

## **BULLYING AS AN OLD-NEW PHENOMENON IN SCHOOLS – A THEORETICAL REFLECTION**

## **ŠIKANOVANIE AKO STARONOVÝ FENOMÉN V ŠKOLÁCH – TEORETICKÁ REFLEXIA**

**Miriam Niklová, Soňa Kollárová (Slovak Republic)**

### **Abstract**

Bullying is a long-standing problem in schools which adversely affects pupils' psychological and social development. This article presents a review study in which the authors analyse the results of research on bullying over the last ten years. They focus on key findings regarding the forms, mechanisms, and consequences of bullying and formulate recommendations for pedagogical practice. The paper emphasises the importance of addressing this issue given its topicality and the serious consequences that bullying has on victims, aggressors, and the entire school community. The aim is to promote a systematic and evidence-based approach to prevention and intervention in the school environment.

**Keywords:** bullying, school, prevention, intervention, psychological development, social development, review study

### **Abstrakt**

Šikanovanie je dlhodobou pretrvávajúcou problémom školského prostredia, ktorý negatívne ovplyvňuje psychický a sociálny vývoj žiakov. Príspevok predstavuje prehľadovú štúdiu, v ktorej autorky analyzujú výsledky výskumov zameraných na šikanovanie za posledných desať rokov. Zameriavajú sa na kľúčové poznatky týkajúce sa foriem, mechanizmov a dôsledkov šikanovania a zároveň formulujú odporúčania pre pedagogickú prax. Práca zdôrazňuje dôležitosť riešenia tejto problematiky vzhľadom na jej aktuálnosť a závažné následky, ktoré šikanovanie spôsobuje obetiam, agresorom a celej školskej komunite. Cieľom je podporiť systematický a dôkazmi podložený prístup k prevencii a intervencii v školskom prostredí.

**Kľúčové slová:** šikanovanie, škola, prevencia, intervencia, psychický vývoj, sociálny vývoj, prehľadová štúdia

## Introduction

Aggression has been an extremely topical social and professional issue in recent years. Statistical data show an annual increase in the number of juvenile offenders at the global level, with a growing trend also observed in individual regions of the Slovak Republic (Mihályová, 2022). Research conducted in 2022 showed that up to 45% of Slovak adolescents had experienced bullying, with more than a quarter of them becoming direct victims of physical or verbal violence, including cyberbullying. With the growing importance of digital technologies and the intensive use of social networks, bullying is gradually shifting and intensifying to the online environment, making this phenomenon even more complex and challenging to prevent and intervene in (Božík, Kopányiová & Smiková, 2022).

The authors' research findings point to a significantly worrying level of aggressive behaviour among primary and secondary school pupils. A survey conducted between October 2022 and March 2023 on a sample of 384 teachers revealed that aggressive behaviour occurs with high regularity in the school environment—it was reported weekly by 23.7% of respondents, monthly by 26%, and once a year by as many as 38.3%. Only 12% of teachers reported that they had not encountered aggressive behaviour among students (Emmerová, 2024). These results also confirm that student aggression is a relatively common phenomenon that tends to escalate into more serious forms of risk, particularly bullying and cyberbullying. According to research, these forms of behaviour occur weekly in 5.5% of cases (bullying) and in 2.9% of cases (cyberbullying) (Research Institute of Child Psychology and Pathopsychology, 2023).

According to Svoboda (2014), three basic forms of aggression can be distinguished:

- a) Individual aggression. This type manifests itself in individuals who tend to provoke, repeatedly cause conflicts, and engage in verbal or physical confrontations with other members of the group. It is a manifestation of negative attitudes and behaviour towards specific individuals. Other members of the group do not usually respond actively to this type of aggression, and its repeated occurrence leads to the emergence of a tolerated stereotype within the group.
- b) Group aggression is characterised by the entire group directing its aggressive behaviour toward one or more individuals. The victim is usually chosen based on specific, traceable reasons. This type of aggression is limited in duration (approximately three months), after which another member of the group becomes the target of the attacks.
- c) Bullying is a specific form of aggression that manifests itself in pathological behaviour by an individual or group toward one specific member of the group, often a student. The term comes from the French word *chicane*, which means malicious

harassment. A typical feature of bullying is its repetitive nature with elements of aggression, manipulation, and asymmetry of power between the bully and the victim. It is therefore a systematic, unbalanced power relationship in which the victim faces repeated attacks, insults, intimidation, blackmail, or physical and psychological pressure. Bullying can be verbal, physical, psychological, or emotional. When aggressors use electronic means of communication (e-mail, text messages, social networks) for this purpose, we refer to it as cyberbullying.

The issue of bullying has been systematically studied in Slovakia by several authors, such as Janková (2020, 2023), who analysed the attitudes of prevention coordinators and students towards bullying and cyberbullying, Pétiová (2021), who focused on the experiences of primary and secondary school students, and Holdoš, Izrael, Almašiová, and Kohútová (2022), who monitored children's experiences during the pandemic. Sejčová (2019) also pointed to the issue of violence in schools, while Pašková, Stehlíková, and Valihorová (2018) examined maladaptive behaviour among younger school-age students.

Research into bullying has a long tradition in foreign literature. Olweus (1993, 2010) is one of the pioneers of systematic research into this phenomenon and the creator of the well-known OBPP prevention programme. Espelage and Swearer (2010) emphasised the importance of the socio-ecological model, which interprets bullying as the result of the interaction of individual, peer, school, and social factors. Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, and Lattanner (2014) focused on cyberbullying and its psychological consequences, confirming a substantial overlap with traditional bullying. The longitudinal research by Ttofi and Farrington (2011) also made a significant contribution by demonstrating the effectiveness of school prevention programmes.

## **Methodology**

The review study aimed to collect and analyse relevant studies and reports focusing on bullying of children and youth in the school environment of the Slovak Republic in the period 2015–2025. The review covered scientific and professional articles, university research, and national statistical or research projects (e.g. HBSC, PISA) published in Slovak or containing Slovak data. The studies were selected based on the keywords “bullying”, “children”, “youth”, and “school”.

The following criteria were defined for inclusion in the review: (1) time criterion – publications and research from 2015–2025; (2) thematic criterion – texts had to directly address bullying, its forms, occurrence, and prevention; (3) language criterion – published in Slovak or containing a Slovak sample; (4) type criterion – quantitative, qualitative and mixed studies, expert reports and national projects were included; (5) availability – studies had to be available in digital form with a clearly defined methodology, sample and research tools;

(6) relevance and quality – texts had to provide systematic data on the research sample, methods used, main results and recommendations for practice.

The selection of studies was carried out using the Google Scholar database and the official websites of relevant institutions. Based on a systematic search, approximately 50 potential sources were identified, of which 12 key studies and reports were included in the overview after applying the above criteria.

Each source included was analysed in terms of the nature of the research sample (age, gender, type of school, region), sample size, and methods used (quantitative questionnaires, statistical analyses, qualitative interviews, and case studies). The issue of bullying was then assessed, including its various forms, frequency of occurrence, differences according to age, gender or type of school, as well as ways of dealing with situations and preventive measures. The analysis also included recommendations for practice and intervention, which made it possible to identify gaps in research and areas requiring further attention.

**Table 1 Overview of the studies analysed**

Year	Study authors	Title of the study
2018	Lucia Pašková, Jana Stehlíková, Marta Valihorová	Risky behaviour of younger school-age children from the perspective of primary school teachers
2018	HBSC Slovakia (WHO & HBSC team SR)	Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: Slovakia national report 2017/2018
2019	OECD PISA – Slovakia	PISA 2018 Results (Volume III) – What school life means for students' lives
2019	Ľuboslava Sejčová	Violence and bullying at school and its prevention
2019/2020	State School Inspectorate	Thematic report: Prevention and resolution of bullying in schools 2019/2020
2020	Mária Janková	Prevention and resolution of bullying and cyberbullying in primary and secondary schools from the perspective of prevention coordinators
2021	Marianna Pétiová	Opinions and experiences of primary and secondary school pupils with bullying and cyberbullying
2022	Juraj Holdoš, Pavel Izrael, Angela Almašiová, Katarína Kohútová	The experiences and behaviour of children and young people in Slovakia during the pandemic – Bullying and cyberbullying
2023	Mária Janková	Bullying and cyberbullying in primary and secondary schools
2023/2024	State School Inspectorate	Thematic report: Prevention and resolution of bullying in schools 2023/2024

## Results

A detailed overview of selected studies, including authors, year of research, number of respondents, description of the research tool used, and study results, is provided in Table 2.

**Table 2 Overview and focus of the studies**

Year	Authors / Institution	Research sample	Research tools	Results	Recommendations
2018	Lucia Pašková, Jana Stehlíková, Marta Valihorová, UMB	N=316	Questionnaire	Teachers most often perceived maladaptive behaviour, with boys scoring higher than girls. Significant gender differences were found in most categories of risk behaviour.	Strengthen the presence of specialists in schools (psychologist, special educator, educational counselor, teaching assistant, therapeutic educator, social educator).
2018	HBSC Slovakia (WHO & HBSC team SR)	N≈10 000 pupils (aged 11, 13, and 15)	International standardised HBSC questionnaire	8–10% of pupils reported being bullied twice or more per month; a similar proportion admitted to bullying others themselves. Higher incidence among 11-year-olds, boys more physically, girls verbally and socially. The trend has declined slightly since 2013/14.	Strengthen age-appropriate prevention programmes, focusing on younger grades; combine prevention of physical and social bullying, involve peers.
2019	Ľuboslava Sejčová	Not specified	Interviews	The author presents the results of research on violence and bullying in schools.	Implement bullying prevention directly in the school environment.
2019	OECD PISA – Slovakia	15-year old pupils (N≈6 000)	Questionnaire PISA	20% of girls and 21% of boys are bullied several times a month; a decrease compared to 2018. The most common forms of bullying are gossip, ridicule, and name-calling.	As part of school policy, work specifically on the classroom climate, strengthen the role of teachers as facilitators, and strengthen peer programmes.

2019/ 2020	State School Inspectorate	Primary and secondary schools (N not specified, nationwide collection)	Questionnaire, school reports	14.5% of pupils reported that they had been victims of bullying in the last 3 months. Most often in the classroom, in the corridors, during breaks.	Intensify supervision in the corridors, support teachers in dealing with bullying, systematic prevention.
2020	Mária Janková, CVTI SR	N=553	Questionnaire	Most schools dealt with bullying (more often primary schools than secondary schools). Differences according to school type and place of residence.	Set a fixed time in the timetable for preventive programmes; strengthen schools by providing them with a social pedagogue.
2021	Marianna Pétiová, CVTI SR	N=2 194	Questionnaire	The victims of bullying are mainly girls, grammar school pupils, and pupils from large cities. The aggressors are more often boys. Primary school pupils sought help from their parents, secondary school pupils from their friends, or did not tell anyone.	Teachers and parents should provide information about possible solutions, reject violence, and promote prevention.
2022	Juraj Holdoš, Pavel Izrael, Angela Almašiová, Katarína Kohútová, KU	N=232 (aged 6-18, 50 % boys; 103 in the clinical group)	Questionnaire (bližšie nešpecifikované)	26% of children and young people (aged 9-17) have experienced bullying. Most often face to face. 29% of victims do not tell anyone about it.	Monitor the incidence, pay attention to silent victims, and strengthen face-to-face prevention.
2023	Mária Janková, CVTI SR	N=2 397	Questionnaire	45% of pupils have not experienced bullying. The most common manifestations are vulgar insults, irony, and ridicule. The incidence is related to classroom relationships and the teacher's approach.	Cooperate with the school psychologist, monitor the climate, ensure supervision during breaks.
2023/ 2024	State School Inspectorate	Primary and secondary schools (nationwide collection)	Questionnaire	17.2% of pupils reported that they had been victims of bullying. Some pupils do not tell anyone about it.	Systematic monitoring, strengthen prevention programmes, training for teachers.

## Discussion

Research from Slovak schools confirms that bullying remains a significant problem, manifesting itself mainly in verbal attacks, irony, and ridicule. Janková (2020, 2023) found that most primary schools encountered this problem in the 2019/2020 school year. The classroom climate and teachers' attitudes play an important role in this, which corresponds to the international findings of the HBSC study also conducted on a sample of Slovak students (Inchley et al., 2020; WHO, 2022), which point to a stable incidence of traditional bullying among approximately 10-11% of pupils, while cyberbullying is on the rise. Similar findings are reported by the EU Kids Online project (Šmahel et al., 2020), which showed that approximately one in ten children has experienced cyberbullying, with prevalence varying between countries.

Slovak studies also show significant gender differences – boys are predominantly the aggressors and girls the victims, with adolescents in grammar schools and larger cities encountering bullying more frequently (Pétiová, 2021). Similarly, Pašková, Stehlíková, and Valihorová (2018) drew attention to the maladaptive behaviour of younger school-age children and emphasised the need for systematic support from professional staff in schools.

Special attention should be paid to the so-called “silent victims” who do not confide their experiences of violence to anyone. Holdoš, Izrael, Almašiová, and Kohútová (2022) found that up to 29% of bullying victims did not tell anyone about their experiences. A similar phenomenon is confirmed by foreign studies (Hinduja & Patchin, 2018), which show that the willingness to talk about bullying is closely linked to trust in adults and the existence of clear school procedures.

The differences between primary and secondary school students are apparent. Primary school students are more likely to seek support from their parents. In contrast, older secondary school students often try to deal with the situation themselves or do not confide in anyone (Pétiová, 2021). This trend is important to understand in the context of the socio-ecological model (Espelage & Swearer, 2010), which emphasises the interaction between the family, school, and the broader social environment. Slovak data show that the quality of relationships between classmates, the classroom climate, and teachers' attitudes significantly influence whether and how students deal with bullying.

Foreign meta-analyses also point to an overlap between traditional and cyberbullying, with involvement in one form increasing the likelihood of the other (Kowalski et al., 2014; Nixon, 2014). The consequences of both forms are associated with increased levels of depressive and anxiety symptoms and a decline in school performance, which Slovak schools confirm in their cases (Janková, 2020, 2023).

In terms of interventions, school-wide programmes that include rules, work on the classroom climate, and parental involvement are considered the most effective. The most frequently cited is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (Olweus & Limber, 2010), which has repeatedly demonstrated its effectiveness in reducing traditional forms of bullying. Meta-analyses (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011) show that programmes based on multi-level intervention are more effective than isolated activities, which is in line with the recommendations of Slovak authors – for example, Janková (2020, 2023), who emphasises the need for regular time for prevention and strengthening the professional team in schools, or Pašková et al. (2018), who recommend the presence of a school psychologist, special educator, and teaching assistant.

## **Conclusion**

An analysis of available Slovak empirical studies confirms that bullying and cyberbullying continue to be a current phenomenon in primary and secondary schools. Empirical findings point to a high prevalence of verbal forms of aggression (insults, irony, ridicule). However, specific risk groups have also been identified, including girls, older high school students, and respondents from urban environments. It is particularly worrying that a significant proportion of victims do not report their experiences, which reduces the possibility of early intervention and adequate support.

The determinants of bullying are multifactorial. The results emphasise the role of the classroom and school climate, the quality of peer relationships, and the pedagogical approach, with gender and developmental characteristics representing additional modifying variables. These findings are consistent with foreign literature, which interprets bullying within a socio-ecological model, and confirm the need to address the issue simultaneously at the level of the individual, peer group, school, and broader social environment.

In terms of application implications, it seems crucial to institutionalise preventive programmes directly into the educational process, ensure that schools are staffed with professionals (school psychologists, special and social educators), and systematically monitor social dynamics in school communities. Cooperation with families and counselling facilities also plays an important role, as does implementing digital prevention measures that reflect the specific characteristics of cyberspace.

A comprehensive, multi-level, and evidence-based approach to prevention and intervention is therefore a prerequisite for reducing the incidence of bullying and creating a safe school environment that supports the psychosocial development of students and minimises the risks associated with violent behaviour.

*Affiliation to the project: The contribution is the output of the KEGA project No. 021UMB-4/2025 entitled Prophylactic aspects of bullying in educational practice.*

## References

Božík, M., Kopányiová, S., & Smiková, E. (2022). *Kyberšikanovanie a jeho súvislosti v online priestore adolescentov [Cyberbullying and Its Contexts in Adolescents' Online Space]*. Bratislava: Výskumný ústav detskej psychológie a patopsychológie.

Emmerová, I. (2024). *Agresívne správanie žiakov v školskom prostredí: Prevalencia a rizikové faktory [Aggressive Behavior of Pupils in the School Environment: Prevalence and Risk Factors]*. Bratislava: Ústav pre výskum vzdelávania.

Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2010). A social-ecological model for bullying prevention and intervention. In S. R. Jimerson, S. M. Swearer, & D. L. Espelage (Eds.), *Handbook of bullying in schools: An international perspective* (pp. 61–72). New York: Routledge.

HBSC Slovakia, & World Health Organization. (2020). *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study: Slovakia national report 2017/2018*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Holdoš, J., Izrael, P., Almašiová, A., & Kohútová, K. (2022). *Prežívanie a správanie detí a mládeže na Slovensku počas pandémie – Šikanovanie a kyberšikanovanie [Experiences and Behavior of Children and Youth in Slovakia During the Pandemic – Bullying and Cyberbullying]*. Ružomberok: Katolícka univerzita.

Inchley, J., Currie, D., Budisavljevic, S., Torsheim, T., Jåstad, A., Cosma, A., & Kelly, C. (2020). *Spotlight on adolescent health and well-being: Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey in Europe and Canada*. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.

Janková, M. (2020). *Prevenencia a riešenie šikanovania a kyberšikanovania v základných a stredných školách z pohľadu koordinátorov prevencie [Prevention and Resolution of Bullying and Cyberbullying in Primary and Secondary Schools from the Perspective of Prevention Coordinators]*. Bratislava: Centrum vedecko-technických informácií SR.

Janková, M. (2023). *Šikanovanie a kyberšikanovanie v základných a stredných školách [Bullying and Cyberbullying in Primary and Secondary Schools]*. Bratislava: Centrum vedecko-technických informácií SR.

Kowalski, R. M., Giumetti, G. W., Schroeder, A. N., & Lattanner, M. R. (2014). Bullying in the

digital age: A critical review and meta-analysis of cyberbullying research among youth. *Psychological Bulletin*, 140(4), 1073–1137. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0035618>

Mihályová, E. (2022). *Mladiství páchatelia trestnej činnosti: Trendy a výzvy [Juvenile Offenders: Trends and Challenges]*. Bratislava: Kriminologický ústav.

Nixon, C. L. (2014). Current perspectives: The impact of cyberbullying on adolescent health. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*, 5, 143–158. <https://doi.org/10.2147/AHMT.S36456>

OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 Results (Volume III): What school life means for students' lives*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/acd78851-en>

Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school: What we know and what we can do*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Olweus, D., & Limber, S. P. (2010). Bullying in school: Evaluation and dissemination of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 80(1), 124–134. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01015.x>

Pašková, L., Stehlíková, J., & Valihorová, M. (2018). *Rizikové správanie žiakov mladšieho školského veku z pohľadu učiteľov primárneho vzdelávania [Risk Behavior of Younger School-Age Pupils from the Perspective of Primary Education Teachers]*. *Psychologie a její kontexty*, 9(1), 15–28. Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita.

Pétiová, M. (2021). *Názory a skúsenosti žiakov základných a stredných škôl so šikanovaním a kyberšikanovaním [Opinions and Experiences of Primary and Secondary School Pupils with Bullying and Cyberbullying]*. Bratislava: Centrum vedecko-technických informácií SR.

Sejčová, Ľ. (2019). *Násilie a šikanovanie v škole a jeho predchádzanie [Violence and Bullying in School and Its Prevention]*. In *Zborník Paedagogica*, 31, 127–146. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo UK.

Svoboda, M. (2014). *Psychológia agresie a šikanovania [Psychology of Aggression and Bullying]*. Praha: Grada.

Šmahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dědková, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020). *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries*. London: EU Kids Online.

Štátna školská inšpekcia. (2020). *Tematická správa: Prevencia a riešenie šikanovania na školách 2019/2020 [Thematic Report: Prevention and Resolution of Bullying in Schools 2019/2020]*. Bratislava: ŠŠI.

Štátna školská inšpekcia. (2024). *Tematická správa: Prevencia a riešenie šikanovania na školách 2023/2024 [Thematic Report: Prevention and Resolution of Bullying in Schools 2023/2024]*. Bratislava: ŠŠI.

2023/2024]. Bratislava: ŠŠI.

Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P. (2011). Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 7(1), 27–56. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-010-9109-1>

Výskumný ústav detskej psychológie a patopsychológie. (2023). *Správa o výskyte agresívneho správania a šikanovania v školskom prostredí [Report on the Incidence of Aggressive Behavior and Bullying in the School Environment]*. Bratislava: VÚDPaP.

World Health Organization. (2022). *Global status report on preventing violence against children*. Geneva: WHO.

prof. PhDr. Miriam Niklová, PhD.

Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy

Faculty of Pedagogy

Matej Bel University

Slovak Republic

miriam.niklova@umb.sk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0463-8322>

Mgr. Soňa Kollárová, PhD.

Department of Pedagogy and Andragogy

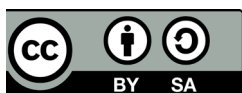
Faculty of Pedagogy

Matej Bel University

Slovak Republic

sona.kollarova@umb.sk

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3451-7334>.



This proceedings is licensed under a Creative Commons license 4.0 CC-BY-SA 4.0 – Attribution – Share Alike <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.