

## EXISTENCE OF LATENT AGGRESSION AT STANDARD AND SPECIAL CLASSES IN SLOVAK SCHOOLS – EDUCATORS' FINDINGS

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The study presents an analysis of findings from a long-term research supported by the VEGA agency 1/0452/18 Identifications, analyses, inhibitions of latently aggressive children's actions in pre-school period.

**Abstract:** The paper describes research findings that focused on the occurrence of latent aggression in special classes in primary schools and in classes where pupils with health handicaps are educated. The research evaluators were teachers who educated pupils at a health disadvantage in schools. The indicators show the occurrence of latent aggression in classrooms, where pupils with health handicaps are educated.

**Keywords:** aggressive behaviour, latent aggression, kindergarten

### 1 Theoretical background

When dealing with latent (hidden) aggression at schools, it is necessary to mention that school classes are premises for its emergence and formation. At the same time, those premises also provide space for the implementation of preventive programs aimed at inhibiting latent aggression in the classroom, school (Kováčová, 2014, Šavrnichová et al., 2020). According to Gajdošová (2000), school classes have solid groupings that are connected by mutual relationships created on the basis of coexistence and that are aware of mutual togetherness. Relationships in classes or peer groups themselves are also a space for latent aggression. Adamík Šimegová (2011, p. 9) claims about the school environment, that it is "inevitably also a space of constant movements, dynamics, and formation of forces, which also give potential for assertion, aggression and violence."

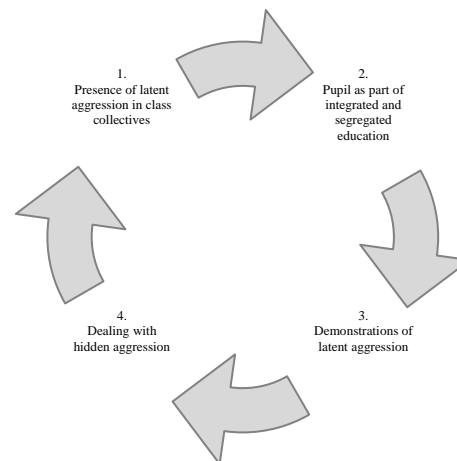
The form of this aggressive behaviour is a negative factor for every school, class, educator and pupil. Latent aggression is also one of the barriers to inclusive education (Šuhajdová, 2019). It harms the social networks of children/pupils with disabilities, specifically affecting components such as friendship/relationships, interaction / contact and perception / acceptance (Bizová, 2013). According to specific educators' statements, physical bullying can be identified more quickly in comparison with hidden aggression. The pedagogues' research findings and conclusions (Kováčová, 2019) confirmed that physical aggression is more visible for educators in the school environment. Teachers say they do not have the professional abilities and competencies to detect latent aggression. Up to 78% of educators point to the fact that bullying in schools is revealed in the case when victims decided or more precisely forced to do tragic solutions or bear sorrowful consequences ... In particular, victims feel help from the competent authorities in raising awareness related to their problems, in immediate coping strategies such as govern the problem, choosing an effective approach and assistance.

Based on those facts, we focused on the occurrence of latent aggression in the classes where the pupils with health handicaps are educated, in so-called special classes and general classes. The direct participation of an experienced teacher, who was involved in aggressive acts, should be considered as a significant factor in the described research.

### 2 Research methodology

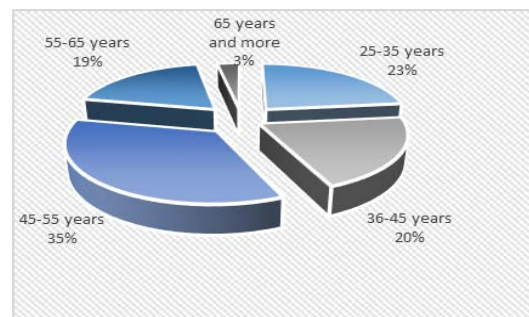
Within more detailed research related to latent aggression, there was used a method of group interview focusing on the research of four factors (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Four factors (research)



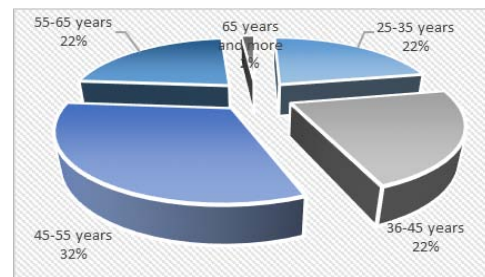
The educators who were divided into two groups took a part in the interview. The first group (group A) represented educators ( $N_a = 69$ ) who teach in general classes where was the handicapped pupil who was registered as individually integrated (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Research Group A classified according to age



The second group (group B) consisted of educators ( $N_b = 59$ ) who taught in special classes in general schools or teach in special classes (Graph 2).

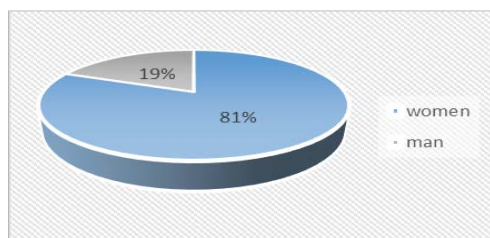
Graph 2. Research Group B classified according to age



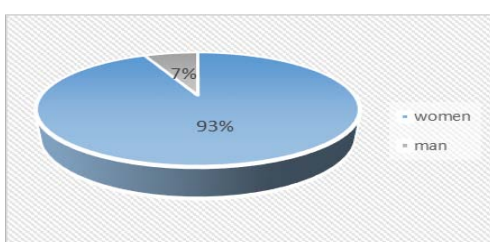
When comparing the age in the separate groups we can state that participants aged 45-55 years represented the most numerous group in the mentioned both groups.

The working groups that took part in the group interview had 8-10 active participants at an average. The group interview took place directly in schools; one meeting lasted about 220 minutes. The characteristics of the groups are presented in a graphic design based on gender (Graph 4, Graph 5) and the highest level of education achieved (Figure 2, Figure 3) in the following graphic design.

Graph 3. Research Group A classified on the basis of sex



Graph 4. Research Group B classified on the basis of sex



When comparing gender heterogeneity in the research groups, we conclude that Group A is represented 1:5 in favour of women, Group B is represented 1:14 in favour of women.

Figure 2. Research Group A based on the highest educational achievement

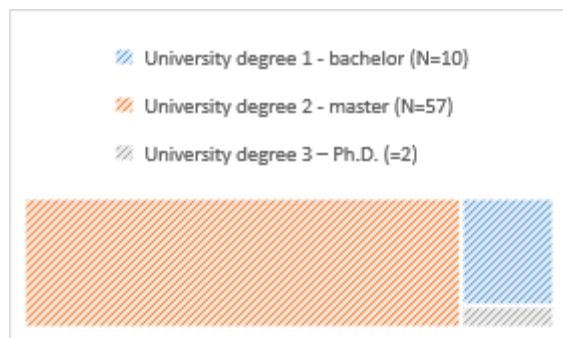
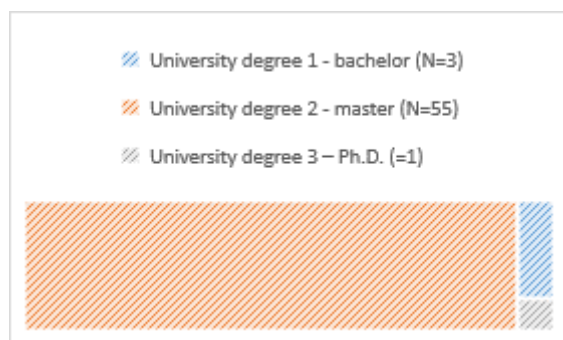


Figure 3. Research Group A based on the highest educational achievement



When comparing the highest educational achievement, it could be stated that both groups have a comparable representation.

The lowest number of educators achieved only secondary and higher education of the 3rd degree.

### 3 Research findings

#### 3.1 Research findings (elementary schools)

Based on interviews with educators (Na = 69) from general elementary schools, we present the following findings based on the four factors mentioned above.

##### 3.1.1 The presence of latent aggression in class collectives.

Interviews with educators confirmed the occurrence of latent aggression, although its increase or decrease cannot be objectively assessed. Up to 47% of educators admit latent aggression, but they do not have the means to prevent this form of aggressive behaviours. They used own experience to point out to insufficient knowledge abilities. To a greater extent, educators have verbalized the problem of detection and, based on experience, have also demonstrated their concerns, e.g.

- *It was in communication with the pupil – victim, who did not manage recalcitrant problem and came to tell about it to the new colleague, who just joined* [R5 / 1PS / 42].
- *We did not reveal it, it was just a coincidence, even if the educational counsellor says something else* [R1 / 2PS / 55].

We have no means of revealing it - what do we do to them? Will we write them worse assessments in behaviour report cards? They laugh and rag. The teacher no longer has the position he had ever had, even when dealing with problematic pupils, and overall ... [R2 / 4PS / 57].

Educators think that if they had sufficient and effective means (in terms of effective sanctions), and information about latent aggression (how to reveal it and what is needed to observe), it is probable that latent aggression in school would be detected and eliminated.

##### 3.1.2 Pupil as part of integrated education

Interview with teachers was designed to know the status of integrated pupils, more precisely; pupils with special educational needs in the classroom. The testimony suggests that the inclusion of a pupil with disabilities in intact collectives is a common matter, but the training of community does not exist yet.

- *The responses of healthy pupils to the inclusion of the disabled ones seem to be at the first glance positive, but there are also individuals trying to "hide" their reactions, but I know they have not accepted this child. Then, problems will start and problems will be exacerbated.* [R2 / 4PS / 57]
- *In our case, each individually integrated one was problematic, either in behaviour or in learning. It even happened that he was the initiator of class aggression.* [R4 / 4PS / 31].

The most frequent victims of hidden aggression were pupils with cognitive and health handicaps. Educators state that hostility to disadvantaged children comes from the family environment. *I do not dare to talk about the parents' reactions, but I did not catch any negative reactions from them, except some parents' comments during parents' associations meetings. Those comments were more than unpleasant, especially when the parent of this pupil left and the discussion started about him without him (...) when I remarked that it was inappropriate, one of them told me: "don't take it too seriously, the whole class will be lazy, because teachers pay to Patrick all attention. I don't know when our children will catch up on, they don't know anything, and they have no homework*

because everything revolves around him and his individual schedule ... [R6 / 4PS / 28].

### 3.1.3 Manifestations of latent aggression.

The described manifestations of latent aggression were divided into two basic groups (Table 1), which shows that rational aggression has a higher incidence, despite a lower number of manifestations compared to social manipulation.

Table 1. Occurrences of latent aggression during integrated education

RATIONAL AGGRESSION		SOCIAL MANIPULATION	
Specific Expression	Frequency	Specific Expression	Frequency
Escalated criticism against the victim	55 %	Prejudicial information without verifying the truth	42 %
Call in question opinions, ideas to degrade the victim	28 %		
Thefts ( to hide victim's belongings without a chance to find them), or demolishing of personal belongings	17 %	humiliating remarks with the repeated intention to hurt the victim	25 %
		Incitation to hurt the victim	15 %
		Segregation with intention of activity isolation	18 %

### 3.1.4 Prevention and dealing with hidden bullying

The interview with teachers shows that teachers seek professional help and appreciate the presence of professional staff at the school. They take their presence like obviousness, which is needed in every school.... *our school was one of the first to have a school psychologist, we appreciate his presence. He cooperates with a special pedagogue. It depends on the situation ... we also cooperate with a psychological counsellor, so if necessary we can also contact him* [R9 / 2PS / 33 / F].

Despite the fact that teachers agreed on the general idea of inclusion (they consider it ideal concerning children with behavioural disorders). The limitation in their work on uncovering hidden aggression is the lack of knowledge and training of practical skills to cope with hidden aggression in the classroom (e.g. use of drawing Valachová, 2019; use of bibliodrama, Chanasová, 2019, etc.).

## 3.2 Research findings (special elementary schools)

Based on interviews with educators (Nb = 59) from special elementary schools, we present the following findings.

### 3.2.1 The presence of latent aggression in class collectives.

Based on interviews with educators, it is evident that latent aggression occurs in segregated conditions compared to integrated education sporadically (17% of teachers admit it).

### 3.2.2 Pupil as part of integrated education

A pupil with a disadvantage in integrated conditions by stigmatization and isolation involuntarily loses friends, thus also social relations in the classroom. Anxiety leads to a loss of interest in the school, even the victim may not finish the school (up to 35% of disadvantaged pupils are voluntarily transferred to special schools).

Usually, he or she either voluntarily leave or seek possible and targeted exclusion for a specific, trivial reason. The pupil who is influenced by that "package of experience" is entering into segregated education. Personal failure in a collective or group

and a sense of inferiority increases victimization after the aggressor appears in a new team. This is one of the reasons why educators say that the reason for transferring to their school must be known because the bullying of the pupil and his subsequent school failure is always a signal to increase attention during the adaptation period.

- *Miško entered in and we had a lot to do to control him. He was normally able to manipulate the class and hate. And he always seems to be innocent arguing that somebody else beat him.*
- *Mrs. teacher, I saw that they were doing wrong and so terrible. They beat Janko, one of them commands and the second one beats Janko again.* "1 [R7 / 2SPS / 5]

Educators have to know their pupils all the better because their expression may not be so understandable, because they have e.g. barriers to communication, they have difficulty expressing themselves as accurately as possible or authentically describing the situation (mostly pupils with cognitive disadvantages).

### 3.2.3 Manifestations of latent aggression.

The described manifestations of latent aggression in special elementary schools have been divided into two basic groups (Table 2), which shows that social manipulation in the context of latent aggressive behaviour has a higher incidence compared to rational aggression.

Table 2. Occurrences of latent aggression within segregated education

RATIONAL AGGRESSION		SOCIAL MANIPULATION	
Specific Expression	Frequency	Specific Expression	Frequency
Thefts ( to hide victim's belongings without a chance to find them), or demolishing of personal belongings	18 %	Prejudicial information without verifying the truth	33 %
		Humiliating remarks with the repeated intention to hurt the victim	24 %
Call in question opinions, ideas to degrade victim	8 %	Incitation to hurt the victim	11 %
		Other incitation-valid for individual situations (unquestionable latency in the behaviour of the aggressor towards the victim)	6 %

### 3.2.4 Prevention and dealing with hidden bullying

Identical conclusions were also recorded based on interviews with educators who carry out preventive activities within class hours as prophylactic measures. In case of suspicion of bullying in the group, they use rather individual interviews. Up to 35% of educators agreed that they had minimal knowledge of latent aggression. Based on the above findings, we find that hidden bullying is a common part of class groups regardless of the age of the participants. Rational aggression is more prevalent in peer groups in general schools, as opposed to peer

<sup>1</sup> Authentic transcript from a special elementary school pupil interview with a teacher

groups in special schools dominated by socially active aggression.

In the case of latent (hidden) aggression from educators' point of view, we state the following:

- The strongest predictor to successfully identify hidden aggression was training of educators. Up to 1/6 of the teachers have had training (relevant training) on this issue and they have a more positive attitude towards its detection and further work with the group.
- The second predictor was the personal factors of the educators (*less stress and more time for the class and paying special attention to pupils with aggressive behaviours*).
- The third predictor was the age of the educator, it was confirmed that the age-younger educators tend to be more positive compared to the age-old colleagues.
- The fourth predictor was the support of school in dealing with this issue, in terms of active climate monitoring of individual classes, support of teachers in further education and real organizing of professional counselling service directly at the school (psychologist, medical educator, eventually special educator, Kováčová, 2019; Vaska et al., 2019).

Latent aggression is a specific form of bullying that Crick - Grotpeter (1995) called as non-physical aggression. From their point of view, it is a momentary effect in the mutual behaviour of people in society, at all levels of social contacts. Later, Fried, Fried (1996) said that this form of aggression should not be considered to be a typical aggressive behaviour because this silent, historically tolerated behaviour was considered as a natural part of socialization. Social aggression has been (and currently remains) an impulse for observation in research and professional publications. Putallaz et al. (2007) confirmed that it is a deliberate ignorance of a member (victim) in various situations, but which strictly excludes any direct attacks on the victim (Kováčová, 2019). Later, they considered slander, obloquy aimed at weakening the position of the victim to be the indirect manifestations, resulting in damage to the reputation (concerning the "good name" or the social reputation) of the victim.

### 3 Conclusion

Based on the presented research findings, it is possible to conclude that current groups of younger schoolchildren create and accept a variable range of relationships from friendly to hostile ones. These relations are also manifesting themselves (not only) by aggression, hatred or hostility. The whole process of hidden aggression begins covertly, in the case, that this form of aggression is not revealed, it gradually transforms into direct aggression.

In accordance with the presented research, the current situation in Slovak schools confirmed the existence of hidden aggression in class groups; it means the presence of latent aggressive phenomena in social relations and their occurrence among disadvantaged pupils of younger school age.

It is necessary to consider a long-term systematic work in favour of inhibiting latent aggression, especially if intervention itself has not started at an early age. The primary form of eliminating hidden aggression in the child/pupil groups is training that promote their competencies in the area of social relationships (Jablonský, 2019). Rather, interactive and experiential processes of fictitious or real situations are used that are adequately addressed with respect to the age of the participants.

On the basis of the above statements of educators, it is necessary that the preventive module aiming to successful results against latent bullying contained:

- Thematic training showing latent aggression in theoretical background and findings (complemented by good practical examples from abroad);
- experience training to deal with a specific situation;
- an internal preventive module containing procedural schemes depicting the school's cooperation with appropriate participants of latent bullying and procedural schemes to support the school's management and staff;
- to validate of the preventive module within procedural schemes in a particular school.

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