

## PREVENTION AGAINST BULLYING BASED ON SKILL DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** *The contribution deals with the phenomenon of bullying, with analysis of its distribution in the clientele of pedagogic-psychological counseling centers, with requirement for programs to solve it, with theoretical outcomes of prevention against bullying, and with the newest activities of the Project of Prevention Against Bullying in the Slovak Republic.*

**Keywords:** *bullying, prevention, schools and school facilities*

Bullying was recently considered to be a phenomenon that appears only rarely in our schools. However, partial surveys in our conditions during recent years point to the fact that inadequate aggressive behavior – bullying – is really widespread and it therefore requires adequate attention.

Pedagogic-Psychological Counseling Centers (PPP's) and Centers of Educational and Psychological Prevention (CVPP), which were transformed from September 1, 2008, to Centers of Pedagogic-Psychological Counseling and Prevention (CPPPP), use – within keeping records of their activity – the application program facility EvuPP, which till now has kept records of the CVPP's and PPP's (i.e., County Pedagogic Counseling Centers – KPPP) clientele separately. The module "Client's motive of coming to PPP/CVPP" is used for needs of the analysis of the clientele's problems. On the basis of the primary analysis of this module, we chose some relevant reasons for needs of following-up the issue in question, and in Table 1 we list the comparison of the number of clients for the last two school years. On the basis of these statistics results we see that the number of clients with inadequate behavior in school environment, as well as clients – bullying victims – is still quite big even despite the systems measures taken in our education resort. On the other hand, these numbers qualify us to think that there is an increasing number of parents who – as the result of these problems – come with their child to the counseling facility determined to solve the given problems.

Table 1: Clients' reason of coming to PPP/CVPP

	Inadequate behavior against teachers		Inadequate behavior against schoolmates		Inadequate behavior against siblings		Aggression		Victim of bullying	
	2005/06	2006/07	2005/06	2006/07	2005/06	2006/07	2005/06	2006/07	2005/06	2006/07
<b>CVVP</b>	275	212	948	916	10	4	41	43	25	22
<b>PPP/KPPP</b>	229	243	1046	431	23	28	71	89	64	58

Source of data: Slovíková (2008)

Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology carried out a **Survey of Counseling-Services Needs in the Education System in Slovakia** in 2007 (Matula, Mrlák, Kopányiová, 2007). The sample consisted of questionnaires from 1192 schools (52,21 %) – 322 922 pupils of basic schools (63,55 %). The Questionnaire for Educational Advisor (Matula, Mrlák, 2007) followed, in addition to other areas, also the educational advisors' opinions in basic schools in the Slovak Republic with regard to the measure of requirement for group preventive-counseling programs of various orientations. Preventive programs with their contentual focus on aggressiveness, bullying, humiliation, and maltreatment are very essential in educational advisors' view (42 %), or somewhat essential (22 %), and just essential (26 %). Only 4 % of educational advisors did indicate that thusly-focused programs are redundant. These findings allow us to think that such programs have their *raison d'être* in basic schools. An interesting finding was that in basic schools in Slovakia, where there is no school psychologist, a need for having preventive programs with contentual focus on aggressiveness, bullying, humiliation, and maltreatment is higher than in schools that have a school psychologist.

Several theoretical and research works substantiate contribution of prevention against social pathological phenomena on the basis of skill development. We will briefly introduce these theories with main focus on their conclusions for planning of prevention against social pathological phenomena (including bullying) based on skill development.

## Development theories

The basis of most of the theories of development of human being lies in researching of the complex biological, social and cognitive changes, which occur from childhood up to adulthood.

A significant component of social cognition during changeover from adolescence to adulthood is the process of understanding oneself, other people, and relationships thereof. The ability to understand causal relationships is developed in the first years of adolescence when more mature measures of problem solving start to be applied. The adolescent person is able to simultaneously conceptualize many variables, to think abstractly and to create rules for decision-making (Piaget, 1972). Social interactions become more and more complicated in this period. Adolescents spend more time with

their peers, the number of their interactions with peers of the opposite sex increases, and they spend less time at home and with their family members.

► **Conclusions for prevention planning:**

- (1) In the school environment, the most important moment for building-up of skills and positive customs is the late child age and early adolescence (6–15 years). In this period, children develop ability for abstract thinking, ability to understand consequences, to start other type of relationships with peers, and to solve problems, as they become more and more independent from their parents and attain bigger control over their own lives.
- (2) In a wider social context of early and intermediate adolescence, a variety of situations occur in which it is possible to practice new skills and to develop positive customs in relation to peers.
- (3) The development of attitudes, values, skills, and competencies has a principal significance for development of self-perception of child as the autonomous individual and for the overall process of learning in school.
- (4) At this age span, very big differences in children’s skills may exist. Activities must be adequate to the degree of development.

## **Social learning theory**

This theory comes from Bandura’s works (1977) – he came to conclusion that children, in addition to learning behavior by means of formal education, also learn by means of observation. Formal education means that parents, teachers, and other authorities speak to children how they should behave; observation is based on the fact how young people perceive behavior of adults and their peers. Behavior of children is strengthened or changed in dependence on consequences of their acts and on other people’s responses to their behavior.

► **Conclusions for prevention planning:**

- (1) During teaching it is necessary to make use of modeling, observation, and social interactions.
- (2) Positive strengthening is applied when it is necessary to demonstrate the correct behavior and skills, while negative or corrective strengthening is used in relation to behavior or skills that must be changed with goal to achieve more positive behavior.
- (3) Teachers and other adult persons are important role patterns.

## **Theory of problem behavior**

The theory of problem behavior (Jessor and Jessor, 1977) deals with relationships between three categories of psychosocial variables. Values, expectations, opinions and attitudes toward oneself and society belong to the first category. The second category represents perception of the surrounding environment – perception of friends’ or parents’ attitudes to behavior belongs here. The third category – the behavioral system – covers socially acceptable and unacceptable behavior.

► **Conclusions for prevention planning:**

- (1) An important part of the learning process is training of skills necessary for critical thinking (including self-evaluation ability and evaluation of values of the social settings).
- (2) Interventions must be proposed in such a way that they would simultaneously have effect on the personal, environmental, and behavioral system.

## **Social influence theory and social immunization theory**

These two theories are jointly interconnected. Social influence theory stems from Bandura's works and from social immunization theory, too, which was made known by authors such as McGuire (1968). Evans (1976, at al.) used it for the first time in smoking prevention programs.

According to social influence theory, children and adolescents are exposed to pressure that makes them choose risk means of behavior.

Programs of social influence and immunization anticipate such pressures and teach young people how to resist them even before they become exposed to them in real life.

► **Conclusions for prevention planning:**

- (1) Attention is focused rather on early prevention than on later intervention.
- (2) If young people are warned in advance about risks, they can already identify types of situations they could face.

## **Theory of cognitive problem solving**

This model of formation of competencies within the scope of primary prevention stems from a theory that teaching of social-cognitive problem solving at early age can improve interpersonal relationships and help to control one's impulsive activities.

► **Conclusions for prevention:**

- (1) Teaching of interpersonal skills and skills necessary for problem solving already in childhood significantly strengthens grounds for learning in the following period.
- (2) Targeting one's attention to skills – which are necessary for self-awareness and self-control, for example, in managing one's anger or impulsiveness, and establishment of alternative solutions of interpersonal problems – can restrict or preclude problem behavior. Being concentrated on one's ability for conceptualization, ability to predict consequences of various types of behavior or solutions can help children choose positive solutions.

## **Flexibility theory**

This theory explains the process that conditions probability that some people would behave in a way that supports health rather than in a way that puts health at risk. It researches interactions among factors in young person's life, which protect him/her and encourage him/her; in focus are also conditions in family, school, and community.

The significance of this theory is based upon the fact that it emphasizes a need to modify and to support mechanisms for protection of healthy child development. In flexibility theory it is asserted that there are internal and external factors, which are all in a mutual interaction and which help people cope with unfavorable circumstances. Among internal protective factors we have self-esteem and self-confidence, confidence in one's ability to influence one's life and feeling of the meaning of life. External factors include mostly social support from part of family and community. Here we deal with a harmonic family, absence of alcohol abuse and family violence, strong relationships and ties with school community, good achievement and relationships with peers based on practicing positive models of behavior (Kirby et al., 2001).

► **Conclusions for prevention:**

- (1) Social-cognitive skills, social competencies and skills necessary for problem solving can operate as mediators of behavior.
- (2) It is important that equal skills be adopted also by teachers and parents, as they should develop harmonic family and school settings and act as archetypes of such a behavior.
- (3) An object of attention in flexibility theory is child, family and community, while the teacher or parent can perform as facilitators of this process.

## **Theory of the change stages**

This theory is based on a model, which elaborated Prochaska (1979; and DiClemente, 1982) – it describes stages that mark out the point where a person happens to be in relation to changing his/her behavior. We face six main stages:

- pre-contemplation (absence of effort to change one's behavior),
- contemplation (intention to change one's behavior),
- preparation (intention to achieve a change in behavior during the course of the following month),
- acting (0 up to 6 months working on one's change of behavior),
- preservation (preserving changes in one's behavior for the time of 6 months up to the time of several years),
- completion (the desired behavior is permanently acquired).

► **Conclusions for prevention:**

- (1) It is important to understand and identify the stage the child is presently in from the aspect of knowledge, attitudes, motivation and experience with the real world, and to adapt its activities and expectations to these stages.
- (2) Interventions focused on stage not relevant to children do not have a big chance for success.

## **The Project of prevention against bullying in basic and secondary schools in SR**

**The Project of prevention against bullying in basic and secondary schools in SR** is very significant from the aspect of the issue of problems we present here. The Project has taken place continually starting from the school year 2001/2002. In the recent years its activities covered:

- Elaboration of the intervention program for classes in which bullying occurred in its initial stage. The development of the program was based on the above-mentioned theoretical concepts that a change in children's behavior can be made, in addition to other things, also by developing social-psychological skills in the process of experiential learning.
- Involvement in the OECD project entitled "International Network On School Bullying and Violence", which has its internet address: <http://oecd-sbv.net/>.
- Taking responsibility (2007–2008) for international coordination of the OECD project.
- Developing an internet website <http://www.prevenciasikanovania.sk/>, which offers the newest information from the area of prevention against bullying for needs of teachers, parents, pupils (the project "National Network On Bullying and Violence Prevention in the Slovak Republic", the coordinator: PhDr. A. Prevotňáková, OZ (Civic Association) Papilion, shielded by: PhDr. E. Tomková, Ministry of Education of SR).
- Monitoring of situation in the area of bullying in schools and school facilities.
- Education and supervision of professional workers (psychologists, social workers, special and occupational therapists) in the issue of socially pathological phenomena, which is carried out by Methodical-Research Cabinet of Educational and Psychological Counseling and Prevention at VÚDPaP.

Not only schools are part of the effective system of prevention, but also school facilities. To make the wider-conceived strategy of prevention against bullying function in practice, it is imperative that particular institutions and all parties involved had relevant information about the issue of problems, as well as professional skills, and mutual communication and cooperation.

## **PREVENIA ŠIKANOVANIA ZALOŽENÁ NA ROZVOJI ZRUČNOSTÍ**

**Abstrakt:** Príspevok sa zaoberá fenoménom šikanovania, analýzou jeho rozšírenia v klientele pedagogicko-psychologických poradní a potrebou programov na jeho riešenie, teoretickými východiskami prevencie šikanovania a najnovšími aktivitami Projektu prevencie šikanovania v Slovenskej republike.

**Kľúčové slová:** šikanovanie, prevencia, školy a školské zariadenia