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Verbal bullying. A comprehensive mental image of primary school students

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Abstract. The study aims to identify the set of mental images that young schoolchildren associate with bullying as comprehensive mental images of primary school students. In relation/derivative of this intention is the methodological design which has as a key element a survey approach based on the questionnaire. The main hypothesis of the investigation can be stated as follows: verbal bullying is a common practice in the school experiences of primary school students. 30 third-grade students were involved in the research. The obtained results confirm some of the formulated hypotheses, allowing the representation of a relevant image associated by students with verbal bullying.

Keywords: verbal bullying, teasing, rumor

1. Introduction

Bullying is a behavior that involves intentionality (aggressors want to harm their victims with premeditated negative behaviors), repetition (does not occur in isolation and unique), power asymmetry (power imbalance, aggressors appeal to weaker individuals, whom they can face or a group of people defeating a single person), lasting psycho-emotional effects (because they leave effects that are deeply imprinted in the minds of the victims) (Mok et al., 2016, p.148).

The act of bullying is one that is practiced persistently and is reinforced through frequent episodes of aggression; the aggressors accumulate increased power, and the victims become weaker and weaker, becoming less able to defend themselves and feeling exhausted and vulnerable (Olweus D., 1991).

It is argued that school aggression is a manifestation of unbalanced social interaction, which can occur due to the psychological characteristics of the aggressor himself, possibly a victim



it, aggression, physical through various channels: verbal, physical or cyber aggression (Sharbat et al., 2018).

Verbal bullying is violence with words intended to embarrass a particular student. However, this type of violence can even hurt the victim more than physical violence itself (Popadić, 2009, stated according to Jevtić, 2016, pp. 164-165).

Verbal bullying as verbal harassment is seen as one of the most common types of bullying used by both boys and girls. Verbal bullying accounts for 70% of reported cases, which can have an immediate impact (Lee, 2004; Coloroso, 2008). Verbal teasing and threats are terms used to describe verbal aggression. Although the consequences of such aggression on a child's self-image may take longer to become apparent than those of physical aggression, verbal aggression is more damaging (Aljabri et al., 2023).

The participants in the act of bullying assume one of the 3 existing roles: victim, aggressor or bully-victim (who is both the aggressor and the victim of the aggression). Victims and perpetrators belong to the same group of colleagues/friends or the same family unit (Armitage R., 2021).

It can be said that the appearance of aggression in the school environment is a process of group dynamics, in which there are divisions of roles. Each role played by an abuser is as follows: the abuser, the abuser's assistant, the reinforcer, the victim, the developer, and the outsider. Bullies are classified as leaders, who take the initiative and are actively involved in bullying behavior. Reinforcers are those who are there when the bullying occurs, participate as witnesses, laugh at the victims, challenge the bullies, invite other students to watch, and so on. (Hamidsyukrie, Muhammad Ilyas, Masyhuri, and Nurlaili Handayani, 2022).

Various types of bullying are known. From the perspective of Salmivalli et al. and Crick et al. (2000, 2001) the most common are verbal, physical, and social or mixed, and according to Armitage R. (2022) there are several types of bullying, namely direct physical, direct verbal, indirect and emotional, sexual and cyberbullying.

According to Griffin et al. (2019) found that verbal aggression was the most prevalent type of aggression experienced by people with intellectual disabilities, while Bhansawy and Hasan (2015) agree, explaining that the forms of verbal aggression encountered by students with intellectual disabilities include nicknames, ridicule and belittling to diminish their status as group members, and forms of physical aggression experienced included hitting, pushing, spitting, causing damage to the victim's property and making exaggerated jokes about them. They reported that the assault usually occurred when the victim was alone.

2. The causes of verbal bullying. The Effects.

2.1. Some students commit acts of violence out of a desire to be accepted and not to feel rejected, which is particularly important for young people who attach great importance to their peer group. Thus, students who are rejected or not accepted show a high degree of direct or indirect aggression (Salmivalli, 2000, listed according to Vasić et al., 2018, p.78).

Teachers see cases of bullying as normal behavior, therefore their lack of intervention is quite frequent, this type of behavior being also related to their level of psychological training (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier 2008, p.150).

2.2. A UNESCO document (2019) presents the most common causes encountered, namely sex difference, age difference, non-conformity with gender norms, appearance, physical and learning disabilities, race, nationality or color, religion, socioeconomic status, migration status, school background, level of education, peer support and family.



In addition to all these causes, low life satisfaction, high psychological suffering, lack of empathic capacity, tendency towards depressive symptomatology, low self-esteem are also added (Estévez E., Estévez J.F., Segura L., Suárez, C., p.50), but also the fact that students see bullying as something fun, having a low level of empathy, they consider that some people deserve to be bothered or offended in various ways, it can also be the fact that they are not appreciated by those around them, even a boring atmosphere at school can lead to the practice of distinct types of bullying (Allen, K. P., 2010, p. 119).

Students who are frequently bullied are nearly twice as likely to miss school regularly, have low academic performance, and are likely to drop out of school (Abudaif et al., 2020; Tekel and Karadag, 2020). A child's sense of belonging at school increases as aggression decreases (UNESCO, 2015).

Students who experience bullying have an increased risk of developing long-term mental health problems (Moore et al., 2017). They may develop depressive symptoms, the tendency to self-harm, suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts (Schneider, 2021, p.1697).

According to Lee (2004), the attention of parents, counselors, teachers and school administrators must be focused on cases of verbal bullying, which have negative effects on self-image and self-esteem, generating depression, anxiety and other problems.

If we talk about frequency, Olweus (1996, 1997) claims that it consists in the repetitiveness of the act of bullying performed by aggressors on victims over time. Because of the teachers who passed by the cases of bullying carelessly (Hazler et al. 2001 and Carney, 2005), they had some continuity.

As a brief conclusion, it is argued that victims of bullying need to be bolder in reporting the bullying they experience to parties who are able to provide solutions. Parents should always build good and direct communication with children so that children can be open about what they experience in the school environment and regularly coordinate with teachers or the school. Teachers and schools must be more active in taking measures to prevent bullying in the school environment and be firm in providing sanctions for perpetrators (Hamidsyukrie, Muhammad Ilyas, Masyhuri, and Nurlaili Handayani, 2022).

3. Methodology

3.1. Purpose

The study aims to identify the set of mental images that young schoolchildren associate with bullying as comprehensive mental images of primary school students.

1. Identification of adults and the attitude towards the victim of verbal bullying
2. Identifying the causes and negative effects at the level of relationship behavior that students associate with various types of verbal bullying
3. Identifying the types of verbal bullying students experience in the school environment
4. Identifying the attitudes/positions practiced by students in the case of verbal bullying

3.2. Working assumptions

1. Verbal bullying is a common practice in the school experiences of primary school students
2. Nicknames represent verbal bullying behaviors with the highest frequency among young schoolchildren
3. Low resistance to frustration is a reason to practice verbal bullying

3.3. Presentation of the group of participants



The group of participants consisted of 30 respondents, third-grade students from Secondary School No. 23 "Constantin Brâncoveanu" from the urban environment. In terms of gender, 22 of the participants are female and 8 are male.

3.4. Description of the tools used

The present research uses questionnaire-based survey, seeking to capture the frequency, causes and effects of verbal bullying. The questionnaire was made up of a varied structure, comprising 20 items: 16 closed items, 2 small and 2 open items. Items 14 and 15 correspond to objective 1, items 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 18 are associated with objective 2, items 1, 2, 3 and 17 are associated with objective 3, and items 11 are associated with objective 4, 12, 13, 19 and 20.

3.5. Experimental research design

The questionnaire was printed and completed by the students, the answers being previously entered in Google Forms. The analysis of the answers was carried out by means of the Excel program and statistical indicators such as percentage values and arithmetic means were extracted.

Results

From the students' answers, it appears that the most common verbal bullying behavior is teasing (an average value of 3.23), as well as nagging and rumors (with an average value of 3.03). The lowest frequency is associated with taunting (with an average of 2.6):

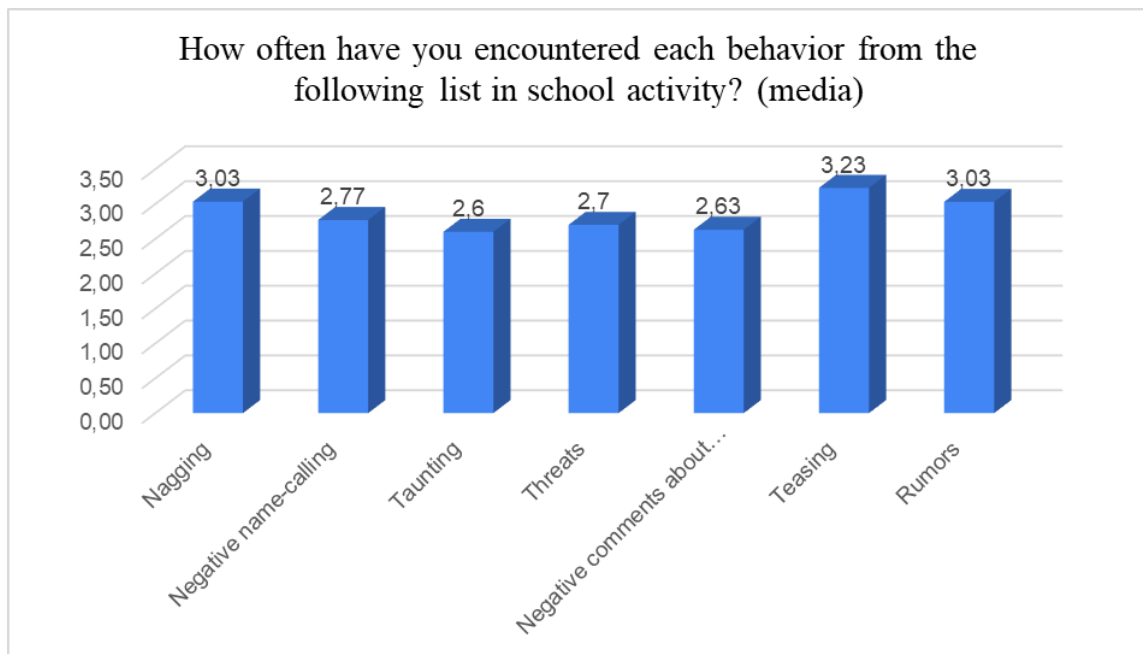


Figure 1. The frequency of bullying behaviors in the school environment. Average

The answers given by the students recognize teasing and nagging as the most frequent ways of manifesting verbal bullying in the classroom (17%). The lowest frequency is associated with threats (11%) and negative nicknames (13%):

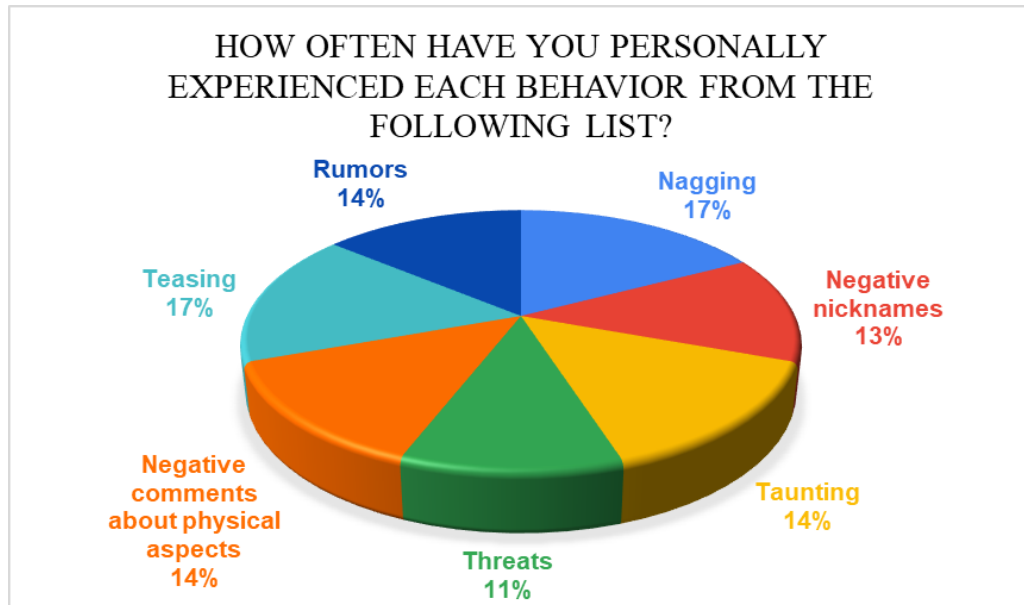


Figure 2. Frequency of experiencing verbal bullying behaviors. Percentages

The answers provided by the students recognize the desire for control (16%), anger and envy (15%) as the most frequent ways of manifesting verbal bullying in the classroom. The lowest frequency is associated with the disappointment caused by a school failure (12%):

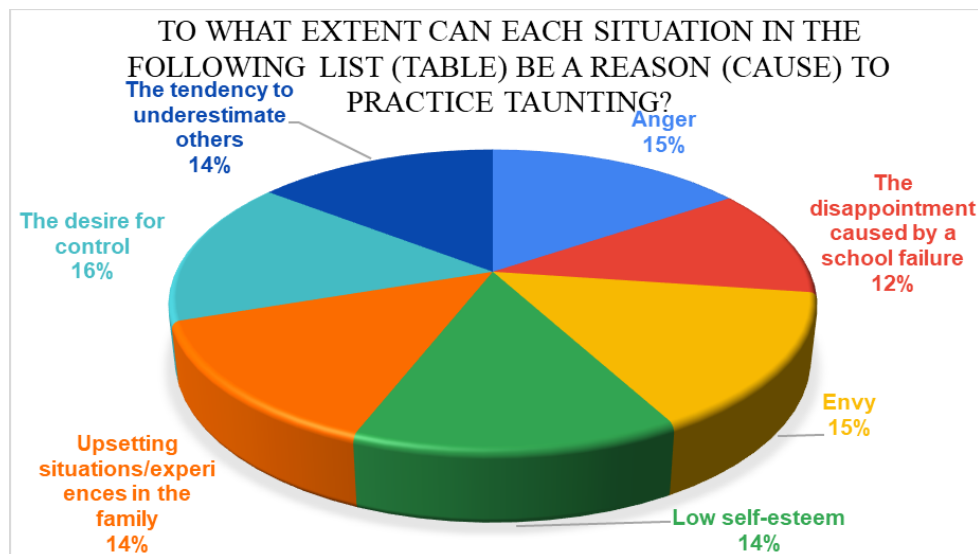


Figure 3. The extent to which each situation is a cause for the practice of mockery. Percentages

Regarding the situations associated with the most relevant forms of manifestation of verbal bullying, it can be observed that envy has the strongest and most homogeneous impact in generating the 4 types of aggressive manifestations. As an analytical example: in the case of envy,



the main cause of the circulation of rumors, as well as negative nicknames. Also, students' desire for control is a relevant cause for reactions such as negative nicknames, teasing and rumors. Disappointment caused by school failure is the behavior least likely to result in negative name-calling and negative comments about physical aspects:

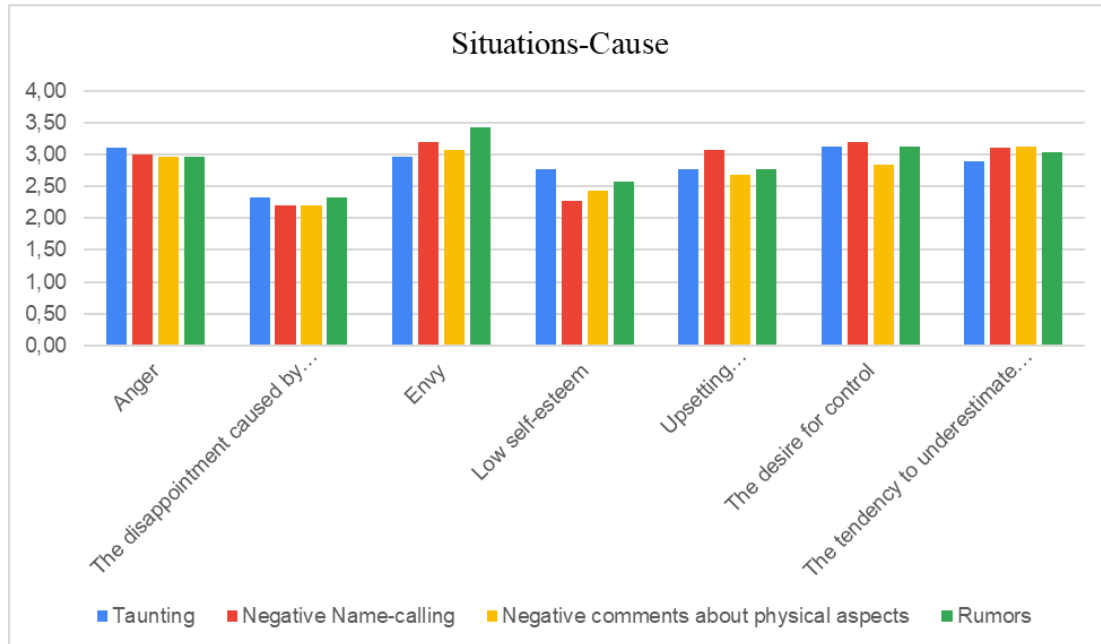


Figure 4. Situations – Cause. Average

Regarding the effects associated with the most relevant forms of manifestation of verbal bullying, it can be observed that the creation of differences between colleagues has the strongest and most homogeneous impact in the generation of the 3 types of aggressive manifestations. As an analytical example: in the case of creating differences between colleagues, this is the main cause of the circulation of rumors as well as nicknames. Also, students' colder communication without opening up to their peers is a relevant cause for reactions such as nicknames and teasing. Disregarding the rules is the behavior that leads to the least amount of name-calling and teasing:

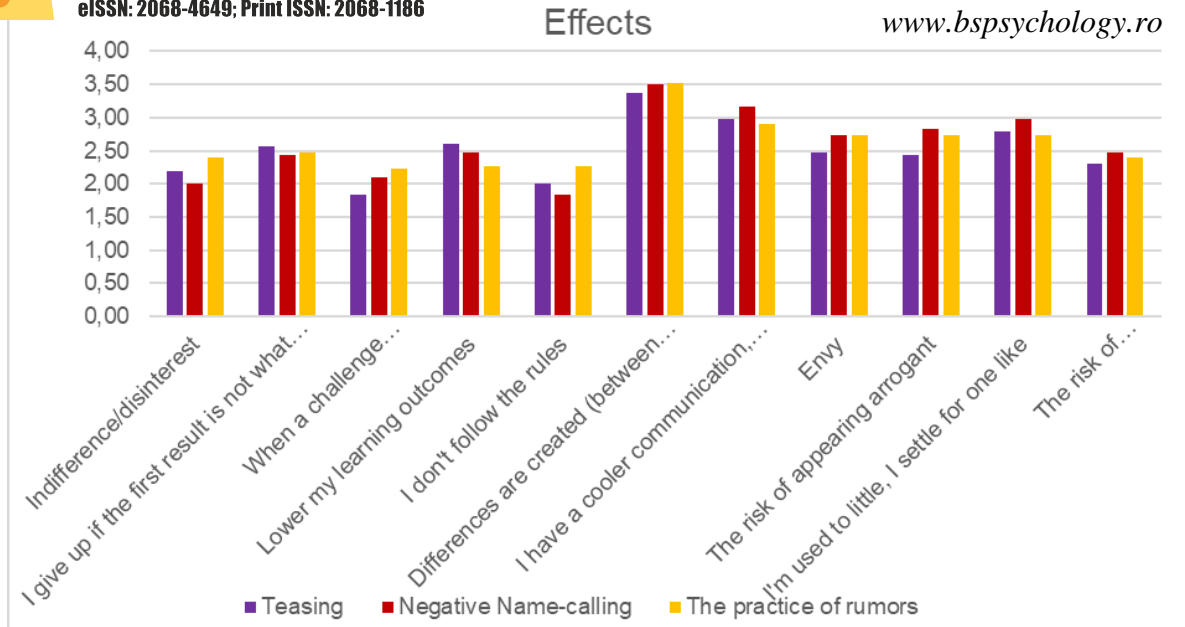


Figure 5. Effects. Average

From the students' answers, it appears that the most common reaction to the practice of verbal bullying behavior is to attract the attention of the one who speaks badly (with an average value of 4), as well as the lack of intervention combined with amusement (with an average value of 1.73) and lack of intervention combined with justice (with an average value of 1.70). The lowest frequency is associated with encouraging the person who practices verbal bullying (with an average of 1.37):

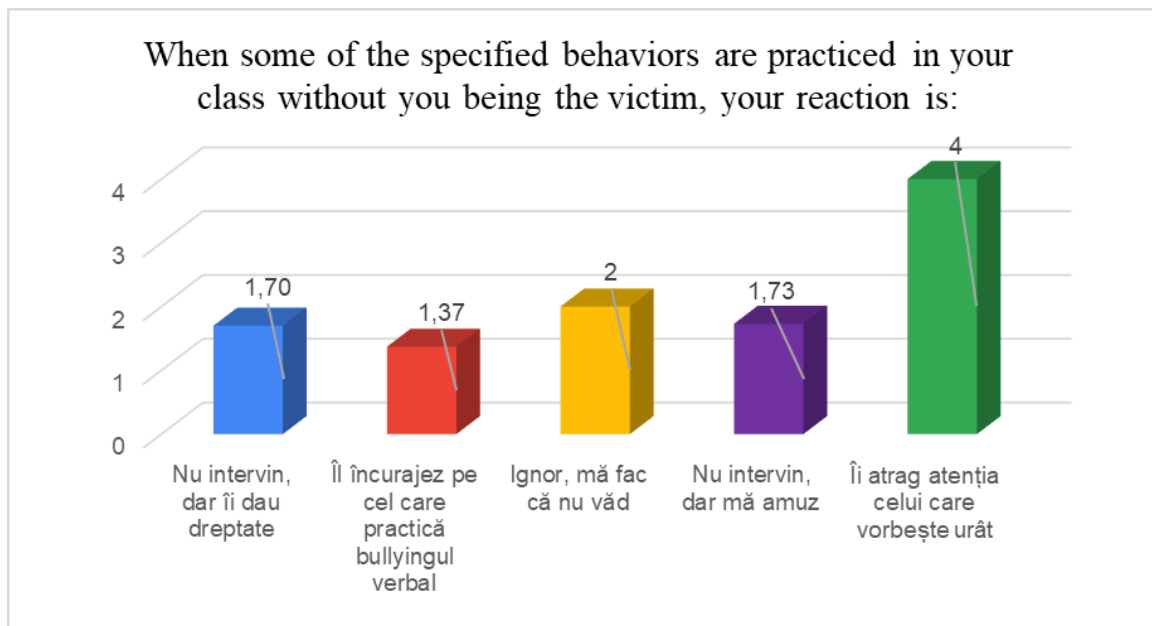


Figure 6. Students' reaction to verbal bullying behaviors. Average



According to Lee (2004), it is confirmed that verbal harassment represents 70% of bullying cases encountered and that they can have immediate and long-term effects on the individual. Like Lee, Coloroso (2008) states that verbal bullying uses strong words that can destroy the child emotionally and in the long term.

The study conducted by Talisa Winahayu titled "The Impact of Verbal Aggression on Interpersonal Intelligence of Grade 2 Students" showed that there is a difference between students who experience verbal aggression and those who do not experience verbal aggression, students who are teased by their friends they sometimes feel sad and don't want their friends to do that anymore, they feel useless and avoid making friends with other children, they are also inferior and don't have the confidence to do anything, so they have difficulty developing their potential.

According to Gaetano Dominici verbal aggression occurs when someone uses spoken language to gain power over the victim. Bullying students during class, during breaks, or during school hours. Students often engage in bullying in the form of threats, taunts, put-downs and the use of inappropriate names. Verbal aggression can occur for various reasons, in the form of body size, physique, communication skills, gender, social status. Additionally, there are students who abuse the power imbalance to the advantage of the abuser by upsetting or isolating the victim. Both victims and perpetrators can suffer the negative effects of verbal abuse. The impact on the victim can take various forms including low self-esteem, inability to interact and socialize properly, tendency to anger and mood swings. Bullying behavior can occur in schools with an unsupervised environment, weak rules and sanctions, and school members who do not care about the bullying that occurs in schools.

Although Goryl et al. (2013) found links between teachers' education level and their confidence in identifying bullying incidents, we found further evidence of a significant interaction between teachers' education level and the type of bullying behavior, as teachers' identification scores for different types of scenarios varied according to their educational level.

According to Al Buhairan et al. (2016), the analysis of students' experiences with bullying at school helped us to better understand the problem. Bullying prevention initiatives should focus on factors identified by participants as significantly encouraging bullying.

According to Muhammad Ilyas, Masyhuri, Hamidsyukrie, and Nurlaili Handayani (2023) these acts of violence can be carried out with a specific purpose or without a purpose. An example is being the center of attention to seek recognition and the desire to have power in school. If continued, bullying in schools will cause trauma, fear, anxiety, depression and even death. Verbal bullying is the type that is often done by bullies. Verbal aggression will be the start of other aggressive behaviors and may be the first step to further violence.

Conclusions

Verbal bullying is one of the most common types of aggression, which has a strong impact on schoolchildren. The causes are diverse and are not visible in the foreground, but can be observed in the long term, the students who practice this act being in the role of victim at a certain moment. The effects are long term and reflected in their personality. In order to reduce and eliminate verbal bullying, group activities such as role-playing, practicing pleasant activities, exercises in front of the mirror and establishing group rules are necessary.

Therefore, it is essential to address verbal bullying with well-thought-out strategies and ongoing interventions, involving students, teachers and parents alike. Education about empathy, effective communication and mutual respect must be integrated into the school to create a safe and



... environment for all students. Only through concerted efforts, a holistic approach, and a positive attitude can we hope to reduce the incidence of verbal bullying and promote the harmonious development of children, ensuring a future where they feel valued and respected.

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