

## Frequency of Bullying Behaviours in Secondary Schools in Cluj-Napoca

Ioana Elena BELDEAN-GALEA<sup>1\*</sup>, Nicolae JURCĂU<sup>2</sup>, Ștefan I. ȚIGAN<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Public Health - Regional Centre for Public Health, Cluj-Napoca, 6 Louis Pasteur, 400349 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

<sup>2</sup> Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, 28 Memorandumului, 400114 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

<sup>3</sup> „Iuliu Hațieganu” University of Medicine and Pharmacy Cluj-Napoca, 13 Emil Isac, 400023 Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

E-mails: galeaioana@yahoo.com, nicolae.jurcau@dppd.utcluj.ro, stigan@umfcluj.ro

\* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; \* Tel: +40-741118138, Fax: +40-264-599891.

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### Abstract

“Bullying” is generally considered to be a specific form of aggressive behaviour. The aim of this paper is the investigation of gender and age-related bully and victim incidence in Cluj-Napoca secondary schools. A survey on bullying was completed by 264 students (141 girls and 123 boys; 112 students from grades 5-6 and 152 students from grades 7-8) with an age range between 10 and 14 years old. From the entire sample, results showed that 3.8% of the students bullied others once a week or more during the previous 3 months and 40.5% had been frequently bullied by other students once a week or more often during the previous 3 months. Considering the gender differences, girls showed a bullying behaviour more frequently than boys.

**Keywords:** Aggressive behaviour; Bullying; Victims; Secondary school.

### Introduction

The bullying behaviour among the youth is a major public health problem because it represents a serious risk factor in the development of psychopathologic behaviours later on [1].

According to Olweus, „bullying is thus characterized by the following three criteria: 1) it is aggressive behaviour or intentional ‚harmdoing’ 2) which is carried out repeatedly and over time, 3) in an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power” [2].

Recurrence (the victim is the target of repeated aggression) and imbalance of power (the victim is unable to defend himself/herself because he/she is outnumbered or of less physical or emotional strength than the bullies) are the two criteria that distinguish the bullying behaviour as a subcategory of the general concept of aggression [2, 3].

Bullying varies and may include different behaviours.

A classifying model for the common types of school bullying based on the models created by Olweus and Rigby is provided by Susan P [4].

- **Verbal bullying:** taunting, teasing, name-calling (*direct bullying*) and spreading rumours (*indirect bullying*)
- **Physical bullying:** Hitting, kicking, shoving, destruction or theft of property (*direct bullying*) and enlisting a friend to assault someone for you (*indirect bullying*)
- **Non-verbal/Non-physical bullying:** Threatening (*direct bullying*) and excluding others from a group, obscene gestures, manipulation of friendships, threatening e-mail (*indirect bullying*)

School bullying is a fact occurring in many countries. According to a study conducted by Currie on child health in 27 countries, the majority of the 13-year-olds in most of the countries have been involved in bullying behaviours at least some of the time [5].

Many studies have indicated that bullying and victimization frequency varies due to gender and age differences. Thus, most of the studies [6-9] show that, according to the students' self-reports, boys are more likely than girls to bully other students. Studies conducted on victimization provided varied results: some studies [8] indicated that the rate of victimization is greater among boys, others [7, 9] did not find any statistically significant difference, and others [6] found that the victimization rate was greater among girls, although the differences came near the statistical significance.

Many studies have found that the frequency of bullying and victimization decreases as children reach higher school grades.

Thus, in their study [7] Genta and colleagues have found that the frequencies of both bullying and victimization decrease from primary grades to secondary school.

Likewise, another study done by Nansel and colleagues [8] has showed that older students are less likely to bully their colleagues than younger students. As for victimization, almost a quarter of the 6<sup>th</sup> graders admitted being bullied during the current school year and less than a tenth of the 10<sup>th</sup> graders reported similar experiences during the same period of time.

Nonetheless, results of another study have indicated an increase in bullying from lower school levels (5<sup>th</sup> grade) to higher levels (6<sup>th</sup> grade) that goes all the way to the 9<sup>th</sup> grade and then decreases in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Reports on victimization show a clear and steady decrease from lower to higher school levels.

The results of a national study on violence in Romanian schools [10] have shown that the percent of schools in which different forms of violence have been reported (ranging from severe to the most simple forms) reaches a worrying level, of over 75% of all the schools included in the study. It was also pointed out that certain conducts regarded as violent behaviours occur more frequently and more severe forms in older students as compared to younger students. The same study has showed that most of the individuals (school principals, school counsellors/social workers and students) questioned about age differences related to school violence considered boys to be more violent than girls.

The aim of this study was the investigation of bullying and victimization frequency in Cluj-Napoca secondary schools based on gender and age variations.

## **Material and Method**

### *Participants*

The sample is made up of 264 students (141 <53.4%> girls and 123 <46.6%> boys; 112 <42.42%> 5<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> graders and 152 <57.57%> 7<sup>th</sup> -8<sup>th</sup> graders) with ages ranging from 10 to 14 years old, from two secondary schools.

The two schools were selected following certain shared criteria (location - neighbourhood schools, the total number of students). This condition was set due to a more extensive study that is to be carried out of which the above-mentioned study will be a part.

### *Instruments*

We have used the Bullying Student Self-Report Questionnaire built by Stevens and co-workers [11] for the Finnish population (includes items belonging to Olweus' Self-report Bullying Inventory and Arora's Life in School Checklist) translated and adapted into Romanian. [12] The survey consists of three scales (bullying, victimization and positive behaviours). In this study only two scales were used (bullying and victimization) which evaluate the frequency of bullying and victimization as well as the forms of bullying and victimization (social exclusion, verbal, physical, indirect) during the three months preceding the survey.

The scores for the answer choices on the survey items are: 0 - never; 1 - rarely, 2 - sometimes; 3 - often; 4 - very often (several times a week).

### *Procedure*

Each student answered the entire self-report survey.

This study applied the model of Stevens and colleagues' study [11], which followed the suggestion made by Olweus that a clear definition of bullying and victimization was given before filling out the

survey.

Because there is no word in Romanian, same as in other Romance languages, that accurately translates the term “bullying” [2], the syntagm “*comportament agresiv, repetitiv, abuziv*” was used as a correspondent to the technical word “bullying”.

In that regard, it was considered necessary first to explain the notion of aggressive behaviour - any kind of behaviour that aims at causing bodily or emotional harm [13]- and to give specific examples of aggressive behaviours that fall into multiple categories of them (verbal-physical, direct-indirect, individual-collective). It was also explained that the positive meaning of the syntagm “aggressive behaviour” (initiative, courage, ambition) which is sometimes used in the ordinary language will be excluded.

Next, the behaviour that is described by the word “bullying” was introduced to the children, according to the definition given by Olweus, as a subset of the more general term of aggressive behaviour [2], pointing out the superiority of the bully, as well as the recurrent nature of the bullying incidents which sets them apart from the general aggressive behaviours (fist fights or quarrels between individuals of the same physical or emotional strength).

Following is the definition given by Olweus:

“We say a student is being bullied when another student, or a group of students, say nasty and unpleasant things to him or her. It is also bullying when a student is hit, kicked, threatened, locked inside a room, and things like that. These things may take place frequently and it is difficult for the student being bullied to defend himself or herself. It is also bullying when a student is teased repeatedly in a negative way. But it is not bullying when two students of about same strength quarrel or fight [11].

Furthermore, examples of factors have been given (along with the students) that can make the victims feel inferior, unable to protect themselves or to confront the bully:

- They are weaker
- They have certain deficiencies
- They have certain personality traits
- Low financial means making them feel inferior to the bully etc.

Filling out the survey took 30 minutes. The students were assured of the privacy of their answers.

#### Statistical Analysis

For the evaluation of the bully and victim incidence descriptive statistical methods, frequencies were used. In order to determine whether the female group differed significantly from the male group and that the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders differed significantly from the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders regarding bullying and victimization frequency the  $\chi^2$  (chi-square) test was calculated.

A p value <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## Results

Out of the 264 students surveyed, 33.8% reported bullying others “once a week or more often”, 60.8% „sometimes” (once or twice and sometime), while only 5.3% reported “never” bullying others (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Frequency of bullying incidents as determined by gender and school level

BULLYING (%)		Never	Sometimes	Once a week or more often
Gender	Girls	3.6	52.9	43.6
	Boys	7.3	69.9	22.8
School level	Grades 5-6	5.4	68.8	25.9
	Grades 7-8	5.3	55.0	39.7
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>5.3</b>	<b>60.8</b>	<b>33.8</b>

There is a statistically significant difference in bullying frequencies between boys and girls ( $p=0.001$ ).

Girls tend to bully others more often than boys; 43.6% of the girls reported bullying other students “once a week or more often” as compared to 22.8% of the boys.

At the same time, bullying frequency varies with school levels. Bullying was seen to occur more often among children in higher grades (grades 7-8, 39.7%) than among those in lower grades (grades 5-6, 25.9%).

Although we cannot say there is a statistically significant difference between school grades regarding the bullying frequency because  $p > 0.05$ , we should mention that this difference is very close to statistical significance ( $p = 0.059$ ).

The same method was used to analyze the data on victimization.

Out of the 264 students surveyed, 40.5% reported being victimized “once a week or more often”, 55% „sometimes” (once or twice and sometimes) and 4.6% reported „never” being victimized (Table 2).

**Table 2.** Frequency of victimization as determined by gender and school level

BULLYING (%)		Never	Sometimes	Once a week or more often
Gender	Girls	7.2	51.8	41.0
	Boys	1.6	58.5	39.8
School level	Grades 5-6	1.8	55.4	42.9
	Grades 7-8	6.7	54.7	38.7
<b>Total (%)</b>		<b>4.6</b>	<b>55.0</b>	<b>40.5</b>

Victimization levels showed no statistically significant differences between boys and girls.

Students in lower grades tend to be victimized more often than those in higher grades; 42.9% of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades reported being bullied “once a week or more often”, 55.4% “sometimes” and only 1.8% “never”, compared to 38.7% of the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders who reported being bullied “once a week or more often”, 54.7% “sometimes” and 6.7% “never”. This difference was found to be statistically insignificant.

## Discussion

In this study we have tried to identify the bullying behaviours among students in Cluj-Napoca.

The data we have gathered indicates that this type of conduct is present among the Romanian students, as is in many other countries [5].

Among the children from the sample used for this study, we noticed a high incidence of bullying behaviours. According to the self-reports, 33.8% of the surveyed students bullied others frequently. The incidence of victimization is higher than that of bullying; 40.5% of the students reported being victimized frequently by other students.

The field’s literature indicates that bullying and victimization incidence is different from one country to another [14]. According to Wolke and Stanford, differences in bullying and victimization incidence from one country to another can be accounted for by the methodological variations between studies: different definitions for bullying and the forms of bullying studied; different incidence/intensity; methodological differences and school or class-specific factors [9].

Given these aspects, the data gathered on the subject of bullying from the Romanian schools and used in this study was not compared to the data recorded in other countries.

As for the gender differences, the results have shown that girls bully more often than boys do, which contrasts with the results provided by other research [6-9]. There are no age differences concerning victimization, in accord with the results offered by other studies [7,9].

Although the results have shown no marked age difference regarding bullying and victimization, there is an increase in bullying and a decrease in victimization in the higher grades [7-8], compared to the lower grades [5-6].

This study has certain limitations, as the data is gathered based on information’s provided by students in only two secondary schools used as such in a single Romanian city. Also, gender-related differences in bullying and victimization frequencies were established only regarding the overall forms of bullying.

We hope that the results provided by this study will encourage further research of bullying behaviours in Romanian schools, using larger samples of students, from more schools that are picked randomly, on larger areas of the country, both urban and rural and from more age groups. Ideally, the research area would include more aspects of bullying, like types, motivations and consequences.

## Conclusions

This study provides basic information regarding the prevalence of bullying phenomenon and victimization in gymnasium schools from Romania.

Its offer data related to gender and school level differences in bullying involving.

The results of this study could be a guiding mark for other similar studies which have as subject the bullying phenomenon in Romanian schools.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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