# BULLYING AND BULLY IN SCHOOL SETTING AS THE ACTUAL PROBLEM OF EDUCATION IN SLOVAK REPUBLIC

**Miroslava Adamík  Šimegová**
Trnava University in Trnava, Slovakia
E-mail: mirka.simegova@centrum.sk

## Abstract

*This contribution is dealing with the problem of bullying as an intentional, repeated violence among pupils in school setting. Its goal is to discuss the specifics and the research of this weighty phenomenon in the worldwide context. It also brings the quantitative and qualitative research conclusions  focusing on bullying and bully in secondary school setting in Slovakia. The main goal of this research was to analyse the phenomenon of bullying with the focus on examining the social climate of classroom where bullying is present, the social position of aggressor, his personal characteristics, the way aggressor perceives bullying, aggression, and how aggressor evaluates his or her family background. As it results from this research, the most frequent place of bullying is classroom with a low cohesion and a bad emotional atmosphere. In classroom  aggressor has an ambivalent status, his position within a group is complicated, he belongs to the controversial pupils. There is an  ambivalent relationship between the group as a whole and the controversial pupils. Aggressors feel in classroom relatively good,  they show satisfaction with it. They are in a positive, optimistic and balanced mood. They are self-confident, self-reliant, spontaneous, relaxed, not controlling their behaviour. The increased rate of spontaneous and reactive agression was not proved. Aggressors consider bullying as something usual, they perceive their victims negatively, and they do not perceive their own behaviour  as „the real bullying". The aggressors who are not satisfied with their own family background, live in an incomplete family where parents are divorced, they evaluate their relationships with parents as conflicting and their relationship with father as more negative, and refer to this kind of relationship as to emotional emptiness, distruss and lack of interest.*
**Key words:** *bullying, bully, school setting, aggressor, social position of aggressor, personal characteristics of aggressor.*

## Introduction

The everyday school practise is convincing us that schools and classrooms are not isolated from violence, whereas school should be a place of safety and security for children and young people. The mission of a teacher is to bring up young people, he has the potential to act against violence, the possibility and duty to prevent the violence  in school and school area. However, it  is not possible not to notice the increasing attention given to the problem of violence, bullying, and victimization in schools. There have been published more publications dealing with this problem, regularly are being published articles, broadcasted TV programmes and there also have been sixs international conferences on the topic bullying so far. According to mass media, bullying is more widespread than people and experts think. Even if many people already perceive immense suffering, humiliation and stress of pupils of all ages caused by bullying, still more empirical facts are needed. There have been

created reserach projects of high quality in Europe and other different parts of the world in recent ten years. The goal of this contribution is to approach the character of this serious phenomenon in Slovak secondary schools by a conducted research study, focusing on bully in school setting.

## Statement of the Problem

Bullying and victimization are universal phenomena that are recognized and studied internationally. Groups of researchers around the world who are concerned about these behaviours and their impact on society are conducting important research to elucidate causes, concomitants, and outcomes of bullying behaviours and victimization (Nansel & Overpeck & Pilla & Ruan & Simons-Morton & Scheidt, 2001). First experts dealing with bullying were in Scandinavia in the early 70s. According to Olweus (1978) bullying includes a range of behaviours that result in an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim. Such behaviours include not only physical aggression but also verbal harassment and public humiliation (name-calling and spreading rumours). In 1983-85 Olweus (1993) was in leading position of campaign against bullying and the results of his well known intervention program „What We Can Do About Bullying" and the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (2001) have not been overcome yet. That is why the other programs originate more or less from his program. The largest intervention program in the UK was the DFE Sheffield project where the team worked with 23 schools in the 90s (1991-94, Smith & Sharp, 1995). During this study, there was a 17% reduction of bullying for primary schools, whilst there was a smaller reduction of 3-5% for secondary schools. There are several other US researches in this field which are well known (Hodges & Perry, 1999).The English researchers Smith & Brain (2000) offered a systematic view on the history of occurrence of bullying, the basis of bullying as well as the forms and effectiveness of the different intervention strategies. Smith & Brain collected facts about the problem of bullying in school setting from nine European countries. There is used another term in connection with bullying in scientific and popular literature, it is „victimization" (Hodges & Perry, 1999; Finnegan & Hodges & Perry, 1998; Egan & Perry, 1998; Crick & Bigbee, 1998 and others). Victimization means to tyrannnise or harm a specific victim (a school setting victim). In the world, in general, there is a still groving number of acts of violence and a quantitative growth of violence in school setting. Those acts are more brutal and the age of bullies is lower. Bullying and being bullied have been recognized as health problems for children because of their association with adjustment problems, including poor mental health and more extreme violent behaviour. It is therefore important to understand how bullying and being bullied affect the well-being and adaptive functioning of youth. (Juvonen & Graham, & Schuster, 2003). Crick & Bigbee (1998, pp. 337 – 347) focused in their research on specific boys and girls forms of victimization whereby they point out that in the past there was a tendency to examine only the boys and their specific forms of victimization. However, the forms of victimization of boys and girls are rather different. By boys there is a tendency to use the so called „overt form of victimization" and „overt aggression". For the overt aggression are typical physical attacks, which is for girls less characteristic. In a group of girls dominates the so called „relational form of victimization". Typical for this kind of victimization are verbal harassment, intriguing and exclusion from the group. However, both of the forms predetermine pupils to some specific problems relating to the adaptation to school setting. Interesting facts about the relationship between bully-victim were drawn in the research of Veenstra & Lindenberg & Zijlstra & Winter & Verhulst & Ormel (2007, pp.1843-1854). The authors examined the relation between the bully and the victim. They found out that the probability of the relationship bully-victim is higher when aggressor is more dominant and the victim more vulnerable, as well as when the victim is rejected by the group. A specifis situation arises by the chronic victims who create conditions for bullying by their anxious behaviour. In connection with the lowering age of bullies Smith & Madsen & Moody (1999, pp. 267 – 285) found out that on the one hand there is a tendency where pupils of lower age are bullying their classmates and on the other hand there is less bullying among older pupils in higher grades. This tendency occurs because older pupils have less opportunity to bully as the potential victims have more social skills and know how to protect themselves more effective. There is a rapid decline of bullying among pupils after reaching the age of fifteen which can be caused by the declining tendency of pupils to bully. Nowadays researchers, psychologists and teachers worldwide are dealing with the problem of bullying and this tendency is

rather stable. There is being conducted a research in the European countries, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. The awarness of this problem is being increased and it is being worked on the prevention programs. The problem of bullying now is not a taboo any more, it became a public problem which is promoted and discussed in media. And yet, sometimes, this problem is underestimated, simplified and not solved properly.

## The Specifics and the Research of Bullying in Slovakia

The Slovak researchers have been dealing with the problem of bullying for more than thirty years (Pavlovkin & Zelina, 1988, Kariková, 1988). The bullying is still present in our schools, it is growing quantitave and becoming new forms, mainly in terms of the psychical tyranny and cyber-bullying. In the Slovak and Czech scientific literature we can find contradictory explanations of reasons of bullying originating in school setting as well as contradictory possibilities how to solve it (Goldmanová, 1995; Kolář, 2001; Říčan, 1998; Elliotová, 1995; Pöthe, 1996; Tholtová & Žuffová & Sučáková, 2000). There is also a problem of the specialised competences of a psychologist (a school psychologist), advisor for upbringig, specialised teacher and teacher in solving bullying ( turma, 2002).The researches dealing with this problem, which have been done in recent years, try to understand the problem of bullying in school setting (mainly from the point of view of the occurrence of bullying) yet they are not dealing with the personality of pupil who is a bully. In general, there is a lack of available information concerning bullies and their personality. The bullying in school setting is analysed from:

- the psychological point of view, as a specific behaviour disorder, that is, problems of a pupil resulting from a weighty violation of relationships within a group;
- the pedagogical point of view as the problematic, or educational-problematic behaviour;
- the legal point of view and the point of view of the criminal code, as criminality commited by a child or a young person; in case the bully is a young person we can also talk about the juvenile delinquency.

The school setting bullying is specific because the mentioned aspects of its evaluation are blending and completing each other. This problem is complex and practically it is not possible to take the school setting bullying out of its pychological context of a problematic behaviour. Also it is not possible to leave out its legal nature and legal reach on our society. The bullying in classroom is a specific form of the violent behaviour, it is a problem resulting from a weighty violation of relationships within the group, an expression of misusing of position and power, a weighty behaviour disorder, a repeated and ongoing humiliating behaviour of an individual or a group against a weaker pupil (Vágnerová, 2005). The bullying is present in groups where the individuals are formally equal, in a relatively symetrical relationship (very often they are peers). In the research of bullying, there is a need of change of the point of view. There is the dyadic social relationships (aggressor - victim) focus of bullying which needs to be changed to the focus of group process. The solution of the group process focus lies in the knowledge of the personalities of pupils. Each effective defence has to come out of the knowledge of the rival, which is the same in school setting bullying. When we will understand the bully´s personality, his motivation, why he likes to bully and his behaviour, then we will be able to understand this phenomenon of bullying and to solve it effectively. We made the research on school setting bullying in Slovak schools, specifically on the atributtes of a bully, because there is a great need in our society to solve the problem of victimization in school, as well as the problem of growth of school violation in general and the increasing aggression of pupils. Even if there are many prevention programs, interventions, good quality pregradual preparation of our teachers and many possibilities of school training, focused on how to deal with the aggressive behaviour, for them, bullying ist still a present unmanageable problem in our school practise.

## Purpose of the Research

The main goal of the research was to analyse, understand and penetrate the basis of origin and

formation of the bullying phenomenon in school setting, the created relationships between bully and his victim.

In our research we focused on:

1. the social position of the aggressor;
2. the social climate of classroom in which bullying is present;
3. the personal characteristics of aggressor;
4. the way, how the agrressor by himself perceives bullying, aggression and the situations, when he harms other pupils;
5. how aggressor evaluates his family background.

## Methodology of Research

There was used the integrating quantitative-qualitative methodological approach in this research:

- It was used the depistage questionnaire for identifying of bullies in classrooms (Šimegová & Kariková, 2008). We examined the occurance and forms of bullying.
- For aims of examining the social climate in classroom, identifying the social positions of aggressors and how are aggressors perceived by their classmates we used following tools:
  1. The sociometric-rating questionnaire SO-RA-D (Hrabal, 1979).
  2. The questionnaire of social climate in classroom MCI – My Class Inventory (by authors: Fraser and Fischer) in translation by La ek & Mare (1991).This questionnaire was inintially set for pupils of 3. – 6. grade of primary schools. (In Slovakia the term primary school is used for children attending the school at the age of 7-15 years). However, this questionnaire was after the factor analysis used for pupils of secondary schools.
  3. The sociometric questionnaire according to the sociometry of J. L. Moreno (Gajdo ová, 2000).
- For getting to know the aggressor´s personality we used the more dimensional questionnaire FPI; Freiburg Personality Inventory; (Fahrenberg & Selg & Hampel) in translation by Kollárik (1970). FPI personality inventory examines personality characteristics in personality dimensions as follows: nervousness, spontaneous aggression, depressiveness, excitability, sociability, masculinity, reactive aggression, openness, extroversion, calmness, emotional lability.
- For aims of the analysis, understanding and penetrating into the essence of the origin and forming of the bullying phenomenon and the relationships which come into existence when being bullied, we used the method of the up-to-date semi-structured interview with the identified aggressors. Resulting from the goal of the research, we decided to use for the semi-structured interview following themes:
  1. Our classroom, my classmates, class teacher.
  2. Harming the pupils, the situation of bullying in classroom.
     The bullied pupils in our classroom. I am harming the other pupils, I am bullying.
  3. Aggression of people, aggression in different situations.
  4. My family background and the most significant influnces in my life.

The research sample selection was composed of pupils of both genders from secondary schools in Slovakia. Considering the research focus, the pupils were selected from vocational schools, were in the past the bullying was present for more times. The selection was intentional, purpose-built, representative from the point of view of the specificity of environment (resulting from qualitative method; Gavora, 2001; Miovský, 2006). On the primary research took part 149 pupils from all grades. The focus of this research was to idetify the social climate and the quality of the social relationshiops

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in classrooms, as well as the presence of aggressors, victims and pupils, who do not behave in the aggressive way. There were chosen two extreme groups of pupils from the research selection of pupils: pupils, who were identified by their classmates as the most aggressive and  asserting themselves in the social relationships, and those, who never behaved in an aggressive way and were not identified as aggressive pupils within classroom.

Collected quantitative data (from questionnaires) were evaluated and analysed by quantitative statistics methods (descriptive statistics – arithmetic mean diffusion, standard deviation, the median and modus, Pearson´s correlation analysis). Colected qualitative data (from semi-structured interview) were analysed by qualitative analysis. Recorded interviews were transcribed (interview transcripting) and the transcripts were coded into categories (coding and indexing of text-units) which were descriptive and interpretative followed by establishing and refining categories within data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## Results of Research

*The occurance and forms of bullying at the secondary schools.*

According to the research, there is almost  19 % of pupils in some way, on a long term basis, repeatedly and systematically  bullied during their studies. This corresponds with the existing research findings of experts who examined the occurance of bullying, approximately 10 – 30 % of pupils. Because some of the researches were conducted twenty years ago, (Kariková, 1988, the victims of bullying: 9,7 – 13,9 % pupils of vocational schools), we can say that the occurence of bullying on vocational schools does not have the decreasing but the increasing tendency. By occurence of bullying in school setting it is important to distinguish the number of  pupils who have been confronted with bullying, it does mean that they have been  witnesses, eventually victims, and those who acknowledged that they have been  victims of bullying. We consider the second fact as more exact. The most frequent place of bullying is *classroom*. This fact is considered to be important and  at the same time underestimated, as bullying often happens also during the teacher´s presence in classroom.

The majority of victims does not confide the fact of being bullied to anybody. The teachers solve bullying in schools only partially, however the educators in youth houses solve this problem more effectively. The most frequent forms of bullying which are the pupils of vocational schools confronted with, are the physical forms such as punching, kicking, slapping, jostling and pushing. The psychical forms of bullying (37 %) are becoming the most different forms and have different names. The most commonly they are viewed as the psychical harming- 22,7 % and verbal harassment in form of swearing – 12,3 %. Very often there are the forms such as mocking, jeering, humiliating, psychical harassment, extorting and verbal harassment. Within the psychical forms of bullying there is also a very simple understanding of being bullied such as „harming" or „annoying somebody". Pupils are often confronted also with a form of bullying connected with property (extorting) and with specifis (ritualistic) forms of physical or psychical bullying.

*The social climate of classroom and the evaluation of aggressor´s position.*

1. Aggressor is an influential pupil, he is not significantly popular among his classmates but also not unpopular, he is of a lower index of inclination (he shows less sympathy to his classmates – acceptance- as the other pupils).

2. In classrooms there was statistically confirmed low cohesion (classes are not cohesive enough) and low emotional atmosphere (there dominates rather negative emotional atmosphere).

3. Aggressor has an ambivalent status within classroom, he can be a significantly popular pupil (in the positive way) or rather unpopular (in the negative way).As he belongs to the controversial pupils, his status within the group is complicated. The group has an ambivalent relationship to the controversial pupils. A positive acceptance of aggressor can be explained in the way that his classmates want to belong to the group around him,

they want to win his confidence and at the same time a part of his power.

4.  In verbal evaluation are aggressors evaluated by their classmates ambivalent. It can be in the negative way:

    -   emotionally colouered evaluation („conceited, unsympathetic, conflicting, insolent, contradictory, disagreeable, arrogant, boring, I have a bad experience with him, I do not like him, I hate him, I avoid him, he is mocking everybody, intruding, nagging at everybody“); there are the characteristics which indicate the power of a bully („he enforces influence, he always achieves what he wants, the other pupils respect him,“). There are some positive evaluations from the other bullies and pupils of opposite gender („he is chilled out, a friend, sympathetic, he gives an advice, he helps, is reliable, honest, hardworking, we understand each other, a normal guy“). The positive characteristic which is often evalueted in the positive way is that aggressors are amusing and therefore popular (the most often they are evaluated with the statement: „amusing“).

5.  Aggressors feel in classroom relatively good, they show a higher satisfaction and in comparison with the other pupils they evaluate class as a more cohesive group. They are the source of fun for their classmates. We also noticed in an interview, they percieve class in a positive way, which is supported by humour, amusement and „fun“. Paradoxically, this way of perceiving is blending with the way of perceiving the conflicts, tension and problems and is connected to the particular pupils, often their victims.

6.  There are more separated groups within classroom what enables conflicts and tension. Aggressors have in classroom classmates whom they considered as being their friends and whom they partly trust in, however, there dominates also the self-confidence of aggressors.

*The personality of bully*

•   In the personality of aggressor we statistically noticed a decreased score in dimensions of personality: depression, restraint and the emotional instability.

•   Aggressors have mostly a positive, optimistic and balanced mood, they are self-confident, self-opiniated, they are able to have contact to the other people, they are confident with themselves, spontaneous, carefree. They act sure, are ready to any action, they like experimenting and go-getting.

•   In the personality of aggressor we statistically noticed an incresed score in dimensions of sociability – fellowship, mildness – calmness, extroversion, masculinity. Aggressors need to contact people, they are fellow, sociable, impulsive, talkative, they form friendships easily and know many people. They are brisk, go-getting, active and prompt. They view themselves also as infallible, able to achieve something (also physically), they easy bear stress, are agile, and like to use an opportunity quickly.They like change and fun, to dominate and take the lead.

•   Sometimes they do not control themselves. They mention few physical and psychosomatic difficulties and anxiety. Because of these characteristics, they are respected and popular with their classmates, have a higher sociometric status in classroom which enables them a better manipulation with their classmates and this caused that aggressor also reflects a higher satisfaction with classroom.

•   There was not proved any higher rate of spontaneous and reactive aggression, aggressors are not more aggressive individuals than their peers.

•   They are confronted with aggression mostly within groups of their friends (often there are the movements such as „skinheads“, „hooligans“, etc.). They also perceive aggression in connection with the use of alcohol and drugs. Aggressors really appreciate the value of friendship, friends and when something is done for them.

- Aggressors acknowledge some features of the aggression in their own behaviour and as a reason of aggression they mention their impulsiveness, choleric temper, unability to control themselves. Aggressors consider stubborness and uncompromising asserting and handling wih people as being a good characteristic.
- They try to behave as people wish to, in the sense of prosocial behaviour.

*Subjective view of aggressors on the bullying in classroom*

- Aggressors view bullying in schools as something normal (usual), as somethig which a pupil must go through and „suffer". They have the tendency of making it easy, denying it or apologizeing this behaviour as „just making fun". According to aggressors, this is not bullying in the right sense of word (military bullying), but rather a kind of amusement and „fun" which is supported by the victim himself. They move the responsibility for bullying to classroom- to all pupils; according to aggressors, in bullying there is a person who initiates it, but the most often, they move the responsibility to the victim. As they say, if it was a real bullying, they would even punish bullies, they take over the competences for solving this problem within classroom. Bullying in school is supported by anxiety of victims and observers (witnesses) to give evidence.
- Victims of bullying are perceived by aggressors in a negative way. According to aggressors the victims are provoking, have their own special expression, are handicapped, or have ridiculous appearance, are not communicative, quiet pupils- solitaries with imprudent and hotheading behaviour. Aggressors acuse of bullying those victims, who are anxious and do not defend themselves sufficiently. Bullies would advise victims to defend themselves more effectively.
- Aggressors do not consider their behaviour as bullying, they consider it as a physical and psychical joking-kidding. They do not realise (they do not remember) that they are bullying because the victim perceives this kind of behaviour as „fun". In this way victim supports the aggressor´s behaviour. Some aggressors claim they were being bullied in the past. In the direct confrontation they apologise for their behaviour by being too much active, impulsive, unable to control themselves.

*Evaluation of family background*

We noticed two different views of aggressors on their family background. The aggressors who are satisfied with their family background, living in a complete family - evaluate the relationships with their parents as equal and the educational activity of their parents as good; parents have the same requirements and the same educational- partly spoiling influence. Aggressors who are not satisfied with their family background, living in an incomplete family – mostly divorced parents – evaluate the relationships with their parents as conflicting. They evaluate the relationship to their father as more negative, there is emotional emptiness, distruss and lack of interest. The interaction with the family environment is by some bullies indifferent to the family members, there is as lack of interest for family, they do not want to talk about their family. However, they think that family, childhood and separation in form of divorce or breaking-up of their parents is the most significant factor in forming of their personality and behaviour. A very important role plays also a reference group which is a dangerous one - friends with problematic behaviour inside school as well as outside.

## Recommendations

Negative emotional atmosphere and a low cohesion of class significantly increases the possibility of bullying. Bullying is an expression of violated relationships within class. Nowadays we consider the fact of prevention of bullying as a very urgent one. Prevention is composed of knowing about bullying, its revelation and effective solving. The availability of methods which can be used for prevention of bullying, as well as the possibilities for better examination of it, is considered to

be sufficient. To the competences of teachers belong to use the methods such as depistage question-naires, for identification of bullying and the sociometric questionnaires. The teacher´s orientation in the events within class is from the point of view of prevention of bullying essential. The teacher has a possibility to diagnose the relationships in group which enables him to make the situation more transparent and make a current view on the quality of relationships within class. The intervention of class teacher and a psychologist in the case of the first problems in relationships within class is an effective tool how to stop bullying at its beginning. Together with the long-time and systematic influence of the educators-teachers it is possible to achieve some positive changes. It is important to condemn, express maximal intolerance against bullying. But at the same time we should be ready for bullying. Bullying should not be understood as a problem of individuals though as a problem of a group and of the relationships within it. When solving the problem of bullying, we should use reso-lute decisions and keep the sanctions set in advance. In every classroom it is neccessary to promote that bullying is not something normal, it is a form of aggression and that no pupil is compulsory to suffer it. It is dangerous to make bullying easier, to deny or apologise it. An effective way how to stop bullying and violation among pupils is making a whole school program against bullying into which would be engaged all the persons educating and bringing up children. Within the frame of pregradual preparation of future teachers it should be given to them a sufficient amount of information dealing with this problem. This information should include the identification of problem, prevention, as well as the possibility of its intervention. Passing a special subject or a training, focused on adopting the skills useful for solving and handling the bullying in school setting, could help the future teachers to help to gain competencies of better quality in their future pedagogical practise. Very necessary is also to cooperate with pupils who are being bullied because their social skills and competences can be developed and their self-confidence can be strengthened. They must train their skills how to defend themselves against aggressive behaviour, train their assertive behaviour and how to solve the conflicts. The prevention and intervention demand only qualified experts, that is why we consider that the presence and work of a school psychologist in school is an inevitable requirement when we want to eliminate bullying effectively.

## Conclusion

Aggressors are influential, not always popular pupils, with ambivalent social status, they show less sympathy to the other pupils in class; they are sociable, extrovert, open with masculine self description. Aggression, as a personal characteristic, is by aggressors not significantly increased, however aggressors as influential pupils have the ability to manipulate their environment. The po-tential of the influence and characterictics of aggressors is possible to use in practise in a positive way, in the sense of its transformation into the activities in classroom, e.g. into the mediation of conflicts. An effective peer mediator can become an influential pupil who is respected by the other classmates. Problematic can be his ambivalent status, actually the ambivalent relatiosnhips of his classmates against him. We consider the negative influence of reference groups and youth move-ments, with problematic behaviour, on aggressors as dangerous. Those groups often provide the young people with emotional background which they miss in the original environment. They can provide aggressor with fellowship, personal importance and protection. However, their influence on a young person, as well as their activities for society are destructive. Quantitatively and qualitatively increasing aggression of young people in our society is related to alcohol and drug consumption. We consider to perceive the prevention of aggressive behaviour and bullying as directly connected to the prevention of sociol-pathological phenomenon, addictions and prevention of membership in aggressive destructive groups.

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*Adviced by Ladislav Požar,*
*Trnava University, Slovakia*

**Miroslava Adamík Šimegová**   Lecturer at Faculty of Education, Trnava University in Trnava, Priemyselná 4, 918 43 Trnava, Slovakia.
Phone: +421 918 495169.
E-mail: mirka.simegova@centrum.sk
Website: http://www.truni.sk