

INTIMIDATION BEHAVIOR IN PREADOLESCENCE

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Abstract: *Intimidation behavior occurs in preteen period, either as a result of the others' encouragement or in cases of low tolerance of frustration or simply because it feels like a great source of fun. To avoid or to postpone the intervention in cases of intimidation does nothing less than to reinforce the behavior and to cause not only a growth in its intensity but also a greater level of acceptance from the others or an implied silent approval by ignoring this phenomenon. A proper education that provides youngsters with actual behavioral patterns from which they can learn how to behave themselves even in tense situations, a preventive program in this respect could alleviate or reduce the manifestation of intimidation in any of the contexts it may occur. The purpose of this program is not only to train teachers or adults from the school environment who interact with children but also to train students by allowing them to achieve some social skills which would prove helpful in their future struggle to adapt without negatively affecting the development and adaptation of the others. The interest of the educator is mainly focused on the reduction and prevention of this phenomenon, which by its effects hinders and affects the instructive-educational process and implicitly the development of the children's personality.*

Keywords: intimidation behavior, aggressiveness, school, provenance.

Introduction

Aggressiveness has always represented a matter worthy of studying in detail, considering the multitude of causes that can form the basis for its manifestation. The latest research targets especially its consequences, not so much at a physical level as at a social and psychological one. These affect the human being longer. Among the latest topics for research is the phenomenon of intimidation too, the so called school-bullying, whose father is considered to be Dan Olweus. Starting with the eighties his studies have revealed the intensity of the school bullying behavior and also its negative effects on children's development.

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Theoretical conceptualization

Olweus defines bullying as a repeated exposure over time to negative actions that come from one or more persons (Olweus, 1986). The meaning of the phrase 'negative actions' refers to the moments when somebody intentionally causes or tries to cause damage or discomfort to another person, statement that is to be found in the definition of the aggressive behavior too (Olweus, 1973). These negative actions can become highlighted in words (verbal) for instance by threats, teasing, the mocking use of certain names (nicknames). Another example of a negative action is when somebody hits, pushes or is being aggressive towards a person or prevents a person from doing a specific action using force. It is also likely that these negative actions do not always imply verbal or physical force but they became obvious by the use of certain gestures or facial expressions in order to exclude a person from a certain group or in order to show the refusal of respecting the wishes of the person in question. Even if one occurrence of harassment can be considered bullying in certain circumstances Olweus's definition underlines the fact that these negative actions have to take place repeatedly and over a certain time span. It is vitally important that occasional actions directed one time towards a student and another time towards another student to be excluded.

The bullying behavior can be manifested by a single bully or by a bullying group (Olweus, 2005). The target of the bullying can also be a single individual – the victim – or a group. In the school context the target is most of the time a single student. The previous research studies show that in most cases the victim is harassed by a group of 2 to 3 students. Another paramount thing worth mentioning when we are talking about bullying is that one cannot talk about bullying when and if two students who have the same strength (physical or psychological) fight or are engaged in certain argument/conflict. In order to label a confrontation as bullying we should be able to identify an inequality of power or strength (an asymmetrical relationship of power): the student exposed to different negative actions has difficulties when he has to defend himself and is somehow

helpless in front of the other student or students that are assaulting him. In this respect we can talk about direct bullying actions – which are pretty obvious attacks on a victim – and indirect bullying actions – which are manifested by social isolation and intentional expulsion of an individual from a group.

Studies have shown that there is a tendency for boys to be more exposed to bullying than girls (Cowie & Dawn, 2008). This tendency is obvious during secondary school and highschool. These results confirm the presence of the direct bullying actions among boys (open attacks) which led to the natural inquiry if among girls can be observed more the indirect type of bullying (social isolation and intentional expulsion from a group of friends). There have been results which confirmed this hypothesis, namely that girls are more exposed to more subtle forms of bullying than the very direct ones (such as direct attacks). However, in the same time, the percentage of boys exposed to the indirect bullying type has been approximately the same as the percentage of girls affected by it.

Olweus's carried out studies have underlined the fact that boys are more prone to manifest this bullying behavior. A percentage higher than 60% of girls (between 5 and 7 years old) have been bullied by the boys, 20 % have been bullied by both boys and girls and the vast majority of the boys, that is more than 80 % have been bullied by other boys. In secondary school and highschool the number of the bullying boys is fourth times higher than that of the bullying girls. It is important to mention the fact that this bullying behavior manifested by sheer physical force is more common among boys. Opposed to this (Craig et al., 2009) more commonly met among the girls there are spreading rumors actions, indirect harassment, friendship relationships manipulation (withholding certain friends' quality time). However the harassment manifested on verbal level and on gestures level is the most common form even among the boys.

Resuming the above stated, boys are mostly both victims of indirect bullying and authors/aggressors. This conclusion comes to reinforce the studies that deal with gender differences in the case of aggressive behavior (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Olweus, 1986). Also a lot of studies certify that the relationships among boys are stronger, tougher and more aggressive than the relationships among girls (Maccoby, 1986). These differences are surely a result of the biological inheritance and of the social / environmental inheritance.

The reference theories which explain the students' violence have started from the point of view of the juvenile justice or from that of the developmental theories and they have focused on the individual differences. Few are the studies which have been focusing on the systematical examination of the emerging of the victimization or of the school bullying since infancy and teenage years from an interpersonal, ecological or institutional perspective.

Corvo and DeLara (2010) were doing a classification of the expository theories regarding aggressiveness in children and teenagers. The first category is represented by the theories of individual development and the psychological theories. In this category there were included the biological and the neuropsychological patterns,

the traumatizations, the disabilities, the attachment disorder during infancy and also the abuse of alcohol or drugs.

The second category of theories, the sociocultural or social cognitive ones approach the aggressive behavior in children and teenagers through the interaction of the personal, behavioral and environmental factors (Bandura, 2001).

The sociocultural theories are centered much more on the understanding of the paramount importance that the situational behavioral factors hold than on the differentiating factors. These theories underline the importance that the organizational cultures have, such as schools, workplaces. The studies have shown that bullying can be an indicator of nondemocratic and authoritative organizations which display a high degree of control. This phenomenon rarely occurs between two isolated individuals (Salmivalli et al., 1996). The contribution of the cognitivist party is that of focusing on the social or cognitive abilities. They regard aggressiveness and particularly bullying as a negative adapting response (Crick & Dodge, 1999). All in all, the bullying phenomenon requires social skills.

A final category of expository theories is considered by the authors to be the systematical theories according to which the school in itself is a system. The environment of the school and the staff of the school represent aspects of the institution as a system which prevent or support the unfolding of some aggressive behaviors among children and teenagers. Using the proper terms of the system theory the adults (the teachers) have a contribution to the creation of an environment in which the aggressive behaviors can be controlled by noticing the predictable behaviors and by reinforcing of the internal rules/regulations, by the establishing of social hierarchies between that which can be accepted and that which has to be changed. The school which pays attention to the ages of the children and teenagers knows their basic psychological needs (security, autonomy, belongingness and competence) and the fulfillment of these needs in the school environment leads to benefits and relationships of respect between the students and between the students and the adults (Schaps, Battistich & Solomon, 2004).

The shame, the third element of the system theory, starts with the hypothesis that the victims of the school aggressions live most frequently the feelings of shame, suffering or confusion. The aggressors externalize the fury they feel as a result of the fact that they have been shamed by the others in order to feel socially accepted. The aggressive behaviors correlate positively with social status and being popular in secondary school and in highschool (Aslund et al., 2009).

The family, the fourth element in the system theory refers to the degree of association between the attitude of the family and children's behavior. The family factors (the treatment to which the children are submitted and domestic violence) are associated with the involvement in aggressive behaviors in all the children groups involved in the study.

Baldry (2003) was investigating the connection between the aggressor and the victim in school and the exposure to parental violence and he was showing that the

exposure to psychical violence at home was positively correlated with the aggressive behavior against the school mates in school.

There were suggested several hypothesis with regard to the etiology of the aggressive behaviors, each one attempting to provide alternative explanations and to outline the responsible factors involved. Our study sets as objective the evaluation of the prevalence of aggressive behaviors in children and teenagers in the school environment.

Although considering that in the frame of relationships which are established in the instructional process the teacher due to his position has the most important influence when the matter of the disorders inside the educational process is debated the relationship between student and student cannot be overlooked which by its effects minimizes or amplifies these disorders. The emotional relationships that are established between the student and the extended group represent for both the student and the teacher a stimulus in the ongoing activity and a moral support which helps both of them to overcome easier the stressful situations which they may have to go through. When a student is rejected by the community or by certain micro groups formed inside the school community spontaneously by certain criteria, baffled by attitudes or insufficiently controlled words employed by the teacher he is not in a position to ask anybody's help because the others reject him, rallying behind the teacher through nicknaming, laughter, aloofness.

The status of being a popular student or a rejected one is not achieved only by means of a preferential or a distancing attitude of all the students but also it can be the result of the student's own attitude, behavior and achievements which secures him a position (Iancu, 1983). Usually the rejected students are those that one way or another stray from the norms of the class group. Behavioral aggressive students prefer inside the classmates' group those classmates who also have a high degree of aggressiveness, this applying to all the personality traits (Mariano & Harton, 2005).

If in the case of the relationship teacher-student the most frequent manifestation of aggressiveness is the verbal one in the case of the student-student relationships these manifestations can take a more serious form, ranging from thefts of personal objects, punching, rumor spreading, group expulsion to attempt of murder or even murder. There is a gender difference in the way the aggressiveness manifests itself with boys and with girls. If boys' aggressiveness has a more physical nature, girls resort to its verbal form. This thing can also be the result of the fact that in the boys' case the aggressiveness is more accepted, moreover it is even considered a positive trait which causes pride especially among fathers, who feel proud of their boys who are capable to defend themselves and manage everything on their own (Hangan & Petruț, 2011). These aspects are difficult to be always seen as general guidelines, because sometimes girls' fights are tougher and more spectacular than the boys' fights. The girls usually make indirect use of aggressiveness through gossip, rumors, group expulsion especially when a new girl appears in the class group.

These aggressive manifestations of the students directed one against the other are much more serious if the teachers support it by a reinforcing behavior of support or indifference.

Lonzarich (2001) provides a few suggestions for the teachers who are confronted with such students. If the mutual aggressive behavior do not come to an end eventually in a natural way and the teacher feels that he won't be able to manage the situation alone the recommended course of action would be asking for a colleague teacher's assistance. If we are talking about very serious aggressive displays it is absolutely necessary to involve the Principal and the parents. After a given time to cool off it is important that the students are also given the opportunity to be heard, to express their point of view regarding what has happened and the reasons that have led to the existing situation, underlining the importance of cooperation.

Due to the negative effects of the aggressive manifestations there have always been preoccupations in order to find ways of reducing it. One of the ways may be the catharsis, which is based on the idea that the aggressive urges of men could be substituted by actions which have no destructive and self-destructive potential for the person performing them. As ways of releasing aggressiveness one can enumerate: watching violent scenes programs, consuming the aggressive tendencies on mental imaginative level, engaging in actual violent actions which instead have no antisocial consequences.

After conducting several experiments some authors reached the conclusion that those subjects provided with the possibility to be aggressive would later on employ less open aggressiveness compared with those who did not have the possibility to release their aggressiveness in a similar way (Feschbach, 1964 apud Ranschburg, 1979). It's very likely that the diminishing of the aggressiveness in those who had the occasion to openly manifest their aggressive tendencies to happen due to the remorse and sense of blame they felt for their previous aggressive attitude. According to some authors from the catharsis interpretation an educational principle emerged known as the discharge theory. The aggressive child is considered a `barrel filled with filthy water, which can be filled with clean water only on condition that the filth is eliminated by means of the imaginary: so we are to encourage, to initiate open aggressiveness because this is the way it exhausts itself, the tendency of becoming aggressive drains out` (Ranschburg, 1979). So a solution for the aggressive child would be providing him with aggressive ways to have fun, encouraging open aggressive behavior (Bandura and Walters, 1963 apud Ranschburg, 1979).

However, the diminishing of the open aggressiveness does not mean necessarily the diminishing of the aggressive tendency (Berkowitz, 1958 apud Ranschburg, 1979). The experimental research have led to the conclusion that these ways of substitution of the aggressive behavior do not lead to the reduction of the aggressiveness but rather its empowering and intensifying. Generally the catharsis exists in real life in the form of an emotional state but using it in the treatment of the aggressive child is wrong (Ranschburg, 1979).

Another way of reducing the aggressiveness is punishment or the threat of punishment. Most of the time it is applied after the aggressive display has already taken place having as aim to prevent its reoccurring. The sanction can be formal, of a juridical sort or they can be informal, taking the form of a rebuke, most commonly encountered in a family environment. The punishment is not the most effective way of reducing the aggressiveness, an aspect proven by the relapse cases. In the aftermath of the punishment the child is blocking only the sanctioned form of aggressiveness which does not mean that the anger and the willpower to have his revenge will diminish in any way (Björkqvist, Österman & Kaukiainen, 1992). The aggressive tendencies of the child will actually grow through all those punishments he labels unjust but he is compelled to endure for fear of new punishments. He will express his aggressiveness through hidden forms, socially accepted. As a consequence he will go on starvation strike or his marks will drop out of the sudden. Inside the family an educational system having at its core the severe punishment, including physical aggressiveness, has a negative impact on the child's evolution and development. In order to be effective the punishment has to fulfill some criteria: to be immediate, to have sufficient intensity and to be very likely.

Another way is using cognitive and learning strategies. Here they talk about providing the child with some models of reacting in front of aggressiveness such as postponed behavioral reaction, negotiating and compromise models of solving conflicts, disciplining methods having at their core discussions based on affective argumentation, all aiming to replace the external control with the internal one. Other techniques appeal to the incompatibility response principle according to which it is not possible to engage in polar affective reactions or to live simultaneously two opposite emotional states of mind.

The prevention efforts of aggressiveness and of school violence have as a starting point the idea that aggressiveness is a learned behavior and thus preventing it involves that the students should learn some alternative behaviors. The condition is they are being learned from an early age before the behavioral patterns become internalized habit. Prevention programs have as objective the instilment of five basic competences (Williamms & Guera, 1996, apud Szentagotai & Tărău, 2004):

A positive identity – that is a positive image of one's self, future purposes, hope, that reduces the risk of violence, a byproduct of a deformed self-image;

Personal development – it implies self-effectiveness, adequate defense strategies, an adequate assignation style, lowering the risks for violence which stems from wrong assignation tendencies;

Self-Adjustment of all types: cognitive, affective, behavioral, reducing the risks of violence associated with a low impulse control;

Social skills – the capacity to solve problems, the empathy, conflict management, which reduces the risk of violence associated with minimal social skills;

Values' system – a sane system of attitudes and regulations, values, moral commitment which reduce the risks for violence associated with attitudes and values that favor it.

Having these five basic competences as a starting point the wanted educational strategies for preventing the violence in school target the following aspects:

The facilitation of a positive identity

Opportunities of involvement in school activities and community activities regardless of the academic performances;

Educational programs for parents and teachers which stress the rewarding and the reinforcement of positive behaviors;

Opportunities of exploring the attitudes and the professional options and the possibility of developing one's personal talents;

Professional training programs which prepare the students for careers that will provide them with satisfactions;

Mentoring programs which should provide positive behavioral patterns and encouragement.

Personal development opportunities

Involving the students in the process of making the decisions at the school's level and at the community level;

Initiating some learning programs focused on the correct interpreting of the messages and communication in the social environment;

Creating a secure and supportive environment which should protect against stress factors;

Programs for developing the coping skills and abilities, for psychical self defense;

Programs for developing one's self-esteem;

Programs for avoiding to play the victim;

The development of the self-adjustment abilities

Techniques of emotional management (anger, self-control);

Opportunities for the students to become involved in group activities which provide reinforcement for adaptable behavior on both short and long term.

The development of the social relational skills

Recreational programs and social development programs in after school format;

Instruction in what different relational abilities with the others are concerned;

Mediation and solving conflicts techniques;

Opportunities of becoming involved in various community service in order to provide assistance for different social categories in need;

Assisting the students in developing a system of values society centered;

Social centered rules promoting campaigns and discouraging aggressive and antisocial rules at the school level and at the community level;

Media campaigns which encourage the responsible and social centered behaviors;

Social development trainings for stressing the role and capital importance of social responsibility.

Discussions and conclusions

The studies carried out in the field of aggressiveness and bullying behavior have known a substantial growth which highlights the fact that this subject matter starts to become more and more common, regardless of the geographical setting. The preteen and teen years are seldom characterized by aggressiveness, especially bullying this stage representing that of the multiple developments. During this stage difficulty seldom appears in the ongoing instructive educative process due to the affective imbalance, physiological modifications, attitudinal deviations and behavioral disorders that come together with the development process and the passing towards the teen years.

As a development stage in a human being's life the adolescence is the period in which the social abilities register a stringent development, especially the ability to communicate. The interactions between persons of the same gender and those between persons of different gender either person to person or person to group have an ideal importance and are invested with new meanings. Gradually one can register a downfall of parental and familial authority, the circle of friends becoming the most important influence.

The preteen and teenager is in full quest of his own identity, he is building his self-image, he chooses a direction of development to follow and he perceives himself as being overwhelmed by the parents who have expectations regarding his behavior, as do his teachers and educators. Most of the times as a result of the existing factors promoting aggressiveness teenagers may get to committing violent acts sometimes taken to the extreme.

Apparently the preteen years seem a period in which violence and aggressiveness are never nonexistent. They are supported by the scarce education families provide, the school as social environment, media channels and eventually the show business industry. School violence is enhanced and sustained by both external factors such as the family with its values, regulations, and accepted behavioral patterns it promotes, the social environment and the personality structure and by one internal school factor namely the school as a violence source.

From the school's perspective the violent behaviors of some students are caused by a bad class management, a lack of adjusting the educational practices to the fast paced and profound changes which the teenagers are experiencing. Gradually the violence from the society imprints into the school environment thus reducing considerably the chances the students have to grow and develop harmoniously and to benefit from a qualitative education.

Talking about the relationships that are being established internally between students and teachers, teachers and students and between students one can notice numerous aggressive behaviors. The points of view regarding the frequency, the development, the causes which form the basis or the seriousness of these behaviors are different in the two parties involved: the students and the teachers, but there is one common denominator namely the fact that regardless the direction they are coming from they affect the harmonious development of the personality and the adequate adaptation to society's rules and values.

The forms of manifestation which teachers' aggressiveness towards the students embed are especially verbal ones, expressed by raising the tone of voice, insults, intimidation and threats. These forms are lighter and their consequences are evaluated as being milder than those of physical type. However these too can have unthinkable effects on the students, especially the shy, sensitive ones, mainly if the aggressive behavior occurs with the whole class as eye-witnesses. The physical forms of aggressiveness are considered to be the most severe with serious consequences ranging from the physical to the psychological and social plan. Also, to be mentioned here is the fact that the students register the causes of the teachers' aggressiveness on the internal level, while the causes of their own aggressive behavior are attributed to the external factors out of their reach and control.

Regarding the manifestation of aggressiveness in the relationship student-teacher this one has verbal form. It is this one which has been chosen simply because is one of the mildest. Another way of expressing aggressiveness towards the teacher is skipping his class. This type of behavior may hide hidden unthinkable motivations, such as a protest against the rules enforced by the school but also the fear and anxiety which are common feelings for a large part of the students when they have to come to school.

The relationship between the students because of its informal character brings out mixed types of aggressiveness: physical accompanied by verbal. The most frequent forms of student-student aggressiveness take the form of pushing, hitting, teasing, labeling, patronizing. Regardless of the form it manifests, all these particular types of aggressiveness create first of all psychical damage and secondly physical. They can affect the development of the positive behavior traits, interpersonal communication, social abilities but also the socializing process.

Besides the serious effects on the general state of well-being, the sense of health and positive view on the world and life, the deviant behaviors, aggressiveness, violence, bullying, can also generate the same serious effects on the mental health

of all the persons involved. The teenagers exposed to aggressive behaviors display raised levels of anger, fury, fear, depression and lack of confidence in the stability of the world they are living in.

When aggressiveness and violence manifest themselves in a school the educational process becomes one of the major victims of the two. They limit its effectiveness and they affect the teaching-learning process. It is not an aspect to be forgotten or trifled with, namely the one regarding the types of costs borne by the society in the attempt to reeducate young men and women ending up in prisons because of all sorts of bad behavior. In order to counteract these negative effects and also in order to create and implement some measures of counteracting aggressiveness knowing everything about each and every form of its manifestation is vitally important, both students' and teachers'. It is also important to identify the causes that form the basis of these destructive behaviors and to outline the attitude that both students and teachers have towards these particular behaviors.

In order to reduce and prevent violence and aggressiveness providing trainings for parents, teachers and students is a proven effective way. Involving the parents in their children's education and aiming for a harmonization between the cognitive, affective, social, and behavioral aspects increases the effectiveness and the quality of the educational process. Moreover, training the teachers to adapt their teaching to the age and individuality particularities can successfully reduce aggressive manifestations, which seem to stem from a bad management of the class, boring classes, the lack of extracurricular activities and the limitation of the freedom of expressing one's thoughts. In what the students are concerned the reducing in aggressiveness is achievable by avoiding subjective forms of evaluation, implementing stricter protective measures on the school premises (such as strict school rules and regulations), by diminishing the excessive authority of some teachers and by avoiding the behavioral sanctioning in the form of bad marks.

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