

VICTIMISATION OF TEACHERS AS A FACTOR THREATENING THEIR WELLBEING (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE SLOVAK AND CZECH REPUBLICS)

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Abstract: The study focuses on the issue of aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Its occurrence is confirmed by the results of objective research. Aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers is a serious educational problem. Such behaviour seriously undermines the well-being of teachers. The satisfaction and wellbeing of teachers and other school staff is not only important for their mental health, but also for the wellbeing of their pupils.

Key words: the teaching profession, aggression, aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers, wellbeing of teachers

1 Introduction

The work of teachers, as well as other pedagogical and professional employees in schools, is psychologically very demanding. The teaching profession is accompanied by a higher level of work stress: problem and risk behaviour of pupils, the need to maintain discipline in the classroom, constant control and criticism from parents. A serious fact at present is the incidence of aggressive behaviour towards teachers and other school employees by pupils and their parents.

The most common sources of stress are: demands on the psyche, high responsibility, low social evaluation and prestige and the related lack of appreciation of teachers' work, inadequate working conditions, frequent changes in educational projects and school organization, monitoring by the inspector or school management, teaching in classes with very different levels and large numbers of pupils, time pressure, problems in teachers' interpersonal relationships, pupils with poor attitudes to work and disruptive pupils (Holeček, Jiřincová, Miňhová, 2001; Nešpor, 2019). Other researches (Štětkovská, Skalníková, 2004) also confirm that the most common stressors for teachers include poor working conditions, lack of appreciation of their work, conflicts with colleagues and parents, and problem behaviour of pupils. Baranovská and Petlák (2022) list stressors that can negatively affect the performance of the teaching profession, such as problem behaviour of pupils (passivity, aggressiveness, noise in the classroom, provocativeness, conflicts, disturbance, low motivation of pupils), cyberbullying (through communication technologies, mobile phones, the Internet). Parents of pupils can also act as a stress factor for teachers (parental ideas about education and upbringing, non-acceptance of school and teacher recommendations, interest in influencing the teacher's evaluation, or not showing any interest in the child), changes in the content of the curriculum, other stress factors (school management, work team, low or inadequate salary, and other circumstances).

The high demands and requirements of the teaching profession are also reflected in interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Conflicts are a natural part of our lives, they also occur in the work environment and therefore also in school. Conflicts are present even among teaching and professional employees in schools. Conflicts, especially in the workplace, can have positive aspects, e.g. attitudes can be clarified, engagement can be increased and even performance can be enhanced. If conflicts are resolved, they can bring about constructive change. However, if they are not addressed, they can escalate into more serious problems in the workplace such as mobbing, bossing and staffing.

Mayer (2017) draws attention to the fact that if we want to talk about improving the quality of the teaching profession, we

assume the continuous professional growth of teachers, through continuous and lifelong learning. The improvement of teachers' professional performance will also be reflected in the quality of the educational process, which is purposeful and should be active, constructive and ultimately effective. In order to reach the desired level, pressure is permanently exerted on professional development and, therefore, on the gradation of teachers' competences.

Disproportionate pressure can result in a negative mental state leading to escalating stress and burnout syndrome. Burnout syndrome is a process, it is the result of an imbalance between expectations, ideals and reality. The development of the burnout syndrome is preceded by certain phases: enthusiasm (one has great ideals, is enthusiastically engaged), stagnation (great ideals cannot be implemented), frustration (work is a great disappointment for a person, he/she perceives it negatively), apathy (the worker does only the most necessary tasks, avoids conversations and activities) and self-burnout (the stage of complete exhaustion). Burnout syndrome usually occurs in three stages (Morovicsová, 2016; Žitniaková Gurgová, Behúňová, 2017): The first stage is characterized by time pressure and performing work tasks under stress. Deficiencies in the performance of job duties appear, which the worker may carry over into the private sphere. Not being able to rest adequately, the worker gives up free time and relaxation. The second stage is characterised by persistent physical and psychological strain. A compulsive need to resolve the situation comes to the fore, but the effort results in distractibility, reduced concentration, and failure to complete work tasks. In the third stage, there is a loss of interest in work; the ability to enjoy positive events at work and in private life is lacking. Fatigue, exhaustion and disappointment are typical.

Wellbeing is understood as a state of subjective welfare where one can fully develop physical, emotional, social and spiritual areas and live a full and satisfying life. Physical wellbeing is mainly related to physical health and safety, emotional wellbeing is reflected in a positive self-perception and trust in others, social wellbeing is related to empathy, maintaining relationships, ability to cooperate and communicate effectively, and spiritual wellbeing is related to values and ethical principles.

Šolcová and Kebza (2004) point out that it has become common to associate wellbeing mainly with the dimension of mental wellbeing, which, however, does not exhaust the concept. More precise is personal wellbeing, where mental, physical and social dimensions are implicitly based.

According to Hanesová (2022), wellbeing as the search for happiness and goodness in human life is a concept as old as humanity (or education) itself. Nowadays, wellbeing conveys comfort, happiness, or welfare.

Wellbeing is influenced by various factors such as health status, socio-economic status, social support, etc., as well as work stress.

The situation in the Slovak Republic with regard to teachers' well-being is illustrated by the results of a questionnaire survey conducted by the State School Inspectorate (Ružeková et al., 2022). The questions in the questionnaire focused on four areas, namely overall job satisfaction, negative impact on physical and mental health, job stress and strain, and professional self-confidence. Overall satisfaction with their own profession, with the school in which they work and with the evaluation of their work by senior teaching staff was expressed by 70% of all teachers. 16% of the teachers considered changing career or changing school, with no differences between school types. The negative impact of work on mental or physical health was felt by up to 27% of the teachers, with no difference between school types. The proportion of the teachers who felt a negative impact

of work on both physical and mental health was 13%. Some form of stress, strain or pressure while carrying out their teaching activities was expressed by 78% of the teachers.

The situation in the Czech Republic is approximated by Herynková (2022), according to research, 60% of the teachers experience excessive stress, 25% of teachers have reduced resilience to stress, and 80% of teachers experience high workload. In the Slovak Republic, it is Lovašová and Vasilová (2017) who point to stress and burnout in teachers.

The issue of meaningfully addressing the safety of the school environment is now a matter of great urgency. A safe school environment influences pupil satisfaction, which translates positively into learning outcomes. Aggressive pupil behaviour and bullying seriously undermine the safety of the school environment and the wellbeing of pupils, as well as the teaching and professional employees of schools.

2 Material and methods

In this study we present the results of research on aggressive behaviour towards teachers in Slovakia and the Czech Republic since 2003. The results of the research have been published in the Slovak, Czech or English language in both database journals and journals not included in any of the databases. We did not take into account researches within the qualifying theses, only researches published in scientific journals.

3 Results and Discussion

Problem behaviour among primary and secondary school pupils is widespread and varied in terms of severity, intensity and frequency of occurrence, which is reflected in the daily work of primary and secondary school teachers. This fact is confirmed by the results of objective researches (Čerešník, Tomšík, Čerešníková, 2017; Hollá, Kurincová, 2013; Niklová, Dulovics, Stehlíková, 2022). Several authors (Kopecký, Sztokowski, 2016; Lokmic, Opic, Biic, 2013) point to the aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers.

Within the selected time period, i.e. since 2003, several researches on aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers have been carried out in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. We present research from both countries, as we have similar and comparable school systems, a common history, and a similar socio-cultural tradition. This situation makes it possible to carry out joint researches of workplaces from Slovakia and the Czech Republic and to compare the results (Čerešník, 2019).

The research reflects the various forms of violence perpetrated by pupils, as well as their parents and guardians, against teachers. In recent years, researchers have also focused their attention on cyber-attacks where the victim is a teacher.

- Research was conducted among secondary school teachers in 2004 by Džuka and Jenčová (2005). They considered a teacher to be a victim of violence if he/she had been subjected to one of the violent acts at least once during the last 30 days. The most frequent were verbal negative expressions - unpleasant statements, taunts and insults which was reported by 129 respondents (35.4%). Being forced to do something against one's will was reported by 61 respondents (16.8%) and social manipulation by 60 teachers (16.5%). Taking things was the case for 45 (12.4%) and direct physical assault or threatening for 18 respondents (4.9%).
- In the second study by Džuka and Dalbert (2007), 108 vocational high school teachers participated in the research, of which 60 (55%) teachers reported experiencing violence from pupils in the past 15 days.
- In the 2007/2008 school year, research was conducted with secondary school teachers in the Czech Republic by Tomášek (2008). He found out that up to 43.4% of the respondents had experienced at least one form of aggressive behaviour towards themselves in their career,

which is almost half of the surveyed secondary school teachers. Of the specific forms, rude verbal insults or name-calling by students during class, followed by rude verbal insults by a parent or other relative, and threatening by a parent or other relative with abusive acquaintances were the dominant forms of bullying.

- Bendl (2010) also paid attention to the issue of teacher bullying and pointed to the results of the research of the Association of Primary School Teachers, where 27% of primary school teachers have encountered vulgarity towards teachers and 2.76% have even experienced bullying of teachers by pupils. Among the second grade of primary school teachers, 51.92% of the respondents reported acts of vulgarity towards teachers and 10.84% reported bullying of teachers by pupils.
- Kariková (2010) presents the results of a research conducted in 2010. The respondents were kindergarten, primary and secondary school teachers. The results clearly indicate significant changes related to the increase of negative aspects in the teaching profession: the increase of problem behaviour of pupils at all types and levels of schools, as well as communication with parents.
- The results of the research (Emmerová, 2014), which was carried out in the school year 2010/2011 using the questionnaire method in the Central Slovak region on a sample of 351 primary and secondary school teachers, confirmed the occurrence of aggressive behaviour of pupils and their parents towards teachers. 237 teachers or 67.52% encountered aggressive behaviour towards themselves. The most widespread form was insults of teachers by pupils during lessons, the second most widespread form was threats by pupils, followed by insults of parents or other relatives. Only 32.48% of primary and secondary school teachers had not encountered any form of aggressive behaviour towards themselves during their practice, which is not even one third of the respondents.
- From the research conducted in the Czech Republic in the conditions of the second grade of primary schools in 2010-2013 (Csémy et al., 2014), 52% of teachers stated that they had not encountered rude verbal aggression of pupils against their own person in the last year, 28.8% had encountered it 1 to 2 times a year, 19.2% of respondents confirmed a more frequent occurrence. Being the object of physical aggression by pupils in the last year was reported by 4.4% of teachers, 1.4% of them repeatedly.
- Niklová and Šajgalová (2016) conducted a research among the teachers of the second stage of primary schools in the Banská Bystrica and Žilina regions in Slovakia, as well as among experts working in the centres of pedagogical-psychological counselling and prevention. They found out that teachers with longer teaching experience reported the lowest incidence of aggressive behaviour of pupils towards them - in the research 1.29% of teachers with 21-25 years of teaching experience reported this, and up to 25% of teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience reported that they encounter aggression from pupils. 25.00% of the respondents (teachers) had experienced acts of aggressive behaviour by pupils towards themselves, and these were teachers with 6-10 years of teaching experience. The lowest occurrence of aggressive behavior of pupils towards themselves was reported by 1.29% of teachers with a length of educational experience of 21 - 25 years. Aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers did not occur in only 20.26% of the respondents.
- Research by Emmerová and Kohútová (2017) also confirmed the occurrence of this serious negative phenomenon. In their research conducted in 2016, they used a questionnaire of their own design, which included scaled questions (5-point scale - completely disagree to completely agree) and open-ended questions on the following areas: perception of aggression, the prevalence of forms of aggression, the reason for pupils' aggressive behavior, discipline, and teacher authority. 268 teachers participated in the research by available sampling. The results of the research showed that 85.4% of the teachers had experienced aggressive behaviour. The most common

manifestations were deliberate disturbance, ignoring and provoking. Based on the research conducted, we found out that the most common aggressive behaviours encountered by teachers were: deliberate disturbance, ignoring and provoking.

- In the Czech Republic, research on cyberbullying of teachers was conducted on a sample of 5136 primary and secondary school teachers (Kopecký, Szotkowski, 2017). They found out that 21.73% of teachers were victims of some form of cyberbullying. The most common forms of cyber attacks on teachers included verbal attacks through mobile phone or internet, harassment through name calling, threatening or intimidating through internet or mobile phone services, dissemination of humiliating, mocking or embarrassing photographs, and hacking of electronic accounts.
- The most recent research (Emmerová, 2023) was carried out in October 2022 to March 2023 using a questionnaire method among primary and secondary school teachers in Slovakia (N 384 respondents). Teachers most frequently encounter pupil insults during class and threats, followed by pupil insults outside of class. Physical assault by a pupil was experienced once by 40 teachers (10.42%) and repeatedly by 8 (2.08%). Threatening by a parent or guardian at least once was reported by 31 (8.07%) respondents and repeatedly by 43 (11.20%) teachers. Physical assault by them was experienced once by 17 respondents (4.43%).

The results clearly show significant changes that are related to the increase in negative aspects in the teaching profession. Pupils' indiscipline and aggressive behaviour take up teachers' time, disrupt the teaching process and provoke conflicts between teacher and pupil, often with the pupil's parents.

The predominant research method was a self-administered questionnaire, not a standardized questionnaire. Little attention was paid to cyberaggression against teachers. Differences were also noted when assessing the incidence of aggressive behaviour towards teachers in terms of timing - over the last school year, the last calendar year, or over the course of a teacher's career.

4 Conclusion

On the basis of the presented research results, we can confirm the occurrence of aggressive behaviour of pupils as well as their parents or legal guardians towards primary and secondary school teachers.

Prolonged psychological strain, caused by exposure to stressors or victimization, can result in experiencing stress, which negatively affects the mental and physical health of teachers, affecting their quality of life even in contradiction to the state of well-being. All this also affects their pedagogical performance.

The current social, political and economic situation in the world is full of rapid changes that bring fear and uncertainty. Global problems also affect education. The teaching profession is demanding and quite stressful. The difficulty is due, among other things, to the rapid development of knowledge, advances in information technology, the social evaluation of the teaching profession, including its financial evaluation, and the increase in socio-pathological phenomena in society, which are reflected in the problem behaviour of pupils (of varying intensity and severity). The satisfaction and well-being of teachers and other school employees is important not only for their mental health but also for the well-being of their pupils.

On a positive note, the health of our citizens, including young people, has been included in the current State Health Policy of the Slovak Republic through the document "Strategic Framework for Health 2030", which in the medium and long term determines the direction of the efforts of all components of society on health as a key factor in the development of society. The basic values underlying the State Health Policy in Slovakia are that health is a fundamental human right, that health is the

key to social development and that full development of health is only possible in a health-supportive environment - family, work, school. Only a mentally healthy population contributes to and develops society.

According to Dončevová (2021), factors related to school organization and school climate can improve and sustain job satisfaction in school. School leadership has an important position. The same qualities as a teacher has should be first of all possessed by the headmaster/principal if his/her management is to be useful and effective for all the actors of the educational process, he/she should possess qualities such as respect and dignity, objectivity and fairness, human approach, interest in the opinion of others and discussion with them, tolerance, ability to establish a healthy working relationship with the employees, to seek appropriate solutions for all and to be a positive role model, open and authentic.

Intensive and effective preventive work with pupils is extremely important. Within the framework of preventive activities, school action should be aimed at developing pupils' social competences with regard to the promotion of protective factors, the development of social perception, anger management, self-regulation, etc. It is important to implement various cooperative activities. According to Jablonský (2009, 2017) interpersonal skills, such as the ability to communicate and work in a team, are increasingly important. Danek (2022) emphasizes that it is necessary to eliminate indifference, disinterest or making light of negative life expressions and to use the possibilities and opportunities for shaping helpfulness towards people during the teaching of each subject.

When implementing the prevention of risk or problematic behaviour, it is necessary to emphasise its systematic and well-thought-out coordinated planning. Regular prevention activities are much more effective than a one-off activity. In schools, prevention can be implemented through various forms of preventive action. Ineffective prevention includes intimidation, emotional appeals, simple passing on information, one-off events, mass activities or showing films without discussion or small-group conversation. Do not implement ineffective prevention activities in schools.

The requirement for permanent training of teachers in the field of prevention of socio-pathological phenomena is becoming topical. Universities preparing future teachers should also prepare students to work with pupils with problem or risk behaviour and include the prevention of risk and problem pupil behaviour for all student of teaching.

In schools, it is necessary to eliminate risk behaviour of pupils and to implement activities to promote social relations between pupils in the classroom and between pupils and teachers. Regularly monitor the incidence of risky behaviour of pupils as well as the wellbeing of pupils and teachers. Establish professional staff positions in all schools to implement prevention at a professional level, to deal effectively with problematic or risky behaviour of pupils and to provide support and guidance in dealing with stressful situations for pupils and teachers.

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