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School bullying: definition, characteristics, and intervention strategies

Mihai CURELARU¹, Ioan IACOB², Beatrice ABĂLAȘEI³

Abstract

The bullying is one of the most frequent forms of school violence which affects about one third of the students' population. Within the present paper, we wanted to present a short synthesis regarding the stage of the researches from the area by first analyzing the prevalence of the school violence and the existing differences according to variables like age and sex. Then, we proposed a conceptual clarification starting from the most well-known definitions and we described the main forms of bullying: physical, verbal and relational. Also, we presented the psychological profile of the bully and of the victim, the way in which they are perceived by their mates and the main consequences of victimization. Within the last part, we described the most frequently used actions for the diminution of the school violence, based on the suggestions made by different authors and that can be found in the majority of the mainly used intervention programs. In the end, we presented the situation in Romania regarding the main scientific researches made until now, as well as the strategy elaborated by the Romanian officials for the combating and prevention of the school violence.

Keywords: *bullying, violence, aggression, prevention, school*

Today, all over the world, from 15 to 30% of the students are affected by the bullying phenomenon, as most of the studies made in schools on this theme show (see for details Piskin, 2002, p. 557). This phenomenon refers to multiple forms

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of physical and/or psychological aggression over other students, repeatedly, in a certain period of time (Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

Many social factors that are involved are interested in the exploration of the manifestations and the causes of the school violence and among these, the most preoccupied are the managerial teams of the schools, the teachers, the school psychologists, the police authorities, as well as the students. Thus, the results of a survey realized in 1984 by *National Association of Secondary School Principals*, showed that over 25% of the students consider that one of the most important worries regarding the school refers to “the fear of the bullies” (Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

Regarding the study of the consequences, in the older approaches of the school violence, the stress was put on the victims and on the school environment exclusively. But the more recent researches show that the school violence has unfavorable psychological consequences both over the victims and over the bullies (Hazler, 1994). Moreover, certain studies over the bullying and sexual harassment from the working place show that these behaviors are originated from practices from the school period (Rayner, 1997; O’Moore, Seigne, McGuire, and Smith, 1998).

Through this synthetic study, we proposed ourselves to explore the complex phenomenon of the school bullying, delimitating its conceptual area, showing the main characteristics, expansion and manifestation forms. There will also be described the psychological profiles of the main involved actors (victims and bullies), and some of the most well-known strategies of social intervention. We will conclude by presenting the situation in our country both at the level of the research and of the national strategy of combating this phenomenon.

The Extent of the Phenomenon

The researches regarding the school violence began in the 8th decade of the past century, through the inquests made by the Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus. The publishing of his first important paper on this theme, *Aggression in the Schools: Bullies and Whipping Boys* (1978), draws the attention of the scientific community over this relatively neglected behavior until that period. But it is in 1982 when this phenomenon sensitizes the authorities after the suicide of three students who were exasperated by the harassment they have been submitted to by their mates. After this event, Olweus leads a major survey on a population of 130,000 students, coming from 715 schools from Norway (Olweus, 1991a, 1993, 1994). The data obtained from this study show that about 15% of the Norwegian students between 7-16 years old were involved in bullying issues (either as aggressors, as victims, or both). From the total of the investigated sample, about

9% were victims, 7% aggressors and 1.6% both victims and aggressors (17% of the total of the victims). Also, 5% of them have been involved in more serious bullying issues, meaning that they have been aggressed once a week or even more frequently (Olweus, 1994).

During the next period, the researches over this phenomenon expanded to other countries as well, like England and Wales (Stephenson and Smith, 1987; Lane, 1989; Smith, 1991; Boulton and Underwood, 1992; Whitney and Smith, 1993), Ireland (O'Moore, Kirkham, and Smith, 1997), Finland (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Berts, and King, 1982), Norway (Roland and Idsøe, 2001), the Netherlands (Junger-Tas, 1999), United States (Perry, Kusel, and Perry, 1988; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, and Scheidt, 2001), Japan (Murakami, 1985; Morita, Soeda, Soeda, and Taki, 1999), Canada (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995), and Australia (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Slee, 1994; Rigby and Slee, 1999).

Regarding the percentage of the directly involved persons (bullies and victims), the results oscillate between 15% and 30% from the population of students, depending on country, age, sex etc. For example, in a survey made in England, Stephenson and Smith (1987) showed that, from the total of the students who participated to the study, 10% have been identified as bullies, 7% declared themselves to be victims of the bullying and 6% obtained characteristics of both victims and bullies. In the same country, a few years later, Smith (1991), found 20% of the students to be victims of the bullying and 10% to be aggressors. More recently, in the U.S.A., through a national survey whose data were published in 2001, it was discovered that 29.9% of the students who participated to the study were involved either as perpetrator (13%), victim (10.6%) or bully-victim (6%), in bullying issues (Nansel et. al, 2001).

Definition and Characteristics

The school bullying is one of the school violence forms, the most frequent form. Generally speaking, in the specialty literature, the bullying is defined as a repeated violent act that takes place between persons who generally have an equal status, for example school mates or work colleagues. But, even from the last decade, within this research area, there have been taken into account various forms of aggressions caused by the students over the teachers or by the teachers over the students (Smith, 2004). For example, the results of a survey realized by Johnston, O'Malley and Bencham (1993), quoted by Batsche and Knoff (1994), showed that in the U.S.A. 28% of the teachers from the public schools have been verbally aggressed, 15% were threatened under different forms and 3% were physically aggressed. But these last reports of bullying (student-teacher or teacher-student) are rarely taken into consideration by the researchers when defining the concept. Therefore, within the following considerations, we will admit that,

generally speaking, the term of bullying is resumed to the student-student relation and it represents only a part of the larger research area of school violence. The latter would also comprise the other forms of school violence, like the teacher – student violence, the student – teacher violence, the perturbation of the classes (the absence, the silence perturbation etc.) and the destruction of the school goods (the deterioration, the theft etc.).

Olweus (1994, 1999) considers that any definition of the *bullying* phenomenon must comprise three criteria: (1) the fact that it is an aggressive behavior meant to hurt someone, (2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time and (3) it takes place within a personal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power (an asymmetric power relationship). In his opinion, “a student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more students” (1999, p. 31). Also, Olweus (1993, 1994) considers that one can make the distinction between the *direct bullying/victimization* (with relatively open attacks on the victim) and *indirect bullying/victimization* (social isolation and intentional exclusion from a group).

Ken Rigby distinguishes two senses of the term of „bullying”. The first sense, more expanded, is that of systematic abuse of power (Rigby, 2002). By the other sense, more restrained, „bullying is repeated oppression, psychological or physical, of a less powerful person by a more powerful person or group of persons” (Rigby, 2007, p.15). The violent act is characterized, in Rigby’s opinion, by the following elements: (1) an initial intention of hurting (2) the express desire to act (3) the touching or hurting of someone (4) the beginning of the behavior by an individual or by a stronger group against someone who is less powerful (5) the lack of justification of the action (6) the recurrence of the act, and (7) the producing of a searched pleasure (Rigby, 2007).

Elinoff, Chafouleas, and Sassu (2004) consider the bullying to be an aggressive individual or group behavior, characterized through direct hostility towards the others, *proactive* (the initiation of the action without any provocation) or *reactive* (as an answer to the action initiated by someone else), *direct* (for example, open attack) or *indirect* (for example, isolation or exclusion) hostility.

Finally, for Lines (2008) „bullying behavior is continual physical, psychological, social, verbal or emotional methods of intimidation by an individual or group. Bullying is any action such as hitting or name-calling that makes you feel angry, hurt or upset” (p.19).

From the before mentioned definitions, one can extract a few elements that are characteristic for the conceptual clarification of this phenomenon, elements that can be identified through several approaches. We excluded any reference to the manifestation forms because we do not consider their presence to be necessary in a minimal definition. In fact, within the following section of this paper we will

detail this subject as well. In the following table we have synthesized these data, taking into account the characteristic element and the author that sustained it (see table 1).

Table 1. Characteristic elements for the bullying

	Characteristic element	Author (s)
Category	A form of aggression	Dodge (1991), Olweus (1993), Rivers and Smith (1994), Batsche, Knoff (1994), Rigby and Slee (1999), Elinoff, Chafouleas, and Sassu (2004)
	A form of violence	Roland (1989)
	A form of oppression	Rigby (2007)
	Repeatedly (systematic character)	Besag (1993), Batsche and Knoff (1994), Smith and Sharp (1994), Olweus (1999), Espelage and Swearer (2003), Rigby (2007)
Time, frequency	A certain period of time, a longer period of time	Roland (1989), Hazler and Hoover (1993), Batsche and Knoff (1994), Olweus (1993, 1994, 1999)
	Exposure to negative actions *	Olweus (1993, 1994, 1999), Elinoff, Chafouleas, and Sassu (2004)
Content	Abuse of power	Smith and Sharp (1994), Rigby (2002)
	Hurtful action	Rigby (2002)
	Method of intimidation	Lines (2008)
	Harassment	Hazler and Hoover (1993)
Relation	Direct hostility towards the others	Elinoff, Chafouleas, and Sassu (2004)
	Imbalance of strength or power	Olweus (1994, 1999), Besag (1993), Nansel et al. (2001), Farrington (1993) Rigby (2002, 2003, 2007)
Target	To hurt for unjustified reasons	Olweus (1994, 1999), Rigby (2002, 2007)
	The provocation of a pleasure, of a satisfaction	Rigby (2007)
	The obtaining of a prestigious gain (dominancy, power, status) or goods	Espelage and Swearer (2003)

Note: „It is negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another – basically what is implied in the definition of aggressive behavior in the social sciences” (Olweus, 2002).

Forms of Bullying

There were also studied the most frequent types or forms of bullying and there were proposed several classifications, like the nature of the act (verbal/physical), the distance rapport with the aggressor (direct/indirect), the number of persons (individual/group), the obnoxiousness (malign/non-malign) and the type of reaction (proactive/reactive).

As about the frequency, the most common types of school violence are the teasing and the name calling, followed by the hitting, the kicking, and the threatening (Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler, 1992; Sharp and Smith, 1994). As about the proper manifestation forms, most of the classifications divide the violent behaviors into two great categories: *direct aggression* versus *indirect aggression* (Olweus, 1991; 1993; Björqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen, 1992; Rivers and Smith, 1994; Craig, Henderson, and Murphy, 2000) or *overt* versus *covert aggression* (Crick, 1995; Crick, Casas, and Ku, 1999). The latter does not imply the face-to-face confrontation, but the presence of a third-party, towards which the respective person is denigrated (the lick, the rumor spreading etc.).

Rigby (2007) proposes a classification in which he crosses two criteria. In the following table we took the two dimensions proposed by Rigby and we systematized the various manifestations of the school violence met in the specialty literature (see table 2).

It is hard to classify the bullying behaviors because some of them can be put in both categories. For example, the name calling is considered to be both a form of direct bullying and of indirect bullying, obviously depending on the context. Then, the threatening is a behavior that usually implies a face-to-face rapport, but it can take all the three modalities of the direct bullying (physical, verbal, non-verbal). Even more, it can be a form of indirect verbal violence when, for example, someone is threatened through another person.

Lately, new forms of bullying are being investigated. One of them is the *relational aggression*, which refers to the bullying exercised over the social relation, in order to compromise, destroy or manipulate it (Crick and Grotpeter, 1996; Crick and Nelson, 2002). Another form is the one called *social aggression*, which represents the deterioration or the compromising of the self-esteem, of the reputation or of the social status (Smith, 2004). The last and the most interesting modality of bullying, explored within this decade, is called by the researchers the *cyberbullying*. For example, Smith (2004) reports the data obtained through a survey with 656 participants, between 11 and 19 years old. The results show that 16% of the participants received threatening electronic messages, 7% were harassed in internet chat rooms, and 4% by email. In another survey, having a number of 360 teen-age participants between 12 and 20 years old, Slonje and Smith (2008) investigated four categories of cyberbullying. The results show that

there are little differences from the perspective of the involved variables, but it was underlined the fact that the impact of cyberbullying was perceived as highly negative for picture/video clip bullying in comparison with the other forms.

Table 2. Forms of bullying

	Direct	Indirect
Physical	Physically assaulting, Hitting, Spitting, Kicking, Slapping, Tripping, Throwing stones, Pulling, Pushing, Damaging victim's property, Stealing things, Gun threatening, Touching or grabbing in sexual way etc.	Getting another person to assault someone etc.
	Verbal	Persuading another person to insult someone, Slandering, Making racial slurs, Spreading malicious rumors, Gossiping, Manipulation of friendships etc.
Non-physical	Non- verbal	Removing and hiding belongings, Deliberate excluding from a group or activity, Rejecting, Social marginalization, Silent treatment, Ostracizing etc.

The Impact of Certain Variables: the Age and the Gender

Numerous studies approached the possible differences regarding the involvement of the students in bullying, from the perspective of variables like the age and the gender. Regarding the first mentioned aspect, the results show that generally speaking the bullying cases reported for the boys are more numerous than in the case of the girls, for the primary and secondary education level. The boys are both victims and aggressors in a higher amount in comparison with the girls. The results of a research made by Boulton and Underwood (1992) show that 65% from the cases of bullying have as authors the boys, 15% girls and 19% both boys and girls.

From the point of view of the physical aggression/relational aggression rapport, the girls practice the relational aggression in a higher percentage than the physical aggression, while in the case of the boys the two forms manifest themselves around the same percentage (Young, Boye and Nelson, 2006). Therefore, the bullying of the girls has a less direct character than the bullying of the boys. The girls practice a more subtle bullying, among the most frequent forms being the rumor spreading, the gossip, the rejection, the social exclusion, and the manipulation of the social relationships (Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, and Peltonen, 1988; Rigby and Slee, 1991; Whitney and Smith, 1993; Ahmad and Smith, 1994; Smith and Sharp, 1994; Rivers and Smith, 1994; Olweus, 1999).

The other important variable that was studied is the age. Generally speaking, the researchers noticed a higher frequency of the violent acts for the smaller age categories than for the older age categories, which indicates a decrease of the phenomenon positively correlated with the ageing (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Boulton and Underwood, 1992; Olweus, 1994; Nansel et al., 2001). The predominance of certain forms of bullying gradually modifies once with the age. Therefore, in the case of the younger persons, the physical aggressions are more frequent, while in the case of the older persons the verbal and psychological aggressions are more frequently met (Piskin, 2002).

Also, if for the younger ages the numbers show that the boys are more involved in bullying actions (both as victims and aggressors), in the case of the older ages, there is a tendency to diminish these differences, so that in college there are no significant differences between boys and girls from this point of view (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Boulton and Underwood, 1992; Nansel et al., 2001).

The Characteristics of the Victim

The victim is characterized first of all by a high degree of insecurity, anxiety and depression (Olweus, 1991a; Olweus, 1993; Bond, Carlin, Thomas, Rubin, and Patton, 2001). Usually, the victim is a pupil who cares about the others, who is calm, lonely and sensitive. When attacked by other students, he or she commonly reacts by crying (at least in the lower grades) and withdrawal (Olweus, 1991a). In most of the studies, there were noticed the following common behaviors: avoidance, withdrawn, and escape behaviors (skipping school, avoiding places at school etc.) (Batsche and Knoff, 1994). Usually, these students hardly adapt themselves to the school life, they have difficulties in communicating with the mates and with the adults, they respond in delay to the tasks given by the teacher and they manifest concentration difficulties during the classes. The data of several studies show the presence of the low self-esteem in the case of the victims (Olweus, 1993; O'Moore and Kirkham, 2001). The students that represent targets of the bullying acts for longer periods of time developed negative

cognitions about themselves, like the belief that they would suffer only failures, that they are unattractive, unintelligent, and that they do not matter in the eyes of the others.

Olweus (1978, 1994) describes two types of victims: *the passive (or submissive) victim* and *the provocative victim*. The first category is represented by the students that manifest sensitivity, anxiety, insecurity, withdrawal, and lack of aggressiveness, but with closer contacts and positive relationships with the parents. They „are characterized by an anxious or submissive reaction pattern combined with physical weakness” (1994, p.1179). The provocative victim, which is the second type of victim, is described by Olweus as hot-tempered, restless, anxious, and „one who will attempt to retaliate when attacked”. The students who belong to this category deal with concentration problems, hyperactivity and they provoke tension and irritation around them. They are less than the others and they „are characterized by a combination of both anxious and aggressive reaction patterns” (1994, p.1179).

How do the other mates see and treat the victims? Generally speaking, the victims do not enjoy a good status in the eyes of the aggressors or of the other mates. The researches show that the victimized students are described by their own mates as „nerds”, „weak”, and „afraid to fight back” (Charach, Pepler, and Ziegler, 1995). In most of the cases, they do not have any friend in the class (Olweus, 1991a), they are gradually abandoned by the other children and they spend their breaks alone (Olweus, 1993).

It was also noticed that the victims rarely report the bullying cases they are involved into. The studies show that about 40% of the students from the primary schools and around 60% from those of the junior high schools indicated as a possibility to solve the bullying problems the appeal to the adults’ help (Olweus, 1991a, 1993). Roberts and Coursol (1996) consider that there are two main reasons why these students avoid the reporting: the fear of revenge and the experience that shows an inefficient support from the adults they appeal to.

On a short and average term, the bullying causes the victims psychological disorders like the depression and the anxiety. Also, the girls specifically develop eating disorders (Bond et al., 2001). Other consequences are the chronic absenteeism, the reduced academic performance, and the suicidal ideation (Beale, 2001; Roberts and Coursol, 1996). A meta-analytic study made by Card (2003), cited by Smith (2004), shows high correlations between victimization and some relational variables on one hand [peer rejection (.38), poor friendship quality (.23), low number of friends (.20), low peer acceptance (.19) etc.t, and between victimization and some personal variables, on the other hand şlow self-esteem (.29), low physical strength (.28), low school enjoyment (.21), poor social skills (.19) etc.].

Rigby (2003) systematizes the consequences of the involvement of the students in bullying acts into four categories, taking into account both the mental and

physical health: (1) low psychological well-being (unhappiness, low self-esteem, anger, and sadness), (2) poor social adjustment (feelings of aversion toward one's social environment, loneliness, isolation, and absenteeism), (3) psychological distress (anxiety, depression, and suicidal thinking), and (4) physical unwellness (physical disorders, and psychosomatic symptoms).

The Characteristics of the Aggressor

The bullies represent a problem because they create an unfavorable school environment in which some students do not feel safe, avoiding the passage or the standing in certain school spaces (the yard, certain halls, the sports yard etc.) (Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

With the help of results from several surveys, one tried to describe the psychological profile of the bully. Olweus showed that this is often one of the strongest students in the class from a physical point of view (Olweus, 1991b, 1994), but many other authors consider that this condition is not a must (Beaty and Alexeyev, 2008). According to Olweus, the basic profile of a masculine bully is characterized by the combination of two elements: a pattern of aggressive reaction and physical strength (Olweus, 1994).

Some studies describe the bully as hot-tempered, impulsive and having a low tolerance for frustration. For the „show” he offers, he is rewarded with a prestigious gain, sometimes with money or cigarettes (Olweus, 1993). The aggressive student is characterized by a strong need to dominate the others, by using reprehensible methods and though some empathy towards the victims (Olweus, 2002; Espelage and Swearer, 2003). Regarding the self-esteem, the comparison of the aggressive students with those who did not aggress the others shows that the first have a lower level of the self-esteem (O'Moore and Kirkham, 2001).

Some authors nuance the profile of the aggressor, distinguishing several sub-types. Thus, Pearce (2002) identifies three different types of bullies: the aggressive type, the anxious type and the passive type. The first type corresponds to most of the aggressors and it is characterized by the initiation of certain negative actions and not only over the weaker persons, but over anyone. Generally speaking, it is a strong student, both from a physical and emotional point of view, who values violence and does not cherish friendship. He is not sensitive to the sufferance of the others, he is dominant, he lack self-control and he has a high self-esteem. The anxious type, who is often a victim, is described as insecure, lonely, emotionally unstable and with a low self-esteem. He tends to provoke attacks through other aggressors or to choose improper victims, like students who are physically stronger than him. The passive aggressor, the third type, engages himself to bullying behaviors in order to protect himself or in order to keep his status. In comparison

with the others, he is characterized by higher empathy and sensitivity to the sufferance of the victims, as well as guilt feelings caused by his deeds.

Regarding his popularity, Farmer et al. (2002), cited by Smokowski and Kopasz (2005), identify two types of bullies. The first type of bully is the popular kind of student, having good social competences and the ability to attract, organize and manipulate the others. In this case, he is able to socialize with the others without having to face the marginalization or stigmatization generated by his own violent deeds. The other type is represented by the unpopular aggressor, a case in which the group neglects him or even rejects him. The popularity of the bully decreases once with the promotion to the higher classes and it is considerably decreased around the age of 16 (Olweus, 2002).

Some bullies do not act by themselves; they only instigate the others to violence, morally „guiding” their acts. Others, called by the researchers *passive bullies, followers* or *henchmen*, participate to the bullying acts, but they do not have their own initiative (Olweus, 1994). Also, Olweus (2002) noticed that many bullies are not aggressive only towards the peers, but they are often aggressive towards the adults, both towards the parents and the teachers.

The researches show that usually the aggressor is victimized within the family. Synthesizing the results of several studies, Batsche and Knoff (1994) sustain that the aggressor has parents with the following characteristics: authoritarianism, preference for the physical means of discipline maintenance, hostility and rejection, behavioral inconsistency (excessive authority alternated in an unjustified manner with permissivity and exaggerated relaxation), reduced surveillance, low skills of problem-solving etc. Within these families, violence is often practiced, seen as something natural; this is the reason why the student who comes from this environment is advised by the parents to answer with his own violence to the violence he faces at school (Batsche and Knoff, 1994).

Oliver and Neal (1994) noticed that the families the bullies come from usually face financial troubles; they develop a cold family environment, which lacks the dialogue and the implication into the children's life. These families are characterized by a weak structure of the internal relationships, rules inconsistency, external social isolation and the lack of certain communitarian arrangements. The family life is dominated by parental conflicts and disharmonies, rigidity in the issues approaching and a reduced preoccupation for the formation of the social competences at children and a weak parental control. The conclusions of several researches show that, in most of the cases, the violence is learned from the family environment (Sandu, 2007, 2008; Croitor, 2008), where there are major conflicts and the aggression is valued as a way to solve the problems. Subsequently, these behaviors are being transferred in the school environment (Espelage and Swearer, 2003).

How do the aggressors motivate their actions over the victims? The most frequent explanations for the boys are „didn't fit in”, „physically weak”, „short-tempered”, „who their friends were”, and „the clothes they wore”, and for the girls „didn't fit in”, „facial appearance”, „cried/was emotional”, „overweight” and „good grades” (Hazler, Hoover, and Oliver, 1992, cited by Beaty and Alekseyev, 2008). The invoked reasons are very diverse: to enter into a certain group, to gain the sympathy of the others, the envy for the material or academic success of the others and a stigma of the family of origin (Hazler and Hoover, 1993).

Strategies of Social Intervention

There have been elaborated numerous intervention plans for the prevention and management of the victimization situations in schools. In some of these programs, the basic elements mainly stress on the individual intervention and they give a major credit to the work of the school counselor (see, for example, Roberts and Coursol, 1996). Other programs contain rather local school violence prevention and control strategies that are addressed to the school management and they stress on factors like the prevention, the severe discipline and the insurance of the security through specialized assistance. A third category is represented by the programs of complex intervention that have as a main goal the reestablishment of the social equilibrium, the ecological intervention, the involvement of all the responsible instances, the use of most of the known techniques and the large scale mobilization of the available human materials. Usually, the proactive programs against the school violence are recommended rather than the reactive programs (Elinoff et al., 2004).

Generally speaking the anti-bullying prevention strategies are grouped on three levels (Elinoff et al., 2004). The first level is that of *primary prevention* and it is addressed to the entire population, including the students, the parents, the teachers, the authorities etc. A few common aims can come from these strategies: (1) the positive modification of the school environment, (2) the organization of some training with the teachers and the school staff so that they become active participants in such programs, and (3) the application of certain procedures for the involvement of the parents in the foreseen interventions (Elinoff et al., 2004). Among the most well-known programs of primary prevention is the *Bully Prevention Program* (Olweus, 1993). This is probably the most spread program of school violence prevention and it mainly regards the restructuring of the social environment through the consolidation of the relations between the students. Initially implemented in Norway, the program was gradually expanded in numerous countries thanks to the positive evaluations of the obtained results (the diminution with over 50% of the bullying cases). The programs from the following level, the level of the *secondary prevention*, addresses to the persons and situations

that already manifest the first signs of the appearance of the problems and they have as a main target the prevention of their aggravation. The strategies are based on the identification of the students or of the risk groups both in order to avoid the producing of aggressions and of victimization. For example, the aggressive students can be integrated into training programs for the formation of certain skills of adequate social interaction with the mates, of problem-solving or self-control. The programs from the third level, *the tertiary prevention*, involve the concentration of the strategies over the remediation of the already installed programs, the diminution of the negative effects and the decrease of the duration of restoration of the positive school environment. Through this, there are prevented the unwanted effects like the escalation of violence, the deepening of the crisis and the aggravation of the consequences at a personal level for the involved students.

We subsequently present a short synthesis of the modalities of intervention in case of school violence, starting from the most frequent recommendations from the specialty literature (Elliot, 1992; Sharp and Smith, 1994; Batsche and Knoff, 1994; Roberts and Coursol, 1996; Elinoff et al., 2004).

(1) *The permanent, expressive and „aggressive” information.* It is recommended a very detailed information over the expansion, development and consequences of the school violence, the use of the video means for the attractive information of the students and the sensitization towards the problem of all those involved: students, parents, teachers etc.

(2) *The promotion of the facts and not of the myths about bullying* (Batsche and Knoff, 1994). The information has to be as clear and objective as possible, avoiding the misrepresentations, the exaggerations, as well as the minimization of the problems.

(3) *The evaluation of the amplitude of the phenomenon through the direction of large evaluation studies of the school bullying.* We need to start some local studies for the evaluation of the amplitude of the phenomenon, based on the inquest method. We can use questions meant to explore the facts, the perception of danger, the attitudes and the beliefs of the aggressors and of the victims regarding the violence. We can also study the perception of the students over the way in which the school manages the acts of violence and the measures that can be taken in order to make the anti-bullying actions more efficient.

(4) *The abatement of the false beliefs about the aggressive behaviors* (Batsche and Knoff, 1994). Through this strategy there are rejected the bullying behaviors as being normal and they are controlled several beliefs like „it is normal that the students fight” („this is part of their life”), „the students that complain do not have courage or dignity”, „the bullies must be ignored and this way they will no longer be successful” etc.

(5) *Preventive security measures*. It is recommended the taking of certain measures for the prevention of violence both in the school spaces (yard, halls etc.), as well as around the school, through the appeal to external guard services.

(6) *The elaboration of a conduct code for the students* (Batsche and Knoff, 1994). The code, which could be elaborated together with the students, should contain clear provisions regarding the prevention and combating of the bullying.

(7) *The implication of the adult persons, especially of the parents in the prevention* (Smokovski and Kopasz, 2005). The implication of the teachers and of the school counselors in the preventive solving of the problems is a must in any successful strategy. The increase of the vigilance and of the authority of the teachers both during the classes and during the breaks is requested. Another measure implies the involvement of the groups of students with a high risk in the common school activities by the teachers. Also, the warning of the parents regarding the problems the children face at school and their engagement in common activities meant to avoid victimization is part of this set of measures.

(8) *The initiation of programs for the formation of certain abilities of violence management*. These programs are addressed to all the students and they have as a main goal the acquisition at a behavioral level of certain non-violent answer patterns in case of violent actions, the crossing of certain trainings for the formation of the problem-solving skills, conflict-resolution, assertiveness, self-control etc. The achievement of certain social skills of interaction with the mates is one of the most important factors in the diminution of the school violence.

(9) *The creation of some anti-bullying committees or commissions, at the school level*. Many of the tasks of the school managements could be transferred to such committees, made of several volunteers. For example, *The School Bullying Prevention Act in Oklahoma* asks every school to organize a *Safe School Committee*, made of teachers, parents and students for the evaluation of the gravity of the school bullying, the choice of the possible intervention programs and the proposal of some adequate measures for the respective situations.

(10) *Immediate response to the victim* (Roberts and Coursol, 1996). This strategy aims to the immediate intervention of the school counselor for the crisis adjustment when the violent act is reported to the school management. It involves the immediate conferring of psychological or medical help, when talking about physical attack.

(11) *Listening approaches* (Roberts and Coursol, 1996). It is recommended the programming of individual counseling meetings with the victimized student in order to understand the problem and the circumstances of the victimization, as well as his point of view. Also, the counselor explores the victim's experiences for the clarification of the major factors that make him vulnerable in the school environment (Neamtu, 2008).

(12) *The elaboration of some procedures of anonymous report of the bullying cases towards the officials.* The students are part of the anti-bullying programs and they have to dispose of safe modalities through which they can advise the school management when they or their colleagues are endangered by the aggressors. Also, it is known that the victims usually tend to hide the fact that they were abused, considering these events shameful and embarrassing (Smokovski and Kopasz, 2005). The assurance of the confidentiality and of the anonymity in order to obtain a full cooperation from the victim, after the aggression, also represents a fundamental condition to avoid the re-victimization.

(13) *The school reinsertion and the development of certain social activities in the case of the victims.* This set of measures aims at the conferring of support for the reintegration in the school group and in the school activity, as well as the supply of assistance for the formation or improvement of some abilities of social interaction with the mates, of the self-esteem and assertive attitude improvement.

(14) *The long term counseling of the victim.* There are necessary strategies of intervention from the part of the school counselor in order to ameliorate the victimization effects in time: dreams, images or recurrent obsessive ideas referring to the occurred events, the avoiding of some places or situations associated with the incidents regarding the victimization, feelings of isolation towards the others, negative affects, concentration difficulties etc.

(15) *The use of some specific work strategies with the aggressive students.* These intervention modalities can be grouped into five great categories: behavior management, self-control strategies, social skills training, assertiveness training, conflict resolution skills, interpersonal problem solving, information processing, and cognitive perspective taking (Coie, Underwood, and Lochman, 1991).

Scientific Researches and Intervention Strategies in Romania

In our country, the researches on the school violence are just beginning. Until 1989, the year of the communist dictatorship fall, the studies on this theme have been avoided because the politic regime of that time did not recognize the existence of violence in a society that is considered to be the best society ever. To this, there was added the fact that psychology was forbidden and eliminated from the universities during the last 15 years of the communist era and the social assistance with similar functions did not exist.

The situation changed once with the democratization of the social relations, with the press freedom and the opening towards the occidental society. In this new social context, people began to talk openly about the school violence, but systematic researches on samples meant to cover bigger regions, were only made during the last years. We believe that the most important reasons are: the lack of

interest of the governors, the lack of the research funds, the weak research tradition, the lack of contact with the Western researchers from the area, the difficult access to the specialty literature etc.

The data provided by the few researches made so far indicate a high level of the bullying in the Romanian schools (Salavastru, 2003; Salavastru, Calin, Cadar, Robota, and Tudose, 2004; Jigau, Liiceanu, Preoteasa, 2005; Iacob, Curelaru, Abalasei, Rusu and Budescu, 2008; Curelaru, Iacob, and Budescu, in press). In the study made by Jigau et al. (2005) there were obtained the following results: in 75% of the Romanian schools there was registered at least one form of serious violence during the anterior school year, in the post-gymnasium schools (high-schools and vocational schools) there is registered a higher level of school violence than in the gymnasium, and in the urban area the percentage of the schools that indicate violent behaviors of the students is higher than in the rural area. Then, in the peripheral schools the school negative events are more numerous than in the schools situated in the central area of the towns, while in the bigger schools the violence phenomena are more frequent than in the schools with a reduced number of students (Jigău et al., 2005).

During the year of 2008, we made a survey on 1100 students, belonging to 35 high-schools from the North-eastern part of Romania, from which 587 between 15-17 years old and 513 between 18-20 years old, 512 boys and 588 girls (Curelaru et al., in press). A series of data have been obtained through a questionnaire that explored the frequency of the violence cases the students witnessed during the anterior school year, for three types of interpersonal relationships: student-student, teacher-student and student-teacher. Another category of data refers to the frequency of the cases of victimization, both for the non-physical bullying (verbal and non-verbal) and for the physical bullying forms. The results obtained for this last aspect are synthetically presented in table 3, according to the respective forms of violence and the main work variables: sex, age and provenience environment of the students (see table 3).

The results of this research correspond to the data obtained in other countries. Generally speaking, for the boys, the cases of physical bullying are more numerous than for the girls, while for the girls the non-physical bullying is rather more common. The other variables have a generally statistic insignificant or very low impact at this age (Curelaru et al., in press).

Regarding the programs of social violence prevention, at this moment, Romania does not have a clear strategy. Although in the mass-media there appear daily new cases and more and more serious violence cases, whose victims are both the students and the teachers, we still do not have a specific law meant to regulate the situation in this area. During the last years, most of the occidental states adopted legislative packages in this sense. For example, in the U.S.A., there were 2003 anti-bullying laws in about 10 states (Elinoff et al., 2004). These

legislative measures demand the schools to elaborate politics meant to categorically forbid the violence in the school-yard, procedures meant to favor the anonymous report of the incidents both for the students and for their parents, as well as standard procedures of investigation and combating by the high-schools management. The schools are asked for a pro-active approach which is preferable to the reactive one. It is considered that the debate of the problems, the popularization of the prevention programs, the cooperation among the school, the family and the competent institutions in the combating of the bullying, as well as the recognition of the causes and effects of this phenomenon ensure an efficient prevention.

Table 3. Distribution on forms of physical and non-physical bullying

n = 1100	Sex		Age		Origins environment		
	Total	Boys	Girls	15-17	18-20	Urban	Rural
	Disdain	5.2%	2.4%	2.8%	3.4%	.8%	3.8%
Lack of politeness	7.9%	4.2%	3.7%	4.0%	3.9%	6.0%	1.9%
Offence	17.2%	7.3%	9.9%	8.7%	8.5%	12.5%	4.6%
Intimidation	5.5%	2.4%	3.2%	3.1%	2.5%	4.4%	1.2%
Humiliation	4.9%	1.9%	3.0%	3.0%	1.9%	3.4%	1.5%
Threatening	9.1%	4.5%	4.6%	3.8%	5.3%	6.6%	2.5%
Insult	9.2%	5.6%	3.5%	4.7%	4.5%	6.4%	2.8%
Name calling	6.7%	4.1%	2.6%	3.1%	3.6%	4.6%	2.1%
Blackmail	2.9%	1.4%	1.5%	1.5%	1.5%	2.1%	0.8%
Taunting	9.6%	3.6%	6.0%	4.7%	4.9%	7.6%	2.0%
Obscene gestures	4.9%	2.9%	2.0%	2.3%	2.6%	3.6%	1.3%
Making faces	2.1%	.7%	1.4%	1.0%	1.1%	1.8%	0.3%
Hitting	7.5%	4.5%	3.0%	4.0%	3.5%	6.0%	1.5%
Corporal punishment	.3%	.2%	.1%	.2%	.1%	0.2%	0.1%
Damaging victim's property	2.3%	.9%	1.4%	1.5%	.7%	1.5%	0.7%
Farces, teasing physical level	3.4%	1.8%	1.5%	2.0%	1.4%	2.1%	1.3%
Touching in sexual way	1.0%	.5%	.5%	.4%	.6%	0.9%	0.1%
Gun threatening (knife)	.5%	.1%	.4%	.4%	.1%	0.2%	0.3%
Stealing things	3.2%	1.8%	1.4%	2.0%	1.2%	2.8%	0.4%
Money solicitation	2.2%	1.2%	1.0%	.5%	1.7%	1.3%	0.9%
Physical exploitation	3.2%	1.4%	1.8%	1.6%	1.5%	2.6%	0.5%

Until now, we have only a ministry decree (no. 1409/2007, 29 June) that resumes the strategy of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth regarding the diminution of the violence phenomenon in the pre-university education institutions (for details, see the document from the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth web-site). This decree has as a scientific basis the previously cited study, made under the UNICEF aegis and called *The Violence in School* (Jigau et al., 2005). Through this document it is demanded to the school inspectorates and schools to implement an ecological intervention model which takes into account the complexity of the phenomenon of the school violence (the involvement of the individual, relational, communitarian and social factors). For now, there are no evaluations of the results of the application of this strategy.

Conclusions

The data obtained from different researches show that the school violence is a largely spread phenomenon, in a continue expansion and with serious consequences that affect the involved persons and the school environment. On one hand, we showed that the victims are affected by low self-esteem, loneliness, depression, anxiety, absenteeism etc. On the other hand, the aggressive students come from disorganized families in which violence is admitted as normal and they tend to associate the bullying behaviors with the alcohol, smoking and drug consumption and with the weak results at school. On a long term, they can turn into delinquents; they can face health problems and social exclusion.

Even from the 70's, there appear the necessity for the elaboration of certain programs (both at a national and local level) for the prevention and diminution of the school violence. The proposed measures are meant to the information and acknowledgement of the effects of this phenomenon, of the restructuring of the school environment, of the improvement of the relationships between the students and between the students and the teachers, of the involvement of the parents etc. The evaluations of the results of these programs are encouraging.

As about our country, we can state that although the violence is very present in the school there are not taken any efficient measures. We do not have a law in this sense, nor a national plan of prevention and combating of the school violence, elaborated under this basis.

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