STUDY REGARDING THE PHENOMENON OF AGGRESSIVENESS IN SCHOOL

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Abstract

"If the sports register a public and participation, as well as a financial success, they are threatened by dangers that we must face in order to keep their reputation. These dangers are represented by insecurity, doping, and lack of ethics", warned the president of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge (2004).

The main aim of this research is to observe the manner in which the aggressiveness manifests itself in primary and middle-school, as well as to try to formulate a prevention and intervention program for this phenomenon, with regard to the pupils having this kind of problems.

The data gathered through the analysis and observation of aggressive behaviors (physical and verbal), in the case of primary and middle-school pupil, offered a basis for information on the causes and ways of manifestation of aggressiveness in school.

The aim of this instrument was to identify the frequency and order in which the pupils of different grades perceive the 6 types of aggressive behaviors, considered to be the most frequently encountered in school.

After analyzing the averages and the standard deviations on grades, I got total scores for each type of behavior, the order being from 1 to 6, in the order of the frequency of encounter, 1 representing the most encountered type of behavior, and 6, representing the least encountered type of behavior.

We can observe, on the basis of the general analysis of the grade averages for each of the 6 aggressive behaviors, that they differ, a fact confirmed also by the results of the Kruskal Wallis comparative test for each of the aggressive behaviors included in the "Inventory of the observed aggressive behaviors".

Today in the world, in spite of the well-known adverse effects regarding domestic, school, and mass-media violence, our society continues to give short answers for short terms. In order to diminish as much as we can the destructive ways appearing as a result of childhood violence, we must allocate energetic and financial resources, and time. Predictable resources are necessary, linked to the safety and variety of the environments the children live in.

Key Words: aggressiveness, school, questionnaires, prevention

Introduction

"If the sports register a public and participation, as well as a financial success, they are threatened by dangers that we must face in order to keep their reputation. These dangers are represented by insecurity, doping, and lack of ethics", warned the president of the International Olympic Committee Jacques Rogge (2004). Sports offer the young people the possibility to relax, to solve their emotional tensions, and to take them away from aggression. More, the success achieved in sports strengthens the self-confidence; it favors the social contacts and group cohesion. Sport cannot be considered a "fix-shop" for social acts, but it does have the necessary instruments for fighting violence and for social integration.

Using their leisure time in disorganized environments and lesser structures makes the young people to accept violence and lack of fair play, intolerance, aggression, which they exert in certain contexts up to an extreme level. The activity, often voluntary, conducted for youths in sportive clubs and associations, integrates them and makes them a part of a community of rules and values, thus being able to exert stabilizing influences, contributing to maintaining and developing the features of the young people's personalities.

The contribution that the sports bring regarding the construction and promoting a civilized society, trespasses the limitations imposed by the areas marked by wars and crises. It is well-known the fact that even the best democracies are not guarded against inner conflicts and acts of violence. (Raţă G., Dobrescu T., 2006)

The sport, an important field of education for fair play, can be a "school of life", developing skills and values such as: self-confidence, trust in others, honesty, self-respect, tolerance, team work, discipline, trust. The fair play, as a fundamental sportive and moral principle, is threatened today, not only in sports, but also in other fields of life. At the same time, the rules of fair play offer the opportunity to be a guide for us in this extremely competitive world. (Dobrescu T., Raţă G., 2006)

What are the chances of fair play to impose itself in today's society, in which obtaining advantages and rule-breaking are more and more common? In a society that is under threat of becoming orientated exclusively towards success, the temptation to break the rules of the game, to focus only on your own advantages, is great. The British author George Orwell wrote in 1948: "Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. (Quoted by Ţopescu, 2003) It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules." A humble disciple of this principle, Cristian Ţopescu was wondering whether "in this world, in which the violence and vulgarity become everyday an alarming

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virtue, both inside the sports arenas, and outside them, isn't it a little bit cynical to talk about fair play?" (2003).

But that makes even more of a problem for fair play, when this "irregular" game from the court is continued outside of it, in the stands, or the streets. Today we meet more often than not acts of violence performed not by the athletes involved in the game, but by their moral and financial supporters, by the clubs' staff, the specialists and investors, supporters and fans. (Dobrescu T., Raţă B., 2006)

Material and method

The main aim of this research is to observe the manner in which the aggressiveness manifests itself in primary and middle-school, as well as to try to formulate a prevention and intervention program for this phenomenon, with regard to the pupils having this kind of problems.

The data gathered through the analysis and observation of aggressive behaviors (physical and verbal), in the case of primary and middle-school pupil, offered a basis for information on the causes and ways of manifestation of aggressiveness in school.

Considering the detrimental character of the aggressive behavior that obviously perturbs the social activity, and considering the aggressive manifestations observed in school, we set to:

➢ observe the ways in which aggressiveness is perceived by pupils of different grades and ages through essays and concrete examples of aggressive behavior encountered by them in school;

➢ identify the most frequently encountered aggressive behaviors in pupils of different grades and ages, in school;

➢ identifying, based on results, of the real causes of aggressive behavior,

➢ elaborating a prevention and intervention program regarding the school-encountered aggressiveness.

➢ including the aggressive pupils in a counseling program.

Based on the emphasized premises, we elaborated the research hypothesis, stating that the identification and the assessment of aggressive behaviors - considered being most frequent in a middle-school institution, constitutes a starting point for a improving intervention.

The group of subjects comprised in the research comprises primary school (303) and middle-school (378) pupils, from the No. 10 School, of Bacau. The group of subjects consisted of 681 pupils. The research conducted on the subjects was according to every ethical standard. The study was conducted over the course of three weeks (October 17 - November 9 2010).

The *research methods* I used were: the documentation method, the observation, the inquiry, the statistical-mathematical method and the graphical representation method.

Based on certain questionnaires given to the subjects of this research, we created an inventory of aggressive behaviors. Their assessment was done on the basis of the 6 stages Lickert scale. The pupils' task was to give a mark from "1" to "6" to each behavior, according to the frequency this behavior was observed in their school, "1" meaning very rarely observed, and "6" very often/frequently observed.

The aim of this instrument was to identify the frequency and order in which the pupils of different grades perceive the 6 types of aggressive behaviors, considered to be the most frequently encountered in school.

I have selected the most suitable tasks for the level of development of the studied children, in order to observe in optimal conditions the aggressive behavior manifested in primary and middle-school pupils.

The questionnaires comprised items such as "What do you understand by aggressiveness?" What is aggressiveness? How can we define it? "Give examples of words that refer to aggressiveness", "What kind of aggressive behaviors do you know?", "What kind of aggressive acts do you know?"

Out of all of the aggressive behaviors offered as examples by the pupils, we selected 6 - the most frequent aggressive behaviors observed in the school, according to the criterion of the frequency, or observation by the pupils inside their school.

Results of the research and discussions

Starting from the negative effects the aggressiveness has in the school environment, visibly perturbing the instructive-educational process, but also the relations between pupils and teachers, and taking into consideration the intervention capacity of the teachers, and especially school counselors (by implementing certain intervention and prevention programs in primary and middle-school), I tried to observe the ways in which the aggressiveness manifests itself in school, by collecting information from the pupils.

This study tries to identify the forms of manifestation of the aggressiveness in school, its gravity, its frequency, and also to identify the differences between the manner of manifestation of aggressiveness - physical and verbal - among the studied pupils. The investigation of aggressive behavior made possible the observation of differences in manifesting aggressiveness according to social class. All the collected data constituted an obvious support for finding certain programs of prevention and primary, secondary and tertiary intervention in the case of school aggressiveness.

In a first stage, we started from the definition of "aggressiveness" given by each individual pupil, as well as each of them offering concrete examples of aggressive behavior and

manifestations they observed in school, and which type of behavior they encountered more often. The pupils gave examples of concrete situations in which they have observed aggressive behaviors, and named them. At the same time, they estimated the frequency in which each type of observed behavior appears, on a five steps Lickert scale, "1" meaning rarely encountered, and "5" frequently encountered.

As a result of the definitions and the essays given by the pupils, I selected and identified the following ten types of behavior, encountered by the primary and middle-school pupils:

Table 1: Aggressive behaviors observed by the pupils inside the school:

Observed behaviors	Average	Standard deviation
Are pushing each other	4.75	0.05
Are fighting each other	3.70	0.95
Are cursing each other	2.50	1.73
Tripping each other	1.00	2.00
They steal	1.00	0.81
Are arguing with each other	3.00	0.81
They spit	0.50	0.57
They don't obey the rules	1.00	2.00
They threaten	2.70	2.21
They destroy objects	0.50	1.00

Through a statistical analysis of this data collected from each grade, I could note six types of aggressive behavior observed by the pupils in school, marked according to the frequency they encountered them.

The data I obtained is presented in the table below, in which the types of aggressive behavior observed in pupils appear in a hierarchical order:

Table 2: Hierarchy of aggressive behaviors, in pupils of different grades:

Number	Aggressive Behavior	Observation frequency	Hierarchy
1	Are pushing each other	4.75	I
2	Are fighting each other	3.75	II.
3	Are arguing with each other	3	III.
4	They use vulgarities (threats, insults)	2.75	IV.
5	Are cursing each other	2.50	V
6	They destroy objects	2	VI

The results we obtained were analyzed both globally, at school level, represented by the group of subjects, representative for the eight grades we comprised in our study (681 pupils), and according to grades (primary and middle-school level).

Based on the assessments the pupils made regarding the aggressive behaviors in school, I chose them according to the highest frequency they appear, calculating the averages and the standard deviations appearing in these manifestations. I must mention that the hierarchy was done from 1 to 6, from the most frequent behavior observed in school, to the least frequent.

In order to observe how much the aggressive behavior observed in school affects the pupils, I made a statistical analysis, assessing the frequency of observation of these behaviors, on a Lickert scale, from 1 (representing the least encountered type of behavior), to 6, representing the most encountered type of behavior.

After analyzing the averages and the standard deviations on grades, I got total scores for each type of behavior, the order being from 1 to 6, in the order of the frequency of encounter, 1 representing the most encountered type of behavior, and 6, representing the least encountered type of behavior.

Table 3: Statistical start indexes for aggressive behaviors; comparison of the scores for the 6 aggressive behaviors observed in the school:

Aggressive manifestation	Average	Standard deviation	Value of χ^2	Significance of the difference to the theoretical average (p)
1 pushing	7.63	1.96	1.67	P < 0,008
2 curses	7.53	2.84	2.11	P < 0,00
3 arguing	6.96	2.46	1.46	P < 0,02
4 fighting	6.57	2.33	1.35	P < 0,05
5 threats	6.33	2.27	0.92	P < 0,36
6 object destruction	3.87	2.56	1.52	P < 0,01
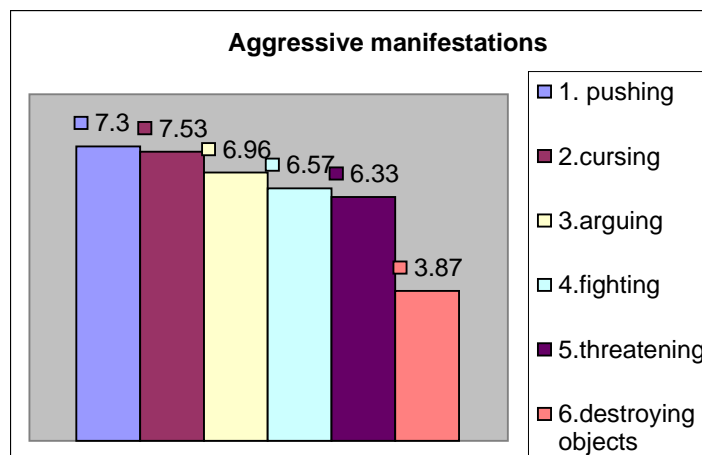
Fig. 1. Graphical description of aggressive behaviors that can be observed in school

From this data, we can see that the pupils consider "*pushing*" as being the most common form of manifestation of aggressiveness, this could have being considered a masked form of physical aggressiveness.

As a consequence, the theoretical average is 6, so we used the standard deviations, the observed averages, for each of the aggressive behaviors. The highest the observed average is for a behavior, the more that particular behavior is manifested more frequently in the school environment. We can see the distribution of the averages in comparison to the theoretical average, for the frequency of the aggressive behaviors manifested in the school. All these deviations of the observed averages from the theoretical average are statistically significant.

We can see that "*pushing*", "*insults*" and "*arguing*" are the most frequent aggressive behaviors. The verbal aggressiveness represents a way of channeling the physical aggressiveness; it is used by the pupils more frequently than the physical one, maybe due also to the fact that it does not attract an immediate sanction. "*Pushing*" represents a masked form of physical aggressiveness. "*The destruction of objects*" appears less frequently, maybe because of the fear of sanctions and punishments that can be applied in schools to the pupils that destroy the school property.

The data were analyzed through the SPSS 12 software.

There are significant differences between the primary school and the middle-school grades pupils, regarding the perception of aggressiveness, so during the collection of data, we compared the frequency of appearance of aggressive behaviors between grades.

In order to see how the pupils perceive the six aggressive behaviors (the most frequently encountered in the school) as being representative (on a scale of "6" - representing the most encountered type of behavior, to "1" - representing the least encountered type of behavior), we analyzed the averages of the scores obtained by grade, in the "Inventory of Aggressive Behaviors". The results can be seen in the table below:

Table 4. Comparison of the scores regarding the aggressive behaviors observed in the school:

Behaviors	Degrees of freedom	x^2	Significance thresholds
Pushing	3	15.5	0.00
Fighting	3	11.2	0.01
Arguing	3	6.6	0.08
Cursing	3	26.4	0.00
Threatening	3	15.8	0.00
Destroying objects	3	22	0.00

We can observe, on the basis of the general analysis of the grade averages for each of the 6 aggressive behaviors, that they differ, a fact confirmed also by the results of the Kruskal Wallis comparative test for each of the aggressive behaviors included in the "Inventory of the observed aggressive behaviors".

So the obtained results confirm the hypothesis stating that on the basis of an inquiry, we can make an assessment of the aggressive behaviors considered to be the most frequently encountered in the school. Thus, for each of the 5 behaviors (*pushing, fighting, cursing, threatening, destroying objects*) we got significant statistical thresholds ($p < 0.05$, respectively $p < 0.01$), while for the behavior "*arguing*" we got an x^2 calculated by 6.6, to which there is a corresponding threshold of $0.08 > 0.05$, the differences of assessment regarding this behavior not being confirmed. In conclusion, in regards to this aggressive verbal behavior ("arguing"), it was assessed approximately the same by all of grades we comprised in the study, not being any significant differences in assessing this type of behavior between the grades we studied.

With reference to the risk factors from the school environment, in this study the most predictable in determining the aggressive behaviors were the ones linked to scholarly failure, or poor performances. Also, other risk factors regarding the pupil's aggressiveness could be taken into consideration. Among these, one of the most important are the normative beliefs regarding aggressiveness.

Other school factors correlated with the aggressive behavior refer to the lack of involvement in school activities, the absence of clear rules and school policies regarding the pupils' behavior, as well as poor attention given to the individual differences inside the school. For example, when the educators fail to establish certain clear rules, or when they establish inconsistent sanctions for the ones that break them, the pupils cease to follow the

school rules, or they learn to manipulate them in their own interest, but non-adaptively (Mayer, 1995 quoted by A. Roşan 2006).

The zero tolerance policies and an authoritarian style of discipline applied to the school conflicts tend to exacerbate these dysfunctions.

When the school curricula and the ways of performing the instruction are not adapted to the level of skills of the pupils, they become frustrated or bored, manifesting a total lack of attachment towards their own school. (Scott, 2001, quoted by A. Roşan 2006) This relation is obvious in the case of many pupils who are emotionally and behaviorally troubled, and who present instrumental difficulties in different disciplines.

The relation between behavioral problems and instrumental difficulties are also because of the different instructional volume, offered in time by the teachers to the pupils with behavioral problems, who are aggressive with their non-problematic colleagues.

The teachers have the tendency to interact less with the destructive pupils. In a study on the children risking to adopt an antisocial behavior, Wehby (1993 quoted by Roşan, 2006) found that the teachers use twice the number of negative commands for them, in comparison with the pupils with no problems. The teachers have the tendency to exclude the pupils with behavioral problems from their class, on the basis of certain disciplinary measures (Skiba and Peterson, 2000 quoted by Roşan, 2006).

The types of social interactions that appear in classes with pupils presenting behavioral troubles, most of the times start with the direct demand of the teacher to the pupil to "do something", and the pupil must obey. Also in these classes we could observe the almost total lack of positive reactions from the teachers, even when the pupils who previously created problems now behave adequately.

Other factors that must be taken into consideration are the deficient relationships between

the pupils, the hostile climate in the classroom, the lack of close relations, and of an inter-individual perception.

The longitudinal studies on the pupils with behavioral problems proved that more than half of the pupils with average problems in the primary and middle-school present a high risk of development problems during adolescence and adulthood (Farmer et al., 2001, quoted by Roşan 2006).

These factors, and not only them, must be strictly taken into consideration when we are dealing with intervention in primary and middle-school for diminishing or preventing aggressive behaviors.

Conclusions:

Today in the world, in spite of the well-known adverse effects regarding domestic, school, and mass-media violence, our society continues to give short answers for short terms. In order to diminish as much as we can the destructive ways appearing as a result of childhood violence, we must allocate energetic and financial resources, and time. Predictable resources are necessary, linked to the safety and variety of the environments the children live in.

If we want violence to disappear from schools, we must be pro-active in our decisions and to analyze the origins of the problem. Violence can be prevented in schools, when children are not predisposed to numerous risk factors. The research indicates that the antisocial behavior models that appear early on in children constitute an enormous risk factor with long term negative effects.

We need valid instruments to identify the children presenting a high risk at a young age, followed by a reorientation from these destructive paths, without ignoring the problem in the hope that it will solve itself, because it surely will not. The incidence will be even higher in the absence of proper interventions and supports.

We must have in mind the fact that before developing more effective and accessible intervention models, we must focus on prevention.

The ones studying the aggressive behavior in schools, as well as the decision makers must understand the indestructible relation between early life experiences and physical, emotional, social and cognitive health.

Changes at a cultural level can only produce by furnishing rich experiences at a cognitive, emotional, social and physical level. Before society would offer these experiences, the child's education must come first. The education of the teachers and parents must be continued by a development in the research on the impact of positive experiences on child development. All of these must be used at the same time with the implementation and testing certain programs that would enrich the life of the child and his/her family, as well as certain programs of early identification and pro-active intervention.

Starting from the harmful consequences of aggressive behavior observed in the school environment more and more, and from the need to intervene where this problem proves to be harder and harder to master, perturbing even the adequate performance of the instructive-educational act and the general climate of the school, an intervention regarding this phenomenon must be made.

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