ERASMUS COMMITTEE

""Let's stop bullying together": Legal framework and protective agents to tackle bullying and violence in EU schools"
Study Guide

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1. WELCOMING LETTER/INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

Dear Delegates,

Our names are Evi Kosta and Afroditi Karatagli, we are both studying Law in Greece and we will be your chairs in the ERASMUS Committee during this year's Aristoteleio College Model United Nations (ArcMUN). We would firstly like to congratulate you all for your participation in this year's ArcMUN conference, and let you know that we will certainly be more than excited to work with you.

Our committee is both a very challenging and intriguing one. Firstly, it introduces a topic of central importance in today's European societies and then it shortly differs from the rest of the committees concerning its structure, since you will not be asked to represent a country but your own beliefs. Thus, it requires you to have studied the topic that is under discussion, and also actively participate in the committee and engage in fruitful debate with your fellow delegates. For this to take place,we would strongly advise you to engage in research that does not solely include this Study Guide and other sources, but also your personal experiences, in order for you to be able to understand and master your basic position on the matter discussed. Your individualized research could start from the following Study Guide and the links proposed at the end.

Regarding our topic, we believe you all understand its central importance in today's Europe. Most people understand bullying as behaviour by an individual or group, repeated over time, that is intended to hurt another individual or group either physically or emotionally. As it will be made clear afterwards, bullying can take many forms but whatever the motivation or method, it is unacceptable and should not be tolerated. Bullying behaviours emerge as a consequence of repeated exposure to aggression in the form of verbal hostility, teasing, physical violence, or social exclusion. As a subtype of aggressive behaviour, bullying involves an imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims, where one side (perpetrator) demonstrates negative actions, and the other (victim) is not able to defend her-/himself. Many researchers have emphasized the group aspect of bullying not only as a dyadic problem between a bully and a victim which is rather recognized as a group phenomenon including bystanders. Thus, it is obvious that exposure to bullying is a significant risk factor that contributes independently to the emergence of psychological difficulties as well as to severe physical trauma.

As a final remark, please feel free and do not hesitate to contact us at any point for any doubts or questions on the topic. We will be happy to help as much as we can. Our e-mail addresses are evikosta66@gmail.com & afroka2001@gmail.com.

We wish you an enjoyable and productive research,

We are really looking forward to meeting you all!

Sincerely,

Evi Kosta & Afroditi Karatagli

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOPIC

Bullying used to be thought of a playground hazard, perhaps even an essential rite of passage. However, times have changed and there is increasing recognition that bullying can affect anyone, of whatever age, from childhood to adulthood and so on.

It is a fact that there is no legal definition of "bullying" but, according to a general agreement, it could be perceived as a "*behavior that is designed to hurt someone else, or make them do something that they do not want to do"*. This behavior can be either verbal or physical; verbal or emotional bullying is probably much more common, and it is also harder to detect since bullies will often try to get away while supporting that it was 'just a joke'. Emotional bullying also leaves no obvious marks, but the damage can be much more severe and long-lasting. Moreover, the Internet has created a whole new world of social communications for young people, which has also become a powerful mean to anonymously target and bully peers, the so called "cyber-bullying".

At this point it is important to mention that peer maltreatment is estimated to be between 20 and 45% and bullying incidents that occur once a week or more can be as high as 32%. The harmful effects of bullying cannot be overstated. Reports of bullying in the 1990s show that, in extreme cases, victims may face shooting or severe beatings and may even turn to suicide (Rigby and Slee, 1999). These reports have triggered public action and many EU Member States currently have laws that require schools to provide education and services directed towards the prevention and cessation of bullying.

However, in Europe, the problem of ensuring freedom of speech both in everyday life and on the Internet, while protecting those who take part in communications has not yet been addressed efficiently on a national level. It is also vital to mention that the issue is further complicated by the existence of legislative gaps.

3. KEY TERMS

''Bullying'': Although bullying is a term that is mostly used to describe unpleasant -for the victim-actions in schools, it is quite hard to find a commonly acceptable definition. Of course, bullying is an incident that also occurs in the workplace, during one's social life and even inside the family. The Council of Europe has adopted the definition of www.stopbullying.gov, which is a US official site created to deal with the problem. Therefore, bullying is defined as ''an unwanted and aggressive behavior among school aged children that involves a real or perceived power imbalance. Bullying tends to be a repeated phenomenon, but individual episodes can also be described as "bullying", as it is not compulsory that bullying occurs on a regular basis.. A variety of

actions can be characterized as bullying, with the most common ones being physical or verbal violence, sexual harassment, social exclusion, psychological pressure or threats.

***''Bullying victim''*:** A person is a victim of bullying when they have faced violent actions from other people, once or multiple times, and they are not able to defend themselves. Usually bullying victims are more vulnerable, since the bullies have made them believe that they do not have the physical or emotional strength to stand up for themselves.

***''Bully''*:** The person that wants to harm or threaten someone else in any way. Usually bullies are children who have been mistreated during the early stages of their childhood and have been raised to believe that aggressive behavior is acceptable. With their actions, they seek power and attention from both their peers and their families. Moreover, it has been noted that most bullies are male. That is mainly due to society's expectations of boys to avoid expressing their feelings and encouragement of their aggressive behavior as a sign of male superiority. However, whatever the sex of the bully, they are usually led to their actions because of low self-esteem.

***''Bystander''*:** Someone who witnesses a bullying episode but does not act upon it. There are three types of bystanders; the bully bystander, who encourages and urges the bully, the avoidant bystander, who decides to ignore or deny the problem and the victim bystander, who is normally too afraid to take action or inform the victim's school and family about the situation.

4. HISTORY OF THE TOPIC

Although bullying has been the center of society's attention mainly for the past two decades, it is a phenomenon that is actually relevant since the Biblical years. Several researchers believe that some parables and mostly the torturing of the Christian people by the Romans, show off shapes of bullying, even though this kind of behavior was considered normal back then. As a term, bullying first appeared during the 1530s and for nearly 300 years it actually had a positive meaning, as it would be expressed using words such as ''sweetheart'', ''fine fellow'', etc (this definition was likely linked to the Dutch word ''boel'' which meant brother). However, some centuries later bullying started being associated with the word ''blusterer'', meaning someone who uses empty threats to terrorize others. Consequently, since the 19th century bullying has been linked only to its negative meaning.

The first public mention of bullying can be seen in Charles Dickens' novel ''Oliver Twist'' (1838). In this classic novel, Dickens addresses for the first time the mistreatment of a child as bullying. Some years later, in 1862, the first real-life bullying report took place. 'The Times' in London addressed the killing of a man who apparently was repeatedly torturing a soldier named John Flood. By the end of the century came the first characterizing of aggressive behavior as bullying; in 1897 an article was published describing brutal behavior targeted at children using mainly physical violence, which as a result caused physical and psychological pain to the victims. However, almost another century was needed until the first research regarding the topic was conducted.

Norwegian psychologist Dr. Dan Olweus conducted research and published a book in the early 1970s, informing the Swedish and Norwegian audience about the forms bullying can take and the devastating psychological consequences it can have on the victims. In 1978 his book was also published in the United States and bullying started drawing the attention of the US and thus most of the EU's governments. During the years that followed, multiple bullying incidents took place, leading to Olweus proposing the first anti-bullying law. His home countries, Sweden and Norway were the first parliaments to adopt anti-bullying legislation in the 1990s.

In 1993, Olweus published another book, explaining the need for bullying in school to be faced as a dangerous situation and asking everyone in charge (i.g teachers, parents, governments, lawmakers) to take all necessary measures to tackle the phenomenon. In spite of Olweus' persistence, it was one tragic event that took place in 1999 that led to the adaptation of anti-bullying laws worldwide. In Columbine, Colorado, USA, two high-school senior boys, who were described as 'gifted' and due to that, extremely bullied for years, brought 50 bombs to school. In addition to 21 wounded students, they killed 12 students and one teacher and finally took their own lives. This massacre was the main motive of lawmakers to finally address bullying.

The years that followed saw the rise of cyber-bullying, as with the evolution of technology, it became easier to harm or threaten others, even anonymously. Cyber-bullying has developed to be the worst and most common type of bullying during the 21st century. Surveys have shown that victims of cyber-bullying often felt suicidal and depressed, while more than 50 percent of the people who bullied others during their school years had tried to commit criminal acts by the age of 24.

5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Nowadays, bullying is a situation addressed by almost every state. Most European governments and the USA have adopted anti-bullying laws or in general legislation in order to tackle violence in schools. Since 2016, the Secretary General has published two reports on the protection of children from bullying and in November 2018, the 3rd GA of the UN issued a resolution in order to underline the importance and the ways of protecting children from in-school violence. Furthermore, the Council of Europe has taken measures aiming to create a common anti-bullying policy among its 47 states.

Firstly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (also known as the Congress of the Council of Europe) published in 2003 two documents regarding violence in schools. Recommendation 135 (2003) refers to the rise of violence in EU schools, especially during the early childhood. The Congress in this Recommendation establishes a list of basic principles that all member-states should take into consideration when introducing their anti-bullying policies and laws. The second document, Resolution 160 (2003), restates those principles and calls the governments to actually combat violence in schools in order to secure urban stability.

7 years later, in 2010, the Committee of Ministers using the appendix of the Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, encouraged the 47 governments to put

into action policies stated in the Charter as a way to deal with in-school violence. Thereafter, the Parliamentary Assembly addressed the topic in 2011. They published a Recommendation aiming to enhance education in schools regarding bullying and the various ways it can be tackled or at least decreased.

The European Union has also taken measures to tackle bullying. In 2011 the European Parliament alongside the Council of the European Union issued a directive regarding the sexual abuse and exploitation of children, while in 2012 they published another directive concerning the rights, support and protection of bullying victims

6. DISCUSSION OF THE TOPIC

Bullying can take many forms and it is possible for the bully to create a mix of these methods against the victim. To be more precise, bullying is usually distinguished in three forms: verbal, social and physical bullying. Also, bullying is sometimes labelled by where it happens or by the type of harm that it provokes.

Type of behavior – verbal, physical and social

There are three types of bully behavior:

- **Verbal bullying,** which includes name calling or insulting someone about physical characteristics (e.g. weight, height, and race) or other attributes, including sexuality, culture, or religion.
- **Physical bullying,** which includes hitting or otherwise hurting someone,intensively pushing or intimidating another person, damaging or stealing their personal belongings.
- **Social bullying,** which includes the consistent and conscious exclusion of a person and the publication of personal images or information in general without their consent.

Verbal, physical and social bullying can occur **in person or online**, directly or indirectly, overtly or covertly.

Setting – in person and online

Bullying can happen in person or online settings (also known as cyberbullying).

The specific features of **cyberbullying** create additional concerns for students, parents and teachers. For example, bullying someone online can attract a very large audience and it is usually anonymous.

However, research shows that children who are bullied online are often also bullied in person by the same bully. This means that effectively dealing with online bullying means looking at other situations as well.

Visibility – overt and covert

Bullying can be easy to detect, (**overt)**, or hidden from those not directly involved, (**covert**).

Overt bullying involves physical actions such as punching or kicking and observable verbal actions, such as name-calling and insulting. Overt physical bullying is a common depiction of bullying ("**traditional bullying"**).

Covert bullying can be almost impossible for people outside the interpersonal interaction to identify. It can include repeatedly using hand gestures and threatening looks, whispering, excluding or turning your back on a person, restricting where a person can sit and who they can talk to.

Covert, social or verbal bullying can be subtle and even sometimes denied by the bully, who claims they were joking or 'just having fun'.

Harm – physical and psychological

The **physical harm** caused by some types of bullying is easily recognised.

More recently, research has confirmed that short and long term **psychological harm** can result from bullying. This includes the harm to a person's social standing or reducing a person's willingness to socialize (particularly covert social bullying).

In fact, just the **fear of bullying** can create distress and harm. The ongoing nature of bullying can lead to the person being bullied feel powerless and unable to stop it from happening.

The effects of bullying, particularly on the mental health and wellbeing of those involved (including bystanders) can continue even after the situation is resolved. Extensive research has revealed that bullying experiences are associated with post psychological and emotional difficulties, including depression, adjustment difficulties, avoidance symptoms, as well as suicide ideation/attempts/completions.

7. ACTIONS ALREADY TAKEN

Ever since the 1999 incident in the United States of America, where two students killed twelve classmates, one teacher and themselves as a revenge to their bullies, the global community has tried actively to tackle bullying. Most governments have established anti-bullying laws and education regarding the matter has been strengthened throughout Europe's schools. In Belgium since 2005 cyber-bullying is prohibited by law, while in Greece the Penal Code in article 312 states the punishment of repeated aggressive behavior. In Hungary's Penal Code bullying is addressed as

a violation of human rights and in Italy it can be considered a violation of the Constitution, the Criminal Code and the Private Law. Anti-bullying laws have also been established the past few years in Portugal, Romania and Spain. Moreover, UN bodies have initiated campaigns during the past years targeted at the various shapes bullying can take.

The United Nations Human Rights Office has organized the 'UN Free and Equal' campaign aiming at stopping bullying that targets an individual's sexual orientation. The campaign does not only apply to in-school violence, but especially to children that have been victimized because they belong in the LGBTQ+ community. The campaign has the support of the UN and several UN-countries at an individual level.

The latest initiative taken by UN bodies is the 'Safe to Learn/End Violence against Children' campaign. The campaign is supported, among others, by UNESCO, UNICEF, the UN Girl's Education Initiative (UNGEI), the World Bank, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Global Partnership to End Violence against Children, and targets at giving an end to in-school violence. The campaign's main goal is to ensure that children will have equal opportunities during their education and that their future will not be jeopardized because of childhood traumas caused by bullying. 11 countries have already welcomed the initiative and in July 2019 world leaders expressed their enthusiasm towards the 5-year plan during the G-7 meeting. The initiative will bring together experts in the field of education, child protection and violence-prevention in order to give and end to in-school violence by 2024. In the G-7 and UNESCO meeting that took place, it was actually agreed that a common international-world day against bullying and cyber bullying will be established, because not all countries choose to celebrate the ''Anti-Bullying Day'' that already exists (4th of May).

In addition to these international actions, the EU has also proceeded to adopting initiatives in order to deal with bullying. From February 2013 to July 2014 the European Commission funded organizations from the UK, Belgium, Spain, Hungary, Greece, Bulgaria and Finland for a campaign aiming to tackle cyber bullying. The initiative was called '#DeleteCyberBullying' and played a pivotal role in raising awareness regarding cyber bullying throughout Europe.

Remaining at a European level, in the beginning of 2013 the European Parliament declared the need to establish a European day against bullying and violence in schools. Since January 2013 until May 2014, there was an ongoing project called 'EAN- European Antibullying Network', aiming on finding solutions regarding bullying, while also raising awareness. The campaign was supported by 17 countries, with 12 of them being EU member-states. The end of the EAN project was celebrated in a conference in Greece on May 2014.

Furthermore, several schools worldwide and especially in the USA, have tried to come up with unique ways of addressing bullying. Some schools have established a texting system, where students can inform school officials when they witness a bullying incident. This way officials can take action quickly. Regarding bullying prevention, some schools target on creating friendly and safe environments in order to ensure the student's mental well-being. It is also considered essential that teachers emphasize on students learning to feel empathy and self-awareness and

consequently dealing better with bullying. The main goal of this initiative is to encourage bystanders to be more supportive and the victims and speak up to the school officials.

Therefore, it is obvious that throughout the years there have been multiple efforts to giving an end to violence in schools. However, it is essential that both the United Nations and the European Union keep on organizing effective campaigns and actively adopt measures towards the elimination of the problem for good.

8. CONCLUSION

All in all, bullying is a socially unacceptable behavior caused by both social rejection and various underlying drivers. The main risk factors include personality, psychosocial factors such as social rejection, struggle for power, family risk factors such as painful childhood experiences, and poor parenting. This aggressive behavior, which may be physical, verbal, or social—and may occur in person or online—can have long-term harmful effects, both physical and psychological.

Thus, combating bullying is a vital European purpose, necessary in order to ensure that students peacefully coexist within a secure learning environment. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators need to be mindful of bullying incidents and their effects on the target, the perpetrator, and the climate of the learning community. Also, prevention initiatives ought to be supported and promoted by the relevant stakeholders, so that policies which address bullying could be easily adopted and successfully implemented. Lastly, continued research upon this social phenomenon is a key component, in order to assist European communities change behavioral patterns and instill civility.

9. POINTS TO BE ADDRESSED

- What encourages people to harass or bully others?

- What is the difference between bullying and harassment?

- How does peer pressure impact bullying behavior?

- What actions can those who witness bullying incidents take?

- Are today's societal campaigns against bullying effective enough and if not - why?

- What are some strategies to reinforce messages of kindness, acceptance, and inclusion at a young age?

- What measures should the EU take, in order to ensure freedom of speech whilst keeping the internet accessible and safe?

- Why is it important for students to advocate for themselves and how can adults help them learn those skills?

- What can you, as a citizen, do to tackle the problem?

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