

Aggressive Behaviour of Pupils against Teachers – Theoretical Reflection and School Practice

Abstract

The increase in socio-pathological phenomena in adults in Slovakia during the transformation period manifested itself also in the increase in problem behaviour in children and youth thus creating a social need for increased effectiveness of prevention and its professionalisation in schools. In the current school practice, pupils' aggressive behaviour, even against teachers, is not sporadic. Despite the severity of this problem it is paid little attention.

Keywords: *agressive behaviour, pupils*

Aggressive behaviour is clearly a socio-pathological phenomenon which is complex and multi-causal. Currently, the increase in pupils' aggressive behaviour becomes a serious problem. Aggressive behaviour of elementary and secondary school pupils may result even in committing a criminal offence. Such actions of pupils get more and more daring and brutal, too. The "*Methodological Guideline No. 7/2006-R on preventing and tackling pupils' bullying in schools and school facilities*" states that currently bullying becomes a serious problem requiring continuous attention in terms of preventive and punitive action. As stated by Z. Martínek (2009, p.7), "the percentage of children having problems with their behaviour has begun to rise, they are unmanageable in classic classes and lessons, disrupt the whole class, they constitute, to a certain degree, a threat to their school-mates. Teachers are defenceless and helpless in guiding them." According to P. Ondrejko (2009, p. 164), "at present there is a dramatic increase in juvenile crime and violence in schools in all European countries. Slovakia is no exception."

Aggression is doing intentional harm, injury- physical, mental, material, by its nature breaking situationally relevant rules and not motivated by an attempt to help. It is an act of behaviour the basic characteristics of which are violence, aggressiveness and destruction. C. Határ (2007, pp. 32–33) elucidates five perspectives of juvenile aggression:

1. Aggression as a form of play
The aim is to try out one's own strength or to experience the joy of victory. There is a danger that the situation may turn from play or fun into a serious form of aggression and aggressiveness. The aggressor expects the joy of victory or the need to try out his/her own strength on a weaker individual, thus there is an obvious disparity of forces.
2. Aggression as a defence mechanism
The victim defends him/herself against the aggressor. There is a danger that the victim will defend him/herself so much that he/she will destroy the aggressor who has provoked the aggression.
3. Aggression as a reaction of a frustrated individual
The pupil seeks compensation for his/her failure or defeat in weaker individuals. This aggression is indicative of a certain inferiority complex in the aggressor.
4. Aggression as a form of curiosity.
The pupil wants to find out the limits of what they can dare to do and what is already forbidden. This form of aggression may result in egotistic enforcement of one's own power.
5. Aggression as an inappropriate form of a desire for love.
The pupil tries to attract attention of the people around him/her with negative behaviour and actions. There is a danger of masochistic satisfaction of the pupil's needs, while he/she is not aware of this.

Aggressive behaviour in school occurs in 4 basic groups of participants:

1. pupil-pupil;
2. teacher-teacher (this may be mobbing when it is violence among colleagues, or bossing when the aggressor is the boss);
3. teacher-pupil (the teacher's violence towards the pupil);
4. pupil or parent- teacher (the teacher as the victim).

Our contribution will focus on the problem of the teacher as the victim of the pupil's, or his/her parent's, aggressive behaviour. Nowadays it is a compelling fact that aggressive behaviour against teachers- by pupils as well as their parents-increases. It is a problem paid only marginal attention despite its severity. Slovak and Czech literature pays considerable attention to bullying among pupils, but

there are few professional sources dealing with aggressive behaviour against or even bullying of teachers and research on this area is missing.

M. Grancová, J. Mitrová and A. Tůmová (2009, p. 12) emphasize that the term bullying of teachers is right, because it has a lot in common with the definition of bullying. In their opinion, “the aggressor’s superiority” is at issue, because theoretically the teacher is always superior to pupils. However, the superiority of bullying pupils is real and sometimes the teacher is actually in the minority in relation to force.

In 2004 J. Džuka and A. Jenčová (2005, pp. 18–20) did research among secondary school teachers. A teacher having been exposed to one of violent acts at least once in the past 30 days was considered a victim of violence. The most frequent were verbal negative expressions- unpleasant statements, ridicule and insults, reported by 129 respondents (35.4%). 61 respondents (16.8%) reported having been forced to do something against their will and 60 teachers (16.5%) reported social manipulation. 45 (12.4%) respondents reported having been taken things and 18 (4.9%) direct physical attacks or threats.

In the school year 2007/2008 J. Tomášek conducted research among secondary school teachers in the Czech Republic. He found out that 43.4% of the respondents had personally encountered at least one form of aggressive behaviour during their career, which was almost a half of the secondary school teachers examined. Prevailing forms were gross verbal abuse or insults by pupils during lessons, then gross verbal abuse by parents or other relatives and threats by parents or other relatives to misuse an acquaintance.

S. Bendl (2010, p. 43) also paid attention to the problem of teacher bullying and pointed out to the results of the research by Elementary Education Teachers’ Association, where 27% of the teachers of the elementary school 1st level had encountered vulgarisms against teachers and 2.76% even bullying of a teacher by pupils. It was 51.92% of the respondents from the group of teachers of the elementary school 2nd level who reported vulgar expressions against teachers, and 10.84% who reported bullying of a teacher by pupils.

S. Kariková (2010, pp. 200–201) presents results of her research done in 2010 among teachers of nursery schools, elementary schools (1st and 2nd level) and secondary schools. The results clearly show major changes related to the increase in negative aspects in the teaching profession. They include both an increase in pupils’ problem behaviour at all school types and levels and communication with parents. These two aspects clearly mirror also society-wide changes, particularly in terms of the increase in various socio-pathological phenomena and thus also problems

in the behaviour of children and pupils; they may also be related to the general attitude of the public to education and also the status of the teaching profession.

In the school year 2010/2011 we carried out research using the questionnaire method in the region of central Slovakia (in the districts Banská Bystrica, Krupina, Lučenec, Martin, Tornaľa, Zvolen and Žilina). The research sample consisted of 196 teachers of elementary and 155 teachers of secondary schools, 351 respondents in total. The objective of the research included also the problem of aggressive behaviour against teachers by parents or pupils of their schools. The research aim was to find out how they had encountered it during their practice.

Table 1 presents our findings concerning the occurrence of pupils' aggressive behaviour against teachers; several respondents reported two or more forms (that is why the total exceeds 100%).

Table 1. Forms of pupils' aggressive behaviour against teachers

Forms of aggressive behaviour	Total	
	N	%
Insults of the teacher by a pupil during lessons	130	37.04
No encounters with aggressive behaviour	114	32.48
Threats of the teacher by a pupil	81	23.08
Insults of the teacher by a pupil's parent or another relative	80	22.79
Insults of the teacher by a pupil outside class	61	17.38
Threats of the teacher by a pupil's parent or another relative	58	16.52
Intentional damage to the teacher's personal property	45	12.82
Physical attack on the teacher by a pupil	25	7.12
Other	16	4.56
Physical attack on the teacher by a pupil's parent or another relative	1	0.28

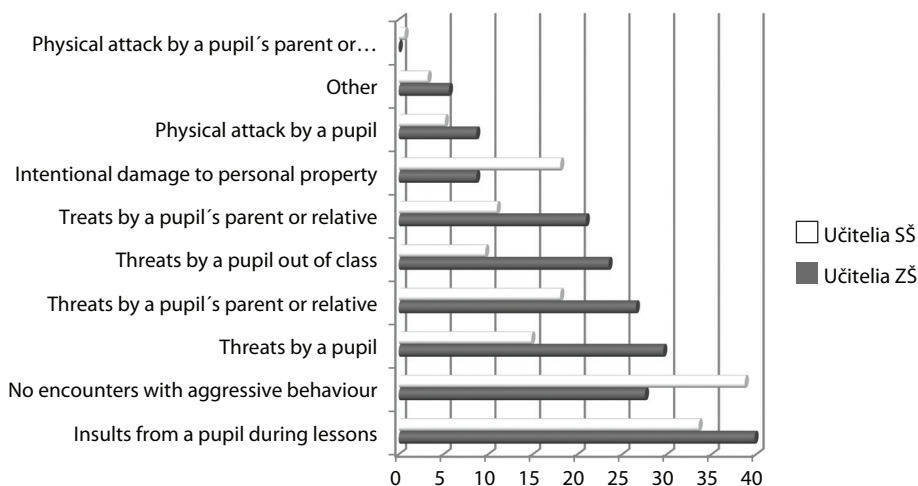
Source: Own research. (Emmerová, I., 2011)

In total, 237 teachers, i.e. 67.52%, have encountered aggressive behaviour. It follows from our empirical findings that the most frequent are insults of teachers by pupils during lessons, reported by up to 37.04% of the teachers. The second most frequent form is threats by pupils, reported by 23.08% of the respondents. Following are insults by parents or other relatives- this option was marked by 22.79% of the respondents.

The alarming fact is that only 32.48% of the elementary and secondary school teachers have not encountered any form of aggressive behaviour against themselves during their practice, which is not even a third of the respondents.

Graph 1 presents our findings concerning aggressive behaviour of pupils or their parents or other relatives against teachers, for elementary school teachers and secondary school teachers, respectively.

Graph 1. Aggressive behaviour towards elementary and secondary school teachers (%)



Legend: red = secondary school teachers, blue = elementary school teachers

The occurrence of insults of teachers by pupils during lessons shows a minimum difference between the elementary (39.80%) and the secondary (33.55%) school teachers. A striking finding is that threats by pupils were reported by up to 29.59% of the elementary school teachers, while this option was marked by 14.84% of the respondents from secondary school teachers. Aggressive behaviour against teachers appears already at ever-younger ages, because 54 respondents from elementary schools (27.55%) reported that they had not encountered aggressive behaviour against themselves, while it was reported by 60 respondents from secondary schools, representing 38.71% of this category.

What is interesting are also the results of the research by M. Bielíková et al. (2011, p. 8) on pupils respecting teachers' authority: pupils respect teachers' authority from time to time (64.1%), only 15.7% often show respect for teachers and even 20.2% of pupils do not respect their teachers' authority at all- this means that every fifth pupil behaves with no respect for his/her teacher.

The current situation in schools is also illustrated in the “*Report on the State of Education in Slovakia and on Systemic Steps to Support its Further Development*” of September 2013, stating the following:

- Threatening the safety of pupils, teaching and non-teaching staff of the school (bullying, attacks by pupils or their legal representatives against teachers) is considered a major problem of education.
- Schools have no tools for increasing the safety in terms of physical and mental safety of pupils and school staff.
- School staff point out to their insufficient education and practical training in dealing with acute crisis situations, despite the fact that the Act No. 317/2009 on teaching staff and professional staff imposes such an obligation on the employer.

A pressing problem of our times is cyber-bullying of teachers. Pupils try to record their teachers in a compromising situation and then put it on the Internet. It even happens that pupils purposefully provoke the teacher and put his/her reaction on the Web. Electronic bullying of the teacher has a profound effect on the teacher’s mental and physical well-being and may result in depression, frustration, resignation or even suicide.

K. Hollá (2010, p. 45) gives the following reasons for pupils’ attacks on teachers (in relation to electronic attacks):

- lack of teacher authority;
- the teacher’s low social status;
- insufficient involvement of pupils in lessons, evoking a feeling of boredom which the pupils stave off by experimenting with mobile phones;
- revenge for evaluation, reprimand, etc.;
- insufficient command of new electronic media- internet and computer applications;
- teacher burn-out syndrome arising from long-term over-load.

According to M. Klimešová and A. Tůmová (2011, pp. 25–28) pupils are motivated to harass, even to bully, their teachers by fun, feeling of power, but also by the incentive:

- to be in the centre of attention;
- to entertain the people around and be given credit for the action;
- to have a dominant position and control over the situation;
- to behave cruelly- attempt at hurting others to experience their suffering;
- to return the pain, either as motivation to hurt another authority because of previous oppression (e.g. also by parents) or direct retaliation for the injustice or wrong done by the teacher;

- to explore the limits and test the teacher- the pupil tries out what he/she can dare and how the teacher will react;
- to have fun- especially an attempt at staving off boredom in class.

Prevention of aggressiveness and bullying should be paid due attention, because their increase (already in the elementary school situation) was confirmed also by the results of our research. The aim of primary prevention is to create conditions in schools for healthy physical, mental and social development. This includes selection of teachers, new approaches of teachers to pupils, placing an emphasis on open and partner conduct, new effective forms of cooperation with parents, etc. It includes also preventive programmes focusing on constructive resolution of conflicts, coping with stress situations, development of social competences, etc. "There are many possibilities for prevention of socio-pathological behaviour in school. However, it must be understood and carried out as a planned, continuous, purposeful and systematic process and integral part of the whole process of education in school." (Hroncová, J., 2013, p. 166). One-off activities cannot be evaluated positively, because they are little effective.

According to S. Kariková (2007, p. 94), application of the so-called experiential learning seems the most optimal in aggressive behaviour prevention. Experiential learning can be understood either as a type of learning or as a process by means of which participants:

- master knowledge more deeply, if explanation includes also direct experience of what is taught in theory or by memorizing existing truths;
- are better able to recognize and reflect their own emotions accompanying them when acquiring certain knowledge, experience and practice;
- actively, proactively and creatively participate in acquiring knowledge and information based on direct contact, particularly with other people;
- gain experience from cooperation in smaller groups, which develops their cooperation and promotes positive interpersonal relationships, reduces anxiety and apathy;
- develop mainly social creativity, since this learning is based on divergent thinking requiring connection of rational and intuitive thinking in creative problem solving;
- are able to realize their own attitudes, values or emotions, particularly by means of subsequent reflection of values, the result of which should be change in understanding oneself, understanding other people and the world around connected with change in attitudes and behaviour;
- are able to perceive and evaluate themselves and others positively.

“Prevention of socio-pathological phenomena constitutes a long-term and systematic process, within which not only primary educational institutions, particularly family and school, but also institutions of educational counselling and prevention, police and public administration must play a more important role than until now.” (Hroncová, J., 2013, p. 25). Prevention in elementary and secondary schools should be carried out at a professional level.

The upbringing function of the school should increase, because its instructional function is emphasized and the upbringing function falls back. “While in the former school we could do with education for hard work, honesty, responsibility, etc., today these basic ethical values are added also other upbringing aspects. Out of them, I will mention upbringing for democracy, upbringing for tolerance, toleration among nations, creating positive relations to and understanding of other cultures, etc. As a matter of fact, in addition to that, upbringing also has to face impacts related to, e.g., commercialization, which significantly interferes with the life of youth – improper films, books, gambling, etc.” (Petlák, E., 2013, p. 42).

Schools should employ professionals- social pedagogues who would deal with prevention and solution of pupils’ problem behaviour. A social pedagogue knows risks and protective factors of children’s and youth’s optimum development, should influence pupils’ personality development and develop their social skills. A social pedagogue belongs to the school professional staff. The Act on teaching staff and professional staff, Section 24 reads: “A social pedagogue performs professional activities within prevention, intervention and counselling, specifically for children and pupils threatened by socio-pathological phenomena, from socially disadvantaged environments, drug addicted, or otherwise disadvantaged children and pupils, their legal representatives and the teaching staff of schools and school facilities. A social pedagogue fulfils tasks of social education, pro-social, ethical behaviour support, socio-pedagogical diagnostics of the environment and relations, socio-pedagogical counselling, prevention of socio-pathological phenomena and re-education of behaviour. A social pedagogue performs expertise activities and public education activities.” *The Report on the State of Education in Slovakia and on Systemic Steps to Support its Further Development* recommends increasing the number of professional employees for prevention. The current school legislation already enables social-pedagogue activities in schools.

In the school environment, consistent solution even of less serious problems in pupils’ behaviour is necessary, because overlooking or underestimating them may result in more serious forms of deviant behaviour in pupils. A social pedagogue as a professional employee is helpful to school, to pupils as well as teachers and parents in many areas (e.g., those of prevention, counselling, etc.).

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