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Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying: Typology of Victims and Aggressors in Slovakia

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Abstract: *Bullying is a serious sociopathological phenomenon occurring among children and youth. The primary aim of the paper was to create a typology in terms of roles in the bullying process and subsequently a typology in terms of forms of bullying (traditional bullying and cyberbullying). The research group consisted of 1423 children and adolescents (48% girls), average age 13 years. A two-step cluster analysis was performed. The results show that 70% of children and adolescents do not participate in bullying, 15% belong to the victim group, 9% belong to the victim/aggressor group, and 6% belong to the aggressor group, while there are differences in sociodemographic characteristics. Victims experienced three types of victimization – in-person and online, only in-person and only online. Up to 30% of children and adolescents have experienced some form of bullying.*

Keywords: *bullying; cyberbullying; victims; aggressors; victims/aggressors; non-participants.*

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Introduction

Bullying and cyberbullying are a societal problem that has significant impacts on all actors involved. Traditional bullying (face-to-face, in-person, offline) can be defined as repeated, intentional aggressive behavior by a group or individual against a victim who cannot defend themselves (Olweus, 1993), a significant characteristic being the power imbalance between the victim and the aggressor (perpetrator). At the theoretical level, bullying is approached differently – General Strain Theory (Agnew, 2001) considers bullying as a reaction to frustration and negative emotions, cognitive-behavioral models (Crick & Dodge, 1994, Kellij et al., 2022) explain bullying through distorted processing of social information and lack of empathy. Participant-role model explains bullying as a group process in which individuals have different roles (Salmivalli, 1999).

Cyberbullying is understood as a form of aggression in which electronic or digital media are used to repeatedly communicate hostilely with the aim of intentionally harming others (Tokunaga, 2010). Research indicates the negative consequences of bullying (Kowalski et al., 2012; Siegel et al., 2009) in both online and offline environments. The prevalence of victimization in bullying is relatively high, 10–35% (Nansel et al., 2001), and varies significantly depending on conceptualization, research strategy, as well as contextual and cultural differences.

An important research task is to understand in more detail the characteristics of victims and perpetrators with the aim of more effective preventive and intervention activities. The ideal method for this purpose is to create typologies and examine their specificities. The analysis of studies of this type showed that the creation of typologies in the field of bullying follows three lines - the first one examines the typology from the perspective of traditional bullying (usually four types are identified), the next line is the typology from the perspective of cyberbullying (in this case, three types are created, and it almost never happens that a certain group is a "pure" victim or aggressor). The last line examines the combination of traditional and online bullying. Research shows that online and offline bullying overlap (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). The article is devoted to identifying the roles of bullying and determining whether the forms of bullying overlap.

Traditional bullying typology

Traditional studies of bullying usually conceptualize actors into 4 groups: aggressors, victims, aggressor/victim and non-participants. For

example, Matias et al. (2023) analyzed 102,301 responses from Brazilian students. Overall, 75% of children did not participate in bullying, 25% did, of which 9% were victims, 21% were aggressors and 3% were victim-aggressors. Both forms of bullying were also addressed in the international study EU Kids online (2020). In all countries studied, the majority of children reported being victims rather than aggressors. The prevalence of victimization ranged from 7% (Slovakia) to 40% (Poland). In most countries, victimization was around 20%. Aggressors ranged from 3% (Slovakia) to 38% (Poland), the prevalence in the countries studied was usually between 10 and 20% (Smahel et al., 2020). A meta-analysis of 116 scientific studies on bullying from 2025 (603,231 participants) showed 25% of participants were in the role of victims, 16% in the role of aggressors, and 16% in the role of aggressor/victim (Ariani et al., 2025).

Typology of cyberbullying

In the case of cyberbullying, it is rarer for actors to belong purely to the aggressor or victim group (Aoyama et al., 2011). Schultze-Krumbholz et al. (2015) found that aggressors in cyberbullying are fewer (around 4%) than in traditional bullying, but they also commonly report experiences with cybervictimization. Perpetrators in traditional bullying are 3 times more likely to be victims themselves. The authors identified three groups for cyberbullying: 70% were non-participants, then there were victims (26%) with high levels of verbal cybervictimization and cyberbullying, and the third group was aggressors (4%) who also suffered from mild victimization. These participants confirmed high levels of cyberbullying, especially verbal attacks, threats, theft and alteration of personal data.

Traditional bullying and cyberbullying

Gini et al. (2019) studied traditional and peer associations of cyber victimization in a sample of 1,377 Italian adolescents. They identified four groups: online victims; traditional victims harassed by peers at school; dual victims who suffer both offline and online harassment; and non-victims. The cited studies support the existence of distinct profiles in relation to bullying. The results differ, probably also due to the different conceptualization of bullying and cyberbullying, the methodology used, and the scales used.

Research objectives

Based on the above, the study has three objectives: to identify bullying profiles in a sample of Slovak children and adolescents; to identify from a subset of victims the form in which they were victimized (personally - face to face, cyberbullying) and to describe in more detail the subset of cyberbullied individuals in terms of frequency, channels, feelings associated with it, and the persons to whom they confided their experiences.

Research methodology

General background of research

The paper presents findings based on representative data collected in Slovakia in June 2021. The method of stratified school class selection was used, the sample was representative in terms of gender, age and size of the region. Data collection was carried out by coordinators from the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic, through an online questionnaire during classes in schools.[1]

Sample of research

The research group consisted of 1423 children and adolescents, 48% were girls and 52% were boys. The average age was 13.4 years (SD 2.74). Overall, 74% of children and adolescents lived with both parents, 21% lived with one of their own parents. The others made up 5% (e.g. lived with grandparents, stepmother, etc.). In further analyses, only the group of adolescents living with both parents and adolescents living with only one of their own parents was compared.

Instruments and procedures

The research methods were taken from the EU Kids Online project (Holdoš et al., 2022), the paper presents the results regarding bullying, which was investigated as follows: the phenomenon of bullying was introduced to the respondents by describing bullying and its forms. Individual items were related to the frequency of such behavior, method (telephone, face to face, etc.), content of unpleasant messages, feelings after such behavior, turning to a person for help, carrying out such behavior. For the purposes of exploratory analysis of subgroups, a two-stage cluster analysis was chosen. Here is an example of the items that were selected for cluster analysis: *In the*

[1] Besides bullying, other variables were also investigated, but those are not subject to this one contribution.

past year, has anyone ever treated you in such a hurtful or nasty way? In the past year, have you ever treated someone else in a hurtful or nasty way? Participants can answer: yes, no, I don't know, Prefer not to say[2].The Log- likelihood method was used to measure the distance (Log- likelihood distance The resulting number of clusters in the model was chosen based on the BIC (Schwarz - Bayesian information criteria; Schwarz, 1978), in which the BIC, BIC Change and Ratio of BIC Change values were assessed, while the quality of the model was assessed using the Silhouette method (Silhouette measure of cohesion and separation).

Research results

Objective 1: To identify the profiles of bullying participants in a sample of Slovak children and adolescents.

The questionnaire asked whether respondents had experienced victimization or had bullied someone themselves. In the sample 1,157 respondents answered the first question, 49 chose "prefer not to answer" and 215 chose "I don't know", 2 respondents did not answer the question at all. Overall, 1,164 respondents answered the second question, 36 chose "prefer not to answer" and 218 said "I don't know", 5 respondents did not answer the question at all. Participants who answered "I don't know," "prefer not to say," or did not answer at all were not included in the analysis.

The cluster analysis showed that the four-cluster solution was the most suitable, as it achieved the lowest BIC value = 55.350, the highest BIC Change = –188.506, and the Ratio of BIC Change = 0.155 across all extracted models (N=15). The model quality was excellent, SI = 0.1. Both variables showed strong predictive values of - 1.

Individual clusters are named based on participation in bullying:

Cluster 1: Non-participants: N = 707 (70%). Respondents answered "no" to both questions, meaning they had not experienced being a victim or aggressor in the last year.

Cluster 2: victims: N = 155 (15%). Respondents had the experience of being bullied (but did not bully themselves).

Cluster 3: victims/aggressors: N = 87 (9%). Respondents both bullied and were bullied.

Cluster 4: aggressors: N = 62 (6%). Respondents in this group answered that they had behaved in a bullying manner towards someone in the last year but were not in the position of a victim.

[2] The options "*I don't know"* and "*Prefer not to say"* were used throughout the EU KIDS online research for ethical reasons.

Table 1 shows the groups identified above compared with respect to gender, age and family type. Based on the results of the chi-square test, it can be stated that there are differences with respect to gender. When examining the standardized residuals for each cell in the chi -square analysis, the results showed that more boys (13.1) than girls (-13.1) were in the aggressor group. More girls (10.5) were in the non-participant group than boys (-10.5), more girls (9.3) were in the victim group compared to boys (-9.3), and there were more boys (6.8) than girls (-6.8) in the victim/aggressor group.

The groups differed in terms of age. Post hoc tests showed that the differences between victims and all other groups, i.e. aggressors -1.87 95% CI (-2.94, -0.79), aggressors/victims 1.27 95% CI (-2.23, -0.32) and non-participants -0.72 95% CI (-1.36, -0.09). The victims were the youngest compared to the other groups. The difference was also between the non-participants and aggressors -1.14 95% CI (-2.08, -0.20), with non-participants being younger compared to aggressors. There were no significant differences in terms of family type.

Table 1 Comparison of bullying typologies in terms of demographic characteristics

		Non-participants 69.9% (N 707)	**Victims** 15.3% (N 155)	**Victims/aggressors** 8.6% (N 87)	**Aggressors** 6.1% (N 62)	p -values for group differences (ANOVA or Chi-square)
Gender	Girl	72%	17%	7%	3%	X^2 (3, N = 1011) = 16.07, p = 0.001
	Boy	68%	14%	10%	9%	
Age		13.4 ± 2.65	12.7 ± 2.79	13.9 ± 2.86	14.6 ± 2.77	*F* (3, 1011) = 8.62, p = 0.000
						post hoc – victim vs. victim/aggressor (0.003), non-participant (0.015), aggressor (0.000); non-participant vs. aggressor (0.009)
Family	With both of their own	71%	15%	12%	6%	X^2 (3, N = 969) = 3.89, p = .273
	With one of my own	68%	7%	7%	6%	

Objective 2: To identify the form of victimization

The above typology shows that 24% of children and adolescents were victimized in the last year (15% in the position of victim and 9% in the position of both victim and aggressor). The following analyses concerned the form in which they were victimized: by traditional form of bullying (face to face), or were cyberbullied, or both. Cluster analysis was again used to identify groups, but only from victims of bullying.

The cluster analysis showed that the three-cluster solution was the most suitable, as it achieved the lowest BIC value = 32.362, and the highest BIC Change = –162.916, and Ratio of BIC Change = 0.559, across all extracted models (N=15). The quality of the model was excellent, SI = 0.1. Both variables showed strong predictive values: cyberbullying (1.00), personal (traditional) bullying (1.00).

The majority of victims experienced both forms of bullying – in-person and cyberbullying (N 114, 52%), followed by a group of those who experienced only the traditional (in-person) form of bullying (N 67, 31%) and those who experienced only cyberbullying (N 39, 18%).

Table 2 shows that the identified groups do not differ in terms of gender, nor in terms of family type. They differ in terms of age, specifically personally victimized vs. both in-person and online victimized 1.36 95% CI (0.37, 2.35), only in-person victimized were the youngest. On the contrary, victimized in both ways were the oldest.

Table 2 Comparison of in-person and online victimization in terms of demographic characteristics

Identified clusters		**Online and in-person victimization** 51.8% (N 114)	**Personal victimization** 30.5% (N 67)	**Online victimization** 18% (N 39)	**p -values for group differences** (ANOVA or Chi-square)
Gender	Girl	57%	28%	16%	X^2 (2, N = 210) = 1.331, p = 0.514
	Boy	47%	33%	20%	
Age		13.6± 2.60	12.3± 2.46	13.4± 3.18	*F* (2, 217) = 5.61, *p* = 0.004 *Post hoc – personally victimized vs. in-person and online victimization:* p = 0.003
Family	With both of their own	51%	29%	20%	X^2 (2, N = 220) = 2.232, p = 0.328
	With one of my own	51%	36%	13%	

Objective 3: To describe frequency of bullying, technology used, emotional reaction and the people victims confide in about their experiences to.

Subsequently, the specifics of cyberbullying were identified, based on a group of children and adolescents who had experienced this type of victimization (N 153).

As for frequency, 18% of children and adolescents are victimized daily or almost daily in person and online, another 18% at least once a week, 9% are victimized daily/almost daily in person, 12% at least once a week. 8% are victimized online on a daily basis and 3% at least once a week. Table 3 shows the frequencies of bullying along with the significance test.

Table 3 Differences between online and offline bullies in terms of frequency

Identified clusters		**Online and in-person victimization** 51.8% (N 114)	**Personal victimization** 30.5% (N 67)	**Online victimization** 18% (N 39)	p -values for group differences (U-test)
Frequency of personal victimization	Never	0%	0%	100%	U ($N_{\text{ONLINE/IN-Person}}$ =114, $N_{\text{IN-Person}}$ =67) = 3296.5, z = -1.68, p = 0.092
	Several times	51%	60%	0%	
	At least once a month	13%	19%	0%	
	At least once a week	18%	12%	0%	
	Daily/almost daily	18%	9%	0%	
Frequency of online victimization	Never	0%	100%	0%	U ($N_{\text{ONLINE/IN-Person}}$ =114, N_{ONLINE} =39) =0, z = -9.69, p = 0.000
	Several times	56%	0%	69%	
	At least once a month	20%	0%	21%	
	At least once a week	20%	0%	3%	
	Daily/almost daily	18%	0%	8%	

The way in which cyberbullying occurs most often is through social networks – 64% of children and adolescents (N 92). This was followed by messages via mobile phone (N 52, 36%) and online game (N 51, 36%), then phone calls (N 22, 15%), through a content sharing site (N 14, 10%) and via email (9.6%). Children could be victimized through a maximum of 6 devices, but a more detailed analysis showed that they were mostly victimized through one device (56%).

The most prevalent form of cyberbullying was via sending nasty or unpleasant messages (N 112, 85 %), followed by the experience of being excluded from an activity or group on the Internet (N 63, 47%). In total, 55 (41%) of children and adolescents who were victims of bullying reported that other nasty and unpleasant things had happened to them on the Internet. Altogether, 50 (38%) of those who experienced cyberbullying had experienced threats in the online environment, 28 (21%) were forced to do something they did not want to do, and 28 (21%) reported that nasty or unpleasant messages about them were shared in the online environment in places where others could see them. In total, children could mark a maximum of 5 of the listed negative experiences they had experienced on the Internet. A more detailed analysis showed that most had two negative experiences (42%), 23% had 3 negative experiences and 22% had 1 negative experience. On average, they had 2.3 (±1.07) negative experiences.

Most adolescents confided in a friend (N 86, 58%), 47 (32%) confided in a mother or father, 24 (16%) confided in a sibling, 9 (6%) in a teacher, 7 (5%) in another adult they trust, 4 (3%) in someone whose job it is to help children (e.g. a school counselor). Up to 44 (30%) of those who experienced cyberbullying kept their experience to themselves and did not confide in anyone. In total, children could name a maximum of 5 people to whom they confided in their negative experiences online, most of whom confided in one person (43%), 16% confided in two people and 12% in three people, but 26% did not confide in anyone.

In terms of the emotions that cyberbullying evoked, it can be stated that 31% of children and adolescents were quite and very worried, 44% were somewhat worried, and 25% were not worried at all.

Discussion

The primary goal of the paper was to create a typology in terms of roles in the bullying process and subsequently a typology in terms of forms of bullying (traditional, cyberbullying).

Cluster analysis demonstrated the existence of 4 types in terms of actors of bullying – victims, aggressors, victims/aggressors and non-

participants. It is necessary to take into account that some respondents decided to choose the answer "I don't know" or "Prefer not to say". The research results support previous findings that adolescents can be grouped into four subtypes of victims of bullying (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2015; Matias et al. 2023). The results of the international EU Kids online study identified 20% of victims, while in our study it was 24% of victims, which also corresponds to the meta-analysis by Ariani et al. (2025).

The prevalence of aggressors in international studies is at the level of 16-18% (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2015), in EU Kids online (2020) 10 to 20%, the HBSC study (2020) 9-26%, the findings in the present study indicate a prevalence of approximately 15% (aggressor group, as well as the "victim-aggressor" group), which again corresponds to the meta-analysis of Ariani et al., (2025).

The prevalence of the victim/aggressor role in our study is 9%, in the meta-analysis by Ariani et al. (2025) this group is represented at 11–21%. Participants belonging to the victim/aggressor cluster according to General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1999) experience stress and helplessness in the position of victim, which can lead to aggressive reactions towards others in order to gain control or power that they previously (during victimization) lost.

In terms of demographic characteristics, the groups differed in terms of gender and age. The victim group was more likely to be girls than boys, while the aggressor group was more likely to be boys than girls. The results regarding gender differences are not entirely consistent, e.g. in the EU Kids online study (2020) no differences were found in most countries. On the other hand, in the study (Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2015) it was found that girls were more likely to be in the victim group, while boys were more likely to be perpetrators. The cited authors explain this by the fact that boys are generally more aggressive, but it may also be due to gender stereotypes. The likelihood of engaging in bullying increases with age, as has been found by several authors (e.g. Aoyama et al., 2011; Schultze-Krumbholz et al., 2015), similarly in the presented research it is noted that aggressors were on average older compared to victims and non-participants. This can be explained by the fact that younger children are bullied by older children and peers, or by the fact that they have not developed more mature ways of defending themselves against bullying behavior. Subsequently, a typology was created only from subgroups of victims (i.e. victims and victims/aggressors). The largest group consists of children and adolescents who are bullied in combination: the victimized in-person and online (52%), followed by the victimized in-person only (31%) and the victimized online only (18%). The

findings support the claim that there is often an overlap between online and offline bullying (Waasdorp & Bradshaw, 2015). Girls and boys did not differ significantly in the form of victimization. Similarly, Trajtenberg et al. (2021) found that girls were more likely to be victims of cyberbullying, while boys were more likely to be victims of traditional bullying.

It was further identified that those who were victims of only in-person victimization were on average the youngest compared to those who were victimized both in-person and online. Similarly, Trajtenberg et al. (2021) found that younger children were more likely to be traditionally bullied, while older children were more likely to be cyberbullied or were also bullied both in-person and online.

The frequency of bullying was also assessed, with 38% of those who were bullied in person and online experiencing cyberbullying at least once a week and 36% experiencing personal victimization. Of the group who were "only" bullied in person, 21% experienced it very frequently (at least once a week), and 11% of those who were "only" bullied online experienced it at least once a week. The highest proportion of frequent bullying is experienced by children and adolescents in the group who were victimized both online and in person.

A subgroup of cyberbullied individuals was also described in more detail, which made up 15% of the entire research group, was also described in more detail. More than half of the victims were cyberbullied via one device, almost a third via two devices and 10% via three devices. The most common victimization was via social networks (e.g. Facebook, Instagram), mobile messages and online games. Cyberbullying mainly took the form of sending unpleasant and/or nasty messages, which was encountered by the vast majority of cyberbullied individuals (85%). Almost half of the victims experienced exclusion from an activity or group on the Internet. Around 40% experienced threats and other nasty and unpleasant things on the Internet. Around 20% experienced pressure (they had to do something they did not want to) and unpleasant information about them was spread in the Internet environment. Similar forms of cyberbullying were also identified by Božík et al., (2022).

Conclusions

The study was aimed at creating a typology in terms of roles in the bullying process and subsequently at creating a typology in terms of forms of bullying (traditional, cyberbullying). The primary results of the research include the finding that 30% of children and adolescents participated in some role in bullying, which is a relatively high prevalence. Given that the

experience of this type of behavior has negative consequences for the psychosocial development of not only the actors, but also non-participants (witnesses), it is necessary to develop intervention and preventive efforts in the educational environment in Slovakia in order to eliminate this phenomenon.

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Statement on the Use of AI Tools | *Hereby, we declare that no artificial intelligence tools were used when writing the article.*

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