

# THE DYNAMICS OF CHILDREN'S GLOBAL VICTIMIZATION

Ana Rodica Stăiculescu<sup>1</sup>

"Ovidius" University from Constanța

Monica Bala Nădrag<sup>2</sup>

University of Bucharest

Alina Stan<sup>3</sup>

University of Bucharest

**Abstract:** *This paper is a response to the problem of the victimization of children by their peers during educational activities and the government action to limit its effects. The purpose of our paper is not only to bring into discussion the implications of changing the cultural way of approaching children's violent behavior, but to present the outcome of an early intervention. In addition, we underline that a hostile environment in the early years of life can be created by an individual's peers, thus establishing a future pattern of behavior for aggressors and victims alike. The objective of this study is to examine the recent increase of bullying issues and will include an overview of its causes and effects, a description of the main physical symptoms caused by the impact of bullying and a summary of strategies that can be used to address it. Bullying is a form of aggression that almost always involves an imbalance of power. This paper will examine bullying as a form of relational violence because it is much more frequent than physical bullying. We will define relational aggression as any psychological, social or emotional aggression between people in relationships, whereby "the group" is used as a weapon to hurt others. Finally, we will reveal the current prevention and intervention programs based on emotional education and cultivation of an emphatic behavior.*

**Keywords:** deviance, relational violence, social attitudes, gender, bullying.

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<sup>1</sup> **Author address:** "Ovidius" University from Constanța, Faculty of Law, Administrative Sciences and Sociology, Aleea Universitatii, no. 1, Campus, Corp A, room 104b, Constanta, 900472. **E-mail:** [staicul@univ-ovidius.ro](mailto:staicul@univ-ovidius.ro)

<sup>2</sup> **Author address:** University of Bucharest, Romania. **E-mail:** [moni\\_paris@yahoo.com](mailto:moni_paris@yahoo.com)

<sup>3</sup> **Author address:** University of Bucharest, Romania. **E-mail:** [costiana\\_stan@yahoo.com](mailto:costiana_stan@yahoo.com)

## Introduction

The purpose of this study is to highlight one of the aspects of school violence, namely *relational aggression*. This form of early violence is invisible, but equally insidious. Our article does not aspire to give a complete picture of the phenomena, but tries to confine the results from international projects addressing bullying and child victimization. The arguments presented here are those of well known authors like Peter Randall, Dan Olweus and Salmivalli Christina who provided valuable suggestions in their studies for proactive solutions based on encouraging evidence. Our particular concern is the global phenomena of children victimization at school, presented in this article through recent research developments of this topic. By examining the interventions proposed by the *scholarly literature*, we will hopefully provide a valuable source of ideas for policy makers and for those attempting to reduce the incidence of bullying at any age.

The article is divided into three parts. The first part gives an overview of what is known about bully/victim problems among school children, and tries to present the heteromorphy notion of bullying at a global level. Even if some reports state that bullying is a considerable problem in Romanian schools, there are simply no official data available to assess directly how frequent bully/victim problems are. The relevance of our subject is thus stressed by the fact that indirect signs suggest that bullying is becoming more serious, and that school bullies can later become adult bullies. Next, we tried to examine the recent increase of bullying issues and we will include an overview of its causes and effects, a description of the main physical symptoms caused by the impact of bullying. The final part offers strategies related to “anti-bullying” in terms of preventing aggressive behavior through early education, increasing empathy and making educational policies respond to these procedures.

## Understanding the global dimension of bullying

Public attention is drawn only in extreme situations in which the victim of such violence can no longer take it and takes his or her own life. In almost every class there is a victim, the outcast, bizarre, inadequate, who bears the insults and humiliation (Simmons, 2002). An increased interest in addressing and preventing school violence must pursue this form of bullying at school because of its long-term implications (Duffy & Nesdale, 2009, pp.121-139).

In this article we will address the problem of victimization, called *bullying*<sup>4</sup> in Anglo-Saxon literature, as defined by the Scandinavian scholar Dan Olweus, addressing the problem in detail: “a person is victimized when he or she is exposed for a long period and regularly to negative actions by one person or more” (1993, p. 9).

Bounded by the theoretical idea of violent acts punishable by criminal law, the type of violence we address is directly involved in the education environment and has

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<sup>4</sup> Cristina Neamțu states that “bullying is a term that tends to be universally adopted in the specialized language and designates a type of long-term violence initiated by an individual or a group and is directed against an individual who cannot defend himself or herself in that context” (2003, p. 218).

another dimension: it consists of seemingly trivial insidious, subtle acts. Intimidation must prevail in the public eye because it is a form of violence overlooked because of its lack of outward manifestation (Craig & Konarski, 1998).

Often, adults do not know that their child has been the victim of threats or intimidation, due to a lack of visible signs. The victims of bullying are however affected by anxiety and depression, as longitudinal studies have demonstrated.

The diversity of forms of violence is a result of its social dimension. The term *violence* has several meanings, i.e. we can speak of verbal or physical violence, of violent relationships and thoughts. In *Histoire de la violence*, Jean Claude Chesnais argues that “violence is not singular, it is manifold. Unfortunately, often imperceptible, always moving and changing, violent acts follow all the places, ages, circumstances, namely dimensions of reality, always different”(1981, p. 14). It is therefore an equivocal term for most people, expressing the alienation of the individual from rules and regulations. Thus there are as many forms of violence as there are types of rules (Randall, 1997).

Violence implies interaction as Michaud (1998, p. 4) defined it: “there is violence when in a situation of interaction one or more social actors act in a direct or indirect, single or divided manner, affecting one or more variables in various degrees - physical or psychic, heritage or other cultural values”. Therefore, violence has a relational character, being a social phenomenon, where at least two people are involved, in our case the author - a student - and the recipient - another student - linked by a violent act likely to prejudice the victim.

Conducts considered as violent are committed by a student not by negligence or recklessness, as hostility is incompatible with lack of intent. From the perspective of the victim, binary, hostile, passive behavior has a different traumatic effect and the dimension of the intent hurts more at a subjective level (Hartjen & Priyadarsini, 2012, pp. 242-250).

Aggressive behavior knows, therefore, a multitude of faces, which can be expressed in a variety of manners, which creates its universal dimension. Studies on training suggest that school violence is possible when the school climate is out of control and consistency.

A report published by the UN Economic and Social Council shows that juvenile delinquency is a problem that exists in practically all countries (Olweus, 2001). Therefore, in most languages there are expressions that designate the youth whose behavior deviates from social norms so as to inspire if not respect, then fear.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In England we have the term “teddy-boys”, in the Netherlands – “nozema”, in Sweden – “raggare”, in France – “blousons noirs”, in Australia – “bodgies”, in Japan – “taiyozuku” and “huligany” in Hungary. Adults should not use the phrase “juvenile delinquent” frequently and without consideration; it is recommended not to use the term except for acts stipulated in criminal law and to not exaggerate the extent of delinquency in the case of benign forms of maladjustment experienced by minors.

This diversity of terms used leads to confusion. Confusion exists because of the large number of terms used in this thematic area: aggression, violence, deviant behavior. In the Anglo - Saxon literature there are even more concepts that further increase the confusion: harassment, aggression, aggressiveness, mobbing, bullying, violence.

Aggressive and violent behavior among students shows differences, depending on the victim's gender and that of the aggressor. In the 1970's schools in Japan were faced with a new form of violence, called *ijime*, including all acts of violence aimed at harming a person's psychological integrity, through humiliation, threats, exclusion, insults. We can note that in the Japanese language there is for the first time a semantic difference between relational school violence - *ijime* and physical school violence - *bouryoku*. *Ijime* refers only to the relational part of school violence that is a way of refusing the feeling of belonging to a group, and being part of a social structure, therefore is a vicious but indirect act of a group towards a victim. This form of bullying is invisible to the public eye as the victim wants to hide his/her shame from the others (Schuler, 1993).

In early 2000 the National Institute of Education and Research in Japan launched an international project in order to investigate bullying in schools. As a result of the investigation, *ijime* was defined as "any behavior that is disprovable or a negative attitude with the clear intent to humiliate or hurt a member who occupies a lower position within the group". It is assumed that it is a tactic used to preserve or prevent the loss of one's position within the group by hurting the position of others. Therefore, the main purpose is to cause psychological distress by use of language, diverting the opinions of others or exclusion from the group (The National Institute for Educational Policy Research [NIER], 2001).

There are three conditions that have to be present in order to deal with *ijime*: group membership, the power to change status and frequency of victimization. *Ijime* is therefore the indirect aggression in the form of acts of teasing, intimidation, insulting, but also the more serious ones, such as death threats (NIER, 2001). In Japan, *ijime* caused suicides among children and young people who were exposed to these practices by their older peers or by those of the same age<sup>6</sup>. *Ijime* covers repeated taunts, thefts, robberies and generally any aggressive attitudes which occur repeatedly in order to isolate the victim in a group and to psychologically torture it. For example, stealing school items or objects of sentimental value from a Japanese child and teasing and taunting him until he reaches a point of psychological breakdown and commits suicide, being unable to bear the everyday hell (Schuler, 1993).

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<sup>6</sup> Suicides as a result of victimization are not limited to Japan. In recent years, the West has faced generically called *bullycide* cases, among them: Steven Shepherd's suicide in 1967, Debbie Shaw who died because of physical aggressions, sisters Samantha and Michaela Kenda who died of starvation because of ridiculing on account of their weight, James Lambeth's suicide, who was teased by his classmates because of his above average intelligence - are just some of the examples listed here. Field T. (2005) offers a well documented section concerning school bullying on his *Bully OnLine* project, part of the Field Foundation; <http://www.bullyonline.org>. The project and the website are funded by seminars and sales of Tim Field's books.

The results of the project have shown that girls have the same aggressive acts pattern: teasing and insults are the most common; they are followed by exclusion and ostracism.

The list of tragedies associated with relational violence is long, but the object of our study is to report the prevalence of this phenomenon in school violence. The highly computerized countries like Japan, U.S. and South Korea face another form of this aggression: *cyber-bullying* or the use of computer or telecommunications as a medium for threats transmission. In these countries girls do not use insulting face-to-face language, but they turn to hateful text messages or emails inciting to committing suicide.

The results in Japan are suggestive for other states, especially if we consider that indirect aggression has an enormous impact on children's self esteem. Following the stress model proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) we can notice that stress can affect people's lives, leading to depression, apathy, decreased quality of life. Sources of stress can come from groups of students, competitive learning or parental expectations. Quite often they are constant in victims' intimidation life. Based on the stimulus-response relationship, the repeated aggressive behavior towards another colleague, the existence of a competitive group will determine both a higher risk of victimization (the child is already sensitive to the pressure of stress factors) and a higher risk of developing aggressive behavior because indirect aggression is often a way to respond to power relations system established in the group (Bazan, 2009).

### **Bullying through the lens of gender and age**

Aggressive behavior is defined as actions that deliberately induce physical or mental discomfort against those who are subject to bullying. Aggressive behaviors are either manifest, explicit, by the traces they leave (bruises, abrasions) or covert, implicit, when hidden and imperceptible to the senses: threat, intimidation, and gossip. Therefore, they are manifest or covert, direct or indirect, depending on how they are inflicted on the recipient. Bullying is an aggressive behavior or a series of aggressive behaviors manifest or covert, direct or indirect, establishing a relationship based on dominance of one person's power against the other, i.e. between the aggressor and his victim and whose repetition reinforces the authority of the former. Relational aggression is defined as acts hurting the others by damaging their relationships, their general feeling of acceptance, friendship or group inclusion, while social aggression is aimed at harming the victim's confidence and trust in others.

Indirect aggressive behavior is specific to girls and although it is rarely punished or taken seriously it often has very serious consequences like suicide or suicide attempts (Artz, et al. 2000). One of the first studies that considered gender as a distinguished factor in the prevalence of direct and indirect violence was made by in late '80 (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist & Peltonen, 1988, p. 404). Lagerspetz explores the relation between gender and aggression in order to find a pattern in girl's violence. Thus, violence is differentiated and embedded in an array of groups,

organizations, communities, and institutions, and reflects the boundaries of class, ethnicity, age, gender, religion, and other variables. Female aggressive behavior is embedded in three dimensions: indirect aggression, relational aggression and social aggression. Indirect aggression describes the behavior that keeps the aggressor's anonymity, allowing him to maintain relationships with victims, but also the other people's disapproval. A clear example would be the use of insults in the form of graffiti, which, unlike gossip, will not lead to the identification of the author. Relational aggression refers to the behavior that will disrupt relationships and will hurt emotionally, but will use direct confrontation, for example a girl telling another not to come to her party because she does not like her. The prevalence of relational aggression for female perpetrators continues into adulthood, as Peter Randall mentioned in his book *Adult bullying*. Social aggression includes any behavior, whether verbal or non-verbal, direct or indirect, intended to harm another's self-esteem and status in the group, giving him/her the evil eye, violent messages or offensive nicknames (Randall, 1997, pp. 39-44).

As evidence of a gender influence on violent acts, studies underline that by the age of four, aggressive behaviors among girls and boys differ slightly (Goldstein, 2002, p. 65) From that moment on until school age their frequency decreases less rapidly in boys. Another transition is operating in the nature of aggressive behavior. Physical aggression among girls is progressively replaced by the force of word. According to Artz and Riecken (1997) this is due to the fact that girls' relational aggression is developing along with verbal development, and language use is faster in girls than in boys, so they can express their feelings and emotions by using words to explore and substitute emotional reactions to battery. Traditional socialization of girls and boys has nothing to do with this trend and the values of "strong man - sensitive woman" stereotypes insert in their universe.

In this context where girls feel the pressure of this stereotype which does not allow them to freely express anger and aggression, it is not surprising that they learn to rely on indirect and relational aggression rather than direct physical aggression. The aggressive behavior characterized by intimidation will be subject to a transition starting from primary school through the end of secondary school, bullying being often committed through relational aggression by girls, and physical aggression by boys. Starting at age 13, there is a difference between girls and boys, girls fostering relational aggression tactics, disguised as: ostracism, spreading rumors, using insulting expressions, while boys continue to use explicit strategies (Olweus, 1993, p.94).

Girls' aggressive behavior is characterized by relational aggression. The choice of atypical means to cause harm is the social response to what social conventions expect of them to do (for girls to cause harm by using words). Girls are more apt to use this weapon because social construction has created and maintained a traditional female role, which suppresses physical strength and maintains harmonious relationships with others. Even more, from an early age children associate direct aggression with the role of male, and girls who adopt such conduct will be most often seen as deviant by peers. For this reason, they will accumulate

more anxiety about how they can repress anger, knowing that if they do it directly, that will arouse disapproval of others. The need to be accepted and to have a large group of friends is given by the social model that emphasizes values such as friendship and its corollary, adolescence. Aggressive children, although playing the group role of informal leaders, are often unsure of their friends and will pursue those who do not have friends, those who are new to the group or those who cannot accept any assigned role. The complexity of social relationships among female adolescents may be correlated with that of a closed society. Social relationships among girls become more important for them emotionally than for boys during adolescence, changing the dynamics of relationships, a reason for using indirect aggression (Artz & Riecken, 1997).

Girls groups are more exclusive than boys groups and are characterized by high levels of intimacy, confidence, a reason why one of the weapons of social violence is revealing confidences made to a third party, which is unacceptable for members of the group. Gossip unites and strengthens interpersonal relationships, but it is also a way in which girls can enter these closed groups without having to make themselves vulnerable. Examination of aggressive behavior among girls is also the theme of Simmons' book, *Odd Girl Out*, which examines the hidden culture of aggression among girls, using as a work method interviews and observation.

Studies conducted by the Dan Olweus, the most cited author on bullying, are based on the triad power, frequency and the intent to hurt, thus revealing the effects of this phenomenon. The concept of victimization is central because it implies an uneven distribution of force and intimidation that occurs only between different people. The consequences revealed by these studies are divided into four categories:

1. low self-esteem, feeling of dissatisfaction, feelings of anger and sadness;
2. lack of social adjustment expressed by isolation, loneliness, low school attendance;
3. psychological distress: high anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation;
4. psychosomatization: signs of a medically diagnosed disease (Simmons, 2002).

Olweus (1993, p. 56) also seeks to present the long time effects of peer victimization, given the insidious nature of these acts, and the coping strategy used by victims in a effort to reduce the negative effects of such acts. Using Lazarus concept of *coping*, he constructs an intervention program for bullying victims. The word comes from the Latin *colpus* which means repeated hitting, but the translation of the Anglo-Saxon term is actually the strategy to cope with, adjustment to a behavior which had an impact on mental and physical wellbeing. The six steps identified by Olweus are:

1. **confusion**: the victim wondering what he/she has done wrong to deserve aggressive social behavior from others. The girls often become confused about their actions that led to such treatment, and misunderstanding leads

to the second step in an attempt to cover or deny externally that this event has occurred.

2. **denial:** parents, teachers will see only a refusal to face the history of the event, some victims trying to forget the whole event; eventually, the victim will realize that denial only leads to suppressing feelings, accepting shame, fear, humiliation, loneliness, betrayal, sadness and pain reached in stage three.
3. **pain:** in this stage, pain can last for years, leading to a desire to escape but which may include the simple desire to leave the group of friends, school or life.
4. **escape:** suicidal ideation is related to the desire to escape<sup>7</sup>.
5. **fear of another attack:** victims will be afraid that others talk about them constantly, trying to hurt or betray them, and wonder if this behavior will ever cease.
6. **exacerbation of interpersonal messages:** This paranoia will ultimately lead to step six, the exacerbation of interpersonal messages. The victim translates any attempt to relate to the idea that *everyone hates me and nothing will ever change*.

There are two more steps, but they are part of the conflict resolution process: **reaction** and **recovery**. Reacting is a response to social aggression, a reaction to and an escalation of the initial conflict. The victim will answer back and thus will escalate the crisis (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Survey instruments used worldwide to determine specific psychopathological consequences are diverse and offer a complete image of the effects of early victimization. Lasting consequences of victimization may be revealed only by longitudinal studies like the one conducted by Brewster and Railsbak in 2001 by the Danish Longitudinal Health Behavior Study, Young Cohort, by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institute of Health in the U.S. (Tofsi, et al. 2011, p. 71). The 1600 sample of students revealed that 7% of them were afraid to go to school because of bullying, 10% said that they had moved to another school, and two thirds of them felt threatened, intimidated in their class. Results of other Norwegian and UK longitudinal studies

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<sup>7</sup> Suicide as a form of deviance was most often explained by the theory of resistance to frustration. The theory was developed by W.C. Reckless (as cited by Hartjen & Priyadarsini, 2012, p.348). Frustration is caused by an obstacle or a social barrier which "blocks" the man from meeting his needs, interests and aspirations. Frustration manifests emotionally through increased internal tensions which direct the behavior in order to satisfy needs by undesirable, socially harmful means. Human capacity to transcend a situation of frustration without responding inadequately has been defined as *tolerance* to frustration. Without this resistance, feelings of abandonment, total loss appear and the solution or lack of it leads to suicide. Frustration tolerance can act as either a beneficial, stimulating, mobilizing element or a destructive one, a blockage to achieving assessments, projects and socially desirable goals. Aggression is considered to be closely related to the concept of frustration. Suicide is defined as a form of violence, violence towards one's own body.

with over 200 students as a sample revealed a direct relationship between bullying and self-esteem, even after long periods of time. The quantitative studies show a variance of bullying, from a 16%. 35% or even 40%, but all longitudinal studies conclude that bullying have long-lasting effects (Salmivalli, 2010).<sup>8</sup>

The negative consequence of aggression during childhood is not just about low self-esteem, but also about poor social insertion, so that in the UK and Canada half of the interviewed adults who had been abused as children said they felt lonely, had problems in developing long-term personal relationships, intimacy and emotional problems (Craig & Konarski, 1998).

The best known effect of social aggression is the sorrow felt by the victim who finds himself in an environment devoid of friends, the suffering escalating towards clinical depression or suicide. Most victims said that after the incident they were so depressed that they chose not to go to school any more. This is emphasized by Olweus, who considers that the main mechanism for *coping* is social withdrawal. Suicidal thoughts are more common among victims of relational aggression rather than direct aggression, so this type of aggression is seen as the most dangerous weapon available for young people to negotiate their status. Numerous studies have linked chronic anxiety symptoms with other symptoms while victimization. Another study conducted by the Scandinavian researcher was called *whipping boys* and has revealed that these children are significantly more anxious and insecure than others (as cited by Hartjen & Priyadarsini, 2012, p. 337).

Another research shows that most children in primary school who are victims of aggression will not sleep well, will have nocturnal enuresis, will feel irritable, angry and will not be able to concentrate easily (idem, 2012, p.346).

The role of gender is important not only in understanding the differences in the level of violent behaviors, general attitude towards violence, but also in the victim's responsiveness. Boys face barriers in a different way than girls and have a broader range of coping resources due to the genuine belief that they are more determined, resilient than girls. Moreover, traditional notions of gender roles associate femininity with sadness, fear and distress. The outcomes of aggression are generally adjusted to other social factors like family support, social adjustment, self esteem, but all the academic studies in this field unveiled a reduced quality of life for victims (Artz & Riecken, 1997). Other physical symptoms that are related to bullying among children can be experiencing stomach cramps, migraines and other health problems such as: eczema, asthma, diarrhea, hives, dizziness, palpitations, bulimia and anorexia. Most students victims of assault were absent during the week of the incident for these reasons (Hunter & Boyle, 2004).

But we must identify the central role of the aggressor and the reason why he/she appeals to such conduct. Social factors such as family, education and relationships

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<sup>8</sup> Studies based on the *Revised Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire* that consists of 40 questions for the measurement of bully/victim problems, *Clinician Adminstrated PTSD Scale for Children and Adolescents*, an interview lasts between 30 and 120 minutes; *Horowitz-T2 Intrusion Impact of the event Scale*; *Radloff scale for Depression*.

with loved ones are paramount. Their conduct problems differ from negative, hostile and provocative behavior because the last one mentioned doesn't hurt the others. Relational aggression is defined as any verbal or non-verbal behavior in preschool children which tends to exclude others from the game, or encourages others to exclude and ignore. Bullying is a learned behavior that is why those who conduct in themselves in this manner have dysfunctional family backgrounds, or have to deal with social or financial hardships, marital problems, toxic substance abuse and a general aggressive background. The remark is also underlined by the fact that the violent girls often have poor relationships with their mother.

School difficulties are another reason for this behavior, as school failure and learning problems are often present as a predictor of the risk towards violence<sup>9</sup>. Crick gave an interesting perspective of bullying between girls using the *chicken and egg comparison*, saying that girls who are relationally aggressive are unpleasant to their loved ones, their colleagues and, in opposition to this sentiment, it is likely that the act of being rejected by a colleague will also determine the girl to act more aggressively (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995, pp. 60-67). Thus, a circle of aggressive behavior can begin from the early school years.

The misfit in children's relationships will exacerbate things, because it is these acts of intimidation that will make the girl unaccepted by other colleges. Another issue is related to patterns of control and dominance in the world, where men are strong and women are dominated. Girls will share this idea of male violence against women, believing that women have less value and are less important. Aggressive girls tend to attack the girls that they perceive as being in competition with themselves for the attention of a man and will try to offer this potential partner a compatible relationship.

Another reason could be that by trying to suppress the anger accumulated or by attempting to divert the attention of the group to themselves, in the absence of other reasons to capture public attention, the child can become aggressive. In studies on workplace violence, Randall Peter (1997) describes the narcissistic tendency of individuals who suffered aggression and who, due to their past experiences as children, can later become adult bullies.

Studies conducted in the Commonwealth suggest a small variation between bullying behaviors across different regions, and international studies unfold the international prevalence of this form of victimization (Shaw & Cross, 2012).

Most of those who act aggressively towards others and resort to intimidation in relation to other children suffer from emotional problems, feelings of helplessness, fear, which are repressed in their violent approach to relationships with others.

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<sup>9</sup> Analyzing the portrait of bullies made some researchers argue that "they are self-focused, highly competitive, aggressive individuals" (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen & Voeten, 2005, p.467). Aggressiveness is related to their social inadaptability, which is established in the first stage of childhood, being inversely proportional to the effectiveness of repression mechanisms which are implemented in this period and then it is consolidated in school, as school failure is a factor strongly correlated to delinquency.

The bullying phenomenon is a challenge that all European educational systems have to deal with. The Romanian mass media reported more than 4,000 cases of violence, alcohol use, discrimination and theft in Romanian schools in recent years. Every day, about 45 violent cases are reported. The increasing number of violent incidents has become a big concern for the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport. Therefore, Romania is part of the *I Am Not Scared* project financed by the European Commission in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme<sup>10</sup>. The project “intends to identify the best European strategies to prevent and combat the bullying phenomenon. The purpose of the project is to involve vocational education teachers, directors, pupils, parents, counselors and key policy makers in the field of education in a common reflection on the issue related to school violence. The project is based on a bottom-up approach for a transnational sharing of the dynamics that can cause the emerging and consolidating of the bullying phenomenon and of the most effective strategies to tackle it.” (Vrînceanu, 2011, p.2).

### Measures to tackle bullying

This study gives an overview on a large problem of society – the clustering of violence in many insidious forms (i.e. verbal, interpersonal) in daily life. As argued by Goldstein (2002) peer victimization is a universal phenomenon common in all industrialised countries, with local and cultural aspects. Normal childhood behaviours can be seen as a mosaic of patterned social interactions and is evaluated according to the double standard of acceptable violence, a notion with a strong cultural and temporal specificity.

A secondary concern rises from the *neutralization* of such forms of violence that are perceived as less dangerous than physical violence. Violent behaviors are dismissed as being normal and the definition of children’s games and torments extracts the intent of bullying and makes it a normal act.

During the arguments presented here we tried to underline the controversial issues of bullying in schools and the pervasive effects that violence, in its many forms, has on the victims. It is difficult in this context not to evaluate the role of social practices, and more specifically the role of gender roles as reflected in daily interactions. Foucault (1978) argued that power is multileveled, it can be exercised in different locations and in multiple ways, and bullying shows us exactly the wide range of power relationships and the process of consolidating a status among peers from an early age. Thus, we face children’s ability to exercise and negotiate power over his/her peers by producing physical or psychological harm.

Finally, we want to enumerate the main developments in the prevention of this form of bullying. The answer to the question “how to prevent aggressive behavior

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<sup>10</sup> *I Am Not Scared* is a European project that involves 11 partners from Belgium, Italy, Greece, France, Romania, Bulgaria, UK, Germany and Lithuania. For Romania, the studies were conducted by EuroEd Foundation. The Romanian report shows that according to a survey conducted in, in 99 schools from Bucharest, 30% of the respondents consider that verbal violence happens often, and 16% consider that non-verbal violence takes place regularly.

in schools?" is not simple. There is no magic ingredient to solve this problem, but all programs are based on early intervention in the development of children's social skills, focused on developing empathy, a good self-esteem, so that in adolescence we can speak of measures of limiting aggressive behavior, as prevention is far more effective at early ages (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen & Voeten, 2005). The core is based on creating a learning environment that stimulates the development of pro-social behavior and helping those already acting aggressively.

Starting with the system developed by Olweus in Norway, there are at present 12 global anti-bullying projects underway in countries such as: United States, Germany, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Ireland, Austria, Switzerland and Australia.

Cultivating empathy with the help of mass-media and modern technology is one of the recent developments, aiming to boost the capacity of empathy in children<sup>11</sup>. As to factors that prevent aggressive behavior, programs developed in the U.S. known as *Bully Prevention* expose the following strategies which can be used in relational violence:

1. providing more opportunities for children so that they have less need to confirm their own personality by excluding the others;
2. promoting children's involvement in extracurricular activities with civic value in order to learn to respect other's individuality;
3. teaching children to have an attitude of acceptance towards competition, behave assertively, have social and personal responsibilities within the group in order to change the position of the aggressor with that of the protector;
4. engaging children in social interventions in order to help them have a less hostile attitude in relationships, developing empathy through provoking situations (this is done at the latest in primary school); creating opportunities to improve school environment and relationships between students, aiming to encourage the creation of a good self-image, a community of students based on cooperation, not competition;
5. teaching them ways of peaceful conflict resolution (see the school mediator institution), causing them to change their behavior, to manage their anger, highlighting the networking skills;

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<sup>11</sup> The Shimpai Muyou! software program creates situations based on forms of juvenile deviance, establishing if the user responds emphatically enough to the given scenario. For example, the virtual character is a victim of an aggression and it asks the user what it can do, encouraging the understanding of the victim and developing empathy, given that a favorite character is aggressed and the user is the only one who can help him. The character is a coherent one which allows building empathic relationships, that is why the initiators of the software intended the virtual character to be believable, expressive and its emotional condition to be clearly expressed in order to resonate with the user. Shimpai Muyou! will act as victim, aggressor, witness or counselor, each of them correlated to certain attitudes: temperamental, anxious, shy. By engaging in the given roles, the user tries on different emotions and will interact emotionally.

6. Finally, teach children that they have to inform adults that they do not feel safe, so that they can make a rapid intervention and prevent the escalation of the conflict.

The authors of this intervention program propose a holistic approach based on the intervention of parents, students and community members.

It seems that programs that promote the development of social and cognitive skills have the greatest impact on attitudes and behaviors and the most promising ones appear to be those acting on several levels.

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