



Bullying at School: Analysis, Facts and Intervention in Lithuania. Project “I Am Not Scared”

Vida Drąsutė, Sigita Drasutis, Rūta Kukučionytė

vida.motekaityte@ktu.lt, sigitas.drasutis@ktu.lt, rutakukucionyte@ktu.lt

Kaunas University of Technology (Lithuania)

Abstract

Bullying is not a new problem for schools, since it has been present for a long time; however, only in recent years its importance has been recognized. Bullying and violence is a problem about which we can discuss with the representatives of all countries because it's not just for one or a few states, particular problem, not exception is also Lithuania. In all countries there is different degree of bullying and violence. Fact, that there are different perceptions and possibilities to assess the prevalence of this phenomena, because it is different societies, families' and children's attitudes towards violence and bullying, the ability to recognize it, the desire and efforts to combat it, aims to ensure children's, as little member of our society, growth and development in safe and based of respect for others, environment. It is important to ensure that each member of the society, especially young ones, could have possibility to grow as a confident personality. Moreover the statistics and analysis made in the past years show that Lithuania takes the first place from 35 countries according to the highest extent of bullying. The situation was discussed between institutions in different countries in Europe and from 2010 the Lifelong Learning Key Activity 1 multilateral project “I am not scared” was initiated and is developed. This article deals with the analysis on bullying phenomenon made in Lithuania by the project partner Kaunas University of Technology, also presents activities and initiatives which were taken in the country and could be mentioned as good practice examples

1. School Bullying Phenomenon in Lithuania

Lithuania is among the countries, which are characterized by high rates of violence and bullying, and have non opportune risk factors for complex phenomena of violence in society. Compared with the other European Union countries, more children in Lithuania feel unhappy, a significant percentage of tending to the destruction of (crimes of aggression outbreaks) or auto destruction (propensity to commit suicide or otherwise harm yourself) operations. Children suffer and feel harassment and bullying in schools, in care institutions, in the broadest sense - the whole society.

Bullying in Lithuania's schools usually appears because of the specific cause that is important for every adolescent: appearance, weight, style, clothes, what things children use in school or how much lunch money do they have. Mostly, bullying occurs when children have too much free time and are not concentrating on their duties.

But often children in Lithuania schools are being bullied because of their own negative acts: desperate seek for attention, lies and cheating. In gymnasiums students may be bullied because of their inability to learn (pupils may be admitted to better schools because of their financial or social status, not because of their academic achievements). It must be emphasised that some children sometimes show themselves not only as being better than others, but also diminishing other classmates in purpose to gain popularity and feel comfortable as being superior. Moreover, there is always at least one pupil who tries to get better grades by acting better when teacher is in class. This kind of behaviour catches attention of his/her classmates and then the bullying begins.

Therefore parents should guide their children towards afterschool activities, such as arts or music school, sports, drama or photography clubs, etc. If children have less free time for laziness and time for paying attention to children's talks, there are less overall problems.

2. Bullying Facts Analysis in Lithuania

This section considers bullying consequences on children health analysed in various studies carried in Lithuania's schools.

Aggression in schools is a problem in many countries around the world. Bullying is a relationship problem in which power and aggression are used to cause distress to a vulnerable person. During Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study Lithuanian situation has been already analyzed for 16 years **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata..**

HBSC out in Lithuania in 1994, 1998, 2002, 2006 and survey carried out in 2008 by World Health Organization served as a basis for the development of a dynamic database for the analysis and evaluation of young people's health behaviour. The data demonstrates the wide range of mental health problems young people face, the main ones being: a relatively low rating of subjective health and well-being; growing prevalence of smoking, alcohol and drug use; high prevalence of bullying in schools; and high rate of suicides **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata..**

In the research "School bullying and its association with health and lifestyle among schoolchildren", done by A. Zaborskis and I. Vareikienė [6], the authors describe the analysis of the data from anonymous survey conducted in the spring of 2002. The students completed the World Health Organization's HBSC questionnaire that included self report of involvement in bullying and being bullied by others as well as subjective health and well-being estimates, health complains (headache, stomach-ache, back pain, anxiety, etc.), and problem behaviours (smoking, alcohol and drug use, suicidal ideation). More than half (52.3%) of students were involved in bullying process at least two times per month: 17.9% were involved as bullies ("victims"), 18.3% were bullied ("aggressors"), and 16.1% bullied others and were bullied themselves **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata..**

The aim of the study carried out by G. Širvinskienė, N. Žemaitienė and A. Didžiokienė **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.** was to overview the impact of bullying and victimization to school-children's subjective health evaluation, happiness feelings, suicidal and risk behaviours. The study was performed in Kaunas 2005, 1053 adolescents of 12–18 age were questioned. The study showed that 52,4% of children were both bullies and victims of bullying – aggressive victims, only 13,3% of children were not involved in bullying behaviour.

Violence, abuse and bullying rates are also mental health indicators of the population. The HBSC survey in 2006 revealed a high rate of bullying in Lithuanian schools. 27.2% of 11–15-year-old students reported that they had been bullied by others at least 2–3 times in the past couple of months **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata..**

World Health Organization, in June, 2008 provided an international survey, which shows that the Lithuanian school children exposed to bullying and other sneer from 1994 to 2006 significantly decreased, but compared to other countries, incidence of bullying in Lithuanian schools still remains one of the largest. So far, according to lead to bullying Lithuanian figures are the first or the second position depending on the children's age. Children who sneer from others in 2008 were 30.33% boys and 16.60% girls. According to the other children bullying in Lithuania takes the first, third and fifth place in the different age groups.

In a publication written by A. Laskytė, N. Žemaitienė, R. Vaitkevičius (2008) **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.** the correlation of deliberate self-harm and stressful life events in adolescence in Lithuania was analysed. The concluded results note that experiences of stressful life events increase the possibility of deliberate self harming among adolescents. The probability of deliberate self-harm among girls is mostly related to suicide attempts of family members or friends, problems with police, disagreements or fights with parents or friends, difficulties in relations with a boyfriend, and bullying at school. Such probability of deliberate self-harm among boys is mostly



related to concerns about sexual orientation, sexual abuse, suicidal attempts of family members and difficulties while studying.

There is also some positive news that the rate of being bullied (Fig.1 a) and bullying others (Fig.1 b) in Lithuanian schools seems to be both decreasing (Fig. 1).

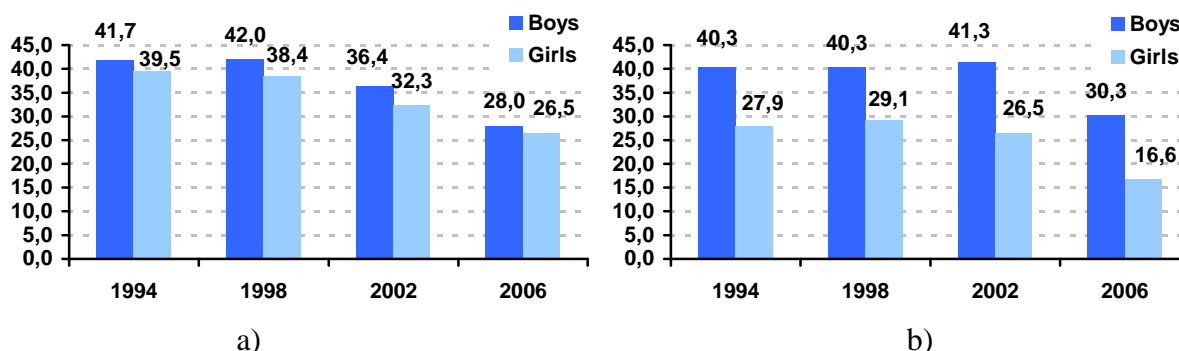


Fig.1. Lithuanian students a) who have been bullied by others and b) who have bullied other 2–3 times or more in the past couple of months, 1994–2006 **Errore. L'origine riferimento non è stata trovata.**

But the fact that there is still a high rate of bullying appearances might be the leading cause for 3.85 % of students reporting that they do not feel safe at their school [Fig.2]. This is according to a survey carried out in the beginning of 2010 in Lithuania's schools 0.

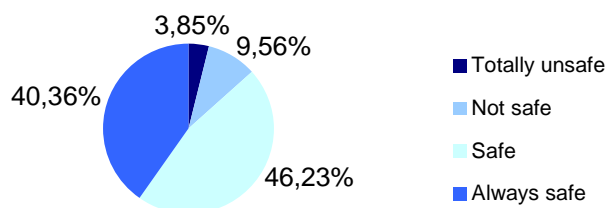


Fig.2. Children's well being at school 0

Though the numbers seem low, but these children have problem which has to be addressed and solved by adults in an appropriate timing.

A significant association between experiencing bullying and adverse health outcomes was found during these studies. Children who bullied others were related with more frequent smoking, alcohol and drug substance use. The experience of being bullied was related with higher suicidal risk, worse health and unhappiness feelings, and more frequent loneliness. The highest risk group should be considered the aggressive victims; they are distinguishing because of the highest suicide risk, and have risk factors of health, future social relationships and risk behaviours, both as victims and as bullies. These findings indicate the importance of bullying prevention in schools and importance to pay bigger attention to aggressive victims' problems.

3. LLP KA1 Project "I Am Not Scared"

Reviewing information in the websites, researchers, conference proceedings it is visible that many surveys carried out at European level highlight how the phenomenon of bullying is involving an high number of pupils. The official research promoted by the European Council in 2008 has acknowledge that the average of pupils declaring being victim of bullying is around 32% with a range from country to country that varies from 25% do 45%. The bullying phenomenon is a main challenge, that all European educational systems have to deal with. The "I Am Not Scared" project (Project number: 511645-2010-LLP-IT-KA1-KA1SCR), which was initiated in 2010 and approved by European Commission), funded by the European Commission in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) KA1 (Policy Cooperation and Innovation), intends to identify the best European strategies to prevent and combat the bullying phenomenon. There are eleven partners involved in nine

different European countries (Italy, Belgium, Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom) project is coordinated by Istituto di Istruzione Superiore Don Lorenzo Milani (Italy), Kaunas University of Technology actively participates as one of the project partners.

The objectives of this action are to achieve comparative analyses of educational systems in the European Union, with a view to ensuring an adequate supply of comparable data, statistics and analysis to underpin lifelong learning policy development, as well as to monitor progress towards objectives and targets in lifelong learning and to identify areas for particular attention.

The project intends to identify the best strategies to prevent and combat the bullying phenomenon and provide secondary school, vocational education teachers, pupils and their parents and key policy makers in the field of education with a better understanding of the dynamics that can lead to the emerging and consolidating of the bullying phenomenon and of the most effective strategies and behaviours to tackle it.

The project will adopt a research-action approach in which the teachers, the pupils and their parents and the policy makers will be themselves the protagonists of the acquiring and understanding of the information, through their commitment to a transnational knowledge sharing experience on the theme of bullying prevention.

Project started in November, 2010 and during $\frac{1}{4}$ time of the project development period, database of reviews of publications addressing the bullying phenomenon available at national level in the nine European countries involved was created and is published together with other results and information in the project website <http://iamnotscared.pixel-online.org>. The publications include: researches, reports, books, articles, web articles, laws, regulations, etc. Each selected publication has been reviewed and presented according to a common format. The reviews of the selected publications are organized in the searchable database in the project website. Publications are available only in the original languages, while the reviews were made in English and in the national languages. Each partner provided more or less 50 reviews of publications, in general expected more than 500 reviews.

The second step which was initiated is a review of good practices, also available at national level in the nine European countries involved, addressing the bullying phenomenon. The best practices include: ongoing and past projects, educational initiatives, training courses to teachers, informative and awareness raising campaigns, etc. Each selected best practice has been reviewed and presented according to a common format. Reviews are made in English and in the national languages.

Next steps are to provide National Reports on school bullying in the nine European countries involved in the project, to involve the schools as beneficiary institutions. Involved teachers of these schools will participate in a peer to peer based knowledge sharing experience, with which they will comment the case studies of the other countries, exchange their opinion and good practise; involved parents will be interviewed in order to understand if they noticed what was happening, if they got informed and by who, if they had the possibility to modify the situation and how. Also we seek to involve experts, counsellors, policy makers, public authorities into the project development process and evaluation. The point of view of the experts, as for example psychologists, working in the school environment will also be taken into account, to understand if they were aware, what they have done, how they would improve communication and cooperation; representatives of the public authorities who are in charge of defining the policies and strategies of intervention in preventing and tackling the bullying phenomenon will be contacted in order to receive a feedback of their interpretation of the events.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Seeing the facts of the analysis made by HBSC, World Health Organization, also researchers Lithuania like many other countries in Europe face the problem of bullying. What is good and gives the light in the dark is that more and more preventive mental health programmes for young people are implemented and developed, also great initiations of national and international projects. The aim of such initiatives is to create safer school environments for children and promote friendly and respectful communication that does not involve humiliation and bullying, encourage involvement of youth volunteers to provide crisis interventions and education for peers, make schools more positive places for students to learn and develop to foster child's self confidence and ability to interact positively with others. Also the project "I am not scared" follows mentioned aims and seeks to involve schools, as active beneficiaries, which will have the main impact from the project.

REFERENCES

- [1] Zaborskis, L. Cirtautienė, N. Žemaitienė. "Bullying in Lithuanian schools in 1994–2002". Institute for Biomedical Research, Kaunas University of Medicine, Lithuania. Available at: <http://medicina.kmu.lt/0507/0507-10e.pdf> .
- [2] Zaborskis, N. Žemaitienė. „Lithuania: youth mental health – from research to policies, practice and partnerships”. WHO/HBSC Forum 2007; Copenhagen, 2008. – 140-152 p. Available at: www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/74769/Hbsc_Forum_2007_Lithuania.pdf .
- [3] Tonja R. Nansel, PhD; Wendy Craig, PhD; Mary D. Overpeck, DrPH; Gitanjali Saluja, PhD; W. June Ruan, MA; and the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Bullying Analyses Working Group. "Cross-national Consistency in the Relationship Between Bullying Behaviors and Psychosocial Adjustment". Reprinted by Arch Pediatr Adolesc med/vol 158, AUG 2004. Available at: www.nuigalway.ie/hbsc/documents/nansel_et_al_apam_1588_bullying.pdf .
- [4] Zaborskis, L. Cirtautienė, N. Žemaitienė. "School bullying and its association with health and lifestyle among schoolchildren". Institute for Biomedical Research, Kaunas University of Medicine, Lithuania. Available at: <http://medicina.kmu.lt/0803/0803-09l.pdf> .
- [5] G. Širvinskienė, N. Žemaitienė and A. Didžiokienė. "The health, risk behaviour and bullying roles of children involved in school bullying behaviors in Kaunas". In: "Visuomenės sveikata", 2008. Available at: www.nkd.lt/files/informacine_medzega/2-Moksliniai_straipsniai/4.pdf .
- [6] Available at: www.juventa.lt/iliustracijos/_pro/200910/saugimokykla/naudmenos/apkl_rez_liet.pdf