

Manifestations of Pupil Aggression towards Teachers in Elementary and Secondary Schools

DOI: 10.15804/tner.2017.50.4.01

Abstract

The study focuses on pupils' aggression towards teachers. The goal of the study was to determine a statistically significant relationship between the forms of aggressive behaviour and the age of teachers and the length of their teaching experience. The research sample consisted of 268 teachers of elementary schools, secondary vocational schools and grammar schools in the region of Banská Bystrica. Results revealed a statistically significant negative relationship between teachers' age and the years of teaching experience in three forms of aggressive behaviour: refusal to obey instructions, intentional disruption and ironic remarks. A statistically significant relationship was observed between the length of teachers' teaching experience and destruction of school property.

Keywords: *aggression, pupil, teacher, pupils' aggressive behaviour towards teachers*

Introduction

The increase in socio-pathological phenomena in society has manifested itself in the increase in pupils' problem behaviour in elementary and secondary schools. Aggressive behaviour is clearly a socio-pathological phenomenon which is complex and multicausal. Currently, the increase in pupil aggressive behaviour, shifting to ever lower age brackets (Emmerová, I., 2014, Kirves, L., Sajaniemi, N., 2012; Saracho, O.N., 2017) and manifested in various forms, has become a serious

problem. Aggression is a continual process, which can progress from disobedience of rules through verbal and non-verbal threats, damage to property, even to physical harm to others (Daly, D.L., Sterba, M.N., 2011).

In the current school practice, aggressive behaviour of pupils towards teachers is not rare, which has been pointed out by several authors (Espelage, D., Anderman, E.M., Brown, V.E., Jones, A., Lane, K.L., McMahon, S.D., Reddy, L.A., Reynolds, C.R., 2013; Garrett, L., 2014; Kauppi, T., Pörhölä, M., 2012a; Kopecký, K., Sztokowski, R., 2017, etc.).

Causes leading pupils to undisciplined, insolent, aggressive behaviour, even bullying of teachers, are various; it may be fun, a feeling of power, but also an effort to be at the centre of attention, to amuse those around and be appreciated for one's conduct, have a dominant position and control over the situation, also retaliation for injustice and wrong done by the teacher, fun and an effort to get rid of boredom in class.

C. de Wet (2010), J.K. Chen, R.A. Astor (2009), E. Lahelma, T. Palmu, T. Gordon (2000) and A.A. Terry (1998) conducted studies on primary or secondary school teachers. Of concrete forms, gross verbal insults or swearing by pupils in class prevailed, followed by negative verbal expressions (unpleasant statements, ridicule and swearing), respondents were forced to do something against their will, teachers reported social manipulation, taking of things and direct physical attacks or threats.

The term bullying of teachers is correct because it has much in common with the definition of bullying (T. Kauppi, M. Pörhölä, 2012b). In their opinion, the point "aggressor's superiority" is controversial because, theoretically, the teacher is always superior to pupils. However, the superiority of pupil bullies is real and sometimes the teacher actually has minor power.

Currently, cyber-bullying of teachers has become an up-to-date problem. Pupils try to record the teacher in an embarrassing situation and publish it on the Internet. What happens is that pupils purposefully provoke the teacher and post his/her reactions on the web. Cyber-bullying of teachers has a profound impact on their psychological and physical well-being, may lead to depression, frustration, resignation, even suicide. In 2016 research, 21.73% of teacher-respondents reported having experienced a cyber-attack on their person (Kopecký, K., Sztokowski, R., 2017).

K. Hollá (2012) indicates the following causes leading pupils to attacks on teachers (in relation to cyber-attacks): the teacher's lack of authority, the teacher's low social status, insufficient engagement of pupils in class resulting in boredom they get rid of by experimenting with mobile phones, revenge for marks, reproach,

etc.; the teacher's failure to handle well new electronic media - the Internet and computer applications, teachers' burn out syndrome resulting from their long-term work overload.

Society-wide changes have caused an increase in various socio-pathological phenomena (e.g., crime, substance and non-substance addictions, etc.) and thus also an increase in problem behaviour in children and youth. Another significant aspect is also the general negative attitude of the public to education and the status of the teaching profession. It is necessary to increase the prestige and attractiveness of the teaching profession. An extremely important role is played by the family, parents' moral values, their attitude to education and school, or lack of attention to the child, too liberal parenting, etc.

Methodological background and methods of research

The occurrence of aggressive behaviour is described by several authors as considerably increasing problems in the school setting. Teachers are directly involved in situations where aggression is targeted at their person by pupils who are at vertical level towards them in terms of social relations.

Our research objectives were specified as follows:

- Examine the statistically significant relationship between the forms of pupils' aggressive behaviour towards teachers and teachers' age;
- Examine the statistically significant relationship between the forms of pupils' aggressive behaviour towards teachers and the length of teachers' teaching experience;
- Examine the occurrence of pupils' aggressive behaviour towards teachers.

The research focused on the following variables in teachers: age, length of teaching experience in relation to forms of aggression manifested by pupils towards teachers. The research was conducted with the use of a questionnaire of our own design, with scaled questions (5-point scale - ranging from "*I completely disagree*" to "*I completely agree*") and open questions: perception of aggression, occurrence of aggression forms, reasons for pupils' aggressive behaviour, discipline, and teacher authority. The research comprised 268 teachers selected by convenience sampling. The research tool pilot was carried out in 2015, when the author conducted research on the issue, and in 2016 she amended the questionnaire accordingly. The research sample consisted of 148 teachers of elementary schools, 75 teachers of secondary vocational schools and 45 teachers of four-year grammar school. The respondents came from various municipalities and towns

in the region of Banská Bystrica. The majority of the teachers participating in the research were from Zvolen and Banská Bystrica, with Banská Bystrica having the highest number of schools in the region. Distribution of the research sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by age and length of teaching experience (N=268)

Teacher's age			Teaching experience		
Years	N	%	Number of years	N	%
25–30 y.	29	10.82	1–5 y.	40	14.92
31–40 y.	65	24.25	6–10 y.	27	10.07
41–50 y.	80	29.85	11–15 y.	34	12.68
51–60 y.	86	32.08	16–20 y.	38	14.17
61–70 y.	8	2.98	21–25 y.	37	13.80
	31–40 y.		26–30 y.	51	19.02
	41		15.29		

Research results

On the basis of the research results, 85.4% of the teachers encountered aggressive behaviours. The most frequent were intentional disrupting, ignoring and provoking. Statistical analysis was carried out of the correlation between the age, the length of teaching experience and the forms of aggression presented in Tables 2 and 3. Data were analysed using a non-parametric test because a non-standard questionnaire was used and the data did not meet the normal distribution condition. The variable of the teacher's age correlated statistically significantly with the following variables of forms of aggression: refusal to obey instructions, intentional disruptions, and ironic remarks. Spearman's coefficient was negative, which means that the younger the teacher, the higher the rate of aggression.

The research results show that there is a statistically significant linear relationship between the forms of aggressive behaviour and the length of teaching experience, where it was found out that the shorter the teacher's teaching experience, the higher the rate of pupils' aggression towards him/her. It was manifested, in particular, in the following forms: destruction of school property, refusal to obey instructions, intentional disrupting, and ironic remarks. Based on our research, it can be stated that the statistically significant linear relationship between three identical forms of pupils' aggressive behaviour towards teachers is significant.

Table 2. Correlation between the forms of aggressive behaviour and the teacher's age

Age	Refusal to obey instructions and fulfil assignments				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		
25-30 y.	29	3.97	1.08	4.14	-0.174	0.004
31-40 y.	65	3.71	1.28	3.96		
41-50 y.	80	3.60	1.28	3.81		
51-60 y.	86	3.36	1.32	3.46		
61-70 y.	8	2.38	1.68	1.80		
Age	Intentional disruption				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		
25-30 y.	29	3.93	1.06	4.10	-0.161	0.008
31-40 y.	65	3.78	1.24	4.05		
41-50 y.	80	3.53	1.28	3.69		
51-60 y.	86	3.38	1.33	3.47		
61-70 y.	8	2.88	1.55	2.75		
Age	Ironic remarks				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		
25-30 y.	29	3.07	1.51	3.36	-0.185	0.002
31-40 y.	65	3.08	1.48	3.20		
41-50 y.	80	2.60	1.46	2.43		
51-60 y.	86	2.25	1.46	2.15		
61-70 y.	8	2.13	1.64	2.00		

Table 3. Correlation between the forms of aggressive behaviour and the length of teaching experience

Length of teaching experience	Destruction of school property				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		
1-5 y.	40	3.18	1.61	3.37	-0.130	0.034
6-10 y.	27	3.07	1.63	3.45		
11-15 y.	34	2.24	1.49	1.77		
16-20 y.	38	2.76	1.46	2.69		
21-25 y.	37	2.69	1.65	2.10		
26-30 y.	51	2.65	1.54	2.46		
31-40 y.	41	2.29	1.52	1.86		

Length of teaching experience	Destruction of school property				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		
1–5 y.	40	3.78	1.05	3.38	-0.161	0.008
6–10 y.	27	4.07	1.29	4.40		
11–15 y.	34	3.59	1.28	3.76		
16–20 y.	38	3.50	1.39	3.73		
21–25 y.	37	3.76	1.23	4.00		
26–30 y.	51	3.22	1.33	3.26		
31–40 y.	41	3.24	1.44	3.33		
Length of teaching experience	Refusal to obey instructions and fulfil assignments				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		
1–5 y.	40	3.73	1.17	3.90	-0.162	0.008
6–10 y.	27	4.26	0.93	4.39		
11–15 y.	34	3.62	1.32	3.82		
16–20 y.	38	3.45	1.24	3.55		
21–25 y.	37	3.76	1.34	4.08		
26–30 y.	51	3.18	1.32	3.22		
31–40 y.	41	3.34	1.37	3.38		
Length of teaching experience	Intentional disruption				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		
1–5 y.	40	2.80	1.43	3.00	-0.174	0.004
6–10 y.	27	3.52	1.39	3.85		
11–15 y.	34	2.94	1.51	3.00		
16–20 y.	38	2.74	1.53	2.70		
21–25 y.	37	2.62	1.55	2.30		
26–30 y.	51	2.29	1.39	1.97		
31–40 y.	41	2.44	1.46	2.09		
Length of teaching experience	Ironic remarks				Spearman's rho	P
	N	AM	SD	Md		

On the basis of our research, it can be stated that there is a statistically significant linear negative relationship between three identical forms of pupils' aggressive behaviour towards teachers and both variables (the teacher's age and length of teaching experience). In addition, a correlation was confirmed between the teacher's age and destruction of school property in his/her presence.

Discussion

The occurrence of pupils' aggressive behaviour towards teachers in school, found out in our research (85.4%), corresponds to the findings of K. Pervin and A. Turner (1998, p. 5), who report in their study that more than 91% of teachers encountered in their teaching career pupils' aggressive behaviour towards their person. This fact was pointed out also by I. Emmerová (2014, pp. 150–151), who conducted research on the issue in the region of Banská Bystrica and her results showed that only 32.4% of elementary and secondary school teachers had not encountered even one form of aggressive behaviour. M. Niklová and M. Šajgalová (2016, p. 107) found out that only 20.26% of teachers had not encountered aggression towards their person. In another study (Džuka, J., Dalbert, C., 2007, p. 10), 108 teachers of secondary vocational schools were examined, out of whom 60 (55%) reported experiencing pupil violence within the last 15 days.

Our research showed that teachers encounter the following manifestations of aggression most frequently: intentional disrupting, ignoring and provoking. Teachers either ignore such manifestations as if overlooking them or take disciplinary actions. It wastes teaching time and raises conflicts between the teacher and pupils, often also pupils' parents. Since the coefficients are relatively low, the statistical correlation should be confirmed in larger research samples outside the region of Banská Bystrica.

The research confirmed the statistically significant correlation between the forms of aggression (in refusal to obey instructions, intentional disrupting, and ironic remarks) and the teacher's age and length of teaching experience. This corresponds to the results of M. Niklová and M. Šajgalová (2016, p. 107), who found out that teachers with longer teaching experience reported the lowest occurrence of pupil aggressive behaviour towards their person. 1.29% of teachers with the teaching experience of 21–25 years, and even 25% of teachers with the teaching experience of 6–10 years reported encountering pupil aggression.

Conclusion

The Act No. 317/2009 on teaching staff and professional staff, Section 3, specifies that a member of teaching staff has the status of a protected person in relation to performance of teaching activities. This can be evaluated positively; the positive aspects include greater authority, safety, acceptance of teachers by pupils and better protection of teachers.

In November 2015, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic issued the Practical Guide to Protecting Teaching Staff and Professional Staff (Praktická príručka k ochrane práv pedagogického zamestnanca a odborného zamestnanca) (2015). The main purpose of the document is the effort to increase the legal consciousness of the teaching staff and professional staff at schools. It also includes model examples as well as concrete examples from practice.

Within protection from attacks on teaching staff and professional staff, it is necessary to specify principles for communication with the external environment and include esteem, regard, and respect for human rights in internal regulations and documents. Attackers can be school pupils, but also their parents, legal representatives or other relatives. The body of laws provides teaching staff and professional staff with general and special protection from attacks that are offences, crimes or infringements on their right for protection of personality and personal expressions, and occur during performance of teaching or professional activities or related thereto.

Schools must pay attention to prevention, implement prevention programmes aimed at harmonization of relations and improvement of the school climate. More attention should be paid to this area also in the higher education of future teachers. In-service teachers should be offered such educational activities and should be motivated to attend them.

In the area of the prevention of the cyber-bullying of teachers, it is required to increase teachers' awareness of active protection in the Internet environment. The number of professional staff in schools trained in social-educational prevention at a professional level should be increased.

References

- Chen, J.K. & Astor, R.A. (2009). Students' Reports of Violence against Teachers in Taiwanese Schools. *Journal of School Violence*. No 1, pp. 2–17.
- Daly, D.L. & Sterba, M.N. (2011). *Working with Aggressive youth*. Nebraska, 224 p.
- De Wet, C. (2010). Victims of educator-targeted bullying: a qualitative study. *South African Journal of Educaion*. Vol 30, pp. 189–201.
- Džuka, J. & Dalbert, C.(2007). Student violence against teachers: Teachers' well-being and the belief in a just world. *European Psychologist*. No 12, pp. 253–260.
- Emmerová, I. (2014). Aggressive Behaviour of Pupils against Teachers – Theoretical Reflection and School Practice. *The New Educational Review*, Vol. 35. No. 2, pp. 147–156.
- Espelage, D. – Anderman, E.M. – Brown, V.E. – Jones, A. – Lane, K.L. – McMahon, S.D. – Reddy, L.A. – Reynolds, C.R. (2013). Understanding and preventing violence directed

- against teachers: Recommendations for a national research, practice and policy agenda. *American Psychologist*. No 2, pp. 75–87.
- Garrett, L. (2014). The student bullying of teachers: An exploration of the nature of the phenomenon and ways in which it is experienced by teachers. *Aigne*. No 5, pp. 19–40.
- Hollá, K. (2012). Cyberbullying of teachers (Kyberšikanovanie učiteľov). *Pedagogika.sk*. No 3, pp. 166–180.
- Kauppi, T. & Pörhölä, M. (2012a). School teachers bullied by their students. Teachers' attributions and how they share their experiences. *Teaching and Teacher Education*. No 7, pp. 1059–1068.
- Kauppi, T. & Pörhölä, M. (2012b). Teachers bullied by students: Forms of bullying and perpetrator characteristics. *Violence and Victims*. No 3, pp. 396–413.
- Kirves, L. & Sajaniemi, N. (2012). Bullying in early educational settings. *Early Child Development and Care*. No 3–4, pp. 383–400.
- Kopecký, K. & Szotkowski, R. (2017). Specifics of cyberbullying of teachers in Czech schools – A national research. *Informatics in Education*. No 1, pp. 103–119.
- Lahelma, E. – Palmu, T. – Gordon, T. (2000). Intersecting Power Relations in Teachers' Experiences of Being Sexualized or Harassed by Students. *Sexualities*. No 4, pp. 463–481.
- Niklová, M. & Šajgalová, M. (2016). Pupils' Aggressive Behaviour towards Teachers in Elementary Schools in Slovakia. *The New Educational Review*. No. 4, pp. 104–118.
- Pervin, K. & Turner, A. (1998). A Study of Bullying of Teachers by Pupils in an Inner London School. *Pastoral Care*. No 4, pp. 4–10.
- Practical Guide to Protecting Teaching Staff and Professional Staff (Praktická príručka k ochrane práv pedagogického zamestnanca a odborného zamestnanca)*. (2015). Bratislava: Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic.
- Saracho, O.N. (2017). Bullying prevention strategies in early childhood education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. No 4, pp. 453–460.
- Terry, A.A. (1998). Teachers as targets of Bullying by their Pupils: A Study to Investigate Incidence. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*. No 2, pp. 255–269.
- The Act No. 317/2009 on teaching staff and professional staff*.