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GENDER AND AGE CHARACTERISTICS OF TEENAGERS' IDEAS ABOUT BULLYING WITHIN EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Larisa Igoryevna Maksimenkova (a)*, Diana Yaroslavovna Gribanova (b),
Sergey Mikhailovich Nikolaev (c), Ekaterina Yuryevna Belova (d),
Dmitriy Alekseevich Nikitin (e), Dmitriy Nikolaevich Matveev (f)
*Corresponding author

(a) Pskov State University, 2, Lenin sq., Pskov, 180000, Russia, lora_max@mail.ru,
(b) Pskov State University, 2, Lenin sq., Pskov, 180000, Russia, dianab81@mail.ru,
(c) Pskov State University, 2, Lenin sq., Pskov, 180000, Russia, nikolaev.pui@mail.ru,
(d) Pskov branch of the Academy of Law and Management of the Federal Penitentiary Service, 28, Zonal highway,
Pskov, 180014, Russia, ekaterina-birukova@inbox.ru,
(i) Saint-Petersburg University of the Federal Service of Execution of Punishments, 34, Sapernaya str., St. Petersburg,
196602, Russia, Pushkindima60-62@yandex.ru,
(f) Pskov State University, 2, Lenin sq., Pskov, 180000, Russia, mdn-74654@yandex.ru

Abstract

The paper discusses the results of an empirical study, which analyzes the ideas of teenage students about bullying within the educational environment. Unfortunately, the expression of violence in the educational environment is becoming quite common, which shifts it from the category of random, and therefore egregious cases into the category of socio-psychological problem, which requires a solution, first of all, at the practical level, but also causing the need for scientific analysis and reflection. The theoretical analysis of Russian-speaking and foreign sources showed that bullying is mostly common for teenage and youth environment, which is associated with the psychological characteristics of these age periods with their inconsistency, difficulties of introspection, conflicts, lack of behavioral repertoire for successful adaptation, lack of experience in solving problems, conflict situations, especially in the field of interpersonal interaction. The paper presents data of the empirical study of ideas of teenage students about the bullying. The study was carried out using a package of copyright techniques that allow assessing the knowledge of schoolchildren about bullying, types of behavior, as well as about the consequences of bullying and how to prevent it. Besides, the study determines the attitude of schoolchildren to various expressions of bullying in the educational environment, including the victim of violence; to an aggressor; to the witness of violence, as well as those assessments given by adolescents of the identity of the aggressor, victim and witness of the violence.

Keywords: Bullying, aggression, violence, aggressor, victim

1. Introduction

Russian science (Baeva, 2014) illustrates a fairly definite idea of psychological safety as a state of the dynamic balance of the subject's relations, allowing him to maintain integrity, realize his own goals and values (Lvovich, 2014). Besides, a person experiences safety as a sense of security (Berezina, 2013), which makes it possible to consider psychological safety not only as an objective characteristic, but also as a subjectively experienced phenomenon.

The violation of the psychological safety of a person entails a number of negative consequences and leads to personal disintegration (Budakova et al., 2010). One of these sources of violation of the psychological safety of a student's personality is the phenomenon of bullying.

In modern science, the study of the bullying phenomenon is one of the current problems both in psychology and in related branches of scientific knowledge. This is caused by relatively high prevalence of this phenomenon in the educational environment; the increasing level of deviant behavior of schoolchildren; changes in the system of values, erosion of moral standards, which often leads to personal degradation; significant number of neuropsychic disorders in childhood and adolescence due to impaired relationships with classmates, bullying by peers. The problem of bullying causes concerns not only among parents of children subjected to bullying, but also among psychologists and teachers.

These circumstances highlight the problem of developing psychological diagnostic tools for a comprehensive study of the bullying phenomenon in the educational environment, the need to determine measures to prevent violence in the educational environment in order to create a psychologically safe educational environment.

In this regard, it is interesting to understand the meaningful, semantic characteristics of the bullying phenomenon, as well as the attitude of its participants to various aspects of bullying.

The hypothesis of the study was to suggest that the ideas of adolescent schoolchildren about bullying varies in completeness, emotional attitude, and effectiveness depending on their gender and age. At the same time, with age, the idea of bullying becomes more complete, the emotional attitude – rejecting, the behavior model – more diverse.

2. Problem Statement

Bullying as a regular and systematic aggressive behavior of schoolchildren, which entails a threat to the psychological safety of participants of the educational process, is of interest to psychologists and is increasingly the subject of psychological research (Baeva et al., 2014; Berezina, 2013).

In foreign publications, the bullying phenomenon is analyzed both within the framework of private scientific research and at the level of government conferences (Fanti, Farmer, Glew, Graham, Juvonen, Kimonis, Nansel, Olweus, etc.)

Various publications consider the bullying phenomenon (Farmer & Xie, 2007); the place of bullying in the school environment (Glew et al., 2008; Rigby, 2003); the role of personality characteristics in determining the position of a bullying participant (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010); effects of school harassment on personal development and identification (Ojala & Nesdale, 2004).

Domestic studies (Bochaver, 2015) also present a psychological analysis of various aspects of the bullying phenomenon:

- prevalence of mental and physical bullying among schoolchildren;
- personal characteristics of its participants, their roles;
- actual and possible ways for adults to respond to bullying;
- gender features of expression and forms of violent behavior (Shalaginova et al., 2019);
- psychological consequences of bullying for further personal development;
- impact of demographic, social stratification factors, national status and socio-cultural context of education on the experience of school bullying (Sobkin & Smyslova, 2014);
- socio-cultural patterns determining the extent of bullying prevalence;
- attitude of adolescents to aggression on social networks (Sobkin & Fedotova, 2019), etc.

It should be noted that bullying is a global public health problem that affects the social and environmental well-being of society caused by a wide variety of factors, different levels and diversity. At the same time, the study of bullying in the aspect of subjective experiences of its participants seems insufficient.

In addition, since bullying is most common in the adolescent environment, which is caused by the specifics of age development at this stage of ontogenesis, it seems interesting to analyze the subjective ideas of adolescent students about the bullying phenomenon.

The theoretical analysis of bullying and the available research in this field made it possible to determine the problematic field that requires its scientific understanding. This refers to the study of subjective ideas of teenage schoolchildren about bullying in the educational environment. The absence of a scientifically based model of ideas about bullying in its participants (both real and potential) does not make it possible to create really effective, scientifically based approaches to the prevention and correction of bullying in the educational environment.

In our opinion, the content of bullying ideas (Maksimenkova et al., 2016) determines both the degree of bullying prevalence and the role position of teenage students in the bullying situation, as well as the consequences of bullying for the development of a student's personality.

Besides, the idea of bullying should be considered as a complex psychological phenomenon, including the information component, the subjective emotional-personal attitude to it, as well as behavior in the bullying situation; i.e. we are talking about the unity of cognitive, emotional-evaluation and behavioral components in the structure of the bullying phenomenon.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the study was the analyze the ideas of teenagers about bullying in the unity of its components – cognitive, emotional-evaluation, behavioral. In particular,

1. age peculiarities of bullying in adolescent schoolchildren;
2. gender peculiarities of ideas about bullying in teenage schoolchildren.

4. Purpose of the Study

Thus, the purpose of the scientific study consucted by scientists from Pskov State University was to identify gender and age characteristics of the ideas of teenage students about bullying in the educational environment.

Within the framework of this paper we will only focus on the analysis of ideas of younger adolescents about the bullying phenomenon and differences in ideas about bullying between boys and girls of this age group.

5. Research Methods

The study used a block of author's techniques aimed at studying cognitive, behavioral and emotional components of adolescents' ideas about bullying:

- a questionnaire (D.Ya. Gribanova) developed specifically for this study on the basis of the results of the bullying study in English literature as a socio-psychological phenomenon, and aimed at studying the knowledge of schoolchildren about bullying, their behaviors, as well as the consequences of bullying and ways to prevent it. In the final version, the questionnaire contains questions that imply both polyvariant and free answers, and has two forms – for younger and senior adolescents.
- the *Color Relations Test* by E.F. Bazhin, Etkind (as cited in Sobchik, 2012) in the modification by R.R. Kalinina aimed at studying the ideas of adolescents about themselves and the closest microsocial environment, expression of bullying, as well as feelings and experiences that the bullying participants may have;
- the *Completion of Proposals* methodology in the modification of L.I. Maksimenkova aimed at determining the attitude of schoolchildren to various expressions of bullying in the educational environment, including to the victim of violence; to an aggressor; to a witness of violence. When interpreting the results, the following response parameters were taken into account: the attitude sign (positive, negative, neutral), the degree of attitude expression (from 1 to 3), the content of attitude (based on the content analysis of responses);
- the *Personal Differential* technique (V.F. Petrenko) in the modification of L.I. Maksimenkova for adolescents to evaluate the identity of an aggressor, a victim of violence, a witness of violence. In accordance with the purpose of the study, 24 words indicating personality traits were selected from the Ozhegov Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian language, grouped according to three scales: activity, strength, assessment (developed by L.I. Maksimenkova). The personal differential was presented to the subjects 3 times to assess the identity of an aggressor, a victim of violence, a witness of violence.

The resulting data array was subjected to mathematical and statistical processing using frequency and comparative analysis (non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test) to identify differences in bullying perceptions between adolescent boys and girls. Only statistically significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$) were considered for the analysis.

6. Findings

Due to the fact that the representation of bullying in this age group as a whole is low, the knowledge of younger adolescents about the forms of bullying is also insufficient, incomplete; only a small part of the fifth graders called bullying a common phenomenon in the educational environment. As for the forms of expression, mainly younger teenagers attribute repeated physical aggression to bullying ("to hit", "to kick", "to give a slap upside the head", "to push", "to put the skids under") and violation of personal boundaries ("to unlock secrets", "to spoil things", "to demand" or "to denude of money").

Regarding the emotional and personal attitude to bullying, it should be noted that the data obtained through the empirical study make it possible to state a generally negative, rejecting attitude of younger adolescents to bullying, as evidenced by color associations to such concepts as "harassment", "victim", "aggressor", "fight", "insult". These concepts cause tension, discomfort among schoolchildren, which is expressed by fear, pain, resentment, a sense of belittled dignity and helplessness. The fifth graders explain the behavior of the aggressor as follows: "he is so self-assertive" and "he is afraid to appear weak". Through the eyes of fifth graders the aggressor is "rude", "dumb", "terrible sadist", "trying to seem better"; and the witness is "bad", "indifferent coward", "deadhead", "heartless idiot", "the same as the one who bullies". However, only a fourth of the fifth graders show sympathy and empathy with the bullying victim.

About a third of younger teenagers show an attitude to violence, in which the victim is blamed ("he is to blame", "laughing stock", "inept moron", "chump", "freak, worse than others"), and the aggressor is assessed quite positively ("active, relaxed"). Such a receiving attitude may be the expression of a defensive reaction to a bullying situation.

It seems interesting that some adolescents show a positive attitude towards concepts related to bullying. For such students, violence is not discomfort. Such teenagers themselves tend to be violent.

As for the behavior of younger teenagers in a bullying situation, it is rather passive: schoolchildren do not know how to behave in a bullying situation, how to independently cope with a situation of violence, do not have an idea of possible behaviors, and rely not on themselves, but exclusively on the help of adults.

The comparative analysis using the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U-test was used to identify differences in bullying perceptions between adolescent boys and girls. Only statistically significant differences ($p \leq 0.05$) were considered in the analysis (Table 1).

Table 1. Comparative analysis of bullying perceptions of adolescent boys and girls

Indicators	Midranking		Significance point (P)
	girls	**boys**	
1. To what extent do you consider bullying a repeated expression of the following actions?			
- refuse to be friends, kick out of the company	129.06	109.82	0.017
- write obscene words about someone on walls, desks	130.37	111.73	0.04
- gnore, declare a boycott	129.20	111.53	0.04
2. Which side of the aggression were you?			
- I stopped the aggressor myself	114.03	133.59	0.01
- I called for help from teachers or other adults	127.41	114.14	0.05
- I told about what happened to adults later	128.03	113.23	0.02
- I filmed what was happening on the phone	118.53	127.05	0.01

- I agreed that the aggressive actions were fair and therefore did not intervene	116.31	130.27	0.01
- I was afraid to intervene in aggressive actions so that they would not do the same to me	127.56	113.91	0.04
3. Frequency of violent acts against you	114.88	132.35	0.04
4. What actions were you bullied with in the past			
- wrote obscene words about me on the walls, desks	126.16	115.95	0.01
- ignored, declared a boycott	125.50	116.91	0.04
- reminded of painful events or negative qualities of myself or my family members	124.59	118.23	0.05
5. Why can some of your peers bully the others?			
- they are mistreated by teachers	111.91	136.68	0.01
6. What would you do to someone who bullies others?			
- would do the same	115.91	130.86	0.02
7. Positive attitude towards a teacher as a source of support	133.21	105.69	0.01
8. Sympathetic attitude to a victim	129.44	111.18	0.04

The results of the comparative analysis show that boys are significantly more likely than girls to consider bullying a common occurrence in the school environment and to mention violent actions more often. As expressions of bullying, boys more often indicate the forms of physical violence ("to push", "to give a slap upside the head", "to put the skids under"). Girls, on the contrary, more often mention psychological forms of bullying, humiliation of personal dignity – "ignore, declare a boycott", "write obscene words on walls, desks", "refuse to be friends". In a situation of violence, girls are reliably more likely than boys to rely on the help of adults and condemn them if they do not intervene in the bullying situation, or ignore it. This is probably caused by cultural attitudes towards the expression of masculinity-femininity: girls are not shy about their weakness, tend to seek help, unlike boys who want to look strong.

As for the behavior of the aggressor, boys more often than girls attribute it to the poor attitude of teachers towards them, they believe that aggressive actions should also be responded to with aggressive actions. The girls rate the victim more negatively, believing that the victim herself is to blame.

Besides, girls are more likely than boys to be violent because of their reluctance to be in the victim's shoes. Boys tend to be active in such a situation, stop the aggressor. However, they indicate that sometimes the aggressive actions of the offender towards the victim are quite understandable.

In addition, we compared ideas of teenage boys and girls about bullying, which hold different role positions in the bullying situation.

It is interesting that both girls who identify themselves with the bullying victim and those who assume the role of an aggressor demonstrate equally high rates of tension in a situation of violence. Tension can be expressed in the form of rudeness, irritability. At the same time, girls who identify themselves with the bullying victim also show insecurity, doom, believing that "violence cannot be stamped out".

Moreover, teenage girls who recognized their passivity for fear of becoming a victim in a bullying situation show a more negative attitude both in general to violence and to the aggressor ("it is cruel, blackguardly"), while teenage girls who identify themselves with a bullying witness are more likely to agree with the actions of the aggressor, accept him as an individual, consider him a leader, independent, active, person.

Thus, praising the actions of the aggressor, they do not show pity for the bullying victim, considering it pathetic, worthless.

The obtained data illustrate two psychologically different roles of witnesses to the bullying situation among adolescent girls: a witness who condemns the aggressor and fears of becoming a victim of violence herself; and a witness who is internally inclined to support, admire and disdain the aggressor.

Among both girls and boys, two psychologically different roles as a witness to the bullying situation can be distinguished: a witness who condemns the aggressor and fears to become a victim (such boys demonstrate a negative attitude towards the class, great alienation and distance); and a witness who internally supports the aggressor, admires him, perceives him as a leader. Such teenagers believe that aggressive actions towards the victim are fair, and the victim is considered passive, weak, uninteresting ("not a good fit", "morally weak").

Thus, the study of gender differences in the perception of bullying among teenage students showed that among the forms of bullying boys are more likely to distinguish physical, and girls – psychological (violation of human dignity).

In a bullying situation, girls more often rely on the help of adults, unlike boys who are more active in a bullying situation, stopping the aggressor, often with the same aggressive actions. Girls more often than boys show a receptible attitude to bullying, due to fear of the aggressor, more negatively assess the victim, considering him guilty. However, boys more often than girls believe that sometimes the offender's aggressive actions towards the victim are justified.

Adolescent girls, who have recognized themselves as both a bullying victim and an aggressor, show equally high rates of tension, which is expressed in the form of rudeness and irritability. At the same time, girls acting as victims also demonstrate insecurity, doom, believing that "violence cannot be stamped out", and are characterized by a higher level of alienation and conflict. Teenagers who act as a witness for fear of becoming a victim show a more negative attitude towards the class ("numbnuts classmates", "ungirt" class), greater alienation and distance in communication with peers.

7. Conclusion

The empirical analysis was conducted to study age and gender characteristics of teenagers' ideas about bullying in the educational environment.

It was revealed that the ideas of younger teenagers about the bullying phenomenon are not complete enough: the psychological forms of bullying are not always indicated by adolescents. The emotional and personal attitude of adolescents to bullying, an aggressor, a passive witness of aggressive actions is generally negative, rejecting.

However, the ideas of behavior in a situation of violence among younger adolescents are incomplete and not always adequate.

Among bullying forms, boys more often distinguish physical phenomena, while girls – psychological.

Teenagers who identify themselves with a bullying victim show higher indicators of tension, alienation in the classroom, distance from their peers.

It was found that among younger adolescents (both girls and boys) two psychologically different roles of a witness to the bullying situation can be distinguished, namely: a witness who condemns the aggressor and fears to become a victim (boys demonstrate a more negative attitude towards the class, greater alienation and distance in communication with peers), and a witness who internally supports the aggressor, admires him, considers him a leader.

The results of the study can be used by educational institutions to improve psychological safety in the educational environment.

This problem, in particular in the aspect of studying the motivation of the behavior of all bullying participants, as well as studying the long-term consequences of bullying on the formation of a student's personality, seems quite relevant for further research.

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