
BULLYING, A DISTURBING PHENOMENON PRESENT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN MACEDONIA

Mariana Prilepchanska Krupishki

OOU 'Vancho Prke' – Shtip, Republic of North Macedonia, mprilepcanska@yahoo.com

Jasminka Durdubakova

OOU 'Vancho Prke' – Shtip, Republic of North Macedonia, jasminkad@yahoo.com

Abstract: No country is immune to bullying crisis. This is one of the reasons why most people in institutions, media and agencies spread the message that bullying has adverse effects on both victims and many other things as well. Where did the word "bullying" come from? The term originates from the Middle Dutch word "boele," which translates to "lover." Initially, in English, "bully" referred to a "sweetheart." Over time, its meaning broadened to signify "fine fellow," and ultimately evolved to denote the contrary: "swaggering coward." This latter usage of "bully" emerged around the 1700s. But what is bullying? Bullying is the verbal or physical bullying of another student by one or several classmates in his own class. The target is repeatedly bullied or battered and generally this individual feels fearful-there is never any security, he/she is always at a disadvantage, all alone. The concepts of "bullying," "harassment," and "peer victimization" are frequently referenced in academic literature to describe behaviors characterized by aggression, which are executed repeatedly over a period and occur within interpersonal relationships marked by a power disparity (Eisenberg and Aalsma, 2005). While there is some overlap in the usage of these terms within the literature, peer victimization specifically refers to the aggressive actions of one child directed towards another, resulting in physical, emotional, social, or psychological damage. A report published in 2012 by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children highlights that over one billion children globally are enrolled in educational institutions. While many of these children benefit from the right to learn in a secure and encouraging environment, a significant number do not have access to such conditions. These boys and girls face various forms of violence, including bullying, sexual and gender-based violence, corporal punishment, and other abusive behaviors. Bullying refers to any unwelcome aggressive actions exhibited by an individual or a group of individuals who are not siblings or current romantic partners. This behavior is characterized by a discernible or perceived imbalance of power and occurs repeatedly or has a high probability of recurrence. The impact of bullying can cause significant harm or distress to the victimized youth, which may manifest in physical, psychological, social, or educational forms. Additionally, they are often subjected to physical confrontations in schoolyards, gang-related violence, assaults involving weapons, and peer-to-peer sexual and gender-based violence. Furthermore, emerging forms of violence, particularly cyberbullying through mobile devices, computers, websites, and social media platforms, are increasingly impacting the lives of children. The issue of peer violence has become an integral part of children's lives in Macedonia from a very young age. Recent years have seen numerous studies confirming this daily reality, while media reports frequently highlight cases that indicate the situation is becoming increasingly alarming. To emphasize the significance of this pressing issue and to propose a pathway towards a gradual resolution, "Makpetrol" has launched the educational campaign "Raise Your Voice Against Peer Violence."

Keywords: Bullying, education, students, violence.

1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying represents a manifestation of direct violence that many individuals observe from an early age. It encompasses any persistent negative behavior that causes an individual to feel belittled, inadequate, or unsafe. Physical bullying can involve actions such as pinching, spitting, hitting, kicking, pushing, or punching, as well as the destruction or damage of personal belongings. On the other hand, verbal bullying consists of severe and repeated teasing, name-calling, or threats aimed at inflicting harm on the victim or their loved ones.

2. HISTORY

School bullying, often referred to as school violence, originates from the English term "bullying" and was first utilized in Taiwan, China. This phenomenon represents a form of aggressive behavior characterized by a clear intent to harm. The context of school bullying is primarily situated within the educational environment, where the primary participants are groups of students; however, it can also involve instances of bullying between teachers and students. Such behavior constitutes a form of collective abuse, where a group systematically targets and harasses an individual student or a small group of students over an extended period. This behavior is marked by its repetitive nature and duration, ultimately categorizing it as a form of juvenile delinquency manifesting in various ways within the school setting.

3. DEFINITION OF BULLYING

Research on bullying began more than forty years ago, defining the behavior as aggressive, intentional acts carried out by an individual or group consistently over time against a victim who is unable to effectively defend themselves. While there has been some debate over the definition, researchers generally agree that bullying involves a deliberate intent to cause harm, an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim, and occurs repeatedly. Definition of bullying Olweus, a leading figure in this field of study, characterized bullying or victimization as situations in which a child is subjected, consistently and over an extended period, to negative actions from one or more peers. According to Olweus (1993), bullying is “any repetitive negative behavior that one or more people do to someone weaker than themselves”. This definition emphasized both the physical aspects of the behavior (such as hitting, pushing, and pulling) and the verbal components (including teasing, threatening, and using derogatory names). Furthermore, bullying may also manifest through more subtle behaviors, such as social exclusion and the dissemination of rumors. Olweus outlined three key criteria for bullying:

- 1) it involves aggressive behavior or intentional harm,
- 2) it occurs repeatedly and over time, and
- 3) it transpires within an interpersonal relationship marked by a power imbalance.

4. UNDERSTANDING BULLYING

Bullying encompasses various forms, including physical, verbal, indirect, and emotional abuse, and can be perpetrated by an individual or a collective of students. Victims of bullying typically experience the following:

- Physical assaults such as hitting
- Repeated acts of kicking or punching
- Pushing or pulling
- Intimidating threats
- Persistent teasing
- Derogatory name-calling
- Insults directed at them or their family
- Any form of verbal maltreatment
- The dissemination of falsehoods and rumors about them
- The receipt of malicious notes
- Social exclusion from groups and activities
- Intentional damage to their belongings
- Coercion to surrender money or possessions through intimidation.

Although bullying is also a type of aggression, it is not enough for any behavior to be defined as bullying to include simple aggressive actions. It should include features such as the presence of power imbalance between the parties, its repetition, and deliberate action (Olweus, 1999).

5. BULLYING IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN THE R.N. MACEDONIA

Research indicates that bullying is a widely studied phenomenon within the disciplines of education and psychology. It is evident that this issue transcends cultural boundaries, affecting individuals of various genders and ages, with its repercussions observable across multiple aspects of life. Notably, no study has been identified that lacks evidence of bullying, regardless of the educational background or age of the participants, in any country. Violence in educational settings often reflects the dynamics found in both the home and the wider community. In our country, recent studies have confirmed this pattern of daily life in recent years, and the incidents often reported by the media suggest that the situation surrounding this issue is increasingly alarming. Around 70% of children between the ages of 2 and 14 experience violent disciplinary practices at home, such as physical punishment and psychological aggression. Children who suffer from ongoing bullying or other forms of violence in schools are more likely to replicate that violence at home, while also experiencing lasting psychological damage. It is crucial to understand that bullying often acts as a cry for help, as those who exhibit violent behavior are frequently victims of violence themselves. The survey findings from North Macedonia indicate that parents frequently learn about the bullying and/or online violence their children experience only after others have already become aware of the situation.

6. CAMPAIGN AGAINST BULLYING

Facts speak for themselves that bullying should be treated from an early age. Traditionally, it was thought that children would naturally overcome the negative impacts of peer violence as they grew older. However, recent findings have revealed the deep and lasting consequences that can arise from these experiences. Numerous scientific studies support the idea that the effects of bullying are real and can result in serious psychological, emotional, and

physical difficulties later in life. For children who are directly or indirectly involved in peer violence, immediate changes may be noticeable; however, the long-term effects can endure for many years after these traumatic events. In our country, peer violence is an alarming problem that has been ignored for too long. In order to point out the importance of this hot topic, but also to offer a way to gradually reach a solution, "Makpetrol" decided to start this campaign and launched the educational campaign "Raise your voice against peer violence". The campaign is aimed at the entire public in Macedonia, and one of its main goals is to encourage changes in the way bullying is understood, but also what steps should be taken to recognize and prevent this behavior. To change this, for all of us – parents, teachers, and children – to learn to react in time. They are aware that this is too big a problem for which there is no quick solution, but they are convinced that with this step of ours, the confrontation with peer violence will begin. The educational campaign consists of multiple components, with the website *kreniglas.mk* being its most crucial and prominent element. This website aims to disseminate knowledge to all stakeholders involved in addressing the issue of peer violence, including children, parents, and educators. Equally important, the website provides a platform for individuals who have been victims of bullying or have encountered such experiences to share their stories anonymously.

5. CONCLUSION

Numerous researches indicate that students who frequently experience bullying exhibit significant stress and related symptoms. This is evidenced by the observation that victims tend to have lower academic performance, may be perceived as physically unappealing, and often hesitate to report their experiences to teachers and parents. In contrast, educators often regard bullying as a common behavioral issue, leading to a lack of necessary attention and formal regulations. The implications of these studies suggest that healthcare professionals, particularly nurses, can recognize victims by assessing both their physical and psychological complaints, as well as any behavioral changes associated with bullying. Future campaigns should concentrate on empowering victims, particularly in areas such as self-identification, the courage to report incidents, and assertiveness in confronting bullying. The challenges that may seem daunting at first often become more manageable, allowing for a more organized approach to tasks. It is vital to cultivate a positive attitude towards peers and boost children's self-confidence, as this lays the groundwork for future interventions. For lasting success, it is important that these students find motivation both in school and at home, empowering them to succeed independently in society. Each challenge we encounter, when genuinely embraced, serves to enhance our character. In my experience, I have gained significant knowledge, particularly in practical aspects, as well as insights into bullying and student engagement within the educational environment. However, the most profound awakening has come from direct interactions with the students, which have illuminated their unique challenges, opportunities, and potential. I think there is still a significant amount of work to be done; however, any effort pursued with love, persistence, and complete dedication will produce valuable and meaningful outcomes. The most important thing is to work on raising awareness and changing students' attitudes towards bullying. We should work to create a mentally healthy environment in primary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia as well as equal opportunities for everyone by developing modern treatments, by adapting the conditions at home, in schools, at workplaces. In the end, we can conclude that each student is unique, individual, for himself/herself and children, in general, will be much happier if bullying is reduced.

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