Prevention, Empowerment, Deterrent - Cyberbullying from the Perspective of the Teachers and the Police

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Abstract

In Hungary, social awareness has increased in recent years and the educational system is placing more and more emphasis on the prevention and treatment of all kinds of bullying in schools (Domonkos, 2016). This research aimed to explore the phenomenon of cyberbullying (Arató et al. 2019) in the town of Keszthely.

Research questions were focused on the awareness of professionals working in schools (teachers, school psychologists) and police about the topic. Next to scientific literature review the research is based on interviews. The sensitive nature of the topic made it difficult to identify interviewees. Teachers in each of the three typical school types (primary, secondary vocational, high school), a school psychologist and a police crime prevention officer were selected to explore their role and experiences.

Similar to literature, the results show that the greatest role in curbing bullying in schools is played by appropriate information (Pongrácz, 2020) and prevention (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012). We suggest focusing on two target groups: turning bystanders into helpers through information and encouragement and paying particular attention to students on the periphery of communities, who could be empowered to deal with bullying. According to teachers, role-playing in primary schools - where the victim and the abuser swap roles and feel the emotions caused by actions - can be effective. In secondary schools, books or films can be used as classroom activities. The police crime prevention team also gives small group presentations on bullying as a preventive measure and after the event. Experience has shown that the presence of police after such incidents discourages participants from continuing the act; the most common private complaint to the police is the sharing of pornographic images. Cases at school can have different outcomes depending on the age of the perpetrator, but most often the case is referred to the Family and Child Welfare Service. In the secondary school age group, having a criminal record - which would affect their chances of starting a life or employment - is already a deterrent.

Keywords: cyberbullying, prevention, teacher, police, Hungary

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Introduction

In Hungary, cyberbullying has not been researched for a long time, so it lags behind the Baltic States, which started researching school bullying in the 1970s, in terms of prevention and treatment. With the advent of mobile phones, the internet and social media, the phenomenon of school bullying has been supplemented by cyberbullying, which is currently in its boom phase. It has been observed that in recent years there has been increasing media attention and social pressure in this area, as both issues can have very serious consequences for victims, including low self-esteem, reduced school performance, emotional problems and suicide risk. The phenomenon is now seen as a serious problem not only by professionals but also by society, and the research suggests that a number of solutions have emerged to reduce bullying and cyberbullying for the benefit of students and teachers.

Objectives

The aim of the research was to assess the situation of school bullying in Keszthely and its surroundings, a town with good economic and cultural characteristics in Western Hungary: to get to know the preparedness of local schools, teachers and the professionals supporting them. The focus of the research was on how much emphasis is currently placed on bullying prevention activities in schools and who are the actors that help students and teachers to prevent or deal with bullying cases. The research explored the role of the police in prevention, in dealing with incidents that do occur, and what they can do if they receive a report of a problem.

Literature Review

Both Hungarian (Pongrácz, 2020; Pongó, 2018) and international (Twemlow & Sacco, 2012) literature agree that the most effective way to curb the cyberbullying phenomenon is prevention would be the most effective tool. One of the most important steps to prevent bullying and cyberbullying in schools would be to turn indifferent bystanders and potential protectors into victim protectors by providing them with the right information and transferring these competencies (Coloroso, 2014).

A good practice in Hungary is the Child Protection Guideline developed by the NGO Hintalovon Foundation, which can be used to reduce bullying and cyberbullying in schools (Stáhly, 2021). The Child Protection Guideline aims to create a clear and transparent framework for students, teachers and staff to address bullying in schools. The essence of the policy is not the specific document that comes out of the audit, but the collective reflection that leads to its drafting by teachers and professionals in the

school. The document helps all participants in the educational institution to clarify the legal, temporal and local framework, the tasks of prevention, the education of children on the subject, and the teachers are informed about the appropriate ways to deal with cases (Stáhly, 2021). Currently, the Child Protection Guideline is not yet a well-known method in Hungary and is less widespread in schools.

But there are also many other programmes and practices available to schools that they can incorporate into classroom life for preventive purposes. A good practice would be to reach out to socially disadvantaged students, using popular, less at-risk students (Twemlow and Sacco, 2012). This could even take place during lessons, when working in pairs or groups. In the long term, school thematic days, simulation games and the display of information posters in busy areas of the school can be effective (Jármi and Piros, 2017).

Cases are not limited to the abuser and the abused. In the community, it is the indifferent bystanders and potential protectors who are the most easily motivated to help, but they are often afraid of making matters worse, of becoming a target themselves, of being hurt, or of not knowing exactly what they should do (Coloroso, 2014). For children, not only school sessions are relevant but also the patterns they learn in the family, so parents have a great responsibility to transmit the core values (self-awareness, empathy) to children because if they empathize with their peer's suffering and have the courage, they will act to resolve the situation (Urbán and Villányi, 2022).

The goal of dealing with bullying in schools is never to punish the bully, but to reduce the suffering of the victim. Discipline, rather than punishment, is an important factor on the part of the abuser. Zero tolerance and punishment are the enemies of an effective response to school bullying. From the victim's point of view, it is important to empower the victim, not to blame him for what has happened, but to reassure him that it is not his fault that he has been bullied. Galambos (2018) also agrees that the success of dealing with abuse cases lies not in finding fault, but in finding a solution through communication. He believes that it is necessary to be able to deal with abuse appropriately, that overreaction is not good practice, but that it is also important not to overlook what is observed.

1. Statistics and poll

Nationally representative surveys on online bullying were also available for primary school (OFI, 2015) and secondary school (Unicef and Medián, 2022) age groups. The majority of primary school age children (6-14 years) surveyed had either not experienced bullying (33%) or had experienced only 1-2 incidents of bullying (37%). However, 5% of children were victims of bullying on a weekly basis and 10% more than once a week. This breaks the paradigm that school is a safe place. The students surveyed considered virtual bullying to be the most serious, taking things or money to be serious, physical violence to be moderate and verbal violence to be the least serious form of bullying. Teachers

were harsher in their judgements of types of abuse, saying that sharing defamatory videos was the most serious, and physical violence was considered more serious than theft. The motive for bullying also differs: students think that bullying is motivated by others wanting to appear strong because others think it's cool. Teachers, on the other hand, consider the victim's characteristics as the initial motive: "because these kids are different from others" or they consider the acts to be fun for the rest of the community (OFI, 2015).

44% of the secondary school students (vocational high school and high school, 14-18 years) surveyed reported having experienced online bullying. Harassment is less common online (3%), school is usually the place of harassment (44%), but nearly as many (42%) reported experiencing a mix of online and school-based harassment. A specific pattern of online bullying in the secondary school age group is that girls are more often victims than boys, the majority of bullies are classmates (58%) or do not know the bully (23%), and the majority of bullying is a one-off incident (57%). Online bullying is mostly in the form of private messages (67%), but the use of Facebook (26%) or Instagram (34%) is also common. A third of respondents have experienced both: bully and bullied (Unicef and Medián, 2022).

Methods

The research was based on semi-structured interviews in addition to the literature. The interviewees were exclusively adult professionals involved in the topic: the head of the crime prevention team of the Keszthely Police Department, a school psychologist working in several schools in the area, and three teachers who have been class teachers for 10-25 years in the 3 main types of schools in the Hungarian education system (primary school 1-8 grades 6-14 years; vocational high school: vocational + matura; high school: matura). During the semi-structured interviews (Molnár, 2010), in addition to the pre-set questions, the interviewees were able to share their thoughts, opinions and experiences that they considered important, so the interviews actually allowed for a deeper exploration of contexts and experiences than planned. The interviews with professionals were structured around three different sets of questions, ensuring that each person was asked questions appropriate to their area of expertise and involvement.

Results

According to the teachers interviewed, there is a great need for lectures on school bullying and cyberbullying in teacher training and in-service training, as in many cases teachers are not sufficiently informed to recognise and deal with cases. Teachers are not aware of the possibility of "booking" the Police lectures, which is due to the fact that the information letters are sent to the principals of the institutions. The head of a secondary

school class criticised the fact that in her school the same lecture on the same subject is given by the crime prevention team every time, which is unanimous and does not focus on other problems affecting young people.

The primary school class teacher says that in addition to the thematic days and presentations, role-playing can also be a good way to achieve good results. In role-playing, the victim and the abuser swap roles, so that the abuser has the opportunity to feel the emotions caused by his/her actions. In addition, as a teacher, if the classroom environment allows, it is worthwhile to watch films with young students on the subject of bullying in schools, where bullying and its consequences are shown, so that they can see the dynamics of the phenomenon from the outside, and to recommend reading books and novels on the subject. The teachers interviewed all agreed that it is impossible for them to detect cyberbullying in the online space if there is no signal from a student. There was also unanimity that parents have almost no control over their children's phones, with few restrictions on their use. In the lower primary school years (grades 1-4, 6-10 years) there are still some cases, but in the upper primary school years (grades 5-8, 11-15 years) the restriction of mobile phone use is punitive for some children. The time spent on social networking sites is directly proportional to the risk of cyberbullying, as the more time a young person spends on these platforms, the more he or she posts, the higher the risk of being a victim of online abuse and harassment. The unanimous opinion of teachers is that the most important message for parents is to watch out for any changes in a child's life, behaviour or habits, as this may indicate that they have been a victim of abuse.

The school psychologist pointed out that cyberbullying cases are usually not brought to light, only when the situation becomes very serious. As for teacher colleagues in general, he said that due to inadequate preparation during teacher training, lack of awareness of the characteristics and dynamics of bullying in schools, and lack of in-depth knowledge, teachers sometimes confuse bullying incidents with conflicts. As regards the management of bullying cases, she stressed that the more the problem is tackled from different angles, the better the results. It is the responsibility of parents to pay attention to the slightest change in a child's behaviour so that timely intervention can be made. For her, as a psychologist, the goal is to empower the victim psychologically.

On the police side, the head of the crime prevention team for the secondary school age group believes that the biggest deterrent for young people, not only for bullying but for any crime, is to have a criminal record. They know that their future career and job prospects can be greatly influenced by the entry on their report card. Cases of bullying in schools are said to be sensitive because the people involved are mostly minors or underage, but even a police case can have a serious impact at such a young age. The Crime Prevention Team Leader agrees with the other experts that parents should always seek help from the school or the police if they notice changes in the child's behaviour and that these should be reported as soon as possible for the benefit of the victim.

Conclusions

The biggest role and impact in curbing bullying in schools is through good information and prevention. Unless bystanders can be turned into helpers through information and encouragement, incidents of bullying will inevitably occur. In addition to bystanders, it is important to address students on the periphery, because if the victim of bullying is able to deal with the abuse they have suffered, they can quickly break the cycle of bullying. But it is in the interest of students that everyone understands that bullying and harassment of students who are different is not acceptable and will not be tolerated. The more pupils see this behaviour as reprehensible, the more bullying in schools will be reduced. In Hungary, the greatest impact at the school level could be achieved by developing the Child Protection Guidelines, as the process of writing them will provide teachers with a wealth of new information and will help them to think more deeply about and discuss how to tackle the issue at the local level. Transforming IT education could also help to reduce cyberbullying. It would be useful to teach pupils in primary school the correct use of the internet, what behaviour is acceptable in the online space and what is not acceptable to do, even in the shadows of anonymity. All have to learn, that this kind of abuse is not acceptable, it is not natural. In addition to prevention, emphasis should also be placed on proper treatment in order to minimise victimisation of the victim of abuse and to focus on helping the victim and repairing his or her injuries during the treatment process. In the appropriate treatment of abuse, the perpetrator should not be immediately subjected to severe punishment through the principle of zero tolerance, as this would achieve the opposite of the desired result. The abuser is preoccupied with his or her own grievances, which prevents the internal processes that can bring about change from being triggered. From the perpetrator's point of view, the aim would be that, having explained to them through discipline why the behaviour is wrong, they would feel guilty from within. But this cannot be done without empathy, so it is mainly up to parents, but also to teachers, to instil the right values in young students. In Keszthely and its surroundings, the organisations involved rely on each other's work, and schools mostly make use of the prevention opportunities offered by the Police and the Child Welfare Service. Information and prevention initiatives are present in the institutions. There is also a need for teachers to have the knowledge and tools to prevent and deal with this phenomenon, which causes so many problems for all concerned.

Annex:

Movie and reading recommendations for school work:

Movies:
The Social Dilemma (2020)
Fomo (2019)
I hope you die next time :) (2018)
LOMO – The Language of Many Others (2017)
Cyberbully (2015)

Series:
13 Reasons Why
Black Mirror

Books:
Jay Asher – Thirteen Reasons Why
Jodi Picoult – Nineteen Minutes
Julie Anne Peters – By the Time You Read This, I'll Be Dead
Laura Steven – The Exact Opposite of Okay

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