

# Psychological Aspects of Bullying and Cyberbullying at Schools

Nazarov V.L., Averbukh N.V.

*Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russia*

*\*Corresponding author. Email: e-mail: natalya\_averbukh@mail.ru*

## ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the topic of bullying and cyberbullying in Russian schools, its spread among children and teenagers, and the danger posed by these phenomena. It shows the connection between bullying and cyberbullying with such a phenomenon as aggression, which is a natural need, but normally should be directed in a healthier direction than causing harm to other people. The author provides a classification of hostile actions on the Internet, describes the harm caused by cyberbullying due to anonymity and the phenomenon of disinhibition, which is associated with a lack of feedback and control. An additional danger of cyberbullying is that children tend to hide these incidents from adults for fear of losing access to the Internet. The article provides data from a survey of students in the Sverdlovsk region on school bullying and cyberbullying. Although a relatively small percentage of children experience violence, it requires special attention and consideration. Since aggression is a natural human need, it is recommended to develop methods of directing it in a constructive direction, including on the Internet.

**Keywords:** *school, teenagers, bullying, cyberbullying, aggression*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term "bullying" refers to an aggressive act with the goal of causing harm [15]. Today, scientific literature increasingly uses a foreign term of a similar meaning - bullying. According to the Norwegian psychologist D. Olweus, bullying or bullying is an aggressive action on the part of one or more persons against another member of the team, which he is acutely experiencing, but at the same time, for various reasons, cannot respond to aggression [5].

The problem of bullying in schools is inextricably linked to the phenomenon of aggression. Within the framework of psychoanalysis, aggression is defined as a natural and necessary need, the suppression of which can lead to depression and suicide [8]. K. Lorenz in his book "Aggression" defined aggressiveness as the instinct of struggle, directed against fellow species, in animals and humans. According to K. Lorenz, "aggression (...) will definitely be a part of the organization of all living beings, preserving their system of functioning and their very life." He also argues that "aggression is a genuine instinct - primary, aimed at preserving the species. (...) The main danger of instinct is its spontaneity" [18]. In the animal kingdom, baiting is used in interspecies aggression by potential victims against a predator and is carried out by a large group. This behavior causes the target to flee or avoid, if possible. If the escape routes are blocked, a so-called critical reaction may follow, that is, the pursued person attacks the pursuers [18]. Speaking about the problem of bullying, it is necessary to understand that bullying is based not only on the desire to harm, to hurt the victim, but also on the group norms that the victim,

willingly or unwittingly, violates, the group's need for recovery and/or the establishment of group cohesion.

The natural processes of group dynamics can lead to pressure on those members who violate group norms. Such pressure serves important functions, in particular, it helps to preserve the group as a whole. It is known that not all members of the group accept its norms consciously and voluntarily. Most do this out of fear of sanctions from the rest [15]. To maintain loyalty to group interests, bullying those who reject common norms may seem necessary (even if they are not aware of it).

Cyberbullying means transferring aggression and harassment to the Internet. Since the end of the 20th century, this environment has become one of the main sources of information for young people [20]. It provides fundamentally new opportunities to influence a person. The opinion of the sometimes unfamiliar audience becomes important for a person and the more dangerous becomes the persecution on the Internet.

When working with such a phenomenon as school bullying, it is necessary to understand not only its inadmissibility from a moral point of view, not only the harm it brings to virtually all participants in the process (both the victim, and persecutors, and observers), but also the naturalness of this phenomenon, which cannot be simply terminated by order or request.

## 2. RELATED WORK

Bullying is inextricably linked both with a person's need to express aggression and with a person's desire to stand out, to show their superiority by humiliating other members of

the community. Today, the most common and problematic is bullying in children and school communities. This is due to the fact that children, due to their age, have not yet fully developed social and communication skills, and is aggravated by the fact that victims of bullying for the same reasons do not know how to behave and are unable to give an adequate response to the offenders, which leads to serious psychological trauma and problems in their personal development, and in some cases to fatal consequences, such as attempted suicide and committed suicides [16].

The Internet is an important medium for the life and communication of both adults and children. In the book of V.L. Nazarov and D.V. Zherdev's relationship between man and modern technology is defined as follows: "The rapid development and diffusion of new information and communication technologies as a result of scientific and technological progress is today acquiring the character of an information revolution unprecedented in its scale, which has an increasing impact on politics, economy, science and other spheres of life society both within national borders and in the world as a whole" [16, 29]. This, of course, led to an increase in opportunities for persecution by moving to the Internet space and gave rise to a new phenomenon - cyberbullying, that is, bullying carried out on the Internet.

Among popular scientific works devoted to cyberbullying, one can name the books by M. Berenov and A. Berenova [3, 4], who offer their own ways of countering bullying, based on practical experience of working with children. Online bullying prevention is becoming a part of the school curriculum [11]. There are Internet portals that publish materials on protection against cyberbullying, for example, "Cyberbullying" [13], or against school bullying, for example, "Dr. Morris/Articles/Bullying at school" [7], an article by school psychologist A. Fominova "School bullying. Who is guilty? What to do?" on the portal "Class-info. Psychologist's advice" [10].

The authors of the scientific papers propose a classification of hostile actions, describe possible causes of aggressive behavior on the Internet, and its consequences for victims. Recommendations are also given, among which you can find teaching children to control emotions, increasing the psychological competence of children, etc. [2, 9, 12]. In the work of A.A. Bochaver and K.D. Khlomov's "Cyberbullying: Bullying in the Space of Modern Technologies" [6] states that the victims of cyberbullying are the same children who become victims of ordinary bullying. Cyberbullying differs from ordinary bullying primarily by its anonymity, the presence of invisible witnesses, and the lack of feedback. In this case, the persecutor gets the opportunity to think out the reaction that he likes best [6]. Children tend to hide the fact of electronic violence, fearing that they will be denied access to the Internet [2, 6, 9]. A logical decision for an adult to stop the flow of insults together with the termination of the child's access to the network turns into additional punishment and reduces the child's trust in the adult along with the desire to complain about existing problems [6].

The problem of bullying can also manifest itself in a group of special children, as shown in the work of E.N. Skavycheva "Bullying in the school collective of mentally retarded students" [21] on the example of mentally retarded students. Bullying, including cyberbullying, can be considered as a deviation, which is shown in the work of I.V. Lebedeva, A.S. Labutin, A.N. Baranova "Bullying as a deviation of relationships in children and teenagers" [17].

As the research carried out by A.A. Bochaver, K.D. Khlomov and D.G. Davydov in 2019 with the participation of Moscow teenagers 11-16 years old (grades 5-9), almost three-quarters of the respondents faced such bullying in one form or another - 72%, while 39% of the respondents were both victims and offenders [22].

### 3. METHODS

As a research method, a survey in the settlements of the Sverdlovsk region was used, carried out in the form of a questionnaire survey by teachers and undergraduates of the Department of Organization of Work with Youth of the Ural Federal University under the guidance of Professor of the Department of Organization of Work with Youth V.L. Nazarov in 2020 on the topic "The use of information technology by youth policy institutions, educational organizations, non-profit organizations, youth and children's organizations to organize the prevention of youth involvement in the activities of destructive organizations, groups, and communities on the Internet" (agreement No. H803.210.002/20 dated March 24, 2020, between UrFU and the State Autonomous Institution of the Sverdlovsk Region "Youth House").

Participants: 4519 students from schools and institutions of secondary vocational education. The age of the majority of respondents is from 14 to 18 years, of which 62% (2801 people) are girls, 38% (1718 people) are boys. Of these, 3357 students live in the Sverdlovsk region, 1162 in Yekaterinburg.

Place of training of respondents

Secondary vocational educational organizations (SPE) - 240.

General education organizations (GS) - 4279.

Questionnaire questions (ordered according to the logic of the article)

1. How do you behave in a team?
  - I am a sociable person and I have many friends;
  - I get along well with everyone and have a few good friends;
  - I don't get along well with people, but I have one or two friends;
  - I hardly communicate with anyone, I am not like everyone else.
2. Do you often have outbursts of aggression?
  - Never;
  - Sometimes;
  - Often;

- Often.
- 3. Do you have a student and teacher in your school (college) for whom you have a terrible hatred?
  - No, there are no such people at school;
  - Yes, there is one;
  - Yes, there are several people;
  - Yes, there are many.
- 4. Do you feel safe in your educational institution?
  - Yes;
  - Rather yes;
  - Probably not;
  - No.
- 5. How often do you see violence and humiliation occurring among your peers in your organization?
  - Once a month or less;
  - Several times a month;
  - Every week;
  - Almost daily.
- 6. How often do you personally have to participate in events where violence and humiliation are present?
  - Almost never;
  - Sometimes you have to;
  - Often.
- 7. If you are faced with insults from your peers, then you
  - Just ignore it because you are above it;
  - You try to solve the problem peacefully, discuss the situation with the abuser;
  - Seek help from elders;
  - You answer the offender in the same way and act according to the situation;
  - You are not afraid of conflicts, as you can stand up for yourself;
  - Be patient, because you know that someday you will take revenge on your abuser.
- 8. How often do you see systematic insults, threats and the spread of lies that defame someone from your environment on social networks?
  - Almost never;
  - Rarely, encountered several times;
  - Often;
  - Constantly.
- 9. How often do you personally have to participate in such conflicts on social networks?
  - Almost never;
  - Rarely, encountered several times;
  - Often;
  - Constantly.
- 10. Who do you think is the fault of these cases of abuse and violence between teenagers, both in real life and on social networks?
  - More often than not, the one who gets it is his own fault;

- The instigators who often harass others for entertainment are to blame;
- Both sides are to blame;
- Such situations are common, and there are no right or wrong in them.
- 11. If you become an observer or participant in an incident (in real life and on social networks) related to violence, systematic insults, spreading lies, or bullying, then you:
  - Report the incident to parents or teachers;
  - Ask for help from friends and acquaintances;
  - Complain to the administration of the site on which this occurs;
  - Deal with the situation yourself;
  - You won't do anything.
- 12. Do you have guys in your educational organization who consider themselves to be subcultures, wear special clothes, speak their own slang, follow unwritten rules?
  - Yes;
  - No;
  - I am at a loss to answer.
- 13. What are some slang words and phrases they use? (open question)
- 14. How often do these guys or their part have conflicts related to violence, humiliation, and aggression?
  - Almost never;
  - Sometimes it happens;
  - Often;
  - Constantly.

The first two questions are designed to show the personal characteristics of the respondent in the field of communication and his tendency to aggression. The third question is related to them and is aimed at assessing whether there is a specific object for aggression. The fourth question is intended to determine the general environment in the educational institution. The fifth question is formulated in order to determine the level of violence in the educational environment of the respondent. The sixth question continues the fifth and demonstrates the degree of the respondent's personal participation in such phenomena. The seventh question of the block is aimed at showing the behavioral patterns of respondents in a conflict situation. Questions 8 and 9 clarify the extent of cyberbullying among teenagers. The tenth and eleventh questions show the attitude towards the bullying situation and are aimed at identifying the behavioral patterns that the respondents adhere to in this situation. Questions twelve to fourteen were included in the questionnaire to clarify the subcultural component in the educational environment, as well as its influence and aggression on the part of its representatives.

## 4. RESULTS

1. How do you behave in a team?

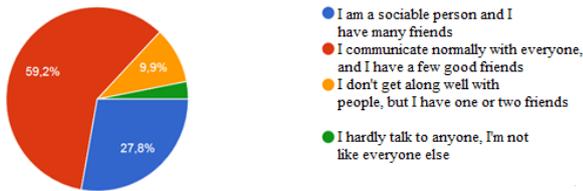


Figure 1 Distribution of students' answers to question 1

As can be seen from Figure 1, the majority of students rate their communication abilities and their communicative environment as sufficient, however, 3.1% indicate the presence of social problems. These children are a vulnerable part of any group, as a lack of communication or inability to communicate, the perception of oneself as different from others often makes the child a target of aggression by other children.

2. Do you often have outbursts of aggression?

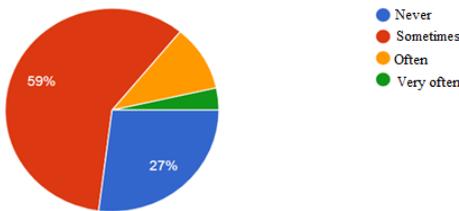


Figure 2 Distribution of students' answers to question 2.

As can be seen from Figure 2, most students do not have outbursts of aggression or they occur quite rarely. However, those who often visit them make up 10.5%, and very often - 3.5%.

Children prone to outbursts of aggression can both become the organizers of bullying, and, once they lose control over themselves, provoke reciprocal aggression from fellow practitioners and, thus, become victims of bullying themselves.

3. Do you have a student and teacher in your school (college) for whom you have a terrible hatred?

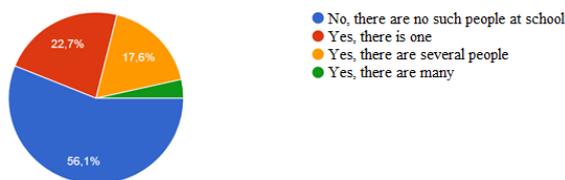


Figure 3 Distribution of students' answers to question 3

As you can see from Figure 3, most people say they have no enemies to hate at school. 40.3% confirm that there are such people, but this answer is also normal due to the age characteristics of the respondents. However, 3.6% say that they hate almost everyone; this behavior also requires the intervention of specialists. Such children are at risk. They can turn to blatant aggression against other students in the scenario of "school shooting" or other forms of attacks, they can take out their hatred through various forms of cyberbullying. In addition, these children may themselves be the victims of bullying and the emotions they feel in

relation to other people may be a direct consequence of the difficult situation in which they find themselves.

4. Do you feel safe in your educational institution?

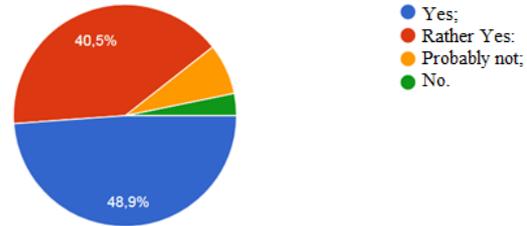


Figure 4 Distribution of students' answers to question 4

The overwhelming majority of respondents, 89.4% indicated that they feel safe, or rather feel, in the affirmative, however, more than 10% note that they do not feel safe, this may be due to a negative situation in the school or classroom among students or indicates the presence of conflicts within the team and the presence of bullying or other destructive phenomena.

5. How often do you see violence and humiliation occurring among your peers in your organization?

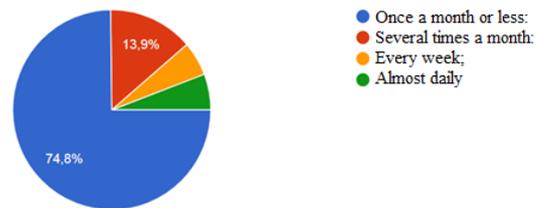


Figure 5 Distribution of students' answers to question 5

74.8% and 13.9% of respondents say that they see scenes of violence or humiliation in their school no more than once a month or a couple of times a month, respectively. This is natural for any teenager environment, due to social and age characteristics, and does not indicate a negative environment in this society. However, 11.3% of students observe these phenomena every week or almost daily. This indicates an extremely unfavorable environment in a school or a specific classroom, requiring the intervention of specialists.

6. How often do you personally have to participate in events where violence and humiliation are present?

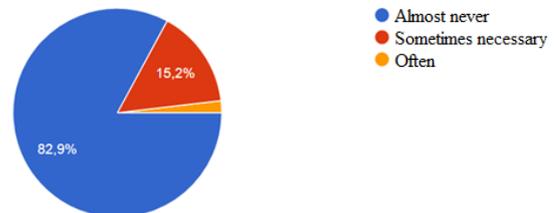


Figure 6 Distribution of students' answers to question 6

The answer to question 6 shows a fairly favorable picture, however, when analyzing these results, one should take into account the inaccuracy of the wording, which does not indicate whether the respondent participated as a victim, one of the persecutors, or instigator. In addition, there

remains the possibility of respondents giving the desired answer, that is, choosing the option that will show them in the best light. In addition, bullying participants do not always rate their behavior as cruel, especially if they do not turn to explicit physical abuse, but may perceive their own actions as a fun game.

7. If you are faced with insults from your peers, then you ...?



Figure 7 Distribution of students' answers to question 7

As you can see, the overwhelming majority act in proportion to their age, or ignore the offenders 35.5%, or try to solve problems through peaceful negotiations, 25.3% also have a significant category of respondents who are ready to stand up for themselves in any situation - 22.2%. These answers are quite typical for teenagers, their age, and personality characteristics. However, only 1.7% of pupils turn to elders for help in such situations. This indicates the traditional closeness of the teenager community from adults and the traditionally low level of participation of teachers and parents in the personal relationships of children.

8. How often do you see systematic insults, threats, and spread of lies defaming someone from your environment on social networks?

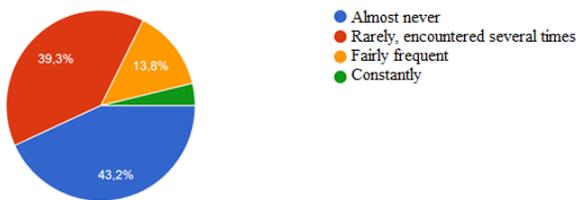


Figure 8 Distribution of students' answers to question 8

9. How often do you personally have to participate in such conflicts on social networks?

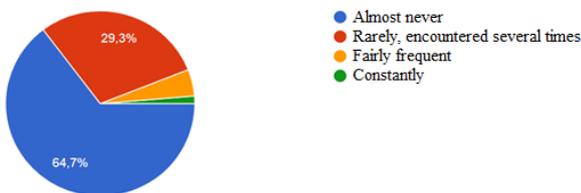


Figure 9 Distribution of students' answers to question 9

For convenience, let's combine the results of questions 8 and 9 on the scale of cyberbullying in teenagers. The majority of respondents do not encounter a similar phenomenon and do not participate in it - 43.2% and 64.7%, respectively. 39.3% and 29.3% of respondents

sometimes encounter such phenomena and themselves several times became participants. However, 13.8% of respondents face this phenomenon often, 3,7 - constantly, and 6% often or constantly become participants. The results suggest that cyberbullying is somehow present in the lives of teenagers. And a small number of schoolchildren are often faced with this phenomenon and, perhaps, they themselves are victims.

10. What do you think is the fault of such cases of abuse and violence between teenagers, both in real life and in social networks?

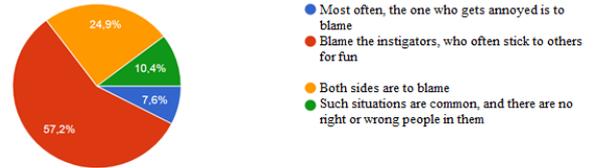


Figure 10 Distribution of students' answers to question 10

As can be seen from the diagram, the majority, 57.2%, rationally admit the offender's guilt in this situation, however, various conflicts arise in the teenager environment, so many are not so unambiguous and give different answers. For example, 24.9% believe that both parties are to blame, and 7.6% that the one who is offended is to blame. It is likely that these respondents themselves participated in bullying by the offenders and do not consider themselves guilty.

11. If you become an observer or participant of an incident (in real life and in social networks) related to violence, systematic insults, spreading lies, or bullying, then you ...?

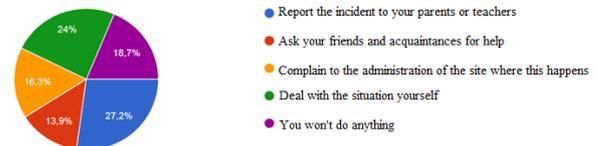
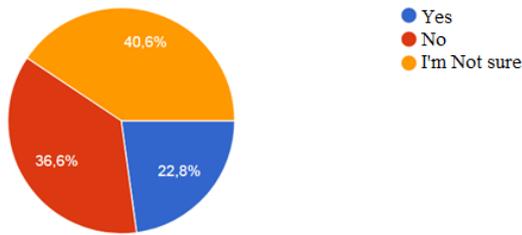


Figure 11 Distribution of students' answers to question 11

Answers to question 11 do not show a clearly expressed preference of students for any one strategy of behavior. It is interesting to compare these results with the answers to question 7. If the victim of insults and attacks by peers was only in 1.7% of cases ready to seek help from their elders, then a conditional majority - 27.2% - are ready for this as witnesses. The second largest group, 24%, is ready to deal with the situation on its own, which indicates a certain level of self-confidence and the presence of communication skills. Many, however, 18%, are not ready to do anything about this situation.

12. Do you have guys in your educational organization who consider themselves to be subcultures, wear special clothes, speak their own slang, and follow unwritten rules?



**Figure 12** Distribution of students' answers to question 12

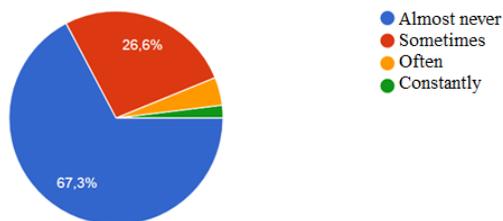
As can be seen from Figure 12, not all students are familiar with representatives of subcultures among students of their educational institutions, but there are such children.

13. What are some slang words and phrases they use?

From these answers, we can understand that there are not so many separate subcultures in the youth environment. In particular, one of the most popular is the subculture of fans of Japanese cartoons with the general name "Anime", they are called "Animes" - we have 486 references. This subculture is not destructive.

However, the terminology of the AUE subculture banned in August 2020 in the Russian Federation received a large number of references - 76 references. The subculture of football hooligans, built on violence and being destructive, was also mentioned.

13. How often do these guys or their part have conflicts related to violence, humiliation, and aggression?



**Figure 13** Distribution of students' answers to question 14

Since most of the subcultures indicated by the respondents are not destructive, it is quite easy to explain what explains most of the answers about the absence of conflicts and aggression from the representatives of subcultures or in their environment. However, it can be seen that about a third of respondents still faced violence from representatives of subcultures, and 6.1% - often and constantly. This is also explained by the mention of destructive structures, as well as the naturalness of conflicts and aggression in adolescence.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The research shows that aggression and violence are not very common in the school environment. However, this is not enough to calm down: in order for the persecution to

begin, one instigator is enough, and the rest can not interfere with him or her and not pay attention to what is happening. Of course, if other team members join the bullying, the situation will become even more depressing. Most of the children, according to them, do not participate in violence against their peers, but this should not be reassuring, since a minority is enough to organize bullying, in addition, it cannot be ruled out that children do not want to admit what they are doing, or not before end understand how their behavior is traumatic for a friend. In the case of verbal bullying, for example, they may assume that they are just teasing and that the victim might respond in kind. Unfortunately, only a few children are willing to report being bullied or cyberbullying, making it difficult for adults to intervene.

The belonging of children to one or another subculture may in some cases cause concern. Such children can, by their appearance and behavior, violating the group norms of the class (group) in which they study, become a target for persecution, in addition, if they belong to a destructive subculture, it is possible that their group norms already push them to violence in their environment or against other children who do not belong to their subculture.

Despite the rather optimistic statistics, one must understand that the study of bullying and cyberbullying requires additional attention and understanding of modern realities. The transfer of aggression to the Internet environment, with its supposed anonymity and impunity, as well as with the exaggerated attention that is often given to electronic events, can create psychological situations that are not limited to the already studied consequences of bullying.

Teachers need to take into account that, since aggression is a human need, it is advisable, within the framework of the fight and prevention of bullying and cyberbullying, not to try to suppress aggressive instincts, but to direct them in a constructive direction, including on the Internet, for example, through the organization of positive activities in networks.

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