

BULLYING PREVENTION AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract

People are different – this is our civilization blessing and tragedy at the same time. Human nature can be headstrong when resisting life-challenges and working on most complicated scientific issues. Meanwhile no universal remedy has been found against arrogance, humiliation of others known as bullying which can easily degrade down to racism and other atrocities.

Although bullying is not wide-spread in Russian universities because the policy is aimed at multi-cultural bonds of friendship and international collaboration, we have to keep prevention in mind without waiting for the problem to appear. Over 44000 students from all over Russia study in our university together with more than 4000 foreign students from more than 100 countries study in our university and the administration takes a special care about their security, comfort and adaptation to the local life here. Professors monitor their life in hostels, interview on both academic and after-class activities, organize collaboration get-togethers (theatre- and cinema-going, excursions and walks) and various performances and contests. Still bullying cannot be excluded from the list of communication risks as long as globalization and Internet influence are on and the content offered by some Internet groups and resources do not seem to be positive.

Prevention is better than cure, wise people say, so we are here to collect the data on the problem of bullying and offer our vision of troubleshooting. Bullying may start in childhood and get sometimes worse in young adulthood when the competition among youngsters may grow and get new forms. On the one hand, students are more socially mature and life-experienced, if compared with early teens and tweens, and therefore, have enough self-expression, independence, self-esteem and will-power to resist any possible mocking remarks or inappropriate sarcasm. On the other hand, their self is still vulnerable, quite maximalist and emotional to make well-balanced decisions and not flexible enough for a compromise at times. Consequently, professors should be sensitive and keep a watchful eye on the micro-climate within a student group. As a matter of fact, all professors' teamwork is vital here because collaboration involves more attention and observation towards students.

The reasons of bullying can vary from mere negative authoritarian behaviour line, possible disadvantaged background of the one who bullies to sophisticated personal revenge. The older the person is, the smarter and more complicated the scheme may become.

The victim behaviour is also explained differently: a bullied person may have already come across suchlike psychological violence in early childhood and unfortunately taken it for granted – just weep and develop wallflower reaction to the misbehavior. Professors have to be extremely careful with these students and if the private conversation does not work, report on the student's depression to his / her parents and university psychological service without delay. Conversely, other bullied students may rebel and become aggressive and rude towards peers, professors and even strangers. In this case the professor should also get into the root of the problem and be in constant contact with his / her group to prevent the situation from going downhill.

Modern-time prevention techniques are quite numerous and we are going to analyze the effectiveness of the each one.

Keywords: student, professor, bullying, young people, victim behaviour, globalization, trigger, prevention technique, modern time, university.

1 INTRODUCTION

Can you see the air? It is see-through and cannot be touched but it exists. We assume it is the same with human problems. They might be quite invisible and trifle-looking at first sight unless they hit you painfully without any warning in the broad daylight.

Talking about bullying directly is vital and should never be ignored. The world is developing and changing by leaps and bounds: it is getting more and more globalized which brings about lots of travelling, migration, freedom of word and action and Internet interaction. Collaboration of various mentalities, cultures and traditions enriches people's erudition and life-experience on the one hand, and can become a stumbling block and shake the world with absence of mutual understanding, respect and friendliness – on the other. Our civilization has breakthroughs in space and everyday technology, bio-engineering and medicine... Though as well as the Moon has its dark side, humanity continues having drawbacks: there are no visible advances of mankind in fighting down such evil character traits as arrogance, toxic attitude to people and nations, humiliation of others – bullying. Bullying is not a child-and-child problem, it may unfortunately turn up in quite adult societies: among employees, colleagues, army officers and soldiers, matrimonial alliances, etc. Psychologists claim bullying can get camouflaged well with age: it may take more sophisticated, cunning and dangerous forms. Hazards of bullying cannot be underestimated as bullying lies in the basis of racism, Nazism, extremism, terrorism. Bullying excludes tolerance, respect, collaboration. It devastates the roots of common interests, friendship bonds, basic humanity values.

To get a better grasp of the message, we have to get to the definition of this phenomenon. Bullying is an aggressive persecution of one team-member (a victim) by an individual (or a group of individuals). Bullying is usually triggered by a leader supported by accomplices [1]. Group bullying (mobbing) can be extremely dangerous as it may involve not only verbal threats and insults, but also wild physical violence. Bullying can hardly be named a conflict because in most cases the victim is not able to resist the negative he / she gets for come reasons and is usually one-sided and imbalanced. As for the conflict, it is a kind of disagreement where both sides express their opposite views. Bullying is the sign of unhealthy atmosphere in class (any social group), according to specialists, there is just one step from bullying to crimes.

Following this further, bullying can be both *verbal* or *psychological* (slander, libel, lies, mockery, gossiping, personal data distortion in front of others, isolation, etc.) and *physical* (pushing, shoving, hitting, tripping, yelling at someone, taking (and breaking) a person's things without asking, making rude gestures, etc.). Psychological bullying can easily get physical under certain circumstances and then it is a crime, as it can involve weapon. In addition, a person might become the victim of cyberbullying: trolling, posting private or false information of a victim accompanied by inappropriate comments and pictures, sending malicious or hateful messages, etc.

Bullying can occur in any environment where people are: on your way home from school or university and back, in your neighbourhood, on-line, etc. This ruining phenomenon seems to have existed as long as humanity...

University is a place where young adults meet, develop academically and socially, acquire full-scale knowledge needed for their future job. It is a meeting point of people from different cities and countries. Aside from having classes, youngsters exchange their life experience and expand it, they can boast having much more independence than high school teens. They still have maximalist views and may take emotional rather than rational decisions in general (especially junior students), most of them have a certain picture of justice as the crucial one. Their thinking is more abstract-and-symbolic, their planning and initiative skills are more developed, and they can verbally explain the logic of their actions in a better way than teens. As for influence priorities, young adults may be still – like teenagers – dependent on their peer opinion, though a smaller group of friends and individual choice matter more than in teenhood. That means students are still prone to showing off at times and demonstrating their standing out from the crowd. So some of them may be ready to go as far as looking down on some other students trying to look better in the eyes of their small-group peers (whose opinion is of importance for them).

Professors' task here is complicated and simple simultaneously: to let their students be what they are and make them realize the boundaries of their actions. "Your right to swing my arm leaves off where my right not to have my nose struck begins" – John B. Finch, the Chairman of the Prohibition National Committee (the USA) mentioned in a collection of his speeches [2]. The professors have to keep academic and social environment balanced, so that not any student might be socially neglected, nor

provoke bullying. And, according to wise people, it is not a piece of cake because the most difficult work is the work with people as long as the art of communication is not a bed of roses at all times.

2 BULLYING AS IT IS

“Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it’s about learning to dance in the rain” – Vivien Greene, the world’s foremost dolls’ house expert once said [3]. The words seem to speak on becoming more adaptive, more flexible about this or that environment. Let us evolve Ms Greene’s idea: you cannot stop all quarrels (“waiting for the storm to pass”), let us face it, but it is in our power to help our students learn to manoeuvre in the busy traffic of life (“dance in the rain”). The trick and the challenge is to have your cake and eat it too.

Balanced against, some sceptics do not take it seriously: students are grown-up enough to be influenced, they should decide for themselves. Yes, it is partly true – they should take their own independent decisions. There is one “but” about these decisions: they cannot ruin anyone’s dignity, respect or values. The professors’ mission here is uneasy but not impossible: teach the students handling people with unreasonable and difficult behaviour, standing their ground without hurting someone’s interests.

2.1. Cyberbullying as a modern challenge

As noted earlier, bullying did not appear yesterday, it has taken all the evil sides of human nature and seems to be numerous currently because information has started to travel really fast. Cyberbullying cannot be so harmless as it seems, it may even drive a vulnerable person to depression and, to make things worse, to a suicide – as a sad illustration of this can be the story of a beautiful model from Australia – Charlotte Dawson, who had been suffering from verbal abuse most of her life and bombarded with vile messages over Twitter – was trolled to suicide in 2014. Modern psychologists acknowledge the fact that cyberbullying is a new phenomenon and there are no universal remedies yet. It is the new reality we have to face and work out the ways of cyberbullying-resistance with time.

The problem is nowadays there is much negative information in mass media, Internet and on TV in open access and people are getting used to it... By all means, special services filter some of it, block dangerous and criminal sites, however we ourselves have to be able to resist this kind of information especially if you find it self-ruining. New generations are possibly more “TV-resistant”, as they were born into society already having it, so they take it for granted. Still it is also the teachers’ and professors’ task to teach them the culture of virtual (and off-line) communication, to tell constructive criticism and manipulation apart, to develop critical thinking.

2.2. Bullying reasons and targets

Speaking about bullying and its prevention, it is equally important to highlight the reasons of bullying. By the way, if a bullying leader is expelled from the class, group or establishment, it can solve the problem on the surface, locally. Globally, he / she may pursue evil-making in a different place... Because, figuratively speaking, you have got rid of symptoms, not the illness.

To get back to the point of reasons, we have to single out the usual targets of the bullying leaders:

- physically weak people or people with some disabilities;
- whiz kids (especially the ones with non-trivial thinking) or A-students;
- D-students;
- students with helicopter-parents;
- teachers’ favourites;
- poor family students (having non-modern gadgets or clothes, f.i.);
- people belonging to certain gender, ethnic or religious minorities;
- even teachers. And people of other professions.

The people bullied can belong to different age, ethnic, religious, gender, social groups but there is one common feature for all of them: extreme vulnerability and evident demonstration of their fears, offense, anger, etc. Although according to Ludmila Petranovskaya, a famous Russian psychologist and publicist, it is not the peculiarities of the victim (“a scape goat”), it is the peculiarities of the group that

should be in the focus. It is not the victim that is the one to blame, it is the deviancy, destructive line of behaviour of the bullying person or a group of people that need special attention and psycho-academic work [4]. By all means, we do not mean lack of support for the bullied, not in the least. They should be neither neglected, nor left alone with their trouble.

2.3. School and university bullying: differences and similarities

As mentioned above, bullying can be different. Bullying at school and university can look alike but have different forms and reasons. Young adults are more mature, so they can camouflage their negative better up to a certain moment. They may have other life-problems – different from schoolers' ones:

- Feeling lonely and homesick (if the student is away from his / her hometown);
- Problems of acceptance within a group (if informal leaders are negative-oriented, they frequently set some inner rules of “who is the king/queen” and “who is the ram”);
- Academic problems and crisis of job-choice (there is always a category of students choosing between professions, the ones who are in search of themselves, so to speak);
- Financial challenges (most students have to start working to cover all expenses and help their parents);
- Private life problems.

Take the case of bullying, it may regain the forms of school-time bullying:

- Emotional verbal attacks and shoving;
- Gossiping and mocking;
- Arrogant attitude, ignoring and isolation.

But may contain more sophisticated forms:

- Black PR and blackmailing;
- Fake information posting in social nets;
- Boycotting.

Prevention is better than cure, folk wisdom says. Indeed, professors are involved in a big volume of academic work; however thinking about young personality shaping is also vital.

3 RESULTS

People have always wanted to differ from other representatives of human race – stand out from the crowd, as they say. They dye their hair acid pink or emerald, tattoo and pierce their skin, wear heavy make-up and extravagant clothes, buy exclusive jewelry and cars – all this to look different and express themselves. And it is their right. Others do weird things for a more “likes” and a doubtful fame in the net – just to catch attention and be admired or... just discussed. There is a tendency nowadays to live online, to make photo- and video-reports about your life: private is no longer private, most people are boastful by nature and post quite intimate information about themselves.

So here are some of our tips on *cyberbullying prevention* for young adults (students):

- Be careful about posting whatever you want about yourself. It is not bad until the information gets into the hands of those who are not interested in your success, in your happiness. Internet remembers everything and forgets nothing, bear it in mind;
- Ignore and delete harmful messages and comments. If the negative flow continues and you feel endangered, address the social net services and the police;
- Make a joke of negative comments – laughter is often the best remedy to take the heat off. Show you are not hurt – your offense, anger are the aims of provocations and trolling. Show that destructive words never stain your personality. Though it is complicated;
- Remember that unhappy losers may hide behind online trolling. It is like telling a boxer he is a coward not in the face, but by the phone. Feel sorry for them because they can like other

people to the capacity they like themselves. And go further. You have got more important things ahead than taking incognito's rude remarks close to your heart;

- Block the people's accounts in social nets in case you get life-threatening messages and they meddle with your self-balance and you feel your self-esteem degrading;
- Surround yourself with believers, not haters – both in real and virtual life.

We have to always underline that any offensive virtual remark, comment does not have a colossal life-value, it is someone's mere opinion. Someone you can never be acquainted with, someone, who you might never come across in real life!

As for *bullying in real life*, university students should remember:

- That it is not you who is the one to blame for this, but a group of immature youngsters who know no other ways of getting rid of stress in life;
- You are not alone. There are always people around you. Good and supportive people – your other groupmates, your uni-professors, your tutor, university psychological help services. Let them know if you need advice and you will work out a plan together;
- Remember you are precious – the way you are. If someone does not like you – it is their right, it is also your right to dislike someone. Try to switch to a different topic if addressed improperly. Thank your offenders for their attention towards you. Crack a joke and get immediately busy with something. And leave;
- Develop your sense of humour to become a great interlocutor. Get yourself busy with a new interesting hobby to distract yourself from depressive and destructive ideas. Join the people of your circle of interests. When you are a group, the bullying usually stops;
- Develop your talents, remember about theatre-going and cinema. Keep in mind that life is various and multi-sided. For two negative things find two positive ones.

Professors themselves can have:

- Collaboration classes with all groupmates involved. Aside from academic classes, having ice-breaking tea-party get-togethers, walks and even trips if possible;
- Regular discussions and role-plays (about life-situations and your possible behaviour);
- Constant brainstorming with colleagues (exchanging ideas on the topic);
- Declaring friendship as a motto of the close-knit team. Supporting every student, especially introverted and silent students;
- Keeping in touch with university psychological service.

4 CONCLUSIONS

If university curriculum could boast having more subjects on human psychology, it would do good to all university inhabitants. Classes on bullying prevention would also be welcoming.

Equally important is professors' competence: knowledge about bullying is essential. Bullying should not be hushed. Bullying – if it takes place – can be overcome by united efforts of all the team. Academic involvement should not exclude supportive attitude about this relationship-based problem.

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