

2020

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## Polymorphous Heterogeneity and Episodes of Violence in School Community: Educational Implications for Building a Democratic School

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**Received date:** February 27, 2020; **Accepted date:** March 12, 2020; **Published date:** March 19, 2020

**Citation:** Sofologi M, Markou E, Kougioumtzis G, Kamari A, Tsanidou A, et al. (2020) Polymorphous Heterogeneity and Episodes of Violence in School Community: Educational Implications for Building a Democratic School. Dual Diagn Open Acc Vol.5 No.1:4.

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### Abstract

The present article is an attempt to shed light on a plethora of research studies concerning bullying and acts of violence within school settings. Furthermore, a basic aim of the chapter is to present different facets of school bullying. The presentation and interpretation of different theoretical approaches and the connection with the profile of different fragile community members aims to gain an understanding of bullying and victimization. Social and cultural heterogeneity seems to reinforce intimidating forms of aggression. Furthermore, the article emphasizes on suggestions that deal with the root causes of aggression, abuse and violence to help schools prevent and deal with this serious issue and become the nurturing learning environments and democratic school that they should be.

definition and conceptual clarification of the term is considered of vital importance. A review of international literature shows that it is only in recent decades that the complex network of violent school relationships has begun to be studied in a consistent and systematic way.

The pioneer in the field of school bullying, Dan Olweus attempts to conceptually interpret the term by describing the phenomenon as follows: "a pupil (is bullied) is considered a victim of bullying when he/she is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions of one or more students who act without immediate challenge[1,2].

At the same time, Olweus notes that an action is considered to be negative when it intentionally damages or disadvantages its recipient or at least attempts to do so. Therefore, according to him, there are three important components that document the bullying phenomenon: a the deliberate intention of the perpetrator to harm the victim, the repetition of his bullying behavior and the inequality between perpetrator and victim, in terms of physical and mental strength, power in general, or even the numerical superiority of the perpetrators [1,3].

Farrington's theoretical notion is also placed in this context, stating that school bullying involves various types of assault, intends to cause pain or fear, involves a strong and a weak student, and is often repeated on the same person. Sharp et al. point out the need for abuse of power and the desire to

**Keywords:** Bullying; Brain networks; Cultural diversity; Social diversity; School community

### Introduction

In an attempt to illuminate school bullying in general and the individual forms in which it manifests itself, the precise

intimidate, according to which, bullying is a form of intentional aggressive behavior that is often persistent-sometimes for weeks, months or even years. Recipients of bullying seem to find it very difficult to defend themselves in order to cease bullying [4-6].

The systematic gradation and intensification of the phenomenon was analyzed by Roland who emphasized that school bullying takes an aggressive and sadistic form through its long and systematic nature. In particular, he defined bullying as "the long-term and systematic use of physical or psychological violence, against a person who cannot defend himself for herself" [7].

Rigby later highlighted a number of features that favor the emergence of school bullying: the perpetrator's intention to do harm, the realization of the above intention, the victim's deliberate harm, the dominant imposition of the perpetrator on the victim (under his/her authority), the common lack of justification for the act, the repetition of the behavior, and finally the satisfaction that the perpetrator may derive from the victim's injury [8].

It is clear that the school community as an environment of shaping relationships, attitudes and behaviors is striking a balance between the individual's diversity and the manipulative or dominant imposition of the strongest student member. The increasing prevalence of violent school behaviors and actions gives birth to two different groups of strong and weak educated members. This results in the creation of an unhealthy school community where there is no right to free choice, but the coercion and blackmailing of the prevailing view that the submissive members of the student community must obey. It is found that school bullying is now a dominant reality in the school context and is directly related to the perpetrator's intentional ability to impose power and authority. Through the constant observation of the school bullying's history, it seems that this is a phenomenon that, while gradually beginning to become visible in the 1970s in the school community, its study reveals ever-larger social implications as more and more perpetrators are found to belong to wider social groups with common collective characteristics but that are so different from the dominant social group of the perpetrator.

In addition, school bullying appears to contain acts or actions aimed at bullying. Consequently, school bullying can be seen as a social phenomenon that involves an unequal power relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, that is often associated to a group's hierarchy and the behaviors that develop there.

It is worth noting that the phenomena of violence occurring in the school community appear to be shaped in a social context much broader than the school itself, which nevertheless offers occasional decoupling of internal tensions and violence by members of the student community.

It is clear that the coexistence of many individuals, of varying ages and of different socioeconomic backgrounds, constitutes a complex network of relationships, the core of which is the set of personal emotional states and values that each member of the

school community has in his or her personal life. However, given the complexity of socialization and the exercise of social control, it is very difficult to identify the various primitive causes that trigger the occurrence of violence in the school environment. Each factor is influenced and differentiated by other factors, yet they all form the connective tissue of a continuum that leads to acts of violence and anger.

## Cultural Diversity and Forms of Bullying

At the macro level, the causative factor and the contamination of annoying or violent behaviors appear to be influenced by two important factors: the geographical location of a country and the prevailing socio-economic conditions. These two components are key elements in shaping power-sharing relationships within the wider social fabric and within the school community.

Similarly, at the microscopic level, the creation of bullying behaviors seems to be influenced by the school context, but also by the coexistence of specific characteristics of pupils such as: age, gender, racial origin, ethnic identity, social class, religious beliefs, family background, but also their specific educational needs. In an attempt to illuminate the multi-dimensional social phenomenon of school violence, it is found that there are two basic forms that constitute the central axis of bullying: direct and indirect school violence [9,10].

In the first case we observe obvious aggressive acts towards the victim, while the second form is expressed by social exclusion of the individual and is not always easily perceived [11,12].

Different forms and types of school bullying are observed depending on the age and gender, also on the ethnic and racial origin, or even on the body type or the possible deformities of the pupils. The main expressions of school violence and bullying can be categorized as follows:

### Physical bullying

It is one of the most common forms of school bullying and is usually chosen by boys. The perpetrator or the one imposing authority uses physical violence, such as punches, as well as abducting or even destroying personal property.

### Verbal bullying

In this form of bullying the offender repeatedly teases the victim, often by mocking or using derogatory and sarcastic comments. The phenomenon of spreading negative or false rumors is often observed.

### Indirect/social/relational bullying

In this form of school bullying, violence is expressed through the social isolation of the victim and the "estrangement" from the peer group through the manipulation of all members of the group. In particular, those in power are grouped together in a group of collective aggression, and in a coordinated manner they ignore their classmates, they make them feel invisible, they

prevent them from playing or they assign them the most unpleasant tasks in group activities with the main purpose of despising them. Indirect bullying negatively affects the victim's interpersonal relationships leading to gradual exclusion and school social "killing". It is worth noting that this form of school bullying is less explicit.

### Extortion

In this form of intimidation, the perpetrators with threats and extortion force the victims to surrender their money and their snacks.

### Cyber bullying

The offender uses electronic media, for example he composes and forwards messages to mobile phones or e-mails. This modern form of bullying has been very common in England, Canada and the USA and exhibits extensions towards the countries of Central Europe [13].

It is noted, however, that cyber bullying takes place mainly outside of school; it can also be implemented during school courses involving computer use. This modern form of bullying also includes the disclosure of personal data and photos of the victim.

### Sexual bullying

The perpetrator evokes a sense of embarrassment and shame at the victim with mischievous sketches, unethical gestures, rude "jokes", sexual commentary and questions of a similar theme. In addition, the victim may be touched at various points in spite of his/her will, in which case it is distinguished from sexual harassment by quantitative criteria.

### The racial bullying

It is a special case of intimidation, expressed physically, socially or psychologically, and aims to stigmatize the diversity of the target in terms of racial origin and religious background. Increasing migratory inflows to European Union countries, and an uneven transition to the school environment, have resulted in the targeting of pupils with different ethnic and religious minorities [9]. In addition, racist intimidation can be triggered or reinforced by the target's differences in social class and economic status, his pronunciation or simply that he is new to the neighborhood and school. Given the victim's diversity in religion, race, ethnicity, social origin, economic status, learning profile, or even sexual orientation, the internal impulse to induce intimidation is triggered. In general, any form of victimization is stigmatized. This form of intimidation is directly and indirectly expressed and may include all forms of attacks mentioned above. Children are found to adopt various negative social roles, in order to cover up their social inadequacies, such as the "bouncer" or the "jester" with the ultimate goal of exerting violence on others rather than satisfying their basic psychosocial need for interaction.

It is undoubtedly important to point out that, without proper targeted intervention, school environments will be transformed

into areas where divergent and dangerous behaviors will be triggered and increasingly reproduced. In the highly complex context of school socialization, the levels of causality are many and interdependent, creating a cycle of aggression [14].

However, forms of aggression as well as the perpetrator's mental sphere must be interpreted in a series of interactive contexts, such as the family, the school environment, the community, society as a complex socio-systemic phenomenon.

The following chapter attempts to present in detail the different social collectivities or groups whose heterogeneity and their different origins seem to reinforce and shape derogatory acts of bullying in the school context.

## School Diversity and School Bullying

The evolving multicultural structure of the school communities creates the need for mutual understanding of the different members of the educational community but also for a redefinition of applied counseling to defend social justice. The divergent and antisocial behavior of educated members of the school community can be interpreted as a reflection of the social stalemate and the deficient social organization that characterizes modern society. The organization of school life is a fundamental expression of the structure and functioning of each social organization and structure.

On the basis of the above it can be concluded that violence at school is a multi-dimensional dynamic social phenomenon that affects not only two individuals or groups of minors, but actually involves the school as a whole organism. Therefore, in a school, where there are many cases of intense violence, the students who are victimized experience feelings of insecurity and lack of satisfaction with school life [15].

One high-risk victimization group is considered to be composed by pupils who are characterized by ethnic and cultural heterogeneity. In particular, an overview of the international bibliography reveals that pupils and students from refugee families are more vulnerable to school bullying because of their nationality, race, religion, and different cultural identities [16].

It is a deliberate and unintentional (on behalf of the victim) manifestation of verbal, emotional and physical violence against a student who has been targeted on his or her ethnic origin and social class by the majority of the student community. In this case, the victim carries the charge of an unwanted and hostile collectivity, because of his identity. In the eyes of the perpetrator, he appears to be dangerous to his or her own dominant collective.

Modern research findings state that in border host countries, such as Lebanon and Jordan, parents of pupils are found to have many collective reactions to the presence of Syrian refugees in schools.

This stereotypical perception triggers an increase in the rate of school bullying and violence as if their presence could cause a decline of the quality of the provided education. At the same time, studies have suggested that many isolated incidents have been reported, such as suggestions not to sit next to them,

considering refugees as outbreaks of infection and spreading diseases.

Under the prism of exploring cultural heterogeneity and engagement of these children in the school bullying, scholars seem to point at the existence of three different forms of bullying, resulted by social and cultural diversity; a. of a different race b. of a different language c. of a different religion and clothing [17]. For example, surveys conducted in American schools show that different religion, and in particular Muslim, is an important factor in causing school violence against refugee students facing the category of "terrorists" by reflecting religious and ethnic social phobia. Regarding refugee groups in Greece, unlike the 1990s migratory stream, where the countries of origin were mainly from Eastern Europe, the refugee streams are mainly from countries the wider Middle East with an entirely different linguistic, religious and cultural identity (Arabic language, Muslims with a strong religious faith, different cultural habits, etc.). As it is a phenomenon that has only begun to be studied in Greece in recent years, the literature review reveals that limited research has been carried out on incidents of aggressive and intimidating behavior in Greek school environments and therefore we cannot draw safe conclusions.

In the diverse mosaic of pupils integrated into the education system context there are groups of under-performing children. Indeed, a review of the literature reveals that students with Learning Disabilities or Developmental Learning Disabilities are more likely to be victimized compared to standard developmental peer groups. Possibly, the social victimization of students with learning disabilities may be the result of their language difficulties.

This finding is confirmed by research by Gagliano et al. in which students with Developmental Learning Disabilities appeared to be assessed by their teachers with social withdrawal and social withdrawal from student actions compared to typical developmental peer groups of the same age. Similar research findings also lead to Singer's study showing that students with developmental learning disabilities are more likely to be bullied compared to children of similar age [18,19].

Considering the above research it seems reasonable to conclude that children with learning, physical and psychological difficulties are 2-3 times more likely to be intimidated. Over time, due to the fact that they usually lack social skills, they are more difficult to integrate into the school community and lack the protection of friends in the event of bullying. Characteristics such as stuttering or clumsiness can be an obvious "target".

At the same time, it has been found that 25% of students with formal developmental disabilities are bullied, while those with special educational needs have a higher rate of 67% and those with mild difficulties than mild ones. In one sample of adults, 59% reported being bullied at school, at least once a week, and almost all reported that the nature of bullying was related to their disability [20].

In her findings, little found that up to 94% of children with Asperger's syndrome and children with learning disabilities had experienced some form of bullying. Almost three-quarters of these children were physically intimidated and 75% were

emotionally intimidated. Correspondingly, in a study by Woods and Wolke involving 1,016 primary school students, it was found that victims of physical and social bullying were more likely to be children with behavioral problems, including social problems, hyperactivity, emotional symptoms, and peer problems in comparison with children without behavioral difficulties [21-23].

Finally, many research data support that children with developmental disorders face greater difficulty interacting with peers and experience higher rates of social exclusion than their peers with motor disabilities, sensory impairments, or dyslexia. The low acceptance they are likely to experience in their relationships can be a risk of becoming a target [24]. Victims are usually targeted because they have an element that seems to differentiate them, such as their physique or some other characteristic, without showing the slightest tolerance for the other. It is essentially a feature that is directly related to their degree of popularity. It should be noted, however, that some traits may not only be negative (obesity, malformation, etc.) but also particularly positive traits, such as exceptional beauty, may attract targeting and intimidation. However, violence and all forms of aggressive behavior have disastrous effects on the normal development of children as they are affected by their mental health through the development of psychosomatic disorders (headaches, dyspnoea, abdominal pain, sweating, etc.) and their learning performance.

School bullying is directly linked to the community around the school community, the families of students and the living environment, as well as the violence inherent practiced by and towards adults from what they experience and have learned to believe, but also from adults to weaker members of the social tissue, children. The rhetoric of the hatred that prevails in society paves the way for the rejection of the other and the lack of respect for the other. Children learn to act as they have been taught by 'empirical social reality', replicating what they experience in their daily lives [25].

The school environment with its diverse diversity, in terms of person relationships, is yet another reason for the bullying phenomenon. School heterogeneity is a dominant reality shaped and reinforced by different societal causes that are inextricably linked to school violence such as different cultural dimensions, religious beliefs, ethnic and racial backgrounds, and learning profiles.

There is no doubt that school violence is a multidimensional social phenomenon that concerns not only two individuals or groups of minors, but involves the school community as an institution. Passive attitude or avoidance of violence creates feelings of insecurity and fear in all members of the school community, information that is permanently stored in emotional memory. The need for a quick and effective response to this phenomenon is considered important as the impact of school violence has not only immediate but also long-term, as it effects on all its members involved.

At the same time, it should be noted that the vicious cycle of school violence affects not only the mental tension and insecurity that is created among its members, but also concerns educators as citizens of a society of the future, as school

subordination will be transformed into a social practice that replicates the school model as a result of the experiences containing violence during school years [26].

Everything that fosters phobic relationships, either within the school, the family and society on general, as well as individualization, personal interests, wrong behavior patterns, system value facilitating the rewarding of the strongest, tendency or need of imposing on the weak, leads to school bullying and self-regulation of children's behavior that they will be also reproduced by them as citizens [27].

In view of the above, it is found that the dynamic phenomenon of school bullying is pushing for a systemic response that should include both bullying individuals, victims, interlocutors, adults (parents, educators, mental health counselors) and community. The content of the scientific knowledge that accompanies this action can be transferred to all levels and bodies of social control so that it can be applied at an interdisciplinary level by adopting an influential role [28].

Despite the legitimate concerns raised by bullying and aggressive behavior in the school context, it is expected that social recognition of the phenomenon can serve as a springboard for the design and implementation of intervention programs, which will signal a gradual response to the intensity of the phenomenon. The educational programs must function as a protection shield for the minors and as a prevention code for the potential victimization by acting as a key element [29].

The difficulty of adaptation of children and of adolescents certainly requires a multi-layered and holistic approach. For this reason, a common and consistent strategy for deconstructing any form of divergent behavior should exist in order to systematically educate children in the educational community with the aim of gaining empathy. Role-playing is on the one hand the development and cultivation of empathy and solidarity, and on the other, the acceptance of diversity. A potential exercise activity is a particularly appealing tool for children as it is a purely experiential and interactive technique. In addition, scenario building can give shape and form to experiences to help beyond the comprehension process, enhance their self-esteem, and assimilate techniques for dealing with violence. At the same time, it fosters the development of a cooperative and friendly spirit among the students by encouraging solidarity activities within the framework of the school partners. In addition, the culture of collaborative interaction as well as resolution training is conflict promoted [30].

The open dialogue between members of the school community can build trusting relationships and the encouragement of learners to adopt socially acceptable rules, will result the new solutions for any effective conflict management.

## Conclusion

In view of the above mention statements, it is reasonable to conclude that the school community should develop pedagogical intervention methods and mechanisms. On the one hand, the protection of children's rights and, on the other,

respect for their personality and personal data. The dynamic phenomenon of school bullying is pushing for a systemic response that includes both the individuals who practice bullying and also those submitted to bullying, from different social groups who are victimized, parents, teachers, and the State itself. The creation of a modern democratic school can create and lay the foundation for hope for a better world and the prospects for structures and social life based on justice, brotherhood and equality regardless of ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds. Through this school rebirth we will expressly state that social injustice, which creates tensions, cause violence, either in the form of class society or in the form of social inequalities and leads to violent actions and conflict situations, will not have a place in the democratic school.

A single lecture of school bullying cannot bring solutions. The need for a pedagogical rearrangement of school curricula is considered important in order to effectively tackle the violence within it. In addition, the creation of a modern school must have a variety of recipients, such as teachers, pupils' parents, the school community as well as educational policy practitioners.

With a key focus on acquiring the spirit of acceptance and cooperation within a more democratic school context, the key aim should be to spread this culture to the wider social fabric in order to encourage the acceptance, solidarity and harmonious coexistence of members of a society. The democratic school, as an empowered body and institution that acts within the social realm, will be critical of violence and support freedom and equality, preaching a world where people will be sincerely and selflessly respected.

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