Perception of the Ways of Elimination and Prevention of Bullying by Future Secondary School Teachers

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Abstract – Are future secondary school teachers able to identify the possibilities for preventing and reducing negative consequences of bullying and cyberbullying using digital technologies? We verified this question through a case study method. Teachers play a very important role in detection, elimination, as well as prevention. It is therefore necessary to educate them and constantly remind them of the seriousness of these problems. In our research, we tried not only to identify the opinions of respondents, future secondary school teachers, but also to emphasize these problems. The existence of ICT have "facilitated" the spread of violent content and thus encouraged its wider expansion. In our research, respondents stated several serious and important ideas. The number of identified cases of bullying and cyberbullying in their vicinity was increasing. There was non-significant number of opinions about non-existence, or ignorance of any kind of bullying near respondents. Despite identifying the contribution of ICT tools to the increase in bullying and cyberbullying, respondents did not mention these tools as possible preventive tools. We can conclude that, although the most respondents are able to identify these issues.

The mentioned ways for preventing and eliminating negative consequences were only general and did not exceed basic knowledge about this growing phenomenon.

Keywords – bullying, cyberbullying, ICT, prevention, elimination, future teachers.

1. Introduction

Many situations in today's society indicate the increasing importance of having a high level of digital, information and media literacy and thus avoiding the negative consequences of a globalized virtual environment [3], [7], [9]. Overload of information in the virtual world and growing ways of communication contribute to the increase in the misuse of technology to delinquency, crime, or violence often with no ethics and morality. ICT tools can be a source of information for potential delinquents. Everyday example of the misuse of information or the possibility of communication in virtual space is the growing number of any kind of cyberbullying. Educational process and school environment are not excluded [4], [8], [11].

Bullying and Cyberbulling at School

According to the directive of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic [2], [10], bullying is "the behavior of a pupil with harming, endangering or intimidating purpose to another pupils or group of pupils, who do not know about it or cannot effectively prevent, 'and cyberbullying' as a direct form of bullying involving the misuse of information and communication technologies (in particular telephone, tablet, internet and social networks) for intentional threats, harm or intimidation, often associated with other forms of bullying." Similarly, cyberbullying is characterized by a number of other authors [1], [13], [14] as an aggressive and intentional behavior that harms someone else by digital tools such as internet or mobile phone.

When can we talk about cyberbullying? These are various forms of insults and insults by any form of digital communication, harassment and intimidation, threats and extortion (anonymous phone calls, text messages, spam, or other forms of unwanted communication), taking control of the victim's profile on the social network and extortion with sharing content from this profile, including confidential information, or any publishing of personal or false information about the victim, etc. However, cyberbullying can be also about publishing embarrassing, intimate or otherwise modified photos, videos of the victim (various photo / video montages containing the victim's face or body). Cyberstlaking is also common, associated not only with persecution, but also with the subsequent use of psychological coercion, unpleasant comments, text messages, emails and calls, etc. A special group of cyberbullying is identity theft for ridicule, or for the financial enrichment. In the school environment, group exclusion or ignoring in communication or discussion groups often occurs.

Next type of cyberbulling is happy slapping. Recording and public sharing the videos with aggressive or sexual attacks on the victim.

As we can see in theory [5], [12] "cyberbullying is primarily related to mental health. Issues in this area have an impact to increasing the possibility that a child or adolescent will become an aggressor and that he or she will become a victim. Educational problems, anxiety, depression, ADHD, as well as frequent experiences with conflicts or violence at home – these are factors where this connection is proven. From this point of view, mental health is a risk factor for cyberbullying."

The Ministry of Education in Slovakia and many teachers realize the need to solve this alarming problem.

There was a survey in 2020 at Slovak primary and secondary schools [6], which was attended by 553 respondents from all over Slovakia. The authors monitored the incidence and frequency of occurrence of bullying and cyberbulling at different levels and types of schools. They also monitored specific forms of bullying and cyberbullying. They also asked about the possibilities of solving the consequences as well as the possibilities of prevention or barriers to inactivity within this phenomenon. In the school year 2019/2020, according to [6], most schools in Slovakia encountered the problem of bullying. Respondents mentioned many existing possibilities of eliminating these problem situations, the most frequent obstacles of their solutions, the possibilities of preventing these situations and evaluation of the success or failure of individual solutions.

The methodology as well as the individual findings of this study inspired us to ask these questions to the future secondary school teachers.

2. Methodology

According to definitions mentioned above, we have formulated the following scientific question. Are future secondary school teachers able to identify the possibilities for preventing and reducing the negative consequences of bullying and cyberbullying using digital technologies? We verified this question through a case study method. Thirty-four respondents from all over Slovakia attended our research. These students of University of Economics in Bratislava are preparing for the teacher profession by additional pedagogical study to their main economic/business specialization. The research was realized in 11/2020 - 02/2021 by solving a case study, which was connected with an online structured interview and group discussions. We recorded these discussions. We have transcripted this video with the main ideas and opinions of respondents. The aim of the research was to find out how informed about cyberbullying and bullying are future teachers of secondary schools, how they can deal with the consequences, as well as the possibilities of prevention. We will also compare these results with the results of other relevant research.

3. Research Realization

Students have solved a case study about happy slapping, which is one of the type of cyberbullying.

In this case, the main actor is a 14-years-old girl bullying a boy classmate in and out of the classroom. She has recorded and posted videos of these attacks on social sites. The victim suffers not only from attacks from the aggressor, but also from his parents at home, who were from socially weaker group. The aggressor wants also to pay attention of her parents, who do not care, therefore her behavior tends to pay attention in the classroom. The situation began to escalate with physical attacks from aggressors parents. Therefore, after a number of physical attacks to her classmate, she also organized an attack by a group of young attackers who tried to seek the aggressor's favor. This physical attack ends with the hospitalization of a victim who end his life in a hospital room. The story ends with the victim's question "why me?" Why he was attacked, when he did not harm anyone.

After reading the text with the case, the students had time to prepare answers for the questions. How can we prevent cyberbullying in our vicinity? How to react when we notice bullying in our vicinity? Moreover, the questions about the responsibility for

this situation as well as to the identification and evaluation of the views of both sides is involved. Students were also asked in the survey about the position and contribution of ICT tools in this case. How could these tools help to prevent, how to use them to eliminate the negative consequences, but especially how to use ICT tools avoiding misusing for these purposes.

4. Results

Identification With the Story

During the discussion, it was clear that the students were fully aware of the seriousness of such a situation. They could identify what kind of bullying is in the story. They could also easily identify that it is problem situation. Students identified verbal and physical attacks on the victim. They consider publishing the attack on social networks worse because the video can be seen by a wide range of people. They identified not only the attack of the aggressor herself, but also her influence on other people, whom she acquired and persuaded to attack. The story fascinated the students in such way, that they could not believe that something similar could happen at all. They did not believe and understand that no one from the vicinity (classmates, class teacher, other teachers, the victim himself) intervened in the problematic situation and did not avoid the consequences. There was also an opinion that in case of obvious aggression and physical attacks it is necessary to talk about it with competent persons such as teachers, police, or member of school staff and thus avoid tragic consequences. As an explanation of the mentioned passivity and lack of interest of the participants, they mentioned that today many people do not care about anything, they have lack of interest when they see some kind of violence or aggression in their surroundings. According to the students, the most common reason is fear. People's fear and unwillingness to solve other people's problems. The students decry the reaction of the victim's parents, who, physically attacked and blamed him because of his weakness, after they had informations about their child's problems. The students described this moment as the key to the culmination of this situation. The victim lost any hope of resolving the situation and lost confidence in the main points of his life - his parents. The parents have to be an option that should still be available in such situations as an aid options. Unfortunately, the victim's parent even behaved similarly to the attackers, which put enormous pressure on the victim. The students mentioned that the source of the aggressor's behavior were her parents, who physically punished her for her bad results at school.

The relationship with their child was limited to this punishment, and she forced to pay attention in the classroom with aggressive behavior comparable with her parent's behavior. Students ask a question why mother of the aggressor did not care about daughter's behavior, despite the fact that she was strict and punished her child in case of bad results at school. One student also stated that the aggressor did not have to know at all, that she was doing something wrong, because if her parents punished her in a similar way, she could think it is normal. The interesting point in the discussion was the opinion, that when we find out that our child is the aggressor, we should punish her/him. Despite the facts, metioned above, obvious negative impact of punishing the aggressor is noticeable. Next supplementary questions from moderator specified and limited the punishment to forbid using a mobile phone.

Several students identified a similar situation, which they witnessed, or even in several cases by the actors themselves. They gave the example of a classmate who had suicidal tendencies after a similar form of bullying. Another case is stated by the student, who confronted the aggressor and warned him, that if he did not stop his attacks on one of his classmates, she would contact his parents. The attacks stopped, but our participant did not know the reasons why this situation arose, because, as she said, the victim was problem-free and inconspicuous. Another mentioned case, where both siblings were bullied at the school, stopped only after the moving to another school. Moving to another school was also a solution to another mentioned situation of bullying in primary school, which one of the students mentioned.

How could we react?

The students stated in the discussion that it was a failure of teachers who, despite evident kind of bullying, remained passive and did not react in any way to this problem. They react at most with only stricter eye contact to the aggressor. The student said in the discussion that she had advised the victim to talk about the problem to another teacher. The victim was afraid of this talking, so she did nothing. Another suggestion was about contact someone who was not interested, outside the classroom, another teacher, the parent of another student, etc. One of the students, who confessed that he was an aggressor, mentioned another case of bullying. After confrontation with teachers and parents, he began to visit a school psychologist, who explained all the consequences and persuaded him to do so. The students stated that it is necessary to contact an adult, someone who was not interested, or even the police.

It is ideal if there is also a school psychologist at school who solves such situations. The absence of a (school) psychologist at the time of the victim's hospitalization was reprehensible and in students' opinion it is necessary to talk with a psychologist in such situations. An interesting moment during the discussion was, when one of the students presented a seemingly clear solution – standing up for the victim and preventing further attacks in front of the whole class. Students emphasized this solution also after the question whether there would be a willingness to end physical attacks as a classroom entertainment. One of the proposed solutions to a similar conflict situation was a visit by the aggressor's parents. However, the fact is that students would expect it, that the parents of the aggressor try to protect their child, also in case he/she is an aggressor. The students also suggested confrontation with aggressor in front of his/her parents and teachers, justifying themselves and explaining the situation and the possible consequences.

How to prevent such a case?

The students made several suggestions. Many aimed at educating students and teachers in this area, and discussions were organized with experts as well as with real actors of bullying (aggressor and victim). According to the students, it is important for the widest possible amount of people to be aware of the importance of talking about these problems, but first that it is wrongdoing. However, there were also opinions that similar activities took place at school, but no cases of bullying were observed at school (it is not known whether this prevention was the reason for non-bullying at this school), so the only contact and knowledge about bullying were just mentioned discussions or other similar actions. One of the students' reactions was in terms of the effects of cyberbullying at the primary school, where at the beginning of the discussion (in which she has participated) about 10% of participants said they had observed some forms of cyberbullying, but after explaining what bullying or cyberbullying actually is, the ratio increased to more than 50 percent.

Several suggestions for prevention by students aimed at the home environment and the necessity of parent's communication with their own children about these problems with emphasizing consequences. In this context, they stated, "it's about family relationships, what children see at home between their parents, how they behave to them, they apply later in the school environment to their peers." They emphasized also the possibility of educating teachers how to react in such cases, how to communicate with the victim, the aggressor and the parents. Several similar ideas aimed at prevention.

"Where there is good prevention, there is no need to solving problems." The mentioned discussions should be with real actors, not only with the teacher and with the students in the classroom.

The role of ICT in this case

In this case, ICT were as a tool to record attacks. Public sharing on social networks of similar records only increases the level of aggression in other possible aggressors and thus increases the number of similar cases. Respondents stated that ICT could be a possible way for prevention and treatment rather than as a tool to support the growth of similar cases of bullying. The answer to the question of whether they would report illegal behavior were clearly positive. So far, none of them has done so.

5. Conclusion

The alarming problem of bullying and cyberbullying motivate the competent institutions constantly to think about the possibilities of preventing or eliminating its negative consequences. Teachers play a very important role in detection, elimination, as well as prevention. It is therefore necessary to educate them and constantly remind them of the seriousness of these problems. In our research, we tried not only to identify the opinions of respondents, future secondary school teachers, but also to emphasize these problems. Bullying in schools is not a new, unknown problem. It occurred long time before the ICT tools comes into everyday life. However, their existence have "facilitated" the spread of violent content and thus encouraged its wider expansion. In our research, respondents stated several serious and important ideas. The number of identified cases of bullying and cyberbullying in their vicinity was interesting. Most respondents stated that there was a specific example of bullying and cyberbullying in their area. There was non-significant amount of opinions about non-existence, or ignorance any kind of bullying near respondents. Despite identifying the contribution of ICT tools to the increase in bullying and cyberbullying, respondents did not mention these tools as possible preventive tools. The need of psychologists or prevention coordinators in schools was clear. The connection with ICT tools, e.g. mobile application for reporting, parents, victims and other pupils or any other emergency tools usable with mobile devices was not in respondents' ideas. Likewise, they did not mention the way of using mobile devices for preventive-educational activities for parents or pupils, as potential victims and aggressors. When asked about experiences with violent content, several respondents stated that they had already observed such content. However, their

reaction was not a reporting, but rather a passive ignorance. None of the respondents stated that they would comment on such violent posts with refusal or otherwise condemn. We can conclude that most respondents are able to identify these issues. The mentioned ways for preventing and eliminating negative consequences were only general and did not exceed basic knowledge about this growing phenomenon. Therefore, our recommendation will be to raise awareness of preventive as well as elimination methods as much as possible by training future teachers in this area as well.

Acknowledgements

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