

## DEFINING BULLYING AND ITS BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS

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### **Abstract:**

*The term "bullying" has become prevalent in everyday language. Phrases such as "don't bully" or "this is bullying" are frequently used in casual conversation. This widespread use has both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, regular use of the term helps to reinforce its meaning, enabling people to recognize the behavior it describes. However, the frequent and casual use of the term can also diminish the severity of the behavior, making it seem commonplace or insignificant. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the precise definition of the term and the specific characteristics of the behavior it describes.*

**Keywords:** *bullying, violence, adolescents, oppression*

### **Introduction:**

In Georgia, the term "bullying" has entered public discourse over the past decade, accelerated by several tragic events. One of the most notable is the "Khorava Street case," which occurred on December 1, 2017. On that day, two teenagers were fatally assaulted by their peers, and it was later revealed that the confrontation stemmed from a bullying incident in a school restroom. Given the destructive nature of bullying, society cannot afford the luxury of gradually understanding its characteristics. Researchers, educators, parents, and society must give it the attention it urgently requires.

### **Literature Review:**

Dr. Peter Smith, Emeritus Professor at Goldsmiths University of London, highlights the significance of the book *Standing Above Bullying* (2011) by Rosemary Hayes and Carrie Herbert. The book tells the story of Zack, who was subjected to severe bullying when he moved to middle school. Initially bullied by a few boys, Zack eventually became the target of the entire school, leading to constant nightmares and a sense of hopelessness. Although Zack eventually regained his self-confidence, the book emphasizes that no child should have to endure such a painful journey (Hayes, 2011) (Smith, 2019).

There are numerous cases like Zack's, both globally and within Georgian society. These examples lead us to several conclusions:

1. Bullying can cause severe psycho-emotional trauma in adolescents.
2. The forms of bullying are diverse.
3. Victims of bullying often feel particularly vulnerable and exhausted.
4. Bullying incidents typically have a long history, with prolonged victimization leading to a physical harm or, in extreme cases, suicidal thoughts or actions.
5. Bullying, as a group phenomenon, negatively impacts not only the victim but also the overall school climate and environment.

Today, we know much more about bullying than we did a few years ago. With this knowledge, it becomes easier to prevent and manage bullying at all levels—whether at school, within families, or

among peers. Therefore, it is essential to define the term "bullying" clearly so that there is a common understanding of the behavior it describes.

**Definition of Bullying:**

Given the widespread use of the term "bullying," it is essential to rely on academic definitions to ensure a consistent understanding. While there are many definitions, certain features are consistently identified in the literature:

- a. **Systematic Nature:** Bullying is characterized by repetitive aggressive behavior that occurs over an extended period, resulting in the victim experiencing continuous oppression.
- b. **Group Phenomenon:** Unlike isolated aggressive behavior, bullying involves not only the aggressor and the victim but also other participants, such as bystanders, who may either support or ignore the behavior.
- c. **Power Imbalance:** A defining feature of bullying is the clear disparity in power between the aggressor and the victim. This imbalance makes it difficult for the victim to defend themselves.

Swedish psychologist Dan Olweus was among the first to study bullying from an academic perspective. He defined bullying based on three criteria: the behavior must be intended to harm, repeated over time, and involve a power imbalance where the victim is unable to defend themselves (Olweus, 1993).

Psychologist Peter Smith from Goldsmiths, University of London, presents several definitions of bullying formulated by authoritative organizations. For instance, the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) defines bullying as aggressive behavior among schoolchildren, usually involving a power imbalance. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) describes bullying as aggressive behavior by one or more youths against their peers, characterized by a power imbalance and repeated over time. The London Department of Education's definition also emphasizes the repetition of the behavior and the significant physical and emotional harm it causes. The European Anti-Bullying Network (EAN) takes the definition further by interpreting bullying from the victim's perspective. According to EAN, a teenager becomes a victim of bullying when the bully seeks to enhance their social status by exploiting the victim's weakness, leading to repeated abuse (Smith, 2019).

From these definitions, we can conclude that bullying is a form of aggressive behavior where there is a clear power imbalance, repeated oppression, and often, the presence of bystanders. This behavior can be classified as bullying, and the aggressor can be identified as a bully.

**Historical Context and Global Perspectives:**

These definitions are grounded in large-scale studies conducted in various countries. Scandinavian nations, particularly Norway and Sweden, are considered pioneers in bullying research, with Finland joining soon after. Since the 1980s, research on bullying has been conducted worldwide, and by the late 1990s, the United States, Europe, and the United Kingdom had devoted significant attention to studying and understanding this behavior.

In several cases, researchers' interest in bullying was sparked by tragic events. For example, in 1982, three boys aged 12-14 committed suicide in different schools in Norway after being bullied. This incident led to a nationwide anti-bullying campaign in Norway, involving all 3,550 schools (Smith, 2019).

Such tragic cases underscore the need for a coordinated effort to combat bullying, involving schools, families, researchers, governments, the media, and society. To achieve the desired results, all stakeholders must actively participate in anti-bullying campaigns.

Countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have also joined the fight against bullying, actively researching the behavior. In Japan, bullying, known as "Ijime," has been studied since the 1980s, with cross-cultural discussions among researchers from Japan, Australia, and Europe taking place in the 1990s under the auspices of UNESCO (Smith, 2019).

Bullying is a significant challenge of the 21st century, particularly within the general education system, as it violates fundamental human rights. Every child deserves a school environment free from bullying, fear, and discomfort. To address this issue, countries should share experiences and conduct large-scale anti-bullying campaigns tailored to their specific needs.

Another important consideration is the terminology used to describe bullying. In different countries, terms equivalent to "bullying" are used in the native language. The word "bullying" originates from Northern Europe, where the term "mobbing" is often used in Scandinavian countries. In Holland, "pesten" is used, while in Russia, "izdevatelstvo" means a mocking attitude. In Italy, the term is "bullismo," and in Spain, "bullying" is commonly used, as in many other countries where no native term exists. In Georgia, there is ongoing debate about whether to use the Georgian word "Chagvra" (ზღვრის - oppression) instead of "bullying."

While "oppression" carries a similar connotation, further research is needed to determine whether it encompasses all the aspects of bullying as understood by researchers. Until then, using the term "bullying" ensures a consistent understanding of the behavior. This consistency is crucial for research, as standardization requires that specific terms have the same meaning across countries.

According to Huang (2015), the study of bullying is complicated by differing interpretations of the term. To overcome this challenge, researchers suggest that surveys should include a consistent definition of bullying to yield more accurate results. Additionally, the framing of questions in research is critical. For example, instead of directly asking if someone has been a victim of bullying, it may be more effective to ask if they have felt humiliated or insulted by someone else's actions (Huang, 2015)

Another important issue is the systematic nature of bullying. Researchers have explored how often a behavior must be repeated before it can be classified as bullying. According to Kubiszewski, bullying can only be identified when the behavior is repeated multiple times (Kubiszewski, 2015).

Studies have shown that victims of bullying often suffer from depression, irritability, social relationship problems, and low self-esteem (Chang, 2013). Additionally, both bullies and victims tend to have lower academic performance and various health issues.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, secondary research reveals that bullying has a profound impact on the lives of adolescents, leaving a significant mark on their personal histories. Bullying is particularly serious because of its repetitive and group nature, which exacerbates the cruelty of the bully and complicates the victim's recovery.

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