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SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF BULLYING BEHAVIOR AMONG SCHOOL STUDENTS AND PROBLEMS OF ITS PREVENTION

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Abstract: This article examines the social and psychological characteristics of bullying behavior among school students and the major challenges associated with its prevention. Bullying is distinguished from ordinary interpersonal conflict by an imbalance of power, repeated negative actions, and sustained psychological or physical pressure directed toward a particular student. The study focuses on the influence of interpersonal relationships, the psychological climate of the classroom, family upbringing, peer influence, and social regulation within the school environment on the development and persistence of bullying behavior. Particular attention is paid to the psychological roles of aggressors, victims, and bystanders and to the interactional mechanisms that maintain bullying situations. The article emphasizes that effective prevention should not be limited to disciplinary measures but should also promote empathy, mutual respect, constructive conflict resolution, social responsibility, and psychologically safe communication among students. Systematic cooperation between schools, families, teachers, and school psychologists is considered an essential condition for early identification of bullying and reduction of its negative consequences.

Keywords: bullying, school students, social and psychological characteristics, aggressive behavior, peer relationships, school environment, victim, bystander, empathy, prevention, psychological safety.

СОЦИАЛЬНО-ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ БУЛЛИНГА СРЕДИ ШКОЛЬНИКОВ И ПРОБЛЕМЫ ЕГО ПРОФИЛАКТИКИ

Аннотация. В статье рассматриваются социально-психологические особенности буллинга среди школьников и основные проблемы, связанные с его предупреждением. Отмечается, что буллинг отличается от обычного межличностного конфликта наличием дисбаланса сил, повторяемостью негативных действий и систематическим психологическим или физическим давлением на ребёнка. Особое внимание уделяется роли межличностных отношений, психологического климата школьного коллектива, семейного воспитания, влияния сверстников и характера социального контроля в образовательной среде. Раскрываются психологические особенности участников буллинга, включая агрессора, жертву и наблюдателя, а также механизмы их включения в ситуацию травли. Обосновывается необходимость перехода от преимущественно карательного реагирования к комплексной профилактической системе, направленной на развитие эмпатии, уважительного общения, навыков конструктивного разрешения конфликтов и социальной ответственности учащихся. Подчёркивается, что эффективное предупреждение буллинга требует согласованных действий педагогов, школьных психологов, родителей и самих учащихся.

Ключевые слова: буллинг, школьники, социально-психологические особенности, агрессивное поведение, отношения со сверстниками, школьная среда, жертва, наблюдатель, эмпатия, профилактика, психологическая безопасность.

Introduction. Bullying among school students has become an important social and psychological issue because it can negatively affect the emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, academic engagement, and overall development of children and adolescents. The school environment is one of the main social spaces in which young people establish relationships with peers, develop patterns of communication, and learn to respond to differences and conflicts. When these relationships become dominated by repeated intimidation, humiliation, exclusion, threats, or other forms of psychological or physical pressure, the educational environment may lose its sense of safety and become a source of persistent emotional stress for students.

Bullying should not be understood simply as an isolated disagreement between two students. It usually involves a repeated pattern of harmful behavior in which one student or a group of students uses a perceived or actual advantage in physical strength, social status, psychological influence, or group support against another student. The social and psychological nature of bullying is therefore closely connected with the structure of peer relationships, group norms, individual characteristics, and the general emotional climate of the classroom. In some cases, students who participate in bullying may attempt to strengthen their position within the peer group, demonstrate dominance, attract attention, or compensate for personal difficulties through aggressive behavior.

The psychological consequences of bullying can vary depending on the student's age, personality, social support, frequency of exposure, and the nature of the bullying experience. Students who are repeatedly subjected to humiliation or exclusion may experience insecurity, loneliness, reduced self-confidence, emotional tension, and difficulties in establishing relationships with peers. At the same time, students who engage in bullying may develop persistent patterns of aggressive interaction if their behavior is not appropriately addressed. The role of bystanders is also significant because their reactions can either reinforce the bullying situation or contribute to its termination. Consequently, bullying represents not only a relationship between an aggressor and a victim but also a broader group phenomenon.

Age-related characteristics are particularly important when examining bullying behavior. The forms and motives of peer aggression may change as children move from primary school to adolescence. Younger students may demonstrate more direct forms of physical or verbal aggression, whereas older students may increasingly use social exclusion, reputation-based attacks, manipulation of peer relationships, or digital communication channels. Adolescence is especially important because the need for peer acceptance, social recognition, and belonging becomes more pronounced. Therefore, prevention strategies should take into account the developmental characteristics of different age groups rather than applying identical measures to all students.

Another important factor is the interaction between the family and school environments. Patterns of communication acquired within the family can influence how children perceive authority, express emotions, resolve disagreements, and respond to other people. Similarly, the school's response to aggressive behavior can shape students' understanding of acceptable and unacceptable forms of interaction. If bullying is ignored, minimized, or treated exclusively as an individual disciplinary problem, its underlying social and psychological mechanisms may remain unresolved. In contrast, a preventive approach based on respectful communication, emotional support, empathy, clear behavioral boundaries, and cooperation between teachers, psychologists, parents, and students can contribute to a safer educational environment.

Therefore, studying the social and psychological characteristics of bullying among school students is important not only for identifying the causes and manifestations of aggressive behavior but also for developing effective preventive mechanisms. A comprehensive understanding of the roles of aggressors, victims, and bystanders, together with an analysis of peer relationships and the psychological climate of the school, can provide a stronger basis for prevention. In this context,

the development of a psychologically safe school environment should be regarded as a shared responsibility of the educational institution, family, and wider social environment.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Bullying among school students has been examined from psychological, educational, sociological, and developmental perspectives. The literature generally indicates that bullying should be understood as a complex interpersonal and group process rather than as a simple manifestation of individual aggression. Its occurrence is influenced by the interaction of personal characteristics, peer relationships, family experiences, classroom climate, and institutional responses. Therefore, the analysis of existing research requires attention to both the individual behavior of students and the social environment in which this behavior develops.

One of the important theoretical foundations for understanding bullying is the social-ecological approach. From this perspective, children's behavior is influenced simultaneously by several interconnected environments, including the family, peer group, school, and wider social context [1]. This approach is particularly relevant to bullying because aggressive behavior may be strengthened or weakened depending on the reactions of classmates, teachers, parents, and other significant adults. Consequently, the causes of bullying cannot be adequately explained by referring only to the personality of the student who demonstrates aggressive behavior.

Research conducted by D. Olweus played a significant role in establishing bullying as a distinct area of psychological and educational research. Olweus emphasized that bullying involves repeated negative actions directed toward another student and is characterized by an imbalance of power between the participants [2]. This conceptualization makes it possible to distinguish bullying from ordinary disagreements, occasional arguments, and isolated acts of aggression. The distinction is important for prevention because different types of interpersonal problems require different forms of intervention.

The literature also demonstrates that bullying is closely associated with the psychological characteristics of the students involved. Students who repeatedly engage in bullying may demonstrate a strong desire for dominance, difficulties with emotional regulation, or a tendency to use aggression as a means of achieving social influence [3]. However, treating every aggressive student as psychologically identical would oversimplify the phenomenon. Bullying behavior may emerge from different combinations of personal motives, peer expectations, family experiences, and social learning processes. Therefore, preventive work should consider individual differences rather than relying on a single explanation for aggressive behavior.

The role of the peer group has received particular attention in contemporary research. Bullying frequently occurs in front of other students, meaning that classmates can indirectly influence the continuation or termination of the behavior. Some bystanders may support the aggressor, while others remain passive because of fear, uncertainty, or a desire to avoid becoming targets themselves [4]. At the same time, students who defend victims or actively reject bullying can weaken the social reinforcement that allows aggressive behavior to continue. This suggests that prevention programs should address not only potential aggressors and victims but also the broader student group.

Another important direction in the literature concerns the psychological consequences experienced by students who become targets of bullying. Repeated exposure to humiliation, exclusion, threats, or aggression can be associated with emotional distress, loneliness, reduced self-esteem, difficulties in peer relationships, and problems with school adjustment [5]. The severity of these consequences may depend on the duration and intensity of bullying, the availability of social support, and the student's individual psychological resources. Thus, prevention should be complemented by psychological assistance for students who have already experienced bullying.

Family relationships are also considered an important factor in the formation and prevention of bullying behavior. The emotional climate of the family, parenting practices, parental supervision, and patterns of communication may influence children's ways of responding to conflict and interacting with peers [6]. Supportive family relationships can provide children with emotional security and constructive models of communication, whereas inconsistent discipline, excessive hostility, or insufficient parental involvement may create additional developmental risks. Nevertheless, family factors should not be treated as direct and exclusive causes of bullying, since children's behavior develops through the interaction of multiple social contexts.

School climate represents another major theme in the literature. A school characterized by clear behavioral expectations, supportive teacher-student relationships, effective communication, and a sense of collective responsibility is generally more capable of identifying and addressing bullying at an early stage [7]. In contrast, when students perceive that aggressive behavior is tolerated or that adults are unlikely to intervene, bullying may become normalized within the peer group. This indicates that institutional culture can either function as a protective factor or contribute indirectly to the persistence of bullying.

Recent research has also expanded the concept of bullying through the development of digital communication. Cyberbullying enables harmful behavior to extend beyond the physical boundaries of the school and potentially reach students at any time through online platforms. Unlike traditional forms of bullying, digital aggression may involve a wider audience, rapid dissemination of harmful content, and difficulties in controlling its circulation [8]. For this reason, contemporary prevention strategies need to include digital communication culture, responsible technology use, online empathy, and students' ability to seek assistance when encountering harmful digital behavior.

The analysis of existing literature therefore suggests that effective bullying prevention should be multidimensional. Programs focused exclusively on punishment may address visible behavior without changing the interpersonal and psychological conditions that support it. More comprehensive approaches combine early identification, psychological education, teacher training, parental involvement, peer support, development of empathy and emotional regulation, and the establishment of clear institutional procedures for responding to bullying [9]. Such an approach allows prevention to move from simply reacting to incidents toward creating conditions in which bullying is less likely to emerge and persist.

Overall, the reviewed literature demonstrates that bullying is a dynamic social-psychological phenomenon shaped by the interaction of individual, interpersonal, family, peer-group, and school-level factors. Existing studies provide substantial theoretical foundations for understanding its causes, manifestations, and consequences, but they also indicate the importance of considering developmental and cultural contexts. In particular, examining bullying among school students within the specific social and educational conditions of Uzbekistan can contribute to a more context-sensitive understanding of the phenomenon and support the development of prevention strategies appropriate to local schools and families.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to examine the social and psychological characteristics of bullying behavior among school students and to identify practical approaches to its prevention. A mixed methodological perspective was applied, combining theoretical analysis with empirical observation and comparative assessment. The methodology was structured around the assumption that bullying develops through the interaction of individual psychological characteristics and the social environment in which students communicate and study.

The participants were selected from secondary school students representing different age groups. A total of **72 students** were included in the study, allowing the research to remain manageable while providing an opportunity to compare bullying-related tendencies across

developmental stages. The participants were considered according to age, gender, peer interaction patterns, emotional responses, and involvement in situations associated with bullying. Particular attention was paid to distinguishing direct participants in bullying from students who may occupy the role of observers.

Several complementary research methods were employed. **Theoretical analysis** was used to examine psychological and pedagogical approaches to bullying, aggressive behavior, peer relationships, and school climate. **Observation** made it possible to identify recurring patterns of interaction among students, including verbal aggression, social exclusion, intimidation, and supportive or defensive responses from peers. **Questionnaire-based assessment** was used to explore students' perceptions of interpersonal relationships, psychological safety, experiences of bullying, and attitudes toward aggressive behavior. **Comparative analysis** was applied to identify differences in bullying-related characteristics between younger and older students. The results obtained through these methods were interpreted in relation to the developmental and social characteristics of the participants.

The main methodological indicators and their analytical orientation are presented below.

Research direction	Method used	Main indicators	Purpose of analysis
Identification of bullying manifestations	Observation and questionnaire	Verbal aggression, physical intimidation, social exclusion, repeated negative behavior	Determine the most common forms of bullying
Psychological characteristics	Questionnaire and observation	Emotional tension, self-confidence, empathy, reactions to conflict	Identify psychological factors associated with bullying
Peer-group influence	Observation and comparative analysis	Bystander reactions, peer support, group pressure, social status	Examine the role of the student group
Age dynamics	Comparative analysis	Differences between age groups in forms and frequency of bullying-related behavior	Determine developmental differences
School environment	Questionnaire	Sense of safety, teacher support, communication climate, willingness to report incidents	Assess institutional factors influencing prevention
Preventive potential	Questionnaire and qualitative analysis	Students' attitudes toward intervention, empathy, conflict resolution, adult support	Identify appropriate preventive directions

The empirical stage was organized with consideration of students' developmental characteristics. Younger students were primarily assessed in relation to direct forms of interpersonal aggression and their ability to recognize unacceptable behavior. Older students were additionally examined in relation to social exclusion, peer-group influence, reputational pressure, and indirect forms of aggression. This age-sensitive approach was important because the manifestation of bullying may change as students' social relationships and psychological needs become more complex.

The analysis also considered the three principal roles that may emerge within bullying situations: **the aggressor, the target, and the bystander**. The aggressor was considered in terms of behavioral dominance and the use of psychological or social pressure. The target was examined

through indicators related to perceived psychological safety, emotional responses, and social interaction. Bystanders were analyzed according to whether they supported the aggressor, remained passive, or attempted to protect the targeted student. Such differentiation allowed bullying to be considered as a group process rather than merely an interaction between two individuals.

For the prevention component, particular attention was given to students' perceptions of the effectiveness of adult intervention, peer support, classroom discussions, psychological counseling, and parent-school cooperation. The methodological framework assumed that sustainable prevention requires simultaneous work with students, teachers, parents, and the broader school environment. Therefore, prevention was assessed not only in terms of reducing aggressive incidents but also in terms of strengthening empathy, respectful communication, emotional self-regulation, and students' willingness to seek help.

The collected information was interpreted through descriptive and comparative procedures. Quantitative responses were organized according to the main research indicators, while observational information was analyzed according to recurring behavioral patterns. Comparisons between age groups were used to identify developmental tendencies, while qualitative interpretation helped explain possible relationships between peer-group dynamics, psychological characteristics, and bullying behavior.

Ethical principles were also taken into account throughout the research process. Participation was organized on a voluntary basis, and students' responses were treated confidentially. The research procedure avoided labeling students as permanently “aggressive” or “victims,” recognizing that individual roles and behavioral patterns may change depending on the situation and social context. This approach was considered particularly important when studying children and adolescents because psychological safety and respectful treatment should remain central to any investigation involving school students.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, bullying among school students is a complex social and psychological phenomenon influenced by individual characteristics, peer relationships, family environment, and school climate. Its prevention requires more than disciplinary measures; it should focus on developing empathy, respectful communication, emotional self-regulation, and a sense of social responsibility among students. Early identification of bullying, combined with cooperation between teachers, parents, psychologists, and students, can strengthen psychological safety at school and reduce the negative consequences of bullying. An age-sensitive and comprehensive preventive approach is therefore essential for creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment.

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