atmosphere at home, but demanding and constant, in the sense that in the family to show zero tolerance for violating the rules and manifesting violent, aggressive or degrading and stigmatizing others.

Adults around should avoid teasing behaviors, no matter how they are done: directly, indirectly, through the way they relate to other adults, always paying attention to the need to give positive examples to their own children:

- Emphasis on cooperation and not on competition, from kindergarten to college;

- Valuing all the personal characteristics of children;
- Cultivating responsibilities towards different living things.

The family's concern for the inclusion of the child in groups of children employed in different useful activities that respect social norms in accordance with the norms of society; Inclusion of parents in parenting training courses. Willingness to participate, together with teachers, and subsequently to include children in courses on interpersonal communication; i considers it appropriate.

Prompt parental intervention in case they are informed about the participation of the child, in any role (bully, victim or supporter), by recognizing and discussing the problem, without minimizing it and by immediately sanctioning the child's behavior according to the real situation, so that the risk of recurrence of the behavior is eliminated.

Anti-bullying Measures to be Adopted at School Level

The concern of all teachers for the achievement of an adequate rational motivational and behavioral education, in the context of which to value all the qualities of children, and the appreciations and rewards to be granted not only for cognitive performances, but also for artistic, sports, religious ones, promoting the idea that every child is valuable and is not allowed to be stigmatized and marginalized.

In this sense, the subjects propose that at the end of the year, diplomas be awarded for all the performances obtained, regardless of the field, including for gestures of altruism, humanity, fair play. Promoting a school culture, based on direct, permanent and sincere communication, respect for others, between teachers, on the one hand, between students in the class and with those in other classes, but also between students and teachers; clear, strict rules, without exception, discussed in a school council, with the idea of highlighting that we all need help.

It is necessary to cultivate the idea according to which the school must adapt to the real needs of the children, to listen to each one, valuing positively his expectations, not to promote differentiated treatments according to individual or social criteria. If this does not happen, the children break out and solve their own problems.

Promoting a greater number of activities to get to know each child, the qualities and behavioral risks. Expanding the spectrum of groups to which the child belongs. To understand that there are other environments that value other qualities of the child,

in the case of each type of activity emphasizing only the skills specific to that activity.

Some children do not have friends, do not interact with neighbors, need support for inclusion in groups, others have overestimated self-esteem, requiring knowledge activities compared to others who can excel in other areas.

Designing, within the various study disciplines and conducting classes, educational activities that develop altruistic, empathetic feelings, attitudes and behaviors.

Organizing daily discussions with children, in which to analyze their behaviors, and in case of misconduct, including bullying, prompt sanctioning of acts of aggression and their firm deterrence. Establishing rules of conduct, with clear rules, followed by specific sanctions, to be applied firmly.

Establishment of living, non-formal organizational structures, including teachers, students and parents, in which deviant behaviors are analyzed and sanctioned in accordance with regulations, without exception, including by reducing the grade for conduct or expulsion.

The evaluation and sanctioning should target all types of roles involved in bullying, respectively both the aggressors and the victims and supporters, depending on the concrete way of involvement. Elaboration of specific intervention programs depending on the type of deviant behavior and mandatory inclusion of children with behavioral problems in psychological counseling programs dedicated to the phenomenon of bullying.

Involvement of aggressors in community work projects. Real cooperation between family and school in order to carry out an adequate assessment to prevent acts of bullying.

Attracting the community in permanent monitoring of children's behavior.

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