

FROM BULLYING TO CYBERBULLYING IN THE CONTEXT OF ONLINE EDUCATION

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Abstract

The specialty literature is remarked by the presentation of negative facts and phenomena, some of which are particularly serious, such as bullying and cyberbullying. Authors such as Olweus (1993), Smith and Sharp (1994), Rigby (2007), Belsey (2005), Shariff (2009), etc. draw the attention to two categories of people, the ones who abuse and the ones who are victims of the aggression. The online school also brings along the extension of the cyberbullying phenomenon. In previous years, traditional bullying started in school and continued in the online environment, but now all the interaction has been transferred to the cyber environment. We note phenomena such as: cyberbullying, cybermobbing or cyberstalking etc., and we could say that they seem to occur in the online environment in a kind of avalanche that exceeds our imagination whereas the phenomenon is explained primarily by the impossibility to trace the perpetrator. The article presents ways to prevent the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as legislative and institutional aspects, intervention measures aimed at reducing the phenomenon of bullying, directly or virtually, especially at the national level.

Keywords: bullying, cyberbullying, cybermobbing, cyberstalking, online school, prevention, intervention.

Résumé

La littérature de spécialité se distingue par la présentation de faits et de phénomènes négatifs, dont certains sont particulièrement graves, comme le phénomène de l'intimidation et de la cyberintimidation. Des auteurs comme Olweus (1993), Smith and Sharp (1994), Rigby (2007), Belsey (2005), Shariff (2009), etc., se referent à deux catégories de personnes: celles qui abusent et celles qui sont les victimes des agressions. L'école en ligne apporte également l'extension du phénomène de la cyberintimidation. Au cours des années précédentes, l'intimidation traditionnelle commençait dans l'espace scolaire et continuait dans l'environnement en ligne, mais de nos jours toute l'interaction a été transférée dans l'environnement cyber. En remarquant des phénomènes tels que: le cyberintimidation, le

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cybermobbing, le cyberharcèlement, etc., on pourrait dire que dans l'environnement en ligne ils semblent se produire dans une sorte d'avalanche qui dépasse notre imagination, un phénomène qui s'explique surtout par le prisme de l'indétectabilité de l'auteur. L'article présente les moyens de prévenir le phénomène de l'intimidation et de la cyberintimidation, ainsi que les aspects législatifs et institutionnels, des mesures d'intervention qui visent à réduire le phénomène du harcèlement, directement ou virtuellement, notamment au niveau national.

Mots clés: intimidation, cyberintimidation, cybermobbing, cyberstalking, école en ligne, prévention, intervention.

Rezumat

Literatura de specialitate se remarcă prin prezentarea de fapte și fenomene negative, dintre care unele deosebit de grave, precum fenomenul de bullying și cyberbullying. Autori precum Olweus (1993), Smith and Sharp (1994), Rigby (2007), Belsey (2005), Shariff (2009) etc., au în atenție două categorii de persoane, acelea care abuzează și cele care sunt victime ale agresiunilor. Școala online aduce cu sine și extinderea fenomenului cyberbullying. Dacă în anii anteriori, bullyingul tradițional începea în spațiul școlii și continua în mediul online, acum toată interacțiunea s-a transferat în mediul cibernetic. Remarcând fenomene precum: cyberbullying, cybermobbing, cyberstalking etc., am putea spune că în mediul online acestea par să se producă într-un fel de avalanșă care ne depășește imaginația, fenomenul explicându-se în primul rând prin prisma nedectabilității făptașului. Articolul prezintă modalități de prevenție a fenomenului de bullying și cyberbullying, cât și aspecte legislative și instituționale, măsuri de intervenție care urmăresc diminuarea fenomenului de bullying, direct sau virtual, cu precădere la nivel național.

Cuvinte cheie: bullying, cyberbullying, cybermobbing, cyberstalking, școala online, prevenție, intervenție.

1. Introduction

Starting from 2020, the media reported that phenomenon emerged among children, much stronger than bullying and with much more serious consequences: cyberbullying. In the context of online schooling in which children no longer interact but are isolated, traditional bullying moved online and digital aggression spread, in Romania there are real “networks of youth” who humiliate their colleagues on the Internet, sometimes even during classes. Specialists point out that many parents use counseling sessions for their children who have become neurotic. Online courses have a major effect on students' psyche, with the risk of emotional disorders that may occur due to the overexposure to the screen, isolation, repressed emotions and because they do not talk to their parents or friends.

2. The dynamics of the relationship between the aggressor and the victim in cyberbullying

In recent years, cyberbullying has become “a real pandemic of the virtual environment” (Pânișoară & Chirca, 2019, p. 351). The term was first used by the

Canadian professor Bill Belsey in 2005. Cyberbullying Research Center reported in 2015 that a behavior can be classified as cyberbullying if it has the following characteristics: to be deliberate, not accidental, to be repetitive, to follow a pattern, not to occur in isolation, the target of the abusive behavior must perceive this it as a threat, whereas the aggressive behavior occurs through information communication technologies.

Katzer (2018) analyzes how the Internet changes the human behavior, and she states that individuals can free themselves from their true identity and take on a different role in this environment. The author presents the concepts of cybermobbing and cyberstalking, characterized by the fact that online marginalization, mobbing, and stalking have taken on a new dimension in cyberspace because the videos made with a mobile phone may be posted in a few seconds, which can show aggression, such as a girl being raped in the gym, the image of a schoolmate in the toilet, a young man being beaten in the school yard or in another space where he is lured, or nude photos, sometimes fake, which can be made available to the general public on social networks or on video portals, so that they are accessible to hundreds of thousands of Internet users. The victims feel that they can no longer find a corner where to be protected and carry their cybermobbers “with them in their pockets on their smartphones” (Katzer, 2018, p.92), in which the aggressors enter directly into the space where the victim is at any moment, so the consequences are much more serious than in the case of traditional mobbing.

Outlining a dynamic of the victim-aggressor relationship specific to the bullying phenomenon, traditional or cyber, we can specify that abusers lack empathy and ferocity, they are usually dominant and strong in the peer group, whereas victims become anxious, they do not trust themselves, they get isolated, they no longer interact with anyone, there are situations when they choose not to go to school for fear of meeting the abusers again. However, the worst consequences are the ways in which victims turn their aggression to themselves by self-mutilation or even suicide (Palaghia, 2019a).

The cyber victim is an isolated person, with low self-esteem, strongly focused on networking and disconnected from the real world, which is exploited by aggressors who take every opportunity to mock him/her. The extremely caring parents who give their children too much expose them to cybermobbing. The reasons why adults and children end up cybermobbing are different. In the case of adults, it is about envy and rigid hierarchies at work whereas the triggering factors are restructuring processes at work, therefore, the fear of change or losing their job but also boredom and pure pleasure play a very important role.

The adolescents' own satisfaction is on the first place of the etiological approach; they develop a pleasure to harm others, or out of boredom and lack of occupation they seek, recognition from other Internet users, who can reward them by “click”, “share”, etc. It is also possible to develop a competition among colleagues who have the most embarrassing and degrading videos about another

schoolmate. Another triggering factor for aggression may be the desire for revenge because a victim of traditional bullying can become a ferocious aggressor in the virtual environment (Katzner, 2018).

The children are part of the category of people with increased victim vulnerability because of specific psycho-behavioral and age-specific particular features, characterized by the fact that they have almost no physical and mental defenses. The children do not have the ability to anticipate their own behaviour and the one of the adults, have a low ability to understand the consequences of their own actions or those of others, have a low level of empathy, difficulty discerning good intentions from bad, and present a high degree of suggestibility, credibility.

Due to the fact that victims appear to others as insecure individuals, especially passive and unable to react when attacked, aggressors choose their victims especially from children who do not complain and who seem to be physically and emotionally weaker, being tempted to seek the colleagues' attention. Victim pupils generally have overly caring parents or teachers, and as a result, they fail to develop strategies for dealing with conflict situations. Most victims want the aggressor's approval, even after he has rejected them, some of them continue to try to interact with the one who assaulted them (Palaghia, 2019b).

Cyberbullying has extremely serious consequences for victims, and aggression may be long-lasting. Children victims may experience anxiety, depression, behavioral and emotional disorders, and even dramatic consequences. The victims of the cyberbullying phenomenon show anger, sadness, apathy and anxiety. Anorexia, bulimia, suicide attempts, drug or alcohol use, etc. may occur (Palaghia, 2018).

Openshaw says that "suicide is the second leading cause of death among children and adolescents. People who contemplate suicide are frequently ambivalent about killing themselves and usually respond to help. This is because people who have a suicide plan may not want to die, but only to be free from their current situation, therefore suicide seems to be their only viable option. Suicidal students often try to communicate their feelings indirectly prior to attempting suicide" (Openshaw, 2008, p. 234).

Șoitu (2015) mentions that there are "some attempts at clarifying the two terms- vulnerability and resilience- that have been made from a psychological, social (welfare), healthcare, environmental and legal point of view. Lately, more numerous specialists have been increasingly interested in the issue of vulnerability: psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, social workers, demographers, teaching staff, economists, ecologists and geographers. The interest was the basis for interdisciplinary, comprehensive and global approaches" (Chambers, as cited in Șoitu, 2015, p. 10). The professor also says that "vulnerability comes from an exposure to contingency and stress, and from the difficulty of coping with the latter. We can thus talk about an intrinsic vulnerability that consists in the absence of the resources required for coping

with a threat or a risk, and about an extrinsic vulnerability, consisting in risks, shocks and stress” (Chambers, as cited in Şoitu, 2015, p. 10).

Cojocaru states that vulnerability “characterizes not only certain populations, but also each individual person found in certain relationships with the external reality, with some social contexts of individual action, and it can be a result of the individual interpretations given to these contexts” (Cojocaru, 2005, pp. 30-31). The same author concludes: “if we propose ourselves to identify vulnerable populations, we must recognize both the individual and collective actions that lead to the manifestation of vulnerability” (Cojocaru, 2005, p. 30).

Sandu talks about the fact that „it is becoming increasingly difficult for modern social assistance to find personal family motivations for the recovery of vulnerable people” because „through negative attitudes and behaviours towards family, the potential beneficiary of social services is in a state of „self-vulnerability”, “self-aggression” and, therefore, “self-victimization”. (Sandu, 2017, p. 183). Practically, the dependent and vulnerable person “becomes the prey to the challenges of the contemporary world that act through external social risk factors, namely vulnerability, victimization and marginalization” (Sandu, 2017, p. 183).

Irimescu mentions the fact that “remembering risk factors and protective factors without mentioning them means forgetting the other side of the coin. In the absence of risk factors, protective factors have no impact. The intensity of a factor as the interaction with other factors can cause, in some cases, the quality of risk or protective factor” (Irimescu , 2016, p. 17).

The cognitive behavioral step has proven to be the most effective in preventing delinquency and bullying (Cusson, 2006). “The cognitive dimension of the behavioral approach suggests that behavior is mediated through the thinking process just as much as through a series of responses or stimuli. This is relevant especially for the social work, which aims to individualize the client's behaviour, an action that is quite difficult” (Şoitu, 2011, p. 596).

3. Prevention of bullying and cyberbullying at the national level

Preventing and stopping bullying has become a global concern, especially in recent years. Due to the expansion of the phenomenon, there is a need to identify effective methods of prevention and intervention. At the national level, it was decided by the minister's order no. 4390 /07.06.2012, to establish the National Council for Preventing and Fighting Violence in Schools, which has as main attribution the role of a National Anti-Violence Observatory that monitors and evaluates the implementation at the national level of the national strategy for fighting violence in schools.

By Order no. 5115 of 15 December 2014, on the approval of the Regulation on the organization and functioning of pre-university educational institutions, it was mentioned that in each school there is a Commission for preventing and fighting violence in schools, according to the Strategy on reducing violence in schools education. Pursuant to Art. 76 of Order no. 5115 of 15 December 2014, after consulting the Representative Council of Parents and the Representative

Council of Students, the Teachers' Council of each educational institutions establishes for students at least one distinctive sign, such as: a badge, a uniform, a scarf or something similar pursuant to Law no. 35/2007 on the increase of safety in educational institutions, with subsequent amendments and completions. The signs of violence are communicated to the General Directorate of Police or the County Police Inspectorate and to the General Directorate of Constables or to the County Constables Inspectorate.

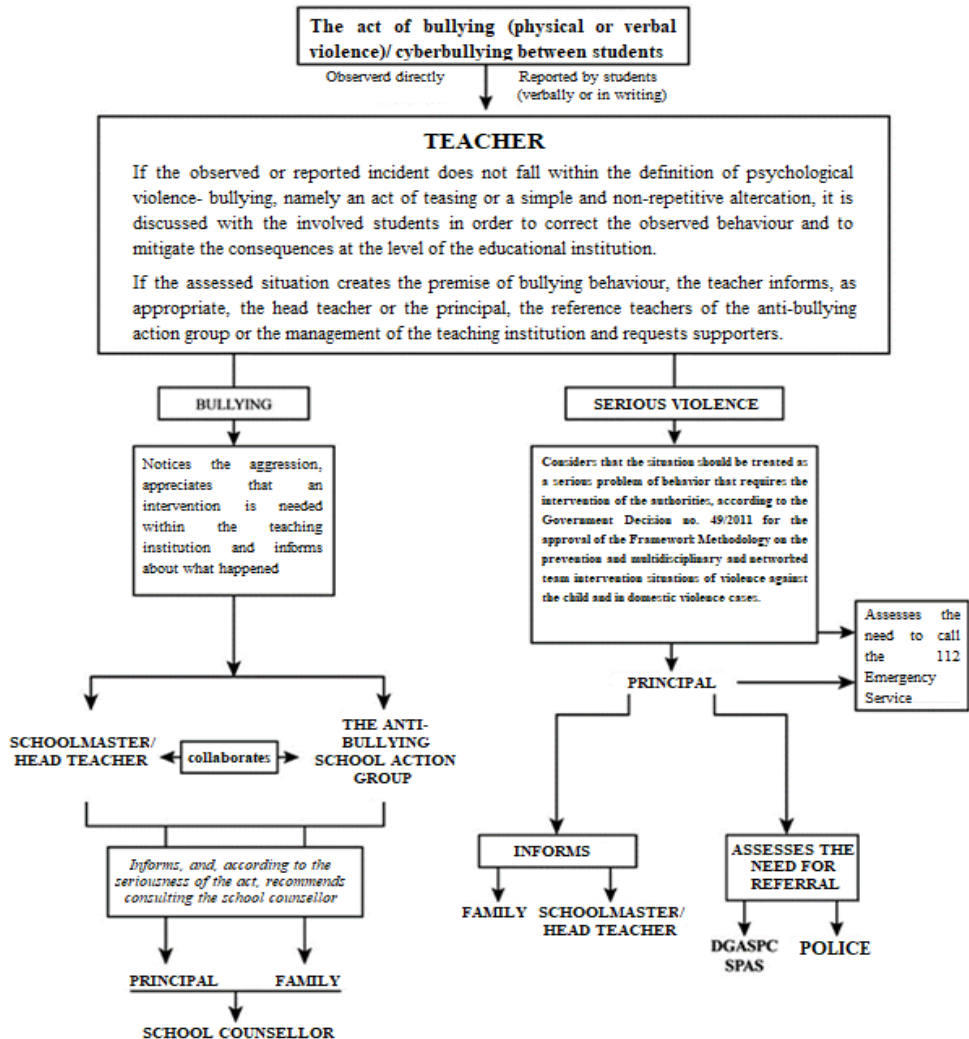
The Ministry of Education and Research developed the Methodological Norms for the enforcement of Law 221 of 18 November 2019, which seeks to amend and supplement the National Education Law no. 1/2011, to prevent and fight bullying in schools. These Methodological Norms were approved by Order no. 4343 of 27 May 2020, published in the Official Gazette, Part I, no. 492 of 10 June 2020 that presents methodological norms which are developed pursuant to Art. III of Law no. 221/2019 for the amendment and completion of the National Education Law no. 1/2011, with subsequent amendments and completions that are completed with the provisions of the Order of the Minister of National Education no. 1.409 /2007, on the approval of the Strategy for the reduction of the violence phenomenon in the pre-university educational institutions, with subsequent modifications and completions, of the Order issued by the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research no. 5.079 /2016 on the approval of the Framework Regulation for the organization and functioning of pre-university educational institutions, the Order issued by the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research no. 4.742 /2016 for the approval of the Student Statute and correlates with the provisions of Law no. 272/2004 on the protection and promotion of children's rights, republished, with subsequent amendments and completions, and of the Government Decision no. 49/2011 for the approval of the Framework Methodology on the prevention and intervention in multidisciplinary and network teams in violent situations against children and domestic violence, and the Methodology of multidisciplinary and interinstitutional intervention on children who are exploited and risk of being exploited through work, children who are victims of human trafficking, as well as Romanian migrant children who are victims of other forms of violence on the territory of other states.

The purpose of the regulated anti-bullying rules is to provide a positive and safe climate in each school, based on the respect for the pupil, non-discrimination, on the motivation for learning and, above all, to provide the well-being of the pupils, no matter if they are in kindergarten or in school. By adopting and publishing these Methodological Norms (www.edu.ro), a new working tool is practically offered to professionals in the educational system, families, students, authorities responsible for Child Protection against Bullying, specialized service providers for the rehabilitation of child victims, observers or children with aggressive behaviour. The objectives pursued by the legislative norms in force are: to promote measures in order to prevent and fight bullying and cyberbullying and to identify, signal and intervene in a multidisciplinary team when such situations occur. Thus, the Anti-Bullying Action Group is set up

in each school, consisting of maximum 10 members, of which, the school principal, the school counselor, three teachers trained in bullying and cyberbullying, two or more student representatives, a representative of the parents and representatives of the local authority. This Action Group aims to prevent, intervene and address bullying and cyberbullying among pupils.

**THE INTERVENTION OF TEACHERS IN THE BULLYING SITUATIONS
IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS***

** according to the intervention model proposed by "Save the Children" and applied in 30 schools and high schools in Târgoviște and Bucharest, in the period 2013-2020.*



Source: Order of the Minister of National Education and Scientific Research no. 4343 of 27 May 2020.

Pursuant to Law 129 of 15 July 2018 that stipulates the establishment of the National Authority for Supervision of Personal Data Processing (ANSPDCP, 2018), which aims at resolving conflict situations involving victims of cyberbullying.

4. Conclusions

Ignoring bullying and cyberbullying prevention measures can have serious and alarming effects on the emotional and professional development of children and of young people. The prevention of traditional bullying in real-life that began long before the discovery of the Internet and other technology facilities, also helps in „changing worlds” such as cyberspace.

It has been shown that schools that are effective in terms of education are also effective in preventing deviant acts (Palaghia, 2016). Having in view that the repeated intimidation, achieved in the real or cyber environment, is perceived by the victim as terrorization (Palaghia, 2018), and that its consequences are extremely serious, there is a preventive approach materialized by the intervention of the school social worker (Neamțu, 2011) who offers services such as: consulting parents and teachers, supporting actors involved in the educational process in managing stress levels, developing parents' educational skills, managing students' stress or anger, developing children's social skills, preventing behavioral disorders, preventing and intervening in cases of anxiety, fear, phobia, aggression, attention deficit and hyperactivity, disability, poor school performance, depression, neurosis, suicide attempts or nonsuicidal self-mutilation, etc.

Having in view that the professional status of the family social worker was regulated by Law 217/2003 (Chapter III, Art. 12-13), we mention the fact that a good collaboration between the school social worker (who must be „the leader” of the multidisciplinary team involved in solving social issues) and the family social worker would ensure the school-family-community partnership with beneficial effects on the pupils' mental health and school integration.

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- *** Legea 129 din 15 iulie 2018, privind înființarea, organizarea și funcționarea Autorității Naționale de Supraveghere a Prelucrării Datelor cu Caracter Personal.
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- *** Ordinul ministrului Educației Naționale nr. 1.409/2007, privind aprobarea Strategiei pentru reducerea fenomenului de violență în unitățile de învățământ preuniversitar, cu modificările și completările ulterioare.
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- *** <https://www.edu.ro/normele metodologice de aplicare a legii împotriva bullyingului>.