



## Research Article

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# Consequences of Bullying in Schools: The Viewpoint of School Directors. Suggestions for Mitigating the Phenomenon - A Case Study of the District of Tirana

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## Abstract

One of the most important institutions which affects the development and education of individuals in society is the school. The territory of schools needs to be safe from any form of violence, including bullying. Bullying in itself is a phenomenon that is defined as a behavior which occurs when an individual or a certain group of individuals, taking advantage of their power or authority, seek to impose, persecute, abuse, or intimidate the weaker ones repeatedly (Dema, 2007). Given that various studies consider bullying to be quite widespread (Haka & Pervizi, 2007 and Boyle, 2003), central and local institutions in Albania but also school leaders, are committed to prevent and fight this phenomenon. The main purpose of this study is to identify the most typical cases and to give suggestions on how to cope with and avoid bullying at school. The selected research method is the qualitative one, using data triangulation, such as literature review, interviews with the directors and focus groups with schools in Tirana district which has about 40 percent of the population at the national level, with a total of 997,380 inhabitants (General Directorate of Status Civil, Ministry of Interior, March 2011). In this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 21 directors from 81 schools in the region of Tirana, including public and private schools, as well as a focus group with 5 directors and 5 security officers from schools with the highest number of students in the district of Tirana. The results of the study show that bullying is widespread in 80 percent of schools and the most present form of bullying is verbal and social, but the physical and cyber forms cannot be neglected. Bullying occurs in the form of student to student in 87 percent of cases, student to teacher in 47 percent of cases and teacher to student in 33 percent of cases. One of the most frequent variables of bullying is the educational level of parents with 33 percent and the family economic situation which accounts for 40 percent. The given results were generated from the analysis of data where 6 of the respondents answered that the family and its economic situation are both considered as determining factor in the emergence of bullying. How can such a phenomenon be prevented? The given study suggests: teachers training should be conducted, open hours with students, parents should be involved in these issues as part of the solution, building a close partnership with the school, meetings and awareness campaigns should be carried out between teachers, parents and students, also including other actors such as the psychologist and the security officer of the school.

**Keywords:** bullying, school, leadership, students, parents, prevention policies

## 1. Introduction

Bullying in itself is a phenomenon that is defined as a behavior that occurs when an individual, or a certain group of individuals, taking advantage of their power or authority, seek to impose, persecute, abuse, or intimidate the weaker ones repeatedly (Dema, 2007). Bullying is classified into several different forms such as: physical bullying, verbal bullying, social bullying, and cyber bullying. The reasons why bullying occurs range from physical appearance, race, ethnicity, physical disability and appearance. But these are not the only ones since we also have such issues like family economic level and sexual orientation to consider. Bullies are mostly children who have been bullied before and they use the same method as their way to survive on the one hand; on the other hand are those children who have a tendency to hurt and make others feel bad for their appearance, or their disabilities. (Natale, 2012)

According to Article 85 of Chapter XIV of the normative provisions "On the pre-university education system" (2013): "The student has the right to perform his activity in the educational institution in quiet and safe conditions for his/her life and health; to be treated with respect, dignity, in a cultured and moral way in the educational institution, without pressure, without injustice, without insulting, without discrimination and without violence". Also, Law no. 69 (2012) "On pre-university education" requires that teachers to be careful about the needs of students in the school environment.

There are certain factors that affect the phenomenon of bullying which have a psychological, personal, genetic, cultural and family nature. Starting with the parent-child relationship, there is an approach that tends to look at the attachment of the child with one of the parents, to provide security and comfort in building his personality and the way he sees the world and himself. (Loreto, 2008)

Another factor also related to the family is family education or the cultural influence which tends to be transmitted to the child, in the form of rules and values. The parenting style is influential because with a very tolerant parent the child is likely to be polite but on the other hand, in a family where the child is being bullied, he or she is more likely to behave inappropriately by following the family model. (Woolfolk, 2011) Bandura emphasizes the same with his theory, highlighting the fact that children tend to model their behavior by observing the social environment where they grow up. (Dragoti, 2012)

Another factor is the individual and personal component which can be learned but there are also studies that claim that it may be innate, i.e. genetic. On the other hand, there is the influence of the group in which individuals belong, that in order to adapt to the expectations of the group and to feel part of it, adapting to social roles, individuals tend to behave aggressively and bully others due to assertiveness as well as self-esteem. (Loreto, 2008)

While, according to Gini & Pozzoli, we can divide the consequences of bullying into two major groups: the first group would consist in physical and psychological consequences while the second group includes consequences of behavior related to the use of alcohol and non-social/violent behaviors. Victims of bullying try to drop out of school, thus being excluded from many social opportunities, and this follows them into adulthood (Gini & Pozzoli, 2018).

According to CHEO we could detect some effects of bullying such as: aggression, alcohol and drug use, depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts and murder. The effects on the victims would be: low self-esteem, stress and health problems, anxiety and loneliness, school dislike and refusal (phobia) depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Therefore, as you can see its effects are very harmful to the individual because they reach to the point where the child starts thinking about his non-existence on earth. (Craig Ross & Tracy Vaillancourt & Angela Lorusso)

It is assumed that there are gender differences in terms of aggression. In a study conducted by Hyde (1986) it was concluded that mid-level aggression occurs in 63% of cases in men and 38% in women, in childhood and adolescence. (Basow, 2003).

There is bullying in schools all over the country and this is also shown by previous studies conducted by various researchers (Dragoti & Ismaili, ... and Haka & Pervizi, 2007) therefore it is

reasonable to look at the phenomenon of bullying in a different point of view, in the viewpoint of school leaders and security officers.

The means of identifying bullying behaviors in schools are selected by sampling several different participants such as teachers, security officer, school psychologist and leaders of the school institution. It is the teachers' perception of bullying which affects the reaction towards bullying in schools. (Lisa.H. Rosen & Kathy Deornellas & Shannon R. Scott, 2017)

The main purpose of this study is to identify the most typical cases and to give suggestions on how to cope with and keep away from bullying in schools.

The basic research questions of this study are:

1. What are the activities undertaken by school directors in the district of Tirana in order to prevent the phenomenon of bullying?
2. What is the relationship between the school and the parents?
3. What is the relationship between the role of the school psychologist, the teacher and the school security officer in resolving and preventing bullying?

## 2. Methodology

The qualitative method was used in order to gather in-depth information on the phenomenon. Data shall be collected through interviews which provide the direct opportunity to discuss and interact with the participants (Bob Matthews & Liz Ross, 2010). Focus groups is the second method used for the data collection and this method helps because it is a reliable and in-depth means of data gathering, whether in a single way as one research method. (Bob Matthews & Liz Ross, 2010)

The interview used for the study was designed based on the literature on bullying. After the interview questions were constructed, the interview was then piloted with a group of 6 school directors from the district of Tirana. After this phase, we restructured and formulated the questions of the interview in reliable results.

The interview was then conducted individually with each school director by the researcher, during which the anonymity of the participant was maintained by coding the interview and the full interview was recorded. The duration varied from 30-45 minutes. The interviewees were selected according to several criteria, based on school, gender, level of management - director and vice director.

Part of the focus groups was the school directors in the district of Tirana who represent private and public schools as well as vocational schools. The directors were interviewed during the time when they attended the "School of Directors". 21 out of them with the status of director and vice director were specifically selected in the study. The focus group included psychologists and school security officers from 5 other schools in the region of Tirana. A total of 26 high schools were included in the study, out of a total of 81 schools throughout Tirana.

## 3. Research Findings

### 3.1 *The factors that lead to bullying are different*

According to the interviewees, there are a number of factors that influence (not only) the occurrence of bullying in schools, such as:

- Parents' lack of information;
- Family economic situation;
- Parent education;
- Community where they belong;
- Peer-pressure;
- School;

- Media;

### 3.2 *There is a high incidence of bullying in school*

Over 80% of school directors claim that in the institutions where they work, there are manifestations of bullying in many different forms. The most common form is verbal bullying and others follow in lower numbers. Despite the mass discussion of the phenomenon in schools, there is still bullying that can lead to suicide.

### 3.3 *Student-teacher bullying is on the rise.*

Previous studies have shown that bullying is mainly between students and this is confirmed in this study with the highest percentage. However, it is followed by the student-teacher bullying with 23% and this is a fact which comes as a boomerang to the teacher.

## 4. Results and Discussions

Demographic data of the interviewees

The interviewees are the directors of the schools of the district of Tirana. They were separated into two categories: directors and vice directors.

The respondents whose age ranges from 34 years old to 61 years old, divided into 16 females and 5 males. It was observed that women hold the highest position with 80%. Directors who have worked for a time period ranging from 1 to 20 years in managerial positions mark an average of 8.2 years, while relatively new school directors ranging from 1 to 10 years mark an average of 4.5 years.

### 4.1 *School characteristics*

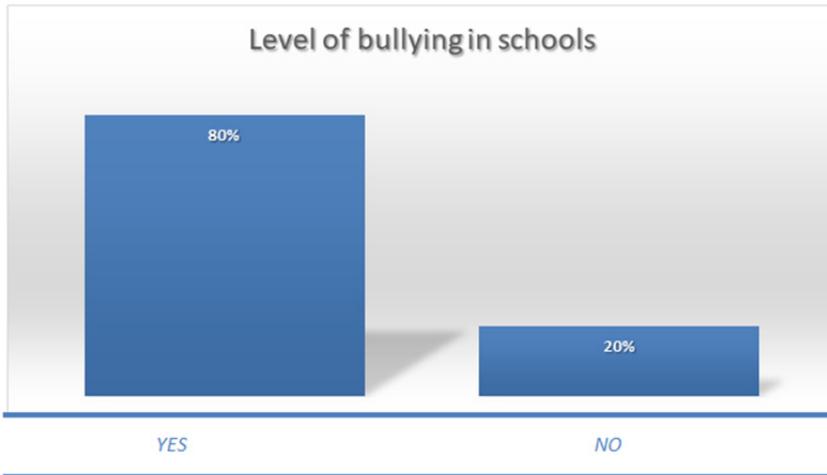
The schools involved in the given study have a total number of students from 310 to 1617 students; 53% study in city schools, while 40% study in rural schools with only 6.7% who study in semi-urban schools. The number of the teachers ranges from 20 to 152, with an average of 56.7 teachers per school. School ranking starts from the highest number up to number 30, with an average of 7.73. The reasons for the ranking of the given schools are as diverse as:

- Number of student absences;
- Achievements in State Matura Exams;
- Teacher shortages;
- Teachers' qualification in the last 5 years;
- The number of teachers' credits;

All the above variables have been mentioned several times by different school directors. It was noticed that one of the main factors in the ranking of students is their results in the State Matura Exams and the number of absences. On the other hand, the academic results and achievements of the teachers are also important to consider.

### 4.2 *The manifestation of bullying*

From the interviews and focus group with school directors, a considerable presence of bullying in schools was observed.



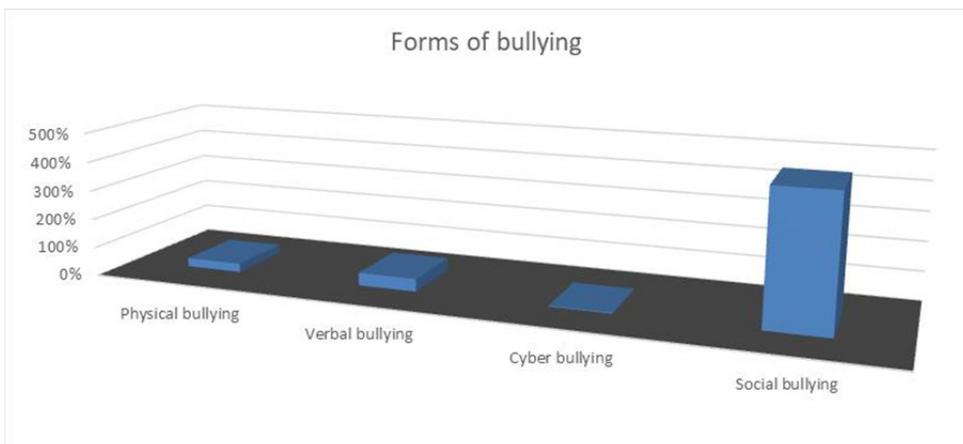
As can be seen from the graph, 80% of directors think and claim that there is a high percentage of bullying in the schools which they currently manage. However, it is worth adding that cases that have not claimed bullying in their schools are included in the group which state that bullying is secret and we cannot identify cases as it mostly occurs in cyber form.

This leads to several types of bullying which have been identified by researchers but also by school directors.

As can be seen from the graph below, we have identified the forms of bullying as follows:

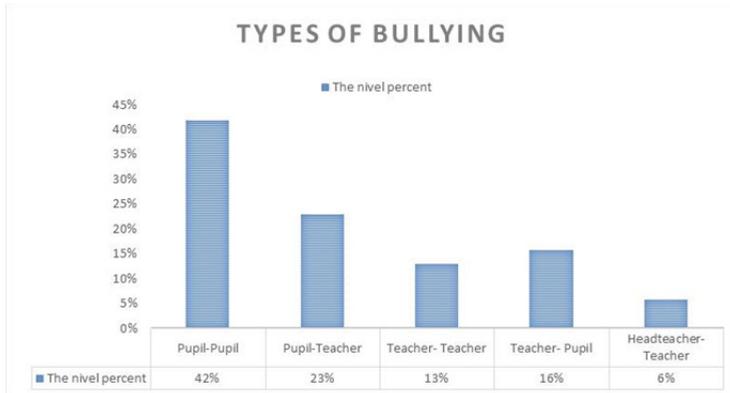
1. Verbal bullying with 44%;
2. Physical bullying with 30%;
3. Social bullying with 23%;
4. Cyber bullying with 3%.

Consequently, it is quite clear that the highest percentage corresponds to verbal bullying. Since schools are currently equipped with security officers, physical confrontations are fewer in number.

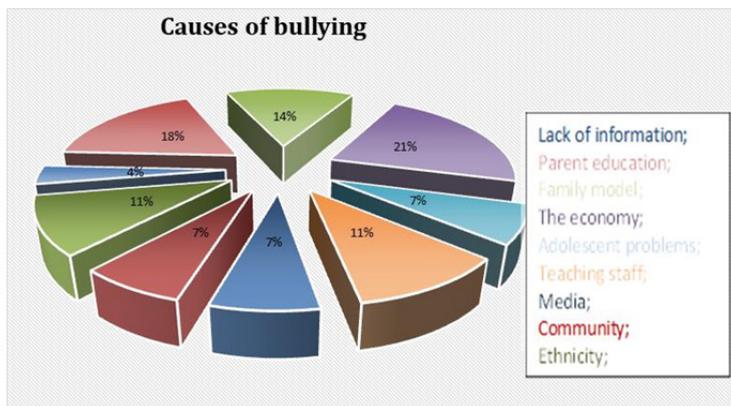


#### 4.3 Types of bullying

As illustrated in graph, the main forms of bullying is between pupils, pupil-teacher and teacher-pupil.



#### 4.4 Causes of bullying



The causes of bullying are different, starting from the family, school, community, etc., so it is quite clear that there is not only one factor but several ones, which makes it even more difficult to eradicate.

In the table below are listed some of the sources of bullying according to the school directors.

Answering the question whether there can be 100% preventive measures for bullying, they said that there can be preventive measures, and some of them are presented in the table below.

Some of the preventive measures that can be taken against bullying are:

- Trainings with teachers, parents, students;
- Open meetings with the school psychologist;
- Competent functioning of the student government;
- The role of the tutor;
- Cooperation with the Department of Psychology and NGOs;
- Competent knowledge of all actors involved in education regarding the psychomotor development of the students;
- Promotion of positive behaviors, role models;
- School-family cooperation;
- Increase of sports activity;
- Trigger students to come forward and denounce bullying cases;
- Improve communication;
- Wearing the uniform in the school;
- Carrying out awareness campaign

On the other hand, there are the activities for the prevention of bullying in school, which are almost all those preventive measures listed in the table above. There have been many meetings and projects on bullying, the school has an annual strategic plan on the phenomenon, awareness and information sessions by the school psychologist, use of school uniforms, spots and brochures, short film, focus groups, training for teachers by representatives of universities etc. The influence of the community and its socio-economic level is a determining factor according to 53% of the directors and for the rest it does not have such a considerable impact. This is then illustrated in their own answers and evaluation, with a range of 5% -80%.

The way bullied students are identified is different, starting with the school psychologist, the security officer, direct reporting of the bullied students in school performance and social behavior, the teachers, through discussions carried out by the directors, from the reporting of class senators, reflections and identification by parents, through open classes, observations, conversations and extracurricular activities with students.

Bullying is hidden in most cases, but some interviewees stated that sometimes you can easily identify cases as it can sometimes be open.

Relevant statements of the school directors:

1. "In our eyes it is hidden but among them it is visible" (Director of an urban school with a large number of students)
2. Information and awareness-raising activities undertaken by the school have resulted in reducing these phenomena with between 10% and 80% of cases.
3. The collaboration with the parents is carried out by starting with meetings, discussions with the directors, psychologist, teachers and finally the use of technological awareness campaigns through the use of various platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. Mostly, parents are cooperative, but there are cases they are not due to: their educational level, time spent with children, economic and social conditions of the family.

The cases of parents of abusive children or abused children turn out to find it difficult to cooperate with the school and this is the reason why these children are the victims of this phenomenon.

The most frequent difficulties with parents are:

- parents do not always have an impact on the child;
- parents refuse to accept that their child is the one who is abused or abusive towards others;
- lack of information about sick children;
- school responsibility for what happens at school;
- indifference towards school;
- low economic and social family level
- family with one parent/single parent family

Despite the great problems with parents on this phenomenon, only a small part of the directors have conducted trainings or meetings with parents on bullying, the frequency of these activities is 1 to 4 times a year.

The role of the class teacher in the school is quite crucial because they are in constant contact with the students all the time and they are considered to be efficient up to 80% in the management and prevention of bullying behaviors in the school.

The same can be said for the school psychologist since his credibility in students is very high, up to 98%. It is emphasized by almost all school directors that the school psychologist must be present at school every day, as the role and help he provides in such cases in school is crucial.

The security officer is another important actor, an element with a positive impact as he has direct contact with pupils in critical situations. He is informed and he spends a lot of time in the school exercising his duty of surveillance and discipline and this conveys a strong sense of security in high schools. The credibility of the security officer in the eyes of the student reaches up to 30%,

unlike the credibility of the school psychologist, which has a very high percentage, 98%, and the teacher with 80%.

## 5. Conclusions

Bullying is a phenomenon that significantly affects the schools in the district of Tirana, whether private, public, central or suburban. The most common form of bullying is verbal bullying and the most helpful actors of the school are: the school psychologist, the teacher and the security officer.

Also, in the recent years, there has been an increase in the number of bullying events of students against teachers. The security officer is a positive key element for the well-being of students in school, but more work needs to be done and more interaction is needed between him and the school psychologist.

It is suggested, that all directors should conduct ongoing teacher training regarding the management and the eradication of the phenomena of bullying in schools.

## 6. Recommendations Proposed by School Directors in the Region of Tirana

1. The Ministry of Education is to conduct more studies on the phenomenon of bullying;
2. Open trainings and meetings need to be held, in the field of bullying and school violence;
3. Various seminars need to be provided by the University, Department of Psychology;
4. Activities with parents and the community;
5. The school needs to be an open and socially active institution.

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