

## PREVENTION OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR OF PUPILS AS THE BASIS FOR CREATING A SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

<sup>a</sup>INGRID EMMEROVÁ

*Faculty of Education, Department of Pedagogy and Special Pedagogy, Hrabovská cesta 1, 034 01 Ružomberok, Slovakia  
email: "ingrid.emmerova@ku.sk"*

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**Abstract:** The study presents current situation regarding the occurrence of aggressive behaviour among primary, lower secondary and upper secondary school pupils. Besides aggressive behaviour of various intensity and significance among pupils, quite common is also aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers. One of the significant problems nowadays is also aggressive behaviour of pupils in the online environment, especially cyberbullying. The author points out the necessity of implementation of prevention in the school environment. Effective prevention of aggressive behaviour of pupils significantly contributes to the creation of safe school environment.

**Keywords:** aggressive behaviour of pupils, cyberaggression, bullying, cyberbullying, prevention, prevention in the school environment

### Introduction

Aggressive behaviour is definitely a socio-pathological phenomenon, which is complex and multicausal. It also appears among primary and secondary school pupils (S. Bellová, 2021; S. Bellová, G. Siváková, K. Tišťanová, 2019; O. N. Saracho, 2017; J. Škoda, P. Douřák, J. Svobodová, 2022). Aggressive behaviour means violation and restriction of the rights of others – symbolic or real restriction, damage or destruction.

As P. Ondrejko (2000) points out, violence committed by youth can be considered a specific form of human behaviour that leads to enforced fulfilment of wishes, interests, orders, etc. More and more young people choose violence in the fight for their own acceptance, acknowledgment, group or social rise, in their effort to achieve certain status position.

Aggression is a continual process that can evolve. Among most significant forms of problem behaviour of pupils belongs committing crimes. Crime statistics report also the crimes committed by minors and juveniles in the Slovak Republic. Each year, minors and juveniles commit violent crimes as well. Of the most significant crimes we can mention murders and robberies. Within the last ten years, minors committed a murder only in 2021 (1 case), but juveniles each year except for 2015, most cases (5) in the years 2011, 2012 and 2020. Robberies occur among minors as well as juveniles, the number of cases is much higher in case of juveniles.

### 1 Aggressive behaviour of primary and secondary school pupils

As pointed out by P. Harsa, D. Kertészová, M. Macák, I. Voldřichová and I. Žukov (2012), aggressiveness is a complex phenomenon present in everyday life and it has its positive and negative sides. Aggressiveness needs to be controlled, cultivated, regulated and directed in a prosocially-meaningful way in order to prevent disruption of relationships among people and social norms.

Aggressive behaviour can escalate into bullying, which belongs among the most significant negative phenomena in current schools, but it can also take place outside of school. Bullying is defined by several authors and we can find common features in the individual definitions. The main point is that it is a long-term, repeated and intentional harming with the intention to gain dominance. It is characterised by disproportion of forces. Victims are for some reason defenceless. It is intentional and repeated violence directed against such pupil or pupils, who are not able to or cannot defend themselves. Bullying is manifested in many forms. Bullying in schools most often takes place

during breaks, in locker rooms, toilets or in other places where teachers do not supervise. There are also cases when children are bullied on their way to or from school.

Bullying is manifested in many forms. Unlike bullying in the past, nowadays it shows some alarming signs: increasing number of bullying cases, appearance of still younger aggressors, increased brutality and sophistication of bullying.

P. Ondrejko (2021), M. Bartoňová and M. Magová (2018) emphasize that besides family, school has its specific role in the process of socialisation. At school children learn the basics of conformity, but also deviation, it creates prerequisites for success and for failure, primary and secondary deviation takes place there, also labelling. Schools should create and ensure safe environment for all pupils. In the school year 2018/2019, State School Inspection of the Slovak Republic carried out inspections in 79 primary and lower secondary schools and 25 upper secondary schools (13 grammar schools and 12 secondary vocational schools), in which it focused on detecting safe school environment and relationships among participants in education. In primary and lower secondary schools, bullying was present in almost all controlled schools. 16.9% of pupils were repeatedly bullied. Bullying was witnessed once or more times by 40.3% of the respondents. In upper secondary schools, 8.5% of pupils did not feel safe in school. This finding was supported also by the pupils' questionnaire results, according to which almost each 15<sup>th</sup> upper secondary school pupil has been subject to bullying not only in places outside the school, but also during breaks in classrooms, corridors or toilets. The results of the State School Inspection in the school year 2019/2020 regarding the occurrence of bullying among primary and secondary school pupils confirm the prevalence of this negative phenomenon (research took place in 31 primary and lower secondary schools, 7 grammar schools and 8 secondary vocational schools). 14.5% of primary and lower secondary school pupils were victims of bullying, 7% of the grammar school pupils and 13% of the secondary vocational school pupils. More than a quarter of the respondents witnessed bullying, specifically 37% of the primary and lower secondary school pupils, 21% of the grammar school pupils and 27% of the secondary vocational school pupils.

Aggressive behaviour reflects also in the virtual environment. Pupils post on the internet hateful messages and comments that are referred to as cyberhate. The individual areas of risk behaviour can overlap and combine in the cyberspace. Cyberaggression is manifested in many forms. A very dangerous and widely spread form is cyberbullying (S. Hinduja, J. W. Patchin, 2022; Q. Chen, Y. Zhu, 2022; D. Strohmeier, P. Grading, 2022).

Cyberbullying and bullying, besides the obvious differences, also have some common features. In some cases, combination of both occurs – when physical bullying is recorded and posted on the internet, which causes even more harm and humiliation to the victim.

Amendment to the Criminal Code No. 300/2005 with effect from July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021 deals with dangerous electronic harassment. Even this fact points to the significant danger of cyberbullying and social necessity to deal with it.

Cyberbullying is a serious and wide-spread educational problem. This is also evidenced by the results of objective researches that were implemented in the Slovak Republic.

Empirical findings of J. Tomková, I. Szamaranská, J. Varholíková and I. Belica (2015) suggest that at least one negative act by the means of Facebook towards another person has been initiated within the last six months by 49.7% of children and 63.1% of adolescents. At least one of the negative acts by the means of Facebook within the last six months has

experienced 51.7% of children and 71.9% of adolescents. Cyberbullying – repeated experiencing of negative acts on the internet in total (at least once a week in the period of the last six months) has experienced 13.1% of children and 5.5% of adolescents.

K. Kopecký et al. (2015) found out that children in Slovakia are most often subjected to verbal attacks (28.38%), next comes account compromising, online accounts and password cracking (26.94%) and quite widely-spread is also threatening and intimidation (6.81%). They found out that repeated attacks in the cyberspace was reported by more than 48% of the Slovak respondents aged 11 – 17 years.

According to the findings of M. Dulovics (2018), 10.2% of pupils have committed some form of cyberbullying twice or more often.

Results from the research among upper secondary school pupils (K. Kohútová, 2020) show that 79% of the respondents experienced insulting on the internet, 78.1% experienced defamation, 65.7% experienced sexual innuendos, 63.8% experienced sending defamatory pictures and 62.9% experienced humiliating comments.

Situation among children and youth is also illustrated by empirical findings of M. Pétiová (2021) regarding experiences of pupils with electronic bullying by the means of a cell phone, internet or social network. In 2010, 87.8% of the respondents did not have such experience, in 2014 it was 72.6% of the respondents and in 2020 it was 70.1% of the respondents.

Another significant concern nowadays is also increased aggressive behaviour towards teachers, or school employees, which is proved by the results of many foreign researches (C. De Wet, 2020; L. Garrett, 2014; T. Kauppi, M. Pörhölä, 2012). The reasons of aggressive behaviour towards teachers may be on the part of teachers and also pupils. On the teacher's part, it may be inappropriate communication with pupils, wrong educational style, insufficient preparation for lessons, unjust evaluation of pupils, little energy. On the part of pupils, it may be frustration, boredom, efforts to draw attention to themselves, personality of an actor and his/her personal characteristics, influence of the family environment. There are many causes of aggressive behaviour of pupils, most often it is a combination of several factors. Unsolved conflicts are often in the background of such behaviour.

Researches aimed at identifying aggressive behaviour towards pupils were implemented also in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic. The seriousness of the situation is also confirmed by the findings of M. Pétiová (2015), which concern relationships between pupils and teachers. In 2014, compared to 2005, the number of respondents – pupils who liked their teachers and respected them, has declined (from 17.1% to 10.0%) and the number of pupils who don't like their teacher has increased (from 6.0% to 9.2%), or eventually pupils who are indifferent to teachers (from 3.0% to 8.1%).

In the research that took place in the conditions of lower secondary schools in the years 2010 to 2013 (L. Csémy et al., 2014), 52% of teachers stated that they did not experience vulgar verbal aggression towards themselves within the last year, 28.8% has experienced it once or twice, more frequent occurrence was reported by 19.2% of the respondents. 4.4% of the teachers have been the object of physical aggression by pupils in the last year, 1.4% of them repeatedly.

M. Niklová and M. Šajgalová (2016) found out that that only 20.26% of the teachers did not experience aggressions towards themselves.

According to the results of I. Emmerová and J. Kohútovej (2017), 85.4% of primary and secondary school teachers experienced aggressive behaviour (of various intensity and severity).

In this context, cyberspace represents a considerable risk. Cyberattacks towards teachers have become a reality, which teachers encounter directly as victims or they may see it among their colleagues.

In 2016, a research on cyberbullying of teachers by pupils was implemented in the Czech Republic among primary and secondary school teachers (Kopecký, Szołkowski, 2016b). According to the results of this research, 21.73% of teachers (1118 out of 5136) were in the past victims of some cyberbullying form. The most frequent forms of cyberbullying attacks on teachers were verbal attacks through cell phones or internet, molestation through short unanswered phone ringing (e.g. in the evening), threatening or intimidation through internet or cell phone services, distribution of humiliating, mocking or embarrassing photos, hacking their electronic accounts (e-mail, social network accounts, etc.). Regarding the length of cyberbullying attacks on teachers they discovered that short-term attacks prevailed, those that lasted less than one week or one to two weeks.

## 2 Prevention of Aggressive Behaviour at Schools

Prevention in the school environment is highly necessary. Schools, especially primary schools, have an important role in prevention, as they are frequented by the whole population since the age of 6, with some rare exceptions. Unfortunately, we cannot count on families, as they quite often fail in their educational and socializing function.

Educational process and educational influence on pupils requires interconnection of *cognitive, affective and conative components* of pupils' personalities – interconnection of preventive action on: "Knowledge – attitudes – social skills".

Implementation of *specific prevention* (focused on the individual types of problem behaviour) and of *non-specific prevention* at schools must be a necessity.

It is also important to pay more attention to university preparation of future teachers in the area of prevention. To provide teachers in practice with educational activities aimed at prevention and to motivate them to participate on these activities. To increase the awareness of active protection on the internet in the area of cyberbullying prevention. *To increase the number of specialists at schools*, who are prepared to implement socio-educational prevention on a professional level.

The aim of primary prevention is to create conditions for healthy physical, mental and social development at schools. Here we can include new approaches of teachers towards pupils that put emphasis on open and partner-like dealing, new effective forms of cooperation with parents etc. It is suitable to implement preventive programmes aimed at harmonization of relationships and improvement of school climate, constructive conflict solving, coping with stressful situations, development of social competences etc. Wide implementation of cooperation among pupils is a significant factor in prevention of bullying and other forms of inappropriate behaviour of pupils. According to T. Jablonský (2009, 2010), interpersonal skills such as e.g. the ability to communicate and work in a team are becoming more and more important.

In the school environment it is *important to consistently address even the less serious problems with pupils' behaviour*, because their overlooking or underestimating may lead to more serious forms of deviant behaviour. The key task is to prevent deepening of inappropriate behaviour of pupils. In connection with dealing with bullying, D. Rosová (2018) recommends not to overlook bullying – to avoid belittling, cautiously investigate the findings, to contact experts from other fields in more complicated cases, and to contact police in case of misdemeanours and crimes, regardless of whether the perpetrator is a child or an adult.

When implementing prevention of risk and problem behaviour it is necessary to pay attention to the *systematicity*. Regular

implementation of preventive activities is much more effective than any one-time activity. Prevention in schools is implemented through various forms of preventive actions. It is advisable to incorporate prevention into the individual school subjects, most commonly into ethical education, science of society, literary education and other subjects that allow it within their curricula.

*To implement prevention through effective forms and methods.* Most suitable are preventive projects and programmes. Efficient and effective primary prevention includes continuous and complex programmes, interactive programmes, especially programmes helping pupils to cope with social pressure, focused on improvement of communication, non-violent conflict solving, refusal of addictive substances, boosting healthy self-esteem, coping with anxiety and stress. Not to implement inefficient prevention (e.g. intimidation, banning, moralizing or exaggerating the consequences etc.).

Implementation of efficient preventive activities requires *to monitor the occurrence of undesirable phenomena*, to forecast the likelihood of occurrence of the given phenomenon and consider the choice of methods and forms of action, both in the field of primary and secondary prevention in the school environment. To continuously monitor the behaviour of pupils and in cases of suspected violations of their healthy personal development to ensure their protection and to address the problem without delay in cooperation with the school management and the child's legal representatives. When it comes to bullying, teachers need to realise that it is not just a matter of the aggressor and the victim. Witnesses to bullying also play an important role, as they can play a positive role on the one hand, but a negative one on the other. It is important *to cooperate with professionals* from counselling centres.

The staffing of prevention in schools, i.e. the implementers of prevention, plays an important role. Prevention can be carried out by pedagogical and specialist school employees. School management and implementers of preventive activities must adequately react to current trends and challenges in this area, plan preventive activities and effectively cooperate with specialists outside the school environment (e.g. employees of counselling facilities, policemen – preventionists, doctors and other specialists). The importance of functional management within school is pointed out by T. Jablonský (2017), J. Veteška and M. Kursch (2018), it is important also in prevention. Schools receive various offers for preventive activities or long-term programmes, it is essential to check in advance the offered preventive activities in order to avoid the possible unwanted influence of lay and unprofessional activities, as well as the explicitly harmful influence of e.g. cults or sects.

## Conclusion

Aggressive behaviour, bullying and cyberbullying are widespread, and effective prevention is essential. The prevention of risk or problem behaviour of pupils is closely linked to the education and socialisation of pupils. As school is the dominant educational and socialising agent, it also plays an important role in prevention.

To prevent the risky use of modern technologies by primary and secondary school pupils, schools need to inform pupils in an age-appropriate way about the risks of their use and organise engaging preventive events on the subject, e.g. on the occasion of Safer Internet Day.

Prevention of risk or problem behaviour of pupils should be implemented as an integral part of the educational process. All teachers must participate in prevention.

Education in the school environment should not only focus on the development of cognitive abilities, but should also pay attention to the personal and social development of pupils. Teaching and professional staff in schools should aim to harmonise relationships and improve the school climate.

Creating a safe school environment and improving classroom relationships, providing pupils with a sense of psychological safety and security, eliminating unwanted behaviours, including risky and problem behaviours, is a current challenge for schools. Despite the fact that each school is original (in terms of its location, composition of pupils and teachers, each school has its own problems and specificities), it is necessary to build a safe environment, to implement systematic, effective prevention and to consistently address behavioural problems.

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