

Interfaculty Chair and Department of Public Health, Medical University of Lublin

MACIEJ LATALSKI, EDYTA OPALIŃSKA,
HANNA SKÓRZYŃSKA

*Aggression and arrogance phenomenon among school youth
as a health risk factor for teachers*

Recently more and more has been written and spoken about the problem of aggression and violence. It is observed that the young's aggression has become an increasing problem especially at schools (9). It is what makes youth picture rather unpleasant and worrying for adult population. However, adults try to find some reasons explaining this kind of behaviour: the young live in difficult times nowadays, they experience existential or even philosophical problems, they have to deal with unemployment, lack of prospects for living, they have to fight the willingness of being materially independent quickly.

Psychology faces the necessity of explaining all these facts. We are aware of the complicated nature of the issue. It requires a profound analysis which will include both the specific nature of adolescence and influence of complex social and political changes in the Polish system (8).

We are living in the reality which is dominated by negative feelings. Nowadays the community treats violence as something normal, common and even necessary. This is so, because aggression and violence are the components of human nature, which have a great power of expansion (12).

According to the psychological definition, aggression is a violent, destructive behaviour, that causes somebody's suffering or destroys something. Elliott Aronson (4) regards aggression as activity that causes damage or offence. There are some kinds of violence: the physical one – towards people or material things (also called vandalism) and the mental one, which includes: verbal aggression – offensive to someone, insulting, disgracing; threats – putting pressure on somebody, blackmailing someone; discrimination – degrading someone or showing someone's superiority (9).

Aggressive behaviour of school youth influences in a negative way the relationship between teachers and school children. Since it brings about health risk for working teachers, it seems important to collect their opinion about aggression and violence phenomenon among school youth.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of the study was to estimate the occurrence of aggressive behaviour towards teachers among school youth.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Research was carried out among 156 teachers: 99 women (63.5%) and 57 men (36.5%), aged 23-60 years, mean age was 40 ± 8.9 years). All data were collected on the basis of a questionnaire including 20 questions concerning kinds and frequency of arrogance and aggressive behaviour among school youth and assessing the stress level among teachers working in different types of schools and its influence on their health status.

The studied group was divided into several age groups: 24 teachers aged 21-30 years (15.4%), 53 ones aged 31-40 years (34%), 63 ones aged 41-50 years (40.4%) and 16 ones aged 51-60 (10.2%). The employment at school ranged between 1 and 35 years, mean 14 ± 9.2 years. 67 teachers (43%) worked from 1 to 10 years at school, 54 (34.6%) – from 11 to 20 years, 27 respondents (17.3%) were employed from 21 to 30 years and at least 8 teachers (5.1%) – over 30 years. Of all the studied participants 60 (38.5%) lectured at secondary schools, 42 (27%) – at vocational, 68 (43.6%) – at technical and 4 (2.6%) – in the last classes of primary schools. 18 people (11.5%) were employed both at technical and vocational schools. All the teachers worked at urban schools. The majority of the investigated subjects – 88 (56.4%) – had higher pedagogical education, 35 (22.4%) – other higher education and 33 (21.2%) completed only secondary education.

Statistical analysis was based on the programme STATISTICA 5.0. To compare the difference in the ranks of scores between the studied groups, non-parametric χ^2 test at the significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ was used.

RESULTS

In our study 44.2% of the investigated subjects observed arrogant behaviour among school youth rarely, 28.2% – sometimes, 22.4% – often and 5.1% – never met such sort of behaviour at school (Fig. 1). Older respondents, aged 41-50 years noticed arrogance more often (14.1%) than the younger ones, $p=0.0000$. It was mainly the young of vocational schools that showed aggressive attitudes towards teachers (15.4%), $p=0.01$.

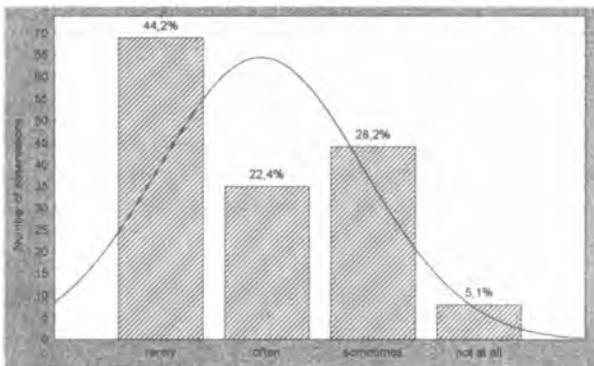


Fig. 1. Frequency of aggressive behaviour among school youth

Arrogant behaviour included first of all verbal aggression such as: arrogant expressions (57%), disrespectful attitude towards teachers (52.6%), refusal to follow teacher's instructions (41%), speaking

out against teacher (39.7%) and putting him down (14.7%) – Table 1. Such types of attitudes were noticed at vocational, technical, but also at secondary schools (with no statistical significance).

Table 1. Aggressive behaviour of school youth

| Aggressive behaviour of school youth | Percent* |
|--|----------|
| Verbal aggressive expressions | 57% |
| Disrespectful attitude towards a teacher | 52.6% |
| Refusal to follow teacher's instructions | 41% |
| Speaking out against a teacher | 39.7% |
| Putting a teacher down | 14.7% |
| Threat directed personally against a teacher | 24.4% |
| Threat directed against teacher's possessions | 14.7% |
| Blackmail | 4.5% |
| Threat directed against teacher's family members | 2.6% |

*The respondents' answers do not constitute 100% due to multiple-choice answers.

Teachers' reactions were different: commenting youngsters' incorrect behaviour in the presence of all class or in private (59%), informing parents (53.8%), throwing youth out of the classroom (28.8%) and rarely – informing headmaster (16%) or writing teacher's comments in the exercise-book (13.5%).

Threats were more seldom indicated by teachers: more than half of respondents (54.5%) did not observe them. Among threats youngsters most often used those directed personally against a teacher (24.4%) or his possessions (14.7%), very seldom – blackmail (4.5%) and attempts at threatening teachers' family members (2.6%) – Table 1. Youngsters used either indirect way of threatening (40.4%) or an anonymous one (10.9%). Mainly at vocational schools teachers (10.9%) met threats directed against themselves ($p=0.004$) and against their possessions (8.3%); ($p=0.0005$). At secondary schools lecturers did not observe them at all, $p=0.00004$.

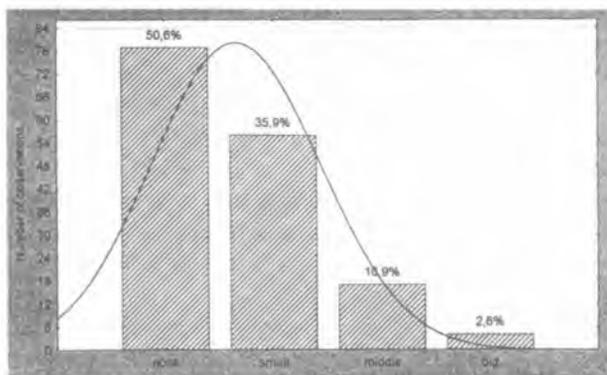


Fig. 2. Level of distress at school in teacher's opinions

Teachers felt different level of distress at school. More than half (50.6%) did not complain of it. About one third of the investigated (35.9%) defined the scale of that phenomenon as small, 10.9% – as medium and only 2.6% – as big (Fig. 2). Most of the teachers (19.9%) who suffered distress belonged to an older group of 41-50 years old teachers. Younger lecturers aged 31-40 years (23.1%) defined their life at school as free of distress, $p=0.009$. Most teachers (26.9%), who did not encounter risk at school, worked at secondary schools, the smallest group (5.8%) lectured at vocational schools, $p=0.00002$.

Most of the respondents observed arrogance and aggression phenomenon to increase during the last years. Only 7.7% did not think so and 11.5% of all did not express their opinion. However, only 12.2% regarded their job as permanently stressful, 50.6% – sometimes and 26.3% - rarely. Only 10.9% did not define their profession as stressful. There was a correlation between gender and stress level at work (Fig. 3). Among women this correlation was stronger: women more often named their job as sometimes stressful (38.5% of all teachers) or as associated with permanent stress (7.7% of all teachers). Most male teachers very seldom felt stress (12.2% of all teachers) or did not observe it at all in their school life (7.7% of all teachers), $p=0.001$. Mainly teachers of secondary schools (20.5%, $p=0.007$) and technical schools (20.5%, $p=0.03$) considered their job to be sometimes stressful.

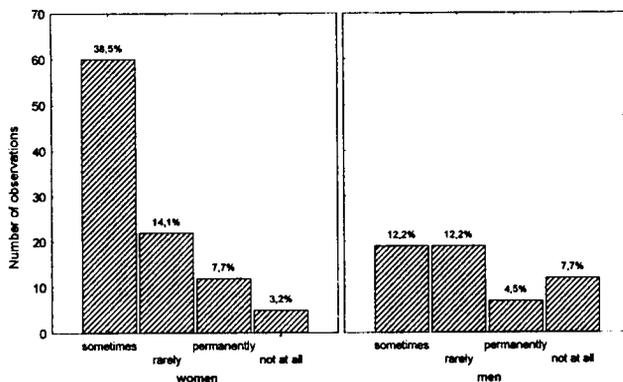


Fig. 3. Correlation between teacher's gender and stress at school

A great part of the studied participants (66.7%) estimated youth negative behaviour to be a health risk factor for them. Of all participants especially women (47.4%, $p=0.004$) and older teachers aged 41-50 years (29.4% of all investigated, $p=0.03$) were of this opinion. Most often they suffered from intensifying nervous stress (65.4%), headache (28.8%), aversion to work (24.5%). Rarely there were concentration disorders, apathy and sleeping problems (Table 2). It was mainly women who complained of increasing nervous tension (46.8% of all teachers, $p=0.003$) and of headache (23% of all the studied subjects, $p=0.006$).

The majority of teachers (62.2%) did not associate stress at school with chronic diseases they suffered from, however 17.3% of the studied subjects tried to find out the correlation. One fifth (20.5%) did not express their opinion about it. Most respondents who associated the stress level with their chronic diseases belonged to an older group of 41-50 years old teachers (10.3%, $p=0.007$). Teachers who did not see such a correlation lectured at secondary schools (29.5%, $p=0.01$).

Table 2. Psychosomatic disorders in teachers as an effect of stress at school

| Psychosomatic disorders | Percent* |
|----------------------------|----------|
| Increasing nervous stress | 65.4% |
| Headache | 28.8% |
| Aversion to work | 24.5% |
| Concentration disorders | 18.6% |
| Apathy | 14.7% |
| Sleeping problems | 14.1% |
| Lack of appetite | 10.1% |
| Digestive system disorders | 9.0% |
| Excessive appetite | 7.8% |

*The respondents' answers do not constitute 100% due to multiple-choice answers.

Some of the investigated (7%) had to apply tranquillisers permanently and 19.2% – sometimes, to reduce stress level at work. The majority (73.7%) did not need such medication. There was a correlation between teachers' gender and the use of tranquillisers (Fig. 4). Mostly women occasionally used medication (14.1% of all teachers) and some of them did it permanently (6.4% of all teachers). The considerable number of men (30.8% of all the teachers) did not need such help at all; $p=0.04$. As regards age groups, most often older teachers (41-50 years old) used drugs constantly (7%) or only sometimes (10.3%). Among younger teachers (31-40 years old) dominated those who did not apply medications because of stress at work (25%, $p=0.00001$).

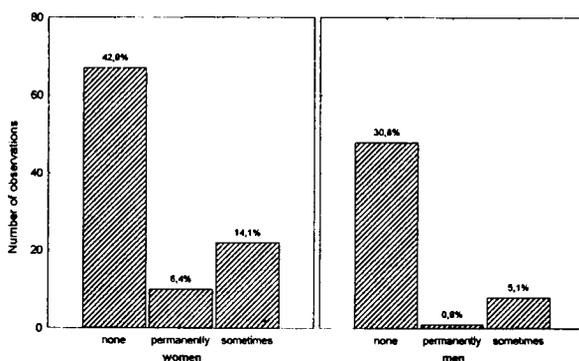


Fig. 4. Correlation between teacher's gender and use of tranquillisers

DISCUSSION

Among all the theories explaining the reasons of aggressive behaviour the theory of social learning should attract special attention. According to it, aggressive types of attitude are assimilated due to

watching violent behaviour of peers and models brought out by mass media, especially television. In the light of that theory parents become responsible for social process, because they set models of proper social behaviour as well as negative ones. Children are able to copy them in different life situations. The stronger emotional link between parents and children exists, the more similar the copying process occurs (10). Nowadays an increasing influence of mass media on human nature can be observed, therefore it seems important to consider violent and creepy scenes on television to be factors forming the attitude of the youngsters and creating antisocial models. These influence human imagination, filling it with negative contents. It is proved that watching TV increases public tolerance and acceptance of somebody's aggressive behaviour (2).

It turns out that aggression sources should be searched also in a feeling of loneliness, which occurs when proper interpersonal links have not been formed in the process of growing up (1). There is possible a direct mechanism of growing aggression associated with the so-called "bore-depression" syndrome (1). Bore can be more devastating than pain or suffering. A man who suffers from bore experiences some sort of "emptiness", which destroys positive values and brings out the worst negative behaviour in him (3). The growing level of aggression among young people can be also connected with condensing them on a small school area, which makes a schoolboy anonymous and allows him to follow all his negative desires. It is really difficult to punish somebody in a crowd, which promotes aggressive behaviour (6).

According to the research carried out in some Polish schools by the Methodical Centre of Psychological and Pedagogical Aid in association with Catholic University in Eichstatt in Bavaria most of violent and aggressive behaviour among school youth was directed against teachers (9). It is in accordance with the results of the present studies. Some authors (5) noticed that such types of negative attitudes concerned all sorts of schools. In this study, aggressive behaviour occurred most often at vocational and technical schools, but also at secondary ones, but at a lower level. A study of the same author (5) showed an increasing problem of aggression and arrogance during the last years, which correlated with the results of this research. Teachers who identified that phenomenon at school agreed that it was a growing problem especially at vocational schools (7), which was shown also in the present study.

Aggression is a sign of school life dehumanisation. It is difficult to avoid aggression, but knowing mechanisms that generate it, one should properly reduce its occurrence (11).

CONCLUSIONS

1. Aggression and arrogance of youth often occur at schools, especially at vocational and technical ones.

2. Most often this is verbal aggression, disrespectful attitude towards a teacher, refusing to follow his instructions, seldom – threats directed against the teacher or his possessions.

3. Despite the growing problem of negative behaviour among school youth during the last few years, teachers generally do not feel distress while working at school.

4. Women, more often than men, define their job as stressful and try to find a correlation between the stress level and psychosomatic disorders, which they suffer from. Also, women more often use tranquillisers to reduce the stress level at work.

REFERENCES

1. Dołęga Z.: Poczucie samotności a zachowania agresywne uczniów. *Psychologia Wychowawcza*, 2, 146-153, 1999.
2. Gałkowska A.: Telewizyjne sceny przemocy a agresja u dzieci i młodzieży w świetle literatury przedmiotu. *Zeszyty Naukowe WSP w Rzeszowie, Pedagogika i Psychologia*, z. 4, 83-93, 1998.
3. Jędrzejewska E.: Dlaczego przemoc? *Wiadomości Kulturalne*, 11, 15, 1997.
4. Kalina R.M.: Przeciwdziałanie agresji: wykorzystanie sportu do zmniejszenia agresywności. PTHP, Warszawa 1991.
5. Kawula S.: Agresja a dysonans społeczny: między przemocą a syntonią w szkole. *Edukacja*, 15-16, 1996.
6. Kazmierczak-Wało D., Noszczyk Z.: Zmiany poziomu lęku i agresji u dzieci związane z zagęszczeniem przestrzennym w szkole. *Prace Naukowe, WSP w Częstochowie, Psychologia*, z.3, 25-34, 1994.
7. Kmiecik-Baran K. *Młodzież i przemoc: mechanizmy socjologiczno-psychologiczne*. PWN, Warszawa 1999.
8. Oleszkowicz A., Bąk O.: Kryzys w wartościowaniu a tendencja do zachowań agresywnych. *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis, Prace Psychologiczne*, 38, 109-117, 1995.
9. Ostrowska K., Tatarowicz J.: Agresja i przemoc w szkołach polskich i niemieckich. *Centrum Metodyczne Pomocy Psychologiczno-Pedagogicznej MEN*, Warszawa 1998.
10. Rostowska T.: Transmisja międzypokoleniowa w rodzinie w zakresie zachowań agresywnych. *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, 1/2, 177-186, 1996.
11. Sirojć Z.: Stres i agresja jako główne przejawy dehumanizacji życia w szkole. *Humanizacja Pracy*, 3, 45-53, 1997.
12. Witalewska H.: W anioły przerobić? *Głos Nauczycielski*, 8, 5, 1997.

2001.05.10

SUMMARY

Arrogance and aggressive behaviour occur more and more often in our lives. Especially at school there are observed negative attitudes of school youth. The aim of the study was to estimate the occurrence of aggressive behaviour among school youth towards teachers. Research based on questionnaires was carried out among 156 teachers (63.5% women and 36.5% men), aged 23-60 (mean 40 ± 8.9) with time of employment ranking from 1-35 years (mean 14 ± 9.2), working at vocational, technical and secondary schools as well as in the last classes of primary schools. Generally, aggressive behaviour more often occurs among school youth. It mainly includes verbal aggression, disrespectful attitude towards a teacher and refusal to follow his instructions. Other kinds of aggressive behaviour were observed rarely. More than half of the investigated persons did not feel distress at school, some of them only a little. The majority of subjects noticed the growing problem of negative behaviour among school youth during the last few years. Especially women defined their job as stressful and associated stress level with psychosomatic disorders (most often the increasing nervous stress and headache) they suffered from. Therefore, some teachers had to use tranquillisers to reduce stress level at work.

Przejawy agresji i arogancji młodzieży szkolnej w stosunku do nauczycieli
jako czynnik zagrożenia zdrowia kadry pedagogicznej

Zachowania aroganckie i agresywne pojawiają się coraz częściej w naszym życiu codziennym. Szczególnie często negatywne postawy młodzieży obserwuje się w środowisku szkolnym. Celem pracy była ocena występowania zachowań aroganckich i agresywnych wśród młodzieży szkolnej w stosunku do kadry pedagogicznej. Przeprowadzono ankietę wśród 156 nauczycieli (63,5% kobiet i 36,5% mężczyzn), w wieku 23-60 lat (średnia $40 \pm 8,9$ lat), ze stażem pracy 1-35 lat (średnia $14 \pm 9,2$ lat), pracujących w szkołach ponadpodstawowych i ostatnich klasach szkół podstawowych. Z przejawami agresywnych i aroganckich zachowań wśród młodzieży szkolnej nauczyciele spotykali się dość często. Najczęściej pojawiały się one pod postacią wypowiedzi słownych, lekceważącego stosunku do nauczyciela lub niewykonywania jego poleceń. Z innymi przejawami agresji nauczyciele stykali się dość rzadko. Około połowa ankietowanych nie czuła się zagrożona ze strony uczniów, zaś niewielu - w małym stopniu. Większość badanych dostrzegała nasilanie się występowania negatywnych zachowań uczniów w ciągu ostatnich lat. Szczególnie nauczycielki uważają swoją pracę z tego powodu za stresującą, co wpływa ujemnie na ich stan zdrowia, powodując różne dolegliwości psychosomatyczne, z których najczęstszymi są wzmożone napięcie nerwowe i bóle głowy. Z tego względu część badanych zmuszona jest do korzystania stale lub okresowo ze środków uspokajających, aby móc zmniejszyć poziom stresu i normalnie funkcjonować w pracy.