3.2 Bullying in the educational environment

In chapter “1.2 The phenomenon of School based bullying” school-based bullying and general cause were discussed.

In this chapter we will have a deeper view about the bullying and the consequences it might have on the educational context and its protagonists.

“A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself.“

(Olweus, D)

https://www.youtube.com/embed/awUU9282UYM?ab_channel=SarahGraceClub

Bullying is a serious issue that affects many students in European schools and is a widespread problem that affects both the physical and emotional well-being of students. There are various reasons why bullying occurs in European schools, but one of the main reasons is due to the lack of awareness and education on the issue.

Bullying typically occurs among students, with the perpetrators often lacking social skills, experiencing low self-esteem, processing information poorly, and struggling with adjustment issues.

Olweus described the ‘aggressive personality pattern’ of bullies as a driving force behind their mean behaviour.

Bullying can take many forms, including verbal, social, physical, cyberbullying, intimidation, and discrimination. Verbal bullying involves name-calling, teasing, inappropriate sexual comments, taunting, and threatening to cause harm. Social bullying includes spreading rumours, manipulating friendships, excluding someone from a group, and embarrassing someone in public. Bullying based on sexual orientation, has increased in recent years due to the conversations surrounding LGBT, economic status and peer pressure, can also contribute to bullying, because bullies might crave the attention and the desire to be perceived as brave and confident in front of the other students.

Physical bullying involves hitting, kicking, pushing, and damaging or stealing someone’s belongings.

Cyberbullying is using technology to threaten, embarrass, or harass someone. Intimidation involves using physical size or strength to intimidate someone, while discrimination is bullying someone due to their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or ability.

Good practices

1. **KiVa** - This is an evidence-based program that originated in Finland and has been adopted in several European countries. It aims to prevent and reduce bullying by promoting positive social interaction and improving the overall school climate.
2. **Respect** - This program is widely implemented in France and focuses on developing respectful behavior among students and teachers, promoting inclusion, and preventing discrimination.
3. **No Blame** - This program is popular in the UK and involves a structured approach to resolving bullying incidents without blaming anyone. It encourages students to identify and solve problems themselves, with the help of peers and teachers.
4. **Peer Support** - This program involves trained student leaders who act as peer supporters and provide emotional and practical assistance to their peers who have experienced bullying.
5. **Bullying Intervention Group** - This program is implemented in several countries, including the Netherlands and Germany, and involves a multidisciplinary team of professionals who work together to address bullying incidents and provide support to students
6. **FearNot!** is a computer program designed for children between the ages of 6 and 12. Its primary objective is to assist victims of bullying in avoiding victimization, decrease bullying incidents by reducing the number of bullies, and increase the number of defenders. The application immerses children in a virtual school environment where they witness a "physical bullying" scenario and a "relational" scenario.
7. The **ComBuS** initiative adopts a comprehensive school-wide approach to address bullying by involving students, teachers, parents, school leaders, and staff. Its primary objective is to enhance understanding of bullying in schools and implement effective strategies to combat it. Additionally, the program seeks to examine the underlying causes of bullying beyond the school environment. As such, a critical component of the program is the interdisciplinary collaboration and engagement of various stakeholders. Through this collaborative effort, the intervention aims to investigate the impact of bullying on children and young individuals and create tailored approaches to combat bullying.
8. **ENABLE** is an initiative supported by the European Union that seeks to address bullying in children's educational and leisure environments through school and center-based interventions. Its main objective is to tackle the root causes of bullying by addressing the wider culture that enables it to persist. ENABLE is grounded in the belief that if children can enhance their socio-emotional skills and develop a deeper understanding of the nature and impact of bullying, they will be less likely to engage in or tolerate bullying

behavior, more likely to intervene when witnessing bullying, and less susceptible to being victimized themselves. The project also recognizes that bullying is a systemic issue that results from a variety of individual, family, school, and community-level factors, rather than an isolated problem affecting only individual victims and bullies.

9. The objective of the **#DeleteCyberbullying** initiative was to increase awareness about the prevalence and risks of cyberbullying and to disseminate effective strategies for identifying and preventing it within schools and families. The intervention targeted children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 19, as well as their parents.
10. The **ConRed** programme is aimed at tackling the issues of cyberbullying and other emerging problems associated with the use of the internet, while also encouraging positive online behavior. Its key objectives are to enhance control over information available online, decrease the time spent on digital devices, and prevent and mitigate instances of cyberbullying.

How can European schools handle bullying?

- Create a safe and supportive environment: Schools should create an atmosphere that supports open dialogue and encourages individuals to come forward and talk about any bullying they have experienced. Schools should also provide support for students who have been bullied, such as counselling and mentoring.
- Implement a zero-tolerance policy: Schools should have a clear policy that outlines the consequences for bullying and makes it clear that bullying will not be tolerated.
- Educate students and staff: Schools should provide education on the impacts of bullying and how to prevent it. This should include training on how to handle bullying incidents, as well as teaching students to look out for their peers and report any bullying they witness.
- Encourage bystander intervention: Schools should create a culture where students feel comfortable intervening if they witness bullying. This could include introducing peer-mentoring programs to train students on how to intervene, or providing resources and support for students who want to stand up against bullying.
- Provide parents and guardians with resources: Schools should ensure that parents and guardians are aware of the resources available to support their children, as well as how to report any incidents of bullying.

It is essential to educate students and teachers about bullying and its consequences.

Teachers and school staff should have a clear understanding of the different types of bullying and how to identify and prevent them. Educational institutes should also have strict policies and procedures in place to address and resolve instances of bullying. Students should be encouraged to speak up if they or someone they know is being bullied, and they should be taught how to intervene safely to help their peers.

The bullies are often with low self-esteem. This is a main factor in the process of becoming a bully, because treating the other student as a victim will make them feel more powerful and dominant.

The peer pressure and the desire to fit in might be a good factor in the bullying process because some students bully to retain their popularity, while others act in violent or threatening ways to fit in. These students may not necessarily be aggressive, but the pressure to fit in and please the popular students may influence them to bully others. Having friends who are bullies is a risk factor, but not a guarantee that they will become aggressive. Being friends with a bully may increase the popularity of the student who is probably to adopt similar ways of thinking and acting. Students who are shy and anxious have a higher probability of being victimised if they have friends who are physically weak and/or disliked by other peers. Victimised students tend to hang out with other victimised students. Bullying has negative health consequences for both bullies and victims, and can have a negative impact on bystanders as well.

Factors of the school's bullying can be influenced by several elements. Students who are perceived to be "different "from the others have a higher risk of bullying. The key factors are presented below:

- Being different from the rest of the group
- Having a physical characteristic that is seen as "abnormal"
- Having a different religion or political views
- Having a different style of dress
- Being perceived as weaker than the rest of the group
- Having a disability
- Being overweight
- Being the new person in the group
- Being intellectually advanced
- Being socially different or shy
- Having a different sexual orientation or gender identity
- Having a different skin color or ethnicity

School bullying is affecting both girls and boys, but in different ways. According to the study conducted in 2018 by UNESCO, boys are more likely to be victims of physical bullying while the girls are more expected to face psychological bullying, along with the sexual bullying.

Going into a further detalisation on the factors that are starting the bullying episodes:

- Students who are not into social norms are at risk of bullying. This includes students who are part of LGBT community and those students who are breaking the social norms of stereotypes: masculinity and femininity.

- Physical appearance remains one of the main causes for bullying between students: this refers to race, colour, style, nationality and religion. Approximately one in four students in Europe who have been bullied report that this was based on their physical appearance
- Socio-economic status: economic and social status of the student is an important factor in the process of bullying.

Bullying can have a wide range of negative consequences for students, both in the short and long term. In the short term, students who are bullied may experience physical injuries, social and emotional distress, and academic difficulties. They may be too scared to go to school, have trouble sleeping, or suffer from a decrease in self-esteem. In the long term, they may be more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues, as well as physical health problems. Bullying can also lead to an increased risk of substance abuse and difficulty forming relationships with peers and adults. Depending on the severity of the bullying, legal consequences can include suspension, expulsion, or criminal charges. Bullying can have psychological consequences, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulty making and keeping friends

The educational consequences of bullying can be wide-reaching and long-lasting. Bullied students may have difficulty focusing on their schoolwork, resulting in lower grades and test scores. It can also lead to decreased attendance and dropping out of school altogether. Students who are bullied frequently are expected to have lower rates in schools than the students who are not bullied.

Student’s mental health and wellbeing can be severely impacted by bullying. Bullying is associated with higher rates of feeling lonely and suicidal, while students who are frequently bullied are twice as likely to have suicidal thought, creating serious mental health consequences. Victims of bullying may experience feelings of sadness, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Long-term mental health issues may include post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, and a greater risk of developing a mental health disorder, such as depression or anxiety. Bullying can also affect an individual's ability to perform well in school or work, and can even lead to physical health issues such as headaches, stomach problems, and sleep disturbances. Active bullying has also had a significant impact on individual life, with bullying being a strong and a specific risk factor for depressive symptoms. Bully victims and bullies had a significantly higher risk for vary problems later in life such as: anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, troubles in establishing trusting relationships, and suicide attempts.

European schools have implemented a range of policies and strategies to combat bullying and promote a secure and inclusive learning environment for all students. Notable measures include the adoption of zero-tolerance policies towards bullying, which entail the strict sanctioning of all forms of bullying without exception. Prevention programs, such as workshops, peer mentoring, and student-led initiatives, have also been implemented to enhance awareness of bullying, educate students on respectful behavior, and encourage reporting of bullying incidents. Clear reporting procedures have been established for students and staff to report any incidents of bullying, with dedicated staff members responsible for investigating reports and taking appropriate action. Furthermore, schools offer counseling and support services for victims of bullying and their

families, to help them cope with the emotional and psychological impact of bullying and equip them with strategies to prevent future incidents. Collaboration with parents, local communities, and other stakeholders is another key aspect of European schools' efforts to address bullying, with parents being encouraged to participate in school-based activities and initiatives.

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