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Covert forms of aggressive behaviour among girls

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Nowadays, increasingly more attention is being paid to the issue of aggressive behaviour, primarily owing to a stronger awareness of children's rights and parents' responsibility to promote them. The number of systematic studies dealing with the relational level and the area of covert aggressive behaviour is limited. In the past, studies investigating aggressive behaviour primarily focused on its most typical manifestation, i.e. physical aggression. In the postmodern period, however, experts have begun to explore different forms of aggressive behaviour which are particularly typical of girls. In this study the authors focused on various forms of covert violence to which girls in elementary schools are exposed. The descriptions of behaviours provided by both teachers and girls reveal a variety of forms of covert aggression among girls as well as a range of related incidents and their causes.

KEY WORDS: behaviour, aggression, covert forms of aggression among girls, relations, elementary school, teachers, family

Introduction

Crick and Grotpeter[1] identified relational aggression as a type of behaviour that is more typical of girls than boys. In expert and sci-

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[1] N.R. Crick, J.K. Grotpeter, *Relational aggression, gender, and social-psychological adjustment*, »Child Development« 1995, nr. 66, s. 710–722.

entific literature, aggressive behaviour is often defined as goal-oriented behaviour aimed at causing harm or injury. Relational aggression is defined as „*any intentional behaviour (direct or indirect action) with its purpose being to harm another by destroying his reputation through deliberate manipulation, and to destroy the individual's „relational" status[2]."* It is also defined as follows: „*in contrast with physical violence, where others are affected by physical injury (or the threat of it), violence in other people's relationships has an effect due to blunt relations (or the threat of them). Violence in relationships includes direct and indirect pressures such as the threat of termination of friendship, if my friend does not fulfil the requirements, social exclusion, or „silent treatment", which is used to control or punish others, and dissemination of malicious rumours about someone in order to make this person rejected by others[3]."*

We attempted to discover whether the covert aggressive behaviour of the girls is also present among the rest of us, and whether the schools are dealing with it, or only with direct forms and attempts to discipline the ones that stand out. In the last 25 years, the concept of aggressive behaviour has been studied, especially in countries where social democracy has developed along with sufficient sensibility for the need to discover analytical solutions to control problems associated with aggressive behaviour (Norway, Sweden, and Canada). Studies conducted in the 1980s (Björkquvist, Ekman and Lagerspetz, 1982; Kagan and Moss, 1984; Rotenberg, 1984; Olweus, 1984; Cairns, Perrin, and Cairns, 1985; Huesmann and Eron, 1986; Pulkkinen, 1987; in Huesmann, 1994[4]), dealing with aggressive behaviour, even now record mainly specific forms of aggression such as beatings, rough treatment and harassment,

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[2] N.R. Crick, *Relational aggression: The role of intent attributions, feelings of distress, and provocation type.* »Development and Psychopathology« 1995, nr. 7, s. 313–322.

[3] N.R. Crick, N.E. Werner, J.F.Casas, K.M. O'Brien, D.A. Nelson, J.K. Grotpeter, et al., *Childhood aggression and gender: A new look at an old problem,* (w:) *Nebraska symposium on motivation,* red. D. Bernstein, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1999.

[4] L.R. Huesmann, *Aggressive Behavior. Current Perspectives*, Plenum Press, New York 1994 s. 133–135.

which have long been labelled typical male behaviour, as explained in the work of Simmons[5]. The survey included at the beginning included both sexes, but the attention is more focused on boys than girls. Simmons adds[6] that scientists often studied aggression in an environment where they did not pay attention to indirect forms and the performed studies did not include girls. Only in the last 20 years (Crick and Grotpeter, 1995, Galen and Underwood, 1997 and Lagerspetz et al, 1988, in Putallaz, Bierman[7]) put forward a new perspective, namely, that the claim of greater male aggressiveness comes from too narrow a definition of aggression, and that there are other ways in which people can cause harm to one another[8]

More attention is focused on identifying and preventing direct forms of aggression that are more evident, more disturbing and require immediate action. The definition of aggressive behaviour is based more on the physical form than the hidden ones, which remain unexplored and without any action being taken[9]. Denial of communication problems, unresolved relationships, misunderstandings, disagreements and the idealization of conflict situations leads to manipulation, control and the need for power[10].

Orenstein's[11] (2000) „Schoolgirl" has helped us to identify self-assessment, self-confidence and the emotional lives of girls. The

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[5] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002, s. 20.

[6] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002, s. 20.

[7] M. Putalazz, L.K. Bierman, *Aggression, Antisocial Behavior and Violence among Girls. A developmental perspective*, The Guilford Press, New York 2004, p. 12.

[8] M. Putalazz, L.K. Bierman, *Aggression, Antisocial Behavior and Violence among Girls. A developmental perspective*, The Guilford Press, New York 2004, p. 12.

[9] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002, s. 261.

[10] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002, s. 261.

[11] P. Orestein, *Schoolgirls. Young women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap*, AncHr Books A Division of Random Huse Inc., New York 2003.

study undertaken by Simmons[12] (2002), based on a sample of girls entitled „*Odd Girl Out – the Hidden Culture of Aggression and Girls*", actually helped us to categorize, describe and analyse the behaviour of girls, to identify and have a better understanding of the dynamics of their behaviour and to gain a deeper recognition of the role played by parents and teachers, and also with the comparison of our established guidelines.

Bloomquis's[13] work has cast further light on the identification of definitions of aggressive behaviour and the identification of gender differences, and given us new information concerning a possible strategy for managing conflict situations, as well as concrete instructions and opportunities for intervention guidance. Given the problems we had with the conceptual division of the various forms, and defining the differences between the overt and covert behaviours of girls, it has been of a great help to be able to use the RIPS/IRSP questionnaire by Richardson and Green[14] (When translating we used the word *hidden* instead of the word *indirectly* due to our use of the term *covert forms of aggression*). Aggression, Antisocial Behaviour, and Violence among Girls[15] „may be regarded as an important contribution to our understanding of the problem, especially in terms of the theoretical view of the characteristics and meanings of the behaviour of girls, of the manifestations of behaviour in a particular developmental period, and of the very distinctive differences in the context of gender.

For all covert forms of aggression, Simmons[16] uses the term *alternative aggression*. The author described strange behaviour exhib-

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[12] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002.

[13] L.M. Bloomquist, *Skills Training for Children with Behaviour Disorders*, The Guilford Press, New York 1996, 1–62.

[14] D.S. Richardson, L.R. Green, *RIPS/IRSP*, »*Revue Internationale de PsycHlogie Sociale*« 2003, nr 16(2), s. 11–30.

[15] M. Putalazz, L.K. Bierman, *Aggression, Antisocial Behavior and Violence among Girls. A developmental perspective*, The Guilford Press, New York 2004.

[16] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002, s. 21.

ited by the girls as an epidemic form, and called it the *hidden culture of aggression of girls*[17] and says that it is mostly an aggressive component exhibited in girls' behaviour.

Xie and the researchers[18] named this type of aggression *confrontational aggression*.

Problems and goals of the research

In this paper we deal with covert aggressive behaviour exhibited by girls. Based on an analysis of the literature available on this issue we have concluded that, through covert aggressive behaviour, girls ruin their relationships, reputation and affect the mental state of individuals[19]. From this assumption, we concluded that these forms of aggression, such as the spreading of rumours, insults, rejecting friendship, ostracism, obstacles posed, harassment, mockery, ridicule, etc, are worrying because they result in severe psychological consequences. In order to explore the forms of covert aggression present among Slovenian girls, it was first necessary to determine whether these forms are really present among the rest of us.

Equipped with data from foreign literature, we had a sufficiently solid starting point to focus on researching this problem in our territory, which was mainly school based. We attempted to ascertain whether the behaviour of girls in Slovenia is in accordance with the findings of foreign authors (description of studies in Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression[20], and Antisocial Be-

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[17] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002, s. 3.

[18] M. Putalazz, L.K. Bierman, *Aggression, Antisocial Behavior and Violence among Girls. A developmental perspective*, The Guilford Press, New York 2004, s. 14.

[19] D.E. Papalia, S. Wendkos Olds, R. Duskin Feldman, K. Musek Lešnik, *Otrokov svet. Otrokov razvoj od spočetja do konca mladostništva*, Educy, Ljubljana 2003, s. 274.

[20] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002.

haviour and Violence Among Girls[21], Helping Children with Aggression and Conduct Problems[22]). They all state that girls are more aggressive than we had previously believed and that, when growing up, this aggression takes different forms, including covert forms of aggression. In line with our objective, we focused mainly on the exploration of covert forms of aggressive behaviour in girls in Slovenian elementary schools. We wanted to know whether it is just a problem observed in individuals, or a wider issue. For the teachers, we wanted to find existing models of good practice, and to synthesize the guidelines (create models that would be effective and work in practice).

We have set ourselves the target of achieving greater awareness of the problem of covert aggressive behaviour exhibited by girls in general.

Methods

Ample

The criterion for sample selection of the girls was attending the seventh grade of elementary school, and individual class teachers considered all girls for possible inclusion in the study. Participation was their own decision, though later we obtained parental consent. We chose random or voluntary sampling of the girls.

For the purposes of the research, we conducted the interview using samples that included two groups:
– 16 girls aged between 12 and 13 years old, included in the seventh grade of primary school,
– 12 female teachers and 4 male teachers who teach the same girls (some of them are also class teachers).

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[21] M. Putalazz, L.K. Bierman, *Aggression, Antisocial Behavior and Violence among Girls. A developmental perspective*, The Guilford Press, New York 2004.

[22] L.M. Bloomquist, *Skills Training for Children with Behaviour Disorders*, The Guilford Press, New York 1996, 1–62.

In order to determine whether there are any significant differences between each environment, we decided to include girls from two different environments (rural and urban).

Process and methodology of research

When collecting the data, we used a non-standardized semi-structured interview with separate forms for girls and teachers. In this way, we wanted to obtain a set of data from two different perspectives and resources. We did not use these forms to prepare a detailed questionnaire because at the interview we relied on questions prepared beforehand, which served us as a guide or proposal for the implementation of the interview. The questions for teachers and girls were adapted and taken from the book by Simmons[23] entitled „Odd Girl Out: the Hidden Culture of Aggression and Girls" and Lagespetzom and Björqvista's[24] study entitled „Indirect Aggression and Boys and Girls".

In order to obtain as many quality results as possible with a semi-structured interview method, we helped ourselves with the conflicting response questionnaire RIPS / IRSP of authors Richardson and Green[25] while carrying out the interview, for better definition and identification of aggressive behaviour forms used by girls.

Methods for data analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. We reviewed the records of each conversation, tried to expand upon

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[23] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002.

[24] K.M. Lagerspetz, K. Björquvist, *Indirect Aggression in Boys and Girls*, [w:] *Aggressive Behavior. Current Perspectives*, red. L.R. Huesmann, Plenum Press, New York 1994, s. 131–149.

[25] D.S. Richardson, L.R. Green, *RIPS/IRSP*, »*Revue Internationale de PsycHlogie Sociale*« 2003, nr. 16(2), s. 11–30.

them, and attempted to pen single thoughts concerning the original extracts, statements and highlights. In the first step we performed a detailed analysis of each case, and in the overall analysis we determined some independently repeated categories, which we later subsequently merged.

The interviews were freely coded and the text interviews were attributed to open codes. To original, content meaningful text we wrote short terms and notions that described the essence of that segment of the research interview to us. Furthermore, we made a selection, defined and then classified the relevant concepts and categories. We have re-examined the records of each conversation, marked the original extracts of statements, and selected typical statements with which we wanted to illustrate a specific narrative and notable topics, views and experiences of both the girls and the teachers. We defined the number of views and statements, disaggregated data into units (codes), classified, linked, merged and formed them into each thematic category.

With the help of linked data we tried to create, clarify and formulate a theory extracted for each crucial piece of data that we obtained. We relied on the procedures of various authors (Bierman, 1983, Blomquist, 2005, pp. 79–87; Halm, 1996, pp. 252–263; Kobolt with colleagues, 2002, p. 177; Weeks, 1997, pp. 11–20; Weeks, 1998, pp. 122; Sagadin, 2001, in Javrh[26]). This has further indicated which topics will be the subject of the research.

Results

Based on the overall pattern of study, we found that it formed several different topics or areas through the presentation. We found that girls are still subject to a different kind of upbringing – the education that elevates social awareness and the development of their

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[26] P. Javrh, *Razvoj kariere učiteljev in njihovo izobraževanje*, Doktorska disertacija, Filozofska fakulteta, Ljubljana 2006.

sense of the needs and welfare of others, which may lead to lack of self-awareness and, consequently, many disguised instances of aggressive behaviour.

Relations between girls are very complex and complicated and contain many unwritten social rules. They want friendly relationships and are ready to invest a lot of themselves into them. But on the other hand, most of their bad experiences come from their friends, due to secrets being disclosed and indirect infliction of pain. The problem occurs when a girl becomes a victim of inappropriate behaviour of her peers. In the conflict, the girls often use a relationship as a weapon and we found that it is no coincidence that, in the last 20 years, the researchers have increasingly used the term "relational aggression" for this type of behaviour.

We found that direct, verbal, aggressive behaviour is quite common among girls, and are usually combined with more subtle but quite dangerous forms, so we believe that we should pay more attention to forms of aggressive behaviour. Teasing, humiliation, nasty gossip, insults behind your back, lying, reproducing stories, the deliberate getting others in trouble and many other forms of covert aggressive behaviour should be observed. Teachers should be alert at the first direct insult and should immediately investigate the background context. Girls should be better informed about how to properly stand up for themselves without retribution, hypocrisy, a calculating attitude. This requires that we devote the time needed, and it cannot be prescribed by any educational plan. This can be done by teachers, according to their conscience and using their own examples.

We confirmed the assumption that girls use aggressive behaviour and that it is mainly verbal in nature. It is important to note, however, that while we garnered a great deal of data indicating frequent use of verbal forms of aggressive behaviour, not all girls necessarily behave in this manner.

According to the responses, which indicated that they are mostly affected by conflict and aggressive behaviour we can conclude that, as a result of these actions, they feel lonely even though they never

state this directly. The fact is that they need the company of their peers, and they experience the loneliness dramatically, as a punishment. Our assumption about which form of aggressive behaviour causes the greatest distress was also confirmed by their allegations – that the fear of isolation is the most serious threat, as well as being „suppressed" or „tricked" by someone. Girls say that they find it hard to believe the apology which comes after the conflict.

Table 1. Covert forms of aggression

COVERT FORMS OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR (ALTERNATIVE = NON ASSERTIVE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR)	
RELATIONAL	**DIRECT/INDIRECT/SOCIAL**
– Hurt another person in order to „break" the friendship – Influence the „control" of friendships – The manner in which you emotionally hurt another person – Suppress feelings of acceptance – To let you know that you are not a part of the group, – Punishment by ignoring – Sabotage/stopping contact – Separation (even with revenge and exclusion from the group), – Direct negative body language (rolling eyes, sticking tongue out).	– Indirect negative body language behind someone's back (sticking tongue out, rolling eyes, non-verbal gestures, silence), – Destruction, damage and hiding other people's property, – Fake kindness (search vulnerabilities of the individuals, putting them in trouble, hide things) – Desire to harm in a way that is not direct confrontation, – Gathering in groups and bringing friends to your side, – Use/rumours spreading (outer appearance, dressing and naming) and hypocrisy – Impact on the status in the group, – Impact on self-esteem, – Conditioning (if you do not … you … you will not, unless …).

Source:
Adjusted table of described behaviours according to Richardson & Green[27] and Simmons[28]

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[27] D.S. Richardson, L.R. Green, *RIPS/IRSP*, »*Revue Internationale de PsycHlogie Sociale*« 2003, nr. 16(2), s. 11–30.

[28] R. Simmons, *Odd Girl Out. The hidden Culture of Aggression in Girl*, Harcourt, New York 2002, s. 21.

How girls understand and experience difficulties in relationships and solve these problems is very specific. It seems that they want to put the most unpleasant emotions „under the carpet", to hide them or pretend that they do not exist. Only a few girls pointed to solutions in eliminating unpleasant situations and expressed a desire to solve them. Answers that were designed to specifically address the problems in relationships could not be obtained.

It opens an important question: did we indirectly obtain important information about the deficits incurred by the girls in the area of social inclusion and the development of social interaction skills? It seems that, to a great extent, they are subjected to the norms, expectations and needs of the community. They are the victims of pressure and are expected to act in a non-confrontational manner. They must deal with problems in a quick and quiet manner, which often does not lead to satisfactory results since that can bring additional unresolved relations and problems with it.

With all this, in turn, we can consequently think of guidelines for working with girls that could include social skills topics such as developing friendships, behaviour recognition, learning the techniques of conflict resolution, etc. Girls should not have to live their lives believing that problems in relationships ought not to exist. Nevertheless, from their responses, we discovered that many think they really should not exist. Furthermore, we confirmed the hypothesis that an idealized image of how to resolve any disputes was instilled in them by important adults.

The girls found it difficult to tell what they would change in the future regarding their relationships, in order to make life easier. Questions that referred to such desires were deliberately ignored, or they said that they have none, saying that the situation is „pretty good".

Given the small number of responses concerning a desire for change in their relationships, it may be assumed on the one hand that the girls have learned to not express their wishes directly. Owing to these unexpressed wishes, they are looking for other options and ways of expression. On the other hand, however, this may indi-

cate that they are not aware of the problems or that, due to igno-rance or insufficient experience, they believe that such expression of desire is inadequate.

If we want to deal with the problems of a lack of understanding between girls, we have to have a very good understanding of their inner selves, their intimate world and their experience. Because of feelings that worry them, they are often lost. The intensity of the relationship is more or less intangible and would require additional research. Socialization, which directs them away from aggression, on the other hand, requires well-rounded girls, a perfection-orientated way of thinking and the expected direction to „beautiful" behaviour. Such beliefs and expectations are inconsistent with the reality faced. Girls are obviously not often directed, by parents or teachers, to the appropriate resolution of conflicts, nor to engage in behaviour that would enable them to „stand up for themselves" and also to accept themselves differently.

We received little information from the girls on social condition-ing and the impact the social environment has on them, but we can assume from the responses obtained from teachers that girls receive and summarize patterns of behaviour, norms and rules of the envi-ronment, which does not accept direct aggression among girls. Since society continues to view such behaviour negatively, perhaps covert forms of behaviour have changed in the last few years and acquired new, even more unrecognizable shapes. From the results obtained from the teacher surveys, we realize that the internalized standards of expectations and beliefs that are applied by individual teachers are firmly entrenched. How a teacher evaluates himself and others is certainly influenced by his views, his value system, prejudices and other factors. Rigid positions, unrealistic and ambitious goals and, with them, often associated tentative self-esteem are certainly obstacles that inhibit teachers. We have noticed that their beliefs about what a teacher is supposed to do are very clear. With this in mind they can be uncompromising to themselves and others, and, consequently, also subject to their own constraints. On the other hand, we detect a discrepancy between words and actions, as if they

do not recognize their helplessness and thus justify their own passivity.

Teachers feel that they should further their interest in the characteristics of the use of covert psychological forms of aggressive behaviour and sometimes, due to discreet repeated aggressive behaviour in girls, school teachers revolve in a vicious circle. There are no girls who would knowingly use aggressive forms; according to the teachers they are extremely resourceful and know how to manipulate well, so their actions are difficult or even impossible to detect. They often do not acknowledge their inappropriate actions. Teachers feel that they are also choosing other forms of aggressive behaviour due to different expectations held by the adults concerned. In some cases, we observed that teachers notice difficulties in their relationships with the girls mostly owing to their resistance, arrogance and disobedience. However, they did not cite any serious conflict with them. The responses from teachers revealed that girls use painful and sophisticated relational and psychological pressures, such as spreading rumours, slyness, a desire to harm, denigration, and insolence rather than more direct varieties.

Teachers believe that psychological forms of aggressive behaviour are much more painful than physical. In their opinion, they are harder to identify and therefore more dangerous. Even verbal forms of aggression are seen as examples of behaviour that are worse when compared to direct physical aggressive behaviour, and have severe and long-term consequences for life. This is the belief of more than half of the teachers. These teachers alleged that the consequences of implementing covert forms of aggression have a substantial negative impact on girls' self-perception. They believe that girls who are more exposed to such forms of behaviour are more insecure, have low self-esteem and feel threatened. They believe it is important to know how and when to recognise covert forms of aggression, which guidelines to follow in order to create change in the school environment, and how to chart a course forward. They provided us with specific, tangible proposals. Some teachers say they notice that problems in school, the classroom and with individuals

worsen if insufficient measures are taken. One of the most important cues with which we have been provided is that instead of direct aggressive behaviour teachers should focus more attention to covert aggressive behaviour. Teachers believe that the influence of the media has also had a primarily negative impact on girls, indicating that the media, including new technologies and communication channels are underutilized (or they do not know how to use them) from the positive perspective. The girls are more skilled in the use of modern communication (Internet, mobile phone) but at the same time more vulnerable to direct and covert forms of aggression over the Internet or mobile phone. Upon completion of interviews with teachers, it was confirmed that girls with lower levels of education are less competent and have a smaller range of social skills at their disposal; therefore, due to their ignorance and clumsiness they actually use several forms of aggressive behaviour, among others some fairly direct verbal forms. We can only assume that these appear more with the latter girls more than with socially „successful" girls. On the other hand, we also noticed the presence of what could be called "disguised aggression" with the girls who are successful at academically and socially. According to the data provided by our teachers, we could possibly even claim that more subtle forms of aggressive behaviour occur more often with successful girls. These specifics of the girls' behaviours should be investigated further.

From the research with teachers we gained a little more feedback on the parental role and the role of schools, and only a few statements that would tell us more about the role of the media and other cultural factors that play an important role in the increase in aggressive behaviour in general. Research has shown that teachers have on the one hand quite high expectations of parents, and some teachers also cited positive experiences. Some parents, as reported by girls and teachers, are aware of their responsibilities and try to understand their children and provide them with help and support which they need to resolve conflicts with aggressive behaviour. The evaluation of the teachers is less encouraging; that there are barely a third of parents who are aware of the latter. Therefore we can con-

clude that, in most cases, teachers do not perceive the majority of their students' family systems as functioning well. In the view of the teachers, as long as the parents continue taking uncompromising conflict situations as aggressive and try to solve it in their own way, with no feeling for other opinions and evaluations, they will be incapable of showing their girls that conflict is an everyday occurrence that you need to learn how to solve. They often want the parents to be more considerate to teachers and children. Some were extremely critical, saying that parents often leave children to their own devices, and that the role of the family has changed to such an extent that today's families are dominated by the complete absence of discussion between parents and children and the absence of parents in general. Perhaps this is an over-generalization and it would be good to think about where parents and teachers might find a common language. Teachers have further deepened into the specifics of encouraging assessment, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour of parents and the general perception of parents as in the search for solutions. In their comments, we repeatedly observed claims of the presence of „overly protective" parenting, which is believed to make them incapable of a critical view of this behaviour, let alone allow them to be able to practically help and support their girls' entrance into the world. Then there is the question whether a new generation of parents have certain prejudices, such as a belief that the schools or teachers cannot perform educational work well anymore.

Even in the interviews carried out with the girls, the portrayal of parents is not too encouraging; only a quarter of the girls said that their parents support them. Far more information was provided by the girls suggesting that their parents do not really know how to help them properly, or even if they are able to. Although in this period they still show great attachment to their parents, it seems that in most cases parents do not provide appropriate support for them and so they are forced to seek help elsewhere. Bearing this in mind, we should think that the school and teachers could possibly do a lot more in this field, if they could only find ways to engage the

families. Certainly the schools, especially the teachers, could have greater impact by involving parents and trying (or not trying) to get them to participate. It seems that the schools could be doing more.

Discussion

With the acquired data, we tried to get a clearer picture of the severity of covert aggressive behaviour of the girls in our schools and to better recognize and identify various covert forms of such behaviour. We examined the methods of work carried out by professional workers, teachers, and to this we have linked their suggestions for successful preventive work with the girls. We found that some schools are aware of more subtle forms of aggressive behaviour of girls and are good at recognising them. We hope that the survey taken will be of additional help to us. We found that teachers are performance-oriented in their daily work, are focused on the intellectual development and academic success of their students, and devote less attention to the development of social competence skills of individuals and their self-image. That this is part of the target only when it is inevitable and necessary is not encouraging. At present, aggressive behaviour is often not measured (or rarely measured) and they do not describe, evaluate and record it. This can be partially justified by the fact that, in the educational curriculum, there still is insufficient content to direct a teacher to pay attention to the observation of social competence and skills developed and to change the behaviour of individuals. In order to make it different, the Educational Plan School has become a mandatory part of the curriculum at schools since September 2009. Suggestions on how to deal with it should help the girls, teachers and parents equally. It might be useful to make recommendations as to how to deal with covert forms of aggressive behaviour in the school environment and to describe concrete suggestions for campaigns in the schools. In terms of observing the girls' behaviour, there should be more research carried out in the future, because this area has been

„pushed" into the background, both in research and theoretical terms. A weary teacher who is more extrovert than introvert should be given greater assistance, especially with adapting to existing norms and in his reflective thinking, so that, in tackling aggressive behaviour exhibited by students, he would not feel alone. Society, parents, colleagues and others apparently expect more from the teachers than they are actually able to provide in a given situation. Teachers should have more opportunities for impact in this area, and should not be only evaluators and disciplinarians.

In the guidelines for the analysis, prevention, and treatment/control of the violence in schools (2004), it is clear that schools should play a greater role, especially when the individual child is exposed to aggressive behaviour. Experience shows that covert aggressive behaviour is often unidentifiable. Children are often victims, even though they are not physically tortured. Therefore, we should devote enough time and awareness to detect and prevent problems associated with covert aggressive behaviour, and supporting the welfare of girls, for the benefit of all students, parents and teachers. In the past we felt that the teacher's attention was directed away from the real needs, away from recognition of the happenings among students and more in-depth observation of the dynamic behaviour exhibited by the girls. This has been partly confirmed by individual statements made by the girls themselves.

We have already mentioned that many teachers believe that preventive work is important and useful, while too little is spoken about prevention itself, which would be focused on students and involve specific incentives and assistance in finding a way to deal with aggressive behaviour. After analysing the interviews with the girls it seemed to us that they were not well aware of whom they could turn to for help. If the school does not have a standard practice, if measures have been made, and if we „talk" only in extreme cases, the positive and preventive role of the schools is also questionable.

Such responses from teachers and the girls gave us the same information: boys use less subtle forms of aggression than girls. Boys used more pronounced physical and other direct forms of aggres-

sion. With our completed research, we found that the assumption that girls display less aggressive behaviour than boys is unfounded. At the same time we wanted to convey that the power of schools also lies in trying to help the students, especially girls, formulate appropriate social behaviour: cooperation, conflict resolution, addressing negative attitudes, learning to negotiate, taking care of themselves, and taking others into consideration.

The socialization of the emotions of girls and boys might lead to a change in attitudes at the school for both genders. This is, of course, an area that would require further research and additional work. We believe that the preventive role of the school can be powerful and positive. It can help teachers better identify what is going on with girls and take appropriate action. It can also help parents recognize the important role they play in encouraging their girls and not inhibiting them further. As in many other studies, the results of our study also reveal that more attention is aimed at identifying and preventing direct forms of more evident aggression – which are more obvious, more disturbing and require immediate action – than to covert forms of aggression.

It was assumed that the task would contribute to a clearer picture of what forms of covert aggressive behaviour girls use. We believe that we have achieved this, but further research should be aimed at girls who are performing and those who are frequently exposed to acts of covert aggression. We should also look to augment the skills required by girls to defend themselves against violence.

It would make sense to include both girls and boys in the further exploration of covert aggressive behaviour. Despite the fact that several studies in the past have been carried out only on boys, this way we will actually achieve a better understanding of behaviour exhibited by both genders.

At the same time we want to explore new approaches and follow the recognition of author Simmons (2002, p. 4), which says: „Aggressive behaviour of girls is often hidden, disguised; it is not physical and remains unexplored. There are no measures which would prevent such conduct accordingly."

What does the future offer then? The view of modern security theories has, from the concept that says that others are responsible for safety, led to the view that each individual is responsible for themselves and his self-protective behaviour can contribute to changes. That is why this area should also be school's concern, which cannot be self-sufficient in this work and operate without the girls and the partnership of parents and others. Only in this way will we achieve the goal of radical changes.

The options offered are broad and cover areas from the introduction of a variety of targeted projects and support for the girls, additional education and professional support materials for teachers, directed work with parents and many others. In particular, it is necessary to monitor the work done; it is necessary to evaluate it and, at the same time, identify what has actually been done in this area and look for new methods and practical solutions.

Attention directed to forms of aggressive behaviour should begin in the nursery (with planned activities such as „School for Parents"). Even then, good teachers should teach girls (and boys) that a disguised form of aggressive behaviour is not acceptable, and they should also teach them about positive relationships and conflict resolution. In preschool they should devote greater attention to resolving conflict within the peer group and in relationships between girls themselves, and find solutions to the problem of inadequate communication between children.

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