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316

# FOREWORD

The present volume represents the result of a fruitful conference, entitled *Contemporary Society in Crisis, 2024*, XIIIth SAS Conference, under the auspices of the Institute for Life Quality of the Romanian Academy, the Romanian Sociologists Association and the Faculty of Sociology and Communication, Transilvania University of Brașov, Romania.

The collection of articles presented successfully by PhD students under the supervision of their respective advisors constitute an invaluable scientific aspect of today's modern society. We are proud to showcase their scientific efforts and expertise on different subjects while taking a moment to appreciate the research work behind each article. Society has always been diverse, curious and rather peculiar in some cases. Diversity is not only important to explore, but also a quintessential marker of the modern-day world. It is an honor for us to publish these articles from various domains of social sciences, as well as communication sciences, as they can provide a more introspective view of life through each author's critical eye.

On behalf of the organizing committee:

Professor PhD Sorin CACE
Professor PhD Claudiu COMAN
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Angelica-Mădălina BANCĂ** 7

*EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO STOP BULLYING IN SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA*

**Elena CALOTĂ** 23

*THE VISIBILITY OF THE CRAIOVA COMMUNITY IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT*

**Vasile CHASCIAR, Denisa Ramona CHASCIAR, Maria-Cristina BULARCA** 43

*THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATION IN TEAM SPORTS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION SKILLS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE*

**Igor COJOCARU** 55

*THE DILEMMAS AND PARADOXES OF SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY AMIDST CONFLICT*

**Emilian DOBRESCU, Vlad BĂTRÂNU-PINȚEA** 73

*A LOOK AT THE CRISIS OF ROMANIAN SOCIETY IN 2024*

**Valentina-Violeta LEFF** 81

*THE PERCEPTION OF SOCIETY REGARDING TATTOOED INDIVIDUALS*

**Vasile-Lucian DRINC** 95

*ROMANIANS IN GERMANY: PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE AND SOCIO-PROFESSIONAL INTEGRATION*

**Florina-Mădălina HARABAGIU** 129

*THE SCHOOL MEDIATOR IN ROMA COMMUNITIES: HIS/HER ROLE AND IMPACT IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIAL REALITIES IN ROMANIA*

**Cristina HOROTAN** 143

*FINANCIAL AND SOCIAL ALTERNATIVES TO PRISON SENTENCES FOR CORRUPTION OFFENCES (White Collar Crimes)*

165

**Camelia KOJQIQI**
*THE DYNAMICS OF IDENTITIES IN KOSOVO: THE EMERGING OF ISLAMIC RELIGION AS AN IDENTITY MARKER*

**Ion NEGRILĂ** 181
*STRATEGIES IN DUAL VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION*

**Marinela NICULA** 197
*COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MEDICAL RESIDENCY SYSTEMS: IMPLICATIONS FOR ROMANIAN MEDICAL GRADUATE EMIGRATION*

**Salomeea PANAIT** 219
*UNDERSTANDING THE INCREASE IN AUTISM INCIDENCE*

**Ionela PÎTEA** 233
*"GENERATION Z" STRUGGLING TO EXPLAIN THE DEFINITION OF THE WORD "TIKTOK"*

**Cornelia PRIOTEASA** 243
*A NEW PERSPECTIVE OF INTERVENTION AND ACTION IN SOCIAL CRISIS SITUATIONS*

**Maria-Oana RĂDULESCU** 257
*AGGRESSION AS A FORM OF BEHAVIOR IN CHILDREN WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES*

**Vlad BĂTRÂNU-PINȚEA, Atena ȘOȘOI** 321
*MASS MEDIA AS A KEY FACTOR OF INFLUENCE REGARDING EATING BEHAVIOR*

**Radu TUDORICĂ** 333
*APPLICATIONS OF LEAN METHODOLOGY IN CASE MANAGEMENT IN SOCIAL WORK*

**Adrian FURTUNĂ** 353
*CULTURAL TRAUMA, SLAVERY AND THE FORMATION OF ROMA IDENTITY CASE STUDY ON THE POWER OF A NAME*: "*DEZROBIȚI"*

# EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO STOP BULLYING IN SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA

*Angelica Mădălina BANCĂ*[1]

*The phenomenon of bullying is quite widespread in Romania, affecting a significant number of children and adolescents in school. Statistics show how big the bullying problem is in Romania, which reflects a serious and worrying problem in the education system. In terms of recognition of the phenomenon by society, there is a rather low level of awareness and recognition of the seriousness of bullying. Despite efforts to prevent and combat bullying in schools, there are still many cases that are not reported or properly investigated. Many parents, teachers and authorities are not sufficiently trained or informed to effectively manage and prevent bullying situations. We started this research from the need to identify solutions to recognise the problem of bullying in Romania. As a research method we used comparative analysis and the study of literature in this field. Such scientific research is necessary to identify solutions to an extremely serious social problem, and the first step to solve the problem is to determine a clear understanding of it by decision makers, as well as the active involvement of school authorities and parents in preventing and managing this phenomenon, providing support and support to victims and punishing those who resort to such aggressive behavior.*

**Keywords:** bullying, violence, school, authorities, intervention.

## 1. Introduction

Bullying is a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon that directly affects hundreds of millions of people every year. In a broad sense, bullying is intentional, repeated and powerfully unbalanced aggressive behaviour aimed at intimidating, controlling or causing distress to another person. From an educational point of view, bullying is aggressive or intimidating behaviour that usually occurs in a school environment, such as verbal, physical or social harassment between students. From a sociological point of view, bullying is seen as the result of a social and structural environment

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that enables and even encourages aggressive behaviour. This definition focuses on environmental factors such as school culture, group dynamics and power relations.

From a sociological perspective, bullying can be defined as repeated and intentional acts of aggression, coercion or intimidation, typically committed by individuals or groups of higher social status or power against those of lower status or power (Smith et al., 2002). These acts often occur in social environments such as schools, workplaces or online platforms, where social dynamics and hierarchies play a significant role in shaping interactions.

Sociologically viewed, bullying is not an isolated behaviour of individuals, but „a reflection of wider societal norms and values, and is influenced by the social structures and cultural contexts in which it occurs" (Smith, Cowie & Liefooghe, 2002, p. 1119). For example, social norms that value competitiveness and aggression may contribute to a climate in which bullying behaviours are more likely to occur. Institutions such as schools also play a crucial role in mitigating or exacerbating bullying through the social environment and the norms they impose.

Bullying in the educational environment is a persistent problem that affects both the individual and the social structure of educational institutions. Bullying is often a reflection of power inequalities between students. Bullies may resort to bullying to assert dominance, control or to maintain their social status in the group hierarchy.

The study of bullying from an educational perspective is crucial because bullying significantly affects the learning environment, socio-emotional and academic development of students, and can have long-term repercussions on students' mental health and well-being. Bullying can negatively affect academic performance and lead to absenteeism, decreased school engagement and dropping out (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Students who are bullied may feel insecure and anxious, which makes it difficult to concentrate and learn.

The authorities, teachers, school principals and, in general, decision-makers in Romania prefer to declare that bullying does not exist as a phenomenon, rather than making efforts to combat it in Romanian schools. While in other countries there is a major concern for studying and combating bullying, in Romania we have statistics of violence in schools, but very few preventive measures, which mainly involve education in the sense of combating bullying.

While Romania ignores bullying in schools, cyberbullying is also developing with maximum speed, which also requires a lot of studies and measures to combat the new phenomenon that mainly affects children and adolescents, being related in many cases with the school environment. In the other European countries, but also in the USA, Canada and Australia, this new phenomenon was intensively studied after the year 2000.

In Moldova Republic there is a much bigger interest for this phenomenon in the last years and also teachers and authorities seem to know better what bullyng is and how to fight against it. In 2021, UNICEF Moldova funded a study and a practical guide for teachers, named „Stop Bullyng in School!" (Petrică, 2021), which contains the clear definition of the phenomenon called bullying, updated and adapted to the school environment, so that the signs of its existence to be well understood by teachers and decision-makers in schools, in order to be able to apply methods to combat and stop this phenomenon. This should happen also in the Romanian schools, because the consequences of this phenomenon are reflected in the big number of violence cases which appears in the national statistics every year and the violent behavior is encreasing.

## 2. Perceptions about bullying. Literature review

The study made by the NGO „Salvați Copiii" („Save the Children") in 2016 shows that many of the children in Romania do not know what bulling means. „less than half of those who participated in the research had heard of the term „bullying" (48% of children answered yes), while 52% said they had not heard or did not know the term. Of those who say they heard, 35% did so on the Internet, 30% on TV, 24% on English class, and 13% in conducting class. Referring to what they understand by bullying, most of those who have heard of the term say that it is a form of aggression, physical or verbal (25%), mocking or humiliating (14%) or bullying (13%)." (Grădinaru, 2016, p. 29). The same study shows that 73% of children state that they witnessed a bullying situation in their school; 58% of the children state that they witnessed a bullying situation in their class; 69% of children state that they witnessed a bullying situation in the online environment; 46% of the children state that they witnessed a bullying situation in the group of friends. Also, about the physical violence and/or destruction of property, the study shows that 13% of children stated that they happened to destroy

another child's things; 16% of children stated that they repeatedly hit another child, and 30% of children that they repeatedly lightly hit a colleague; 32% of children say they have been pushed or pushed by other children, repeatedly; 39% of children say that they were slightly injured and 16% that they were repeatedly beaten at school. „In the peer group, 78% of the children state that they have witnessed a mild aggression (pushing or light hitting) but repeated; 69% of children say they witnessed a fight between Two children. In the school environment, 73% of children state that they witnessed a bullying situation" (Grădinaru, 2016, p. 52). However, in a country like Romania, where many cases o bullyng lead to extreme violence, the Government should do much more to stop this phenomenon. The local authorities should cooperate at least with the NGOs and the researchers, to find solutions to at least help the children understand what bullyng means and how harmful it is. The understanding of the term and phenomenon is necessary as a first step for the children in the comprehensive process. For this, we should have in Romania a much greater concern and involvement from local authorities and school decision-makers for this phenomenon.

Hundreds of studies have been made about bullyng and its consequences, in the last 20 years, in many of the contries all over the world. A study form 1995 shows that „that victims of bullying may lack skills in emotional regulation, a process which facilitates coping with provocative situations to lessen the stress of negative emotions" (Cicchetti, 1995, p. 1). Starting from this definition, a study from 2000 in the USA had examined the emotional regulation and display patterns of victims during classroom bullying episodes. The conclusion was that: „Children in grades one through six were observed during free play in the winter and spring of three consecutive school years. Results of the study indicated that the coping styles observed in victims of bullying can be grouped into two distinct clusters: 1) problem-solving strategies that are associated with the de-escalation and resolution of bullying episodes; and 2) aggressive strategies that tend to perpetuate and escalate the bullying interaction. Parallels were found between victims' and bullies' emotional displays. Results are discussed in the context of how maladaptive emotional regulation processes may act as risk factors for chronic victimization" (Wilton, 200, p. 226).

One of the biggest problems of bullying is denial. A study from 2003, "She is not actually bullied." the discourse of harassment in student groups", shows how in many situations, the victims are ignored by the group and the