

## VIOLENCE IN ROMANIAN SCHOOLS

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**ABSTRACT:** *Human violence is one of the most important themes of contemporary societies, being approached from different perspectives on different categories of population.*

*Violence is an increasingly common phenomenon in contemporary society. Each approach to the subject has strengths and limitations, but to fully distinguish violence from other behaviors it is necessary to observe it from individual episodes to its occurrence in groups and society.*

**Keywords:** *human violence; victims; aggressors; gangs; bullying;*

### Human violence/school violence

A definition of violence that encompasses all of its facets would be one that includes physical, psychological, emotional aspects, but the most impactful among adolescents is the emotional one (Olweus, 2013) and lately we see more and more young people who face anxiety, depression, sometimes reaching acts of extreme violence against other people or even on themselves to the point of committing crimes or suicidal acts. (Schneider et al., 2012)

Violence includes several distinct behaviors and the act itself is qualified with 4 clues: intentional, undesirable, non-essential and harmful. (Hamby, 2017).

Even if aggression originates very far from ancient times, in previous eras, we referred to more physical violence and to certain categories of population, and now we restrict the area of interest to the psycho-emotional area, on the category of adolescents and in the school space, where starting from very fine psycho-emotional aggressions to atrocities and physical masks and not only. Adolescents are the most vulnerable category that has, in modern times, the power and access to information that used incorrectly can cause real disasters. ( Ciuchi, 2011)

The reason why the subject of violence is approached by researchers is precisely its presence more often and on different age categories (Christner et al., 2010), finding an increased aggressiveness more obvious among adolescents. Sociological studies (Popa R.2021) highlight several types of aggression, the most widespread being emotional and social, these are the ones that make a strong mark on young

people with repercussions with increasingly serious behavioral repercussions. ( oitu & H vârneanu, 2001)

With the evolution of society, we see increasingly aggressive reactions and violence can be detected not only on dispersed individuals but also in groups and communities, with strong influences on the human psyche and behavior (Jenkins & Troop-Gordon, 2020)

Acts of violence occur for many reasons, but the main causes are genetic (acquired), educational, family and social environment. (Jenkins & Troop-Gordon, 2020)

### Stigmas, future victims or aggressors

Stigma is generally a victim, but stigma is not only applied to those who have deviant behaviors or special physical or character traits.

In general, we notice a connection between the stigmatized character and the victim or aggressor, but as I said above, stigma also comes from the perception of the group and society, even more than from morally or socially uncompliant behavior (drug or alcohol use, aggression...).

On the contrary, there is an increase in sympathy for such deviant behaviors, from the perspective of material power or influence and the terror exercised by such behavior on the group. These typologies becoming aggressors and also having supporters among colleagues. Stigmas are thus based on social status and the support they have among the group, aggressors or victims.

Erving Goffman identifies three types of stigma, namely: those with physical defects,

those with character defects (mental disorders, junkies, homosexuals, unemployed, addicts...) and those socially / tribally marginalized (religion, ethnicity, nationality, belonging). (Goffman, E.2009)

Interesting is the study of the group that supports each category of stigmatized is that depending on its size, it can develop aggressors or victims.

We also have three categories of supporters: similar, (those who understand and accept them, with whom often a gang of aggressors is made), caregivers and therapists. All three categories have the potential to develop deviant behaviors, gangs and numerous victims.

If those stigmatized on the basis of character defects generally become aggressors, those in the other two categories (with physical defects or belonging to a minority structure) tend to become victims if they are not in groups that support them or have the same kind of stigma. (Goffman, E.2009)

### Gangs

Gangs and the social environment, on the other hand, or belonging to various criminal groups make it increasingly difficult to escape from an aggressive and violent environment, thus perpetuating themselves in environments practiced outside the frequented group, with equally aggressive attitudes and behaviors. (oitu & H vărneanu, 2001)

Media and cultural environment, through music, works of art or community practices or various suburban musical trends encourage verbal aggression and easy transition to deviant behaviors. (Olweus, 2013)

If a few years ago we were talking only about delinquent groups, tributary to a certain cult or a certain behavior established as a rule, we were talking about sub-civilized countries or sub-cultural criminal areas, where violence is practiced at all levels, today we are talking about aggression among adolescents sympathetic to these currents and entering more and more schools, in the environments practiced by adolescents, thus influencing the entire society.

When we refer to violence in schools among adolescents, we can talk about the phenomenon

of bullying (Olweus, 2013), which has also strongly installed itself in Romania, reaching the 3rd place in terms of bullying in schools and around them among groups of adolescents "At European level, Romania ranks 3rd in the ranking of the 42 countries where the phenomenon has been investigated", according to a report by the World Health Organization (WHO).

An investigation by Save the Children has reached some worrying data for 2022, so almost 50% of students were victims of bullying in schools, 27% admit to being bullies and 8 out of 10 students witnessed bullying in school. (Study-Over-a-quarter-of-the-children-were-aggressors,-half-say-were-victims-of-bullying.pdf (salvaticopiii.ro)

### Violence in schools

Violence in school takes various forms, from verbal and psychological (swearing, shouting, insulting or threatening) to physical violence that often involves behaviors that fall under the law (beatings, injuries, murders, rape, drug use or trade, theft) or offense against authorities and teachers or other types of deviant behavior in relation to school, such as vandalism and other bullying. (Olweus, 2013)

According to the Ministry of National Education, in 2010 the number of bullying incidents in school is 6,463, and in 2014 it reaches 12,397 cases, which is almost double during the four years.

As regards the incidence of physical violence, some consistency can be observed, from 3 414 in 2010 and not exceeding 4 798 in 2014.

Sexual abuse is also on the rise, from 847 in 2010, and the highest share is recorded in 2017, with 1 920 cases reported to the competent authorities.

It can also be noted that the total number of cases of violence in schools is constantly increasing, and this fact can be explained in light of the repeated efforts of the competent authorities in the field to inform and at the same time encourage the reporting of violent incidents. This demonstrates the efficiency of informative and educational programs for pupils, parents and teachers on preventing and

combating violence in the school environment. (Annex to OMECT no. 1409/29.06.2007 STRATEGY OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND YOUTH REGARDING THE REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE PHENOMENON IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION UNITS)

In addition to all these episodes quite obvious and which can be proven and noticed quite easily, aggression and bullying violence occurs inside or around schools, this has become an extremely serious problem and when it is not so obvious is even more difficult to combat. (Smith, 2011,)both for students and teachers, as well as for authorities who have tried various strategies to prevent and combat bullying and cyberbullying. (Smith & Ahmad, 1990)

Aggression in school is defined as a form of school deviance conduct, with a variety of forms of manifestation, with different intensity. The student's aggressive behavior can be his response or reaction to various problems (oitu & H vârneanu, 2001) that he encountered in his family. A precarious financial situation, frustrations, desire for affirmation, desire to be accepted into a certain circle ("gang"), entourage can encourage and promote aggressive behavior through harassment (Christner et al., 2010), or genetic inheritance.

In bullying we deal with violence at all different levels and relationships, but the most present and obvious is student-student violence. We find it from verbal violence (quarrels, conflicts, insults, screams), to the social violence very present in the current environment and inspired by the verbal fashion of the street, (media, cinema, games....), with physical and psycho-emotional influence. (Jimerson et al., 2009)

In addition to this violence between students, we also encounter the violence of teachers towards students, which turns into bullying and which is harder to detect and prove (with the help of technology and legislation, which has specific provisions is less and less present) and the violence of students towards teachers, which unfortunately has an increasing percentage.

Student violence against teachers might be viewed strangely, but it is increasingly present

both verbally and physically, or online, especially in recent years since students know their rights and have great power offered by status, material status, but also support, in denigrating teachers, by various influential environments that support their deviant actions. (Annex to OMECT no. 1409/29.06.2007 STRATEGY OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND YOUTH REGARDING THE REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE PHENOMENON IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION UNITS)

The legislator should keep pace with technology, the law being deficient in this chapter, lacking coercive measures for many unforeseen situations.

In other words, the phenomenon of aggression in school involves both bullying, translated into persecution, domination, humiliation, intimidation and subjugation of the victim, as well as mobbing. (Duffy & Yamada, 2018,)which can take place both in school and in the workplace, interpreted by the psychological abuse of the victim exercised by a group of individuals, interpreted by teasing, terrorizing, blackmailing and demeaning the dignity of the individual.

Many times, a verbal dispute leads to physical attack or even homicide. The main types of aggression and violence that occur in the school environment are not simple adolescent "adaptations" or "initiations", and could lead on tragic aspects. (Surviving Your Teens," 2003)

The repercussions of adopting violent behaviors in the school context have negative effects both on the aggressor and especially on the victim, who in most cases ends up, due to frustrations in the position of aggressor, and eventually will have psychological repercussions on the victim. (Jenkins & Tennant, 2022, )

Those involved in bullying, aggressors or victims, are those who drop out of school, have low grades for behavior, low school performance, are expelled for school, those suffer of depression, suicidal tendency, self-aggression and mutilation, and some marginalized students that appeal to alcohol consumption, consumption of various substances with hallucinogenic effect, students

with delinquent behavior or those who develop mental problems (Christner et al., 2010)

### **Bullying**

We talked about bullying as a form of violence, and for defining it we must take into account the three characters : the victim, the aggressor and the witness. It is the action or series of physical, verbal, relational or cybernetic actions that affect psychologically especially, but also physically, exercised in an unequal ratio of forces and characterized by repeatability and tendentious actions, in which usually the aggressor has fun and the victim has a bad state. In this case, interventions are from authorities (processor), individual, family or even social (Beale & Hall, 2007)

Bullying is the violence that involves an imbalance of power, acts to achieve dignity or create an atmosphere of intimidation, humiliating or offensive, directed against a person or group and targets aspects of discrimination and social exclusion, and that is done repeatedly and premeditated.

Bullying is an aggression that is in an unequal ratio of forces (gang vs. individual or age/status difference, material situation, gender...) and it usually happens between very different people, generally having a person stigmatized in one respect. (Dixon et al., 2004)

The aggressor is generally in a (superior) position of strength towards the victim: he is larger, has a strong gang / supporters, has above average material possibilities, has a different state from the victim when interacting with him (eg laughs when the victim cries)

The agresor's needs are at the level of status, higher power, strong desire to control and dominate, impulsivity, lack of empathy, seeking recognition. They are people who set the tone and lead aggressions directed at the victim. (Jimerson et al., 2009). Some of them come from disorganized families where yelling, throwing objects at each other, or behaving badly is a way of responding to stressful or problematic situations. This often leads to murder or suicide even in the family environment. ( Ciuchi, 2011)

The victim is generally in a lower position (Paunovic, 2018) of strength towards the

aggressor, alone or in a smaller group, is younger and is usually a stigmatized person.... (Ro an, 2006, )

The witness and the teacher play an important role in aggressive actions (Paunovic, 2018), because they can become defenders, can settle bullying situations or intervene in settling and resolving the conflict with the help of competent people.

Parents and teachers are often silent witnesses, but they can take initiatives and then turn the situation in favor of the victim. (Edwards, 2016)

An WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION study found that in over 50% of bullying incidents observed, peers support bullies through passive observation. In only 25% of incidents, witnesses supported the victim through direct intervention, distraction or deterrence of the aggressor.

Many times the victim later develops aggressive behavior because of the need to adapt and the fear of being left alone and vulnerable. (Constantinescu, 2015)

Bullying and cyberbullying are evolved methods of deviance, adapted to modern times and technology, and evidence in committing delinquencies is harder to show in the absence of clear and specific legislation. (Pani oara, 2016)

It is hard to prove in an era of diversity and acceptance that a certain type of behavior is deviant or not, but when the phenomenon we are dealing with is known and when the rights and obligations of each member are well known, the phenomenon can be kept under control. (Dixon et al., 2004)

A 2017 Unicef study shows a 71% digital dependency of 15-18 year olds, compared to 48% of the entire population. From interviews with children, teachers and parents, the most important cases in the online environment not detected by parents or adults were: aggressive messages that include insults and vulgarities, virtual messages and threats sent repeatedly, messages that are not true, but are created to defame a person and are transmitted in the media, revealing personal secrets or blocking contacts, as well as being excluded from groups, or even creating groups to gossip about certain people. (Stella O Malley, 2017)

## Bullying in Romania

Regarding the situation in Romania, according to data provided by the Ministry of National Education in collaboration with UNICEF, between 2014 and 2015, Romania ranked first in Europe in the number of students aged between 11 and 15 who bully their colleagues. Almost half of children in Romania, namely 46%, have at some point been witnesses and/or victims of bullying.

According to statistics of the Ministry of National Education, in 2016–2017, the percentage of bullying cases in school increases to 57%. We can observe an increase of bullying cases in school of 11%, and this fact can be explained by the receptivity of teachers and parents to the multitude of governmental and school efforts to prevent and combat bullying. (Annex to OMECT no. 1409/29.06.2007 STRATEGY OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND YOUTH REGARDING THE REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE PHENOMENON IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION UNITS)

According to statistics provided by the Ministry of National Education, violence in general and bullying in particular is on a worrying rise.

In 2010, there were 10,724 aggressions between students on the school territory. Moreover, the study shows that 60% of students aged 11–15 admit to having been bullied and/or bullied by other students themselves.

If we look at 2011, we notice that only 11,842 cases of violence in schools were registered, and in 2014 there were 18,937 cases, of which 3,397 cases of verbal aggression. Furthermore, 19,747 cases were reported in 2015, to 20,583 cases in 2016 and 22,758 cases in 2018. Also, bullying is the most common when it comes to aggressive incidents between students on school territory, always registering significant increases. (ORDER no. 4.343/2020 of May 27, 2020 on the approval of the Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions of Article 7 para. (1<sup>^</sup>1), art. 56<sup>^</sup>1 and point 6<sup>^</sup>1 of the Annex to the National Education Law no. 1/2011, regarding psychological violence - bullying ISSUER:

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### Prevention and combat: institutional approaches and legislative measures

A global picture of violence, including its different forms of manifestation, is difficult to achieve, even if this can be done at national level. At the proposal of the General Secretary of the Council of Europe, Walter Schwimmer, an integrated project on violence took place between 2002–2004, involving 41 European countries interested in participating (including Romania), so that, through a collective effort, a global picture of violence could be achieved.

As a result of these studies, many countries have adopted programmes to combat violence on different predominant categories. **In Portugal**, a project of the Pacifist School focused on disadvantaged communities with children and young people at risk of crime. The activities carried out within the project focused on social mediation, leisure activities, involvement of target subjects in the development of the local community, etc.

**In Belgium**, mediation programmes have been carried out, working in partnership with community agencies and establishing counselling centres, a project focused on creating social capital as a way to reconnect children and young people with the social environment.

**In Switzerland**, the Zurich Program, aims to develop practical knowledge, useful for strengthening the effectiveness of intervention and prevention programs for school violence. Here were set up committees for children and young people, a fast service offered by children and young people to lonely elderly, workshops on democracy in schools.

In the American continent, *in the USA*, there is a longer and more circumscribed experience of the phenomenon; The project Preventing and Responding to School Violence involves strategies at individual, family and community level.

**IN ROMANIA**, measures have been taken at all levels, from individual and family to community and legislative measure, but the

application rules and methodology sometimes encounter problems. It's not hard to spot, given the statistics, but current programs are waiting increased efficiency.

**At individual level**, the interventions consist of measures, provided for early identification of students with aggressive potential, development of individualized assistance programs for students involved, involvement of the National Council of Students, active involvement of students with violent potential... (Ro an, 2006, )

**At family level**, we have school collaboration with families of students with violent potential or who have committed acts of violence, identifying resource parents to get involved in prevention activities, initiating programs for parents, developing coherent prevention and intervention strategies,... (Edwards, 2016)

**At curricular level** we are talking about debating, during counseling and orientation hours, the situations of violence occurring in the school or its vicinity and encouraging the expression of students' opinion on these situations and possible ways of solving, including the development of experiential education programs, such as role play, contests, forum theater (Day, 2002), but also the development of programs provided by antibullying commissions.

**At community level**, the interventions are initiating community awareness programs on the phenomenon of school violence, school unit, Authority for the Protection of Children's Rights, police, city hall, NGOs, but also developing programs to prevent school violence, diversifying social assistance programs for socio-economically disadvantaged families... .. ( ORDER No. 4.343/2020 of 27 May 2020 on the approval of the Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions of art. 7 para. (1<sup>^</sup>), art. 56<sup>^</sup>1 and point 6<sup>^</sup>1 of the Annex to the National Education Law no. 1/2011, regarding psychological violence - bullying ISSUER: MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN: MONITORUL OFICIAL nr. 492 of 10 June 2020)

## Anti-violence campaigns in Romania

In 2012, the National Council for Preventing and Combating Violence in School was established, an organization with the role of National Anti-Violence Observer. The aim is to monitor and then evaluate the implementation of the National Strategy for Combating Violence in the School Environment:

**"You are a hero in the schoolyard when you stop verbal violence"** is a campaign developed and promoted by the Ministry of National Education, which was carried out between 2015 and 2016, having as main purpose the education and empowerment of the student.

The **"panic button"**, also designed by the Ministry of National Education, comes to effectively combat this phenomenon.

**"School with zero tolerance to violence"**, a campaign that is still ongoing and which provides for a multidisciplinary antibullying team to act in every school in Romania.

**The antibullying action group** has the following tasks: applies the legislation for the prevention, identification and reporting of situations of violence against children and violence draws up and implements the antibullying plan of the school, draws up the antibullying code of the school, receives written or verbal notifications from teachers, pupils, parents or auxiliary staff regarding the identified bullying situations and immediately proceeds to investigate them.

It also collaborates with teachers and class teachers to solve the reported problems, ensures the protection of students who have reported bullying situations, applies in its activity the forms, questionnaires, recommendations, rules of investigation, intervention and monitoring of bullying / cyberbullying cases from the specific guidelines drawn up by the Ministry of Education and Research, contacts the families of victims and perpetrators, in order to manage bullying situations, acts of bullying / cyberbullying, annually, evaluates, with the participation of students, the dimension of bullying phenomenon in school.

**The multidisciplinary and interinstitutional team** is the team made up of different

professionals, such as the teacher, the school counselor, the medical staff of the educational unit, the social worker, the family doctor, the specialist doctor, the policeman, the magistrate etc

They are in direct relationship with the child and are empowered within the case management with the responsibility to carry out, each individually, specific activities in the best interest of the child. (ORDER no. 4.343/2020 of May 27, 2020 on the approval of the

Methodological Norms for the application of the provisions of Article 7 para. (1<sup>^</sup>), art. 56<sup>^</sup>1 and of point 6<sup>^</sup>1 of the Annex to the National Education Law no. 1/2011, on psychological violence – bullying)

Taking into account the data presented and the measures applied both in Romania and worldwide, we will follow the statistics and effects of actions for the coming years regarding violence among adolescents.

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28. Annex to OMECT No. 1409/29.06.2007 STRATEGY OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH AND YOUTH REGARDING THE REDUCTION OF VIOLENCE PHENOMENON IN PRE-UNIVERSITY EDUCATION UNITS.