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## Victimization in the school environment : Results of researches realized in some regions of Slovakia

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## **Victimization in the school environment (Results of researches realized in some regions of Slovakia)**

Violence showing up among pupils is not a modern phenomenon. Many adults have experienced it in their school time as well. But nowadays violence in schools and juvenile delinquency in the European countries are increasing under the influence of considerable social changes and its manifestations are often alarming not only to conscience, humanity, but also to professionals for education participating in criminal act.

The goal of this contribution is to present the research results in the topic of victimization in elementary and high schools in the central part of Slovakia, hereby the results revealing a danger area for commissioning victimization, which subsequently defines the orientation, as well as contents, extent, methods and methodology of preventive actions.

For a relationship to be called victimization a complete asymmetry of powers is typical, when a stronger individual uses a weaker one and that way tramples on its rights. Within this meaning victimization is seen as a mischievous and often deadly illness of group democracy. Victimization is omnipresent. It starts in families among siblings, continues in the kindergarten and later in other schools, in interest groups, in professions, in partnerships, in hospitals, among occupants as well as in the relationship to seniors in the family or old people's home. Victimization is a dangerously spreading social illness in the society, whose consequence is health damage in the widest meaning of the word to individuals, groups, including family and society ever.

## 1. Victimization as addiction

Victimization can be understood as addiction, in which a bond between aggressor and victim arises. The idea of that non-free and asymmetrical relation is “hiding the own fear and at the same time using the fear of the other”. This principle thus forces to separate the pupils in many groups into “weak” and “strong”, meaning those, who react sharply and hide their fear by evoking it in others, ergo showing their virtues and that way hiding their weakness. On the other hand “weak”, meaning those, who are thus banned by their fear that they show their weakness, which they wanted to hide. Somehow mutual and surprisingly continual bond emerges between these two poles. They need each other. In advanced stages of victimization common playing and experimentation with fear is going to turn into addiction. For the aggressor manipulation, violation and breaking of the victim’s will becomes a “drug” against fear because it gives him a feeling of superordination and absolute power. From this rank he enjoys the victim’s fear; he cannot even name this pleasure, even if it starts to control him completely. He has that way the need to innovate and intensify the victim’s suffering, he needs the victim more and more and he gets addicted to it. Later it can get out of control and brutal violence will take its place. On the other hand the aggressor’s intensifying of brutality leads very often to a burst of the victim’s fragile defense against physical and psychical pain. A consequence may be an extreme form of addiction – identification with the aggressor: the victim believes the aggressor to be a friend and admires him (Kolář, 2001).

## 2. The reality of victimization in elementary and high schools shown by the research

Based on the research results<sup>18</sup> it is clear, that the existence of victimization in elementary school (ZŠ) confirmed 60,38% of the respondents; 39,62% of the respondents state that victimization is not present in the elementary school.

Students of high schools (SŠ) state by their responds 28,00% that victimization does not exist in their school. To the contrary 72,00% of the asked said that victimization is not present but they came across it in the elementary school.

The research results show that a great amount of pupils have already been a witness of victimization to a schoolmate or a pupil attending the same school, a friend or another person as well as they show that the on-the-outside affected displays of bullying are by far **more noticeable in the elementary school**.

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<sup>18</sup> More than 500 elementary school pupils of all classes and 300 high school pupils participated in this research in 2008 – 2009. The research was realized by questionnaires included in the final works of students with the field of study – social work at the Pedagogical Faculty Catholic University, which were defended within the final state exams in May 2009.

The pupils of **elementary** schools were more often witnesses of victimization of other people and this happening by physical attack (53,00%), vulgar swearwords (34,00%), ironic comments and verbal threats (11,00%), aggressive behaviour (19,00%), extortion of services (15,00%), dispensation of nonsensical orders (6,00%), sexual harassment (7,00%), extortion of thing (6,00%). (possible to choose more answers)

In **high** schools the structure of victimization forms is in smaller amount in the sphere of physical attack (32,00%), but it is more significant in the sphere of verbal hazing and ill-usage (30,00%), extortion of various services (22,00%), dispensation of nonsensical orders (10,00%).

### 3. Forms of victimization in schools

The teachers themselves, the school authorities, authorities responsible in criminal acts (courts, police, prosecutor's office) as well as parents are interested when dealing with questions of safety in schools because they are directly affected. The mass media yield news about violent acts happening in schools and cause hereby the origination of fear and puzzling in the school environment. This way usually young people get used to it and take it for granted. After that only one step is left to take violent acts, which are nearly promoted to a social norm. The expression of violence in schools is a very complex phenomenon (Ondrejko<sup>vič</sup>, 2000) and its existence and expressing are dependent on many factors, from which the most important role plays family and the socio-economical situation in which the socialization, acquiring of values, norms, behaviour patterns takes place.

Immediate violence is preceded by cruelty, non-respect towards teachers, schoolmates. Violence gains a *verbal and a nonverbal character*. Violence by pupils is committed on pupils as well as on teachers. Most frequent is physical violence which has many **shapes** (kicking, beating, jostling); but also physical violence which is often worse than physical violence.

### 4. Personal experience with violence

The **confession** that a pupil (or an adult person) was or is victimized requires a lot of inner strength and courage to face threats, fear from revealing, repeated experiencing during the investigation, feeling of shame and inability to be self-sufficient, humiliation, it being a threat to one's self-confidence a. o. That is way the answers to such a delicate reality are very valuable.

Out of all pupils who have **personal experience** with victimization, 89% stated cursing as the most frequent way of victimization, 78% pupils states fights, 67% humiliation, 56% scoffing and destruction of thing, 44% stated pushing, stumbling and taking away things, 22% pupils stated excluding from games and ignoring, 11% answered that they were forced to do thing they did not want to

or it war unpleasant to them, in the possibility “other” they stated unsuitable nicknames. Based on these findings it is possible to observe that the most frequent forms of victimization are fights, swearwords, humiliation and scoffing. However there is one important finding that there is a certain **swift in looking at the forms of victimization by those who are able to look at it from outside and those who are (were) victimized themselves. People who took part in victimization have quantitative more valuable statements in the groups humiliation, scoffing, ignoring a. o., which can be hidden before others.**

The research results further show that 87,5% respondents have not been victimized in school but 12%-15% stated that they were victimized.

When following the frequency of personal victimization it was found that 8,00% of all asked pupils stated that they were the object to a one-time victimization, 5,00% admitted repeated victimization and 2,00% pupils stated that during the past school year they were regularly one or more times weekly the object to victimization.

Pupils always trust their experience with victimization to someone. Approximately every second asked pupil (49,00%) would that kind of a situation consult with its parents. 31,00% asked would trust it to a friend, 17,00% would trust it to a teacher or educational consultant of the school, however mostly they would keep this negative experience for themselves and would not tell anyone (38,00%). Every fifth pupil would tell his sibling about the experience. Approximately 10,00% asked respondents would solve this problem by themselves convinced that it is a personal matter and it is no else's business (possible to choose more answers). A positive finding is that 90% respondents would not keep it to themselves and out of those who admitted having experienced victimization, no one stated that not telling anyone.

While examining if any steps against the aggressor have been realized, all pupils who were or are victimized and told their parents or teachers or some else, stated that it did bring a change.

To the question “how and if the aggressors were punished”, the respondents answered: 40,00% stated that they were not punished. Elimination from school got 17,00% of aggressors. Nearly 14,00% of respondents stated that the aggressors were prosecuted and nearly 30,00% stated that they were reprimanded in public in front of the whole school.

Out of all pupils who have personal experience with victimization stated that the actors of victimization were in 89% boys and in 11% girls. 44% of the victimized pupils stated that the actors were older pupils, in 33% classmates and 22% pupils said that the actors were even younger pupils.

Very surprising is the fact that victimization is done by individuals as well as whole groups. The research results show that in case of victimization the aggressor in 67% was one pupil and 33% stated that there were more actors – aggressors.

## 5. The space of realized victimization

Nearly half of the respondents met victimization in school (48%) and that either in the class (27,00%) or besides it (19,00%); a little less takes place on the street (22,00%); when surrounded by friends (6,00%); somewhere else (4,00%) or at home (1,00%). If we follow the answers of pupils who met victimization, we find that the overwhelming majority of them experienced victimization in school just before lessons 48,00% in the class and 33,00% in school outside the class.

It is hard for our conscious to admit that “I victimized”. The research results show that 95% has never victimized anyone, however 5% stated they have done it.

How they stated the way of victimizing:

- I poured water in my classmate’s neck and calumniated him;
- I made fun of him;
- My classmate had to obey me.

Many crimes which people commit in the society start in school. It is legitimately to point out the fact that breaking the school order, vulgarity of pupils, offences against teachers, “thefts” of snacks, pocket money, blackmailing classmates a. o. still stays without notice.

## 6. The risks of victimization

The victim is against the aggressor powerless. **We can find two kinds of victims:**

- **Typical victim** – a fearful, indrawn person with lacking self-confidence, unsure, sensitive to oversensitive. The most usual reaction to mobbing is crying, remission, retraction within oneself. This kind of victim sees itself as stupid, unable, someone who failed and is not able to assert. It feels helpless, lonely; it does not have friends in class.
- **Provoked victim** – by combining aggressive a anxious patterns of behaviour it evokes tension all around. Usually it is a hyperactive victim sending out negative elements.

The brutes are usually self-confident, courageous people. An exception builds passive brutes that accompany the main aggressors, but would never behave violent themselves. Some keep the side of the aggressors only because they are afraid of becoming victims themselves.

Victimizing breeds **destructive elements**. To the most serious ones belong:

- A significant group of pupils in state and non-state educational institution and instructional institutions is *scot-free physically and psychically tormented*. Their physical and psychical health is in-long-term and sometimes irretrievably damaged. In advanced stages of victimization even the life of the victim is in danger. Sometimes the aggressor tries to kill or disfigure the victim; sometimes the victim is forced to self-destruction.

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- Victimization often has the character of a group crime and it has some marks of organized crime. Scot-free violence committing and breaking the law in great amounts *damages the character of many group members*.
  - The consequence of victimization is disparagement and overlooking of legal norms, building and fixturing of antisocial attitudes and it (even in minor forms) generally leads to *readiness for a criminal track*, not only for aggressors. For victims and witnesses of victimization it all leads to mistrust towards authorities and to loss of illusions about the society which should shelter everyone experiencing any form of violence. These people learn as they are young that no one is able to secure protection to weak and powerless and it makes therefore no sense to do something against injustice.
  - Victimization completely *paralyzes the educational function of the group* and changes its influence to the destructive form, where it humiliates human dignity, does not respect basic human rights and it does not reflect pedagogical education, but antisocial training (Kolář, 2001).
  - The victimized person can build up a so called *learned helplessness* (specified in: Výrost; Slaměník; Maier a Seligman). This situation can evoke expectations that no other behaviour of the person can control further development of the situation. This perception of a pupil's (or adult's) social reality can evoke: loss of motivation (decreased initiative), loss of ability to remark new probable possibilities to solve the victimization problem, reaction to victimization a. o. Thus it blocks-up the development of a pupil's creativity.

The situation in schools in the examined area is definitely not ideal. The brutal ways of victimization do painfully touch everyone; but the problem is that we cannot see them because they happen when no educationist is present. A better chance to see that something is happening is watching the indirect high signs, manifestations of more subtle, partly tolerated violence and the hidden cry for help. Here belong things like wiggle fingers in front of the victim's face and hair-browsing, "friendly jokes" and practical jokes to the prejudice of classmates, degrading nicknames, laughter upon bad success, pupil's loneliness and its repeatedly being late. These undistinguished signs should not be underestimated and should be checked by the educationist. A very important criterion is the "other" behaviour of the pupil who these so called "fun" is practiced on.

At the beginning it is necessary to base on less remarkable signs of violence and consider if there are any important signs if victimization present like deliberateness, repeating, power inequality and self-advantage of aggression. The educationalists are able to identify high signs of victimization with help of a "map" showing outside victimization signs.

The research was directed to the ability of pupils identify signs of victimization. The respondents stated particular cognitive signs of eventual victimization as

follows: 36,89% respondents stated that the victim is coy, anxious, solitary, have no pushingness or is always sad; 23,30% out of all asked respondents stated similar signs of victimization like fearfulness, abashedness, shyness and being afraid of touching; 18,44% asked respondents said that it is difficult to tell if someone is victimized and also 14,56% respondents do not know how to uncover victimization (possible to choose more answers).

**Table 1.** Cognitive signs of victimization identified by respondents (pupils)

Cognitive signs	% out of all respondents
Being coy, anxiety, sadness, loneliness, no pushingness	41,70
Physical ill-usage, bruises	39,80
Fearfulness, abashedness, shyness, being afraid of touching	23,30
Avoiding some classmates or areas	23,30
Anger, stress, hate	20,40
Mockery, discredit	12,60
Cogitativeness, changing behaviour	7,80
Difficult to take notice	18,40
I do not know	14,60

In some researches many educationalists in elementary and high schools do not state victimization as a problem. At least not at their school, the school needs to keep its certain prestige. Those teachers and others who think the same way are usually wrong because victimization is a problem, especially in their school. An exact survey of the problem is quite difficult because first of all for victimization it is typical to be hidden. An obvious component of this social illness is the increase of the hiding system which is built in conjunction of all direct and indirect protagonists of the cruel and violent world of fear and violence. The research methods nowadays have mostly access to advanced stages of victimization of older children and youth. Actually many forms of victimization are completely unknown; they stay hidden even if their lighter forms or initial stages intervene with a great deal of school population. Germinal stages of victimization contaminate many formal groups in schools and educational institutions where the traditional way of pedagogical work is used. Out of all these lighter forms of victimization a next stage will arise which represents an important percentage of the infected groups. Victimization occurs almost everywhere and no type of school is immune against it; it occurs where we would not expect it for example in kindergartens, among first class pupils, physically handicapped pupils, in Christian schools, universities etc.



(Kolář, 2001). The educationalists get to know victimization only rarely, usually if it is expressed extremely; and the steps they take to fix it, may be wrong and in consequence little effective.

**Some mistakes that need to be eliminated when solving the problem of victimization:**

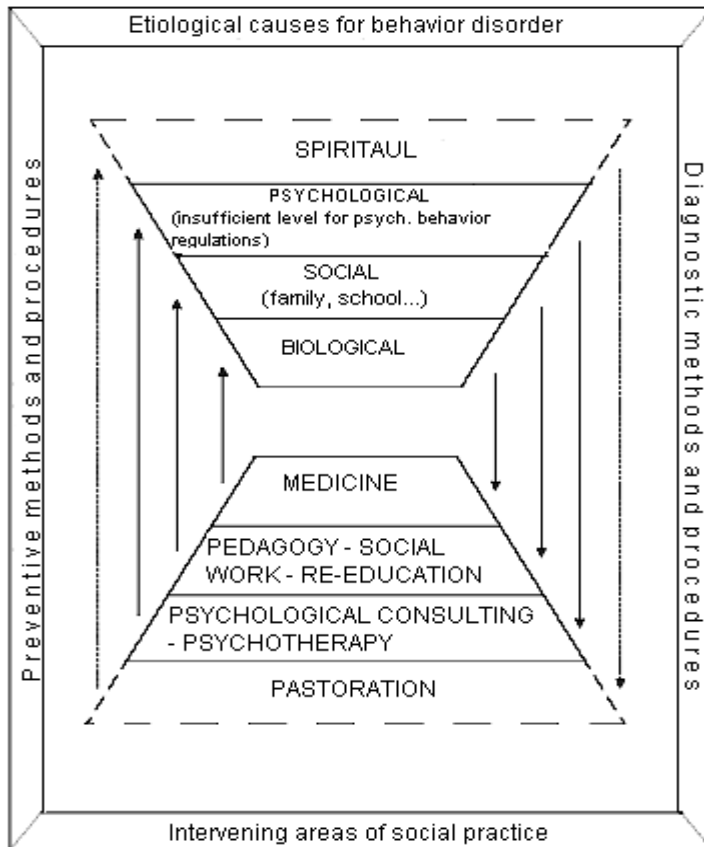
- Usually aggressors and victims are investigated together.
- False opinion evidence required by the aggressor are handled as true.
- Trauma, shame and the victim's coyness are not considered while investigating.
- The utterances of the victimized pupil and the aggressor are directly confronted.
- It sometimes happens that the victim changes classes what deepens and improves further victimization.

It is generally known that if victimization bursts out everyone will know about it, it gets on broadcast and the "destructive game" diverges in which the main goal is to find the offender. In schools usually the form teacher or the school principal becomes the "scapegoat". It is not unusual that this scapegoat is joined by the victim itself and its parents. The form teacher is blamed with the arguments that if he had talked to the pupils, nothing would have happened. The principal cannot avoid backbiting so easily because his school showed an explosion of violence among students and he was not able to avert it and that way he is incompetent. Well in good schools there is no victimization (Kolář, 2001).

"We are educated, but bad" observes M. Zelina and encourages to reevaluation of priorities which a school states as a part of its instructional-educational work. Schools are being transformed and the challenge to teach children for life resonates in our society since the national program Millennium was adopted. Its intention is to develop children's and youth's communicational, personal abilities, to solve problems creatively and critically, to work with modern informational technologies. However, it is indispensable to educate and instruct a person to be morally highly competent, able to perceive needs of the others, to know boundaries of the own freedom and the freedom of the others. This complex process helps to precede social events which are socially undesirable even pathological (see scheme No. 1).

Scheme 1

## INTERGRATOR DESIGN FOR PREVENTION OF SOCIAL PATHOLOGY



Translated from source: [http://www.crime-justice.sk/3zasadnutie\\_soubory/3a.pdf](http://www.crime-justice.sk/3zasadnutie_soubory/3a.pdf).

## Wiktymizacja w środowisku szkolnym (wyniki badań przeprowadzanych w kilku regionach Słowacji)

### Streszczenie

Niejasne i trudne do rozwiązania dla społeczeństwa są zachowania socjopatologiczne pojawiające się wśród uczniów. Artykuł prezentuje wyniki badań nad wzrostem wiktymizacji w szkołach podstawowych i średnich, na który w społeczeństwie słowackim istotny wpływ ma zachodzący proces zmian politycznych, ekonomicznych i społecznych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wiktymizacja, przypadki społeczno-patologiczne, szkoła, uczniowie, zmiana społeczna, badania.

### Summary

Undesirable to socio-pathological cases within the society, including groups of pupils, are increasing in situations of society growth, being a turning point, unclear, socially difficult. One of these changes is also the currently happening process of economical, political and social change in the Slovak society. The contribution presents some research results conducted to the problem of victimization increase in the school environment of elementary and high schools.

**Keywords:** victimization, socio-pathological cases, school, pupils, social change, research

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