



Ukrainian and international practices in preventing and combating bullying in student communities

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Abstract. Contemporary society faces a significant rise in instances of violence, discrimination, and psychological pressure, particularly among young people. Bullying within student communities has emerged as a serious social issue, adversely affecting students' physical and mental health, academic performance, and overall quality of life. The issue of bullying among students has become increasingly relevant, prompting measures aimed at establishing a safe educational environment. This study aimed to analyse Ukrainian and international practices in preventing and addressing bullying within student communities to identify effective methods, strategies, and practices for fostering a safe and supportive educational environment. In Ukraine, educational institutions have implemented training sessions, interactive discussions, and anonymous reporting channels for bullying incidents, promoting experience-sharing among students. The experience of other countries, particularly in Europe, highlights a diverse range of effective programmes, including legislative initiatives, psychological support, and the active involvement of all participants in the educational process. Bullying prevention was viewed as a multifaceted process requiring a comprehensive approach, encompassing awareness-raising efforts and the creation of an inclusive environment. Emphasis was placed on the importance of collaborative efforts among universities, students, educators, and parents in combating bullying, which is essential for fostering a positive learning climate. Recommendations were provided for the adoption of successful international practices that could help reduce bullying rates among university students. Examples of effective programmes from countries such as Sweden, Norway, the United Kingdom, and Germany were examined, showcasing systematic approaches to bullying prevention through education, mediation, and cooperation among all stakeholders in the educational process. The active engagement of all interested parties in anti-bullying efforts was underscored, as only through joint actions can a safe and supportive educational environment be established.

Keywords: violence; students; educational environment; psychological support; anti-bullying programme; inclusivity; safety

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Introduction

Creating a safe environment that fosters democratic values is fundamental to building a strong society. The issue of bullying in higher education is particularly pressing, as there is an urgent need to ensure a safe and non-violent learning environment. Higher education institutions aim to facilitate the all-round development of their students and create conducive conditions for learning effective interpersonal communication. However, frequent instances of bullying and elevated levels of conflict among peers hinder the full realisation of these goals.

The classification of bullying helps to grasp the scale of this social phenomenon, which continues to evolve in new forms. The particularity of the problem lies in the fact that young people are one of the most vulnerable segments of the population. During socialisation, young people develop normative and ethical standards for interacting with others in their social groups. The youth environment is characterised by instability, with frequent changes in behavioural rules and communication norms. Despite this, the issue of bullying among young people remains insufficiently researched and developed in Ukraine. Meanwhile, the phenomenon has gained social and psychological dimensions, becoming an international term recognised by professionals in psychology, education, and law. In addition to traditional bullying, new forms of harassment, such as cyberbullying and internet trolling, have emerged, causing psychological trauma to victims. It is important to emphasise that the serious consequences of bullying affect not only the victims themselves but also their social environment.

Research in the field of social pedagogy indicates that the problem of aggressive behaviour and its prevention among young people has become a focus of study for many researchers. V. Andreenkova *et al.* (2019) and M. Chaikivskyi (2024) note that bullying is the repeated and intentional use of physical, verbal, or psychological aggression by one person or a group of people to harm another. M. Hysing *et al.* (2021), having analysed

recent studies, observed that bullying among university students is associated with a range of psychological problems, such as depression and anxiety, which can be exacerbated by academic pressures. M. Tight (2023) argues that bullying in educational institutions is a serious social problem that can have long-term negative consequences for students' mental health. J. Gómez-Galán *et al.* (2021) also claim that bullying in higher education is often overlooked but remains a serious issue, and students who are perceived as "different" due to their ethnicity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status are particularly vulnerable. L. Mikheieva & O. Kuleshova (2022) emphasise that bullying can lead to serious psychological consequences for students, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and even suicidal thoughts. A survey of higher education students conducted in 2022 revealed that 38% of students had experienced bullying during their studies (Hrytsenko, 2022). The author notes that higher levels of bullying are found among senior students, which is linked to increased competition and stress during exams.

N. Melnyk (2020) highlights the factors contributing to bullying in the Ukrainian student environment. She draws attention to social stereotypes and cultural norms formed during school, where bullying can be normalised. Research on this topic was conducted by scientists S. Sayed *et al.* (2023) who analysed how online education and changes in the learning process due to the pandemic have affected the level of bullying among students. The study of researchers S. Ali & N. Begum (2022), who studied the role of student unions and organisations in combating bullying, is also significant. They note that active student initiatives aimed at raising awareness of bullying and developing a culture of mutual support can significantly reduce the manifestations of bullying in universities. O. Havrysh (2022), who studied the phenomenon of bullying in Ukrainian educational institutions, emphasises that most cases of bullying in Ukrainian institutions go

unpunished due to a lack of effective mechanisms for combating bullying, as well as stereotypes that bullying is a normal phenomenon in the competitive environment of higher education.

According to a UNICEF survey (UNICEF, 2019), approximately 39% of young people in Ukraine in 2019 experienced bullying. This phenomenon poses a serious threat to the physical and psychological well-being of victims, as well as to social harmony in society. Addressing this issue requires in-depth analysis, effective preventive measures, and concrete actions to combat bullying. In educational settings, bullying can manifest in various forms, from isolated incidents to systematic aggressive behaviour. Regardless of its specific manifestations, such actions harm the mental and physical health of all involved. Detecting incidents of violence in educational institutions is a challenging task, as they often occur in places with insufficient adult supervision.

Many universities and educational institutions are developing and implementing specific strategies, programs, and initiatives aimed at ensuring the safety and psychological well-being of students. Key elements of these initiatives include education and raising awareness about bullying, creating mechanisms for reporting incidents of violence and providing support to victims, psychological support, disciplinary measures against perpetrators, and fostering an inclusive environment for all students. Bullying is a complex and painful phenomenon, and the optimal solution to the problem is not always obvious when it arises. An effective anti-bullying strategy involves not only responding to incidents of violence but also actively preventing its occurrence through the implementation of specific measures and programs.

This study aimed to investigate Ukrainian and international practices in combating bullying in higher education institutions and to analyse the need for creating a safe learning environment to prevent violence. To explore Ukrainian and international practices in preventing and combating bullying among students, the author employed a comprehensive interdisciplinary

approach, considering the sociological, pedagogical, psychological, and legal aspects of the phenomenon. Specifically, the research analysed normative documents, scientific studies by Ukrainian and international scholars, statistical reports, and the results of surveys, questionnaires, and interviews. The experiences of Ukraine and international practices in combating bullying were systematised through a review of scientific publications, monographs, conference materials, and reports. A comparison of approaches to bullying prevention in different countries was conducted, particularly in the areas of legislation, educational programs, psychological support, and the involvement of community initiatives. The use of these methods allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the state of bullying in the student environment, as well as the identification of the most effective strategies for its prevention and counteraction, which can be adapted to the Ukrainian context.

Ukrainian experiences in preventing and combating bullying among students

The problem of bullying among Ukrainian students is becoming increasingly pressing, leading to the implementation of various preventive and counteractive measures. Research on bullying in the Ukrainian student environment has employed diagnostic methods to identify cases of bullying among students. Specifically, researchers have used psychological tests, questionnaires, and interviews to identify the nature, forms, and consequences of bullying. For instance, T. Fedorchenko (2023) conducted a diagnosis of bullying among Ukrainian higher education students, utilising various psychological techniques and questionnaires to assess levels of aggression, stress, anxiety, and depression. G. Pishchenko & O. Solovey (2022) also explored bullying through the lens of sociocultural factors. The researchers emphasise that bullying is a global issue, and Ukraine is among the top ten European countries in terms of bullying prevalence among 11-15-year-old adolescents. The authors also

outline types of bullying: psychological, physical, economic, and sexual.

Educational institutions are actively developing programs to foster a safe learning environment. For example, trainings and information sessions are conducted where students can learn about the nature of bullying, its consequences, and prevention methods. For instance, the Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State University held a training session in the format of an interactive discussion with students on the topic "Life without bullying" (ISCM, 2021). During the moderated discussion, participants evaluated the importance of this issue in society, actively engaging in the conversation.

A key aspect is the active engagement of students in discussions on this topic, creating a platform for open communication. Organising discussions, seminars, and interactive lectures allows young people to share experiences and seek joint solutions to combat bullying. Additionally, many educational institutions are implementing anonymous channels for reporting bullying incidents, providing students with the opportunity to seek help confidentially. For instance, the Izmail Agrotechnical Applied College held a discussion on "Counteracting Bullying in the Educational Environment" (NULES, 2023). Students were introduced to the concept of bullying, its legal consequences under the Criminal Code of Ukraine, and participated in a survey. Furthermore, students attended a UNICEF workshop, completed a friendship test, engaged in exercises to identify bullying, and learned about the dynamics of this phenomenon in Ukraine. They also watched a video about Nick Vujicic, a renowned motivational speaker and founder of the "Life Without Limbs" organisation, which served as a powerful example of overcoming bullying.

Combating bullying is considered a multi-stage process requiring concerted efforts from the government, universities, student organisations, educators, parents, and students themselves. Only through coordinated actions and the implementation of comprehensive measures can

success be achieved in this struggle and the best conditions created for the learning and personal growth of the younger generation. Psychological support is a crucial component in the fight against bullying. Universities are organising counselling sessions for students, where they can receive professional help. This benefits not only victims but also perpetrators who also need support in addressing their issues. Overall, Ukraine is beginning to recognise the importance of a comprehensive approach to the problem of bullying, which includes education, support, and creating a safe environment for all students. In response to the growing interest in social interaction and the psychological climate in educational institutions, the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 1646 (2019) approved the Procedures for Responding to Bullying Cases and the Procedures for Applying Educational Measures. Additionally, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with UNICEF, developed a methodological manual titled *Combating Bullying in Educational Institutions: A Systemic Approach* (Andreenkova *et al.*, 2019).

One effective method of preventing bullying in higher education is through dialogue, a complex process of organising cognitive activity (Yanishevska & Tymoshenko, 2018). It involves a step-by-step discussion of material in a question-and-answer format. If even a small part of the information is overlooked, knowledge becomes incomplete, leading to a loss of interest and motivation. Therefore, this form of prevention is widely used in many higher education institutions. When studying the psychological aspects of bullying and methods of prevention, it is essential to consider the role of communication and psychological discussions as important tools (Shatyрко & Moizrist, 2023).

Additionally, collaboration between universities, professional organisations, and student and faculty associations is a crucial component of bullying prevention. Such initiatives help foster critical thinking in young people and the ability to recognise instances of bullying, as well as

understanding their role in preventing it. It is also important to provide access to anonymous reporting channels, allowing students to report bullying incidents without fear. This creates a safe environment for those who have experienced bullying and encourages witnesses to take action. Anonymity reduces the fear of potential repercussions and increases the likelihood of incidents being reported. Equally important is the involvement of parents in bullying prevention. They can participate in seminars and information campaigns, helping to create a unified stance against bullying and strengthening the relationship between educational institutions and families.

Thus, the combined efforts of all participants in the educational process foster a culture of zero tolerance for bullying, which is crucial for creating a safe and supportive learning environment. For example, the National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine (NULES, 2023) has implemented educational activities aimed at preventing bullying and fostering a legal consciousness among students. As part of this work, a thematic lecture entitled “No to Bullying!” was conducted. Similarly, the Dragomanov Ukrainian State University demonstrates a responsible approach to creating a safe learning environment, organising an event titled “For the Safety of the Higher Education Institution” (Dragomanov..., 2023). University initiatives to create an anti-bullying environment aim to prevent and counteract this phenomenon. During these events, a system of anonymous complaints was introduced, allowing students and staff to report incidents of bullying without fear of retaliation or reprisals (Sovenko & Balkova, 2024). Additionally, universities are actively collaborating with experts in psychology and pedagogy to conduct trainings designed to raise awareness among faculty and students about bullying prevention. These measures not only ensure a swift response to potential bullying incidents but also contribute to creating a positive and friendly learning environment where everyone can feel confident and protected.

International experiences in combating bullying in educational institutions

International experiences in preventing and combating bullying in educational settings demonstrate a wide range of approaches and strategies successfully implemented in various countries. Many European Union countries and the USA have national anti-bullying programs aimed at reducing incidents of bullying among students. These programs encompass parental workshops, playground supervision, and intensive educational activities for both adults and children, including specific disciplinary measures.

Sweden stands out among European countries, with its anti-bullying programs demonstrating exceptional effectiveness. Sweden was one of the first countries to recognise bullying as a significant issue. The country's approach involves the active participation of all stakeholders at all stages of anti-bullying measures, making it an integral part of the educational process. In 2006, Sweden enacted the “The Act Prohibiting Discrimination and Other Forms of Degrading Treatment of Children and School Students” (2006). This law mandated educational institutions to implement anti-bullying and anti-discrimination policies. It required schools and universities to develop equality plans aimed at preventing all forms of bullying and ensuring a safe learning environment. In 2008, the law was consolidated with other anti-discrimination acts within the new Discrimination Act (2008), which encompasses a broader range of measures to protect against discrimination and bullying.

In the USA, the primary focus of bullying prevention and intervention efforts is on empowering educators and mentors, supported by professional and medical organisations, to raise awareness about bullying both in and outside of schools and to highlight its negative impacts on students' health and society as a whole. Key aspects include student education, the implementation of anti-bullying policies, active reporting of incidents, and the provision of support services. Many US universities have implemented effective

anti-bullying initiatives through programs such as “Not on My Campus” (ADL, n.d.), which aim to foster a culture of respect, understanding, and reporting of bullying incidents.

In Germany, where, according to S. Fischer & L. Bilz (2024), 14% of surveyed students have experienced bullying at school and 7% have reported cyberbullying, online platforms are used to report bullying incidents and provide psychological support to victims. These resources allow students to anonymously report potential bullying cases, increasing comfort and safety for those who wish to share their experiences. Psychological support can also be accessed through these platforms, where victims can receive confidential counselling from professionals.

In the United Kingdom, the issue of bullying is addressed from the very first day of school. Strategies to combat this issue have been developed since the 1980s, and all educational institutions are mandated to have anti-bullying policies in place (Harrison *et al.*, 2020). Many countries, including the USA, Canada, and the United Kingdom, have implemented specialised programs aimed at raising awareness about bullying among students and staff. One such example is the “Bystander Training” program, which educates students on how to intervene actively when they witness bullying (Wolke & Lereya, 2015). Furthermore, universities in the USA, Germany, and Canada offer a variety of psychological support programs for students who have been victims of bullying. These programs may include individual counselling, group therapy, and specialised sessions for students experiencing stress related to bullying (Waseem & Nickerson, 2023). Psychologists and social workers conduct training sessions for students, discussing conflict resolution strategies and developing emotional intelligence skills.

In Kazakhstan, where specific legislation to address bullying in educational institutions is absent, incidents are handled by a special council composed of elected academic staff (Nazarchuk, 2021). One approach to bullying prevention involves programs focused on developing

communication skills, conflict resolution abilities, and resilience. Successful anti-bullying initiatives such as the “Bullying Prevention Program”, “KiVa”, “Friendly Schools”, “Anti-bullying – prevention and intervention”, and the Farsta Method, implemented in Norway, Finland, the USA, and Sweden, incorporate role-playing activities where participants assume the roles of both victim and bully, as well as writing exercises exploring the victim’s perspective (Olkhova, 2023).

Norway provides another successful example. The programme by D. Olweus (2009) has demonstrated high effectiveness, reducing bullying incidents by 30-50%. This initiative made mandatory for all educational institutions, emphasises peaceful communication within defined boundaries rather than punitive measures. In Norway and Sweden, a three-way agreement is signed at the beginning of the academic year by students, their parents, and the school administration. This agreement fosters greater accountability and commitment among all stakeholders (Nazarchuk, 2021).

Spain has also been actively addressing the issue of bullying. The country has implemented programs that involve role-playing exercises, workshops, and group discussions, allowing students to explore different aspects of bullying. These activities provide students with opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings, as well as learn how to support each other in challenging situations. Under the Organic Law of Spain (2015), bullying is classified as a crime punishable by imprisonment of between three months and two years. Moreover, bullying is one of the most prevalent forms of aggressive behaviour (Saneleuterio *et al.*, 2023).

Each of the approaches discussed reflects a unique strategy for combating bullying in universities and schools. However, a common factor is the active support from administration, faculty, students, and psychological services, contributing to effective bullying prevention and intervention. Thus, international experiences demonstrate that effective bullying prevention and intervention

require the integration of various aspects – from education and support to legislative initiatives and active participation of all members of the educational community. This comprehensive approach enables the creation of a safe and supportive environment for all students.

Conclusions

Bullying remains one of the most pressing and concerning issues in educational settings, as it has a direct impact on the physical and psychological well-being of young people, posing serious threats to their development. According to UNICEF data, a significant proportion of students in Ukraine are victims of bullying, necessitating immediate and comprehensive measures to address this problem. Bullying not only affects the personal well-being of victims but also has long-term consequences, which may include depression, anxiety disorders, and low self-esteem. Given this, preventive measures aimed at raising awareness of bullying, creating effective mechanisms for anonymous reporting of incidents, and providing timely support to victims are of paramount importance.

The implementation of successful anti-bullying programs, such as those in Norway and Sweden, demonstrates the effectiveness of a systematic approach to addressing this issue. Programs that emphasise collaboration among

all educational stakeholders foster a culture of responsibility, mutual understanding, and respect among students and staff. They not only facilitate prompt responses to bullying incidents but also actively prevent them through education, training, and psychological support. Combating bullying is a complex and multifaceted challenge that requires the combined efforts of universities, students, faculty, parents, and even the wider community. Only through the integration of comprehensive measures, including the adoption of international experiences and practices, can a safe and supportive educational environment be created. This approach will enable young people to develop in a setting where they can learn and self-actualise without fear, anxiety, or psychological pressure, thereby fostering their holistic development. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as training programs, interactive activities, and anonymous reporting channels. This will be crucial in identifying the most effective practices for preventing and addressing bullying.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Український та міжнародний досвід профілактики та протидії булінгу у студентському середовищі

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Анотація. Сучасне суспільство стикається з різким зростанням випадків насильства, дискримінації та психологічного тиску, особливо серед молоді. Булінг у студентському середовищі став серйозною соціальною проблемою, що впливає на фізичне і психічне здоров'я студентів, їхні академічні досягнення та загальну якість життя. Проблема булінгу серед студентів стає дедалі актуальнішою, і вживаються заходи для створення безпечного освітнього середовища. Метою дослідження був аналіз українського та міжнародного досвіду профілактики та протидії булінгу у студентському середовищі заради визначення ефективних методів, стратегій і практик для створення безпечного та підтримуючого освітнього середовища. В Україні заклади освіти впроваджують тренінги, інтерактивні дискусії та анонімні канали для повідомлення про випадки цькування, сприяючи обміну досвідом серед студентів. Досвід інших країн, зокрема країн Європи, демонструє широкий спектр ефективних програм, включаючи законодавчі ініціативи, психологічну підтримку та активну участь усіх учасників освітнього процесу. Профілактика булінгу розглядалася як багатогранний процес, що вимагає комплексного підходу, включаючи підвищення обізнаності та створення інклюзивного середовища. Акцентовано увагу на важливості спільних зусиль університетів, студентів, викладачів і батьків у боротьбі з булінгом, що є критично важливим для формування позитивного навчального клімату. Також подано рекомендації щодо впровадження успішних міжнародних практик, що можуть допомогти знизити рівень цькування серед студентської молоді. Розглянуто приклади успішних програм у таких країнах, як Швеція та Норвегія, Велика Британія, Німеччина, які реалізують систематичний підхід до профілактики булінгу через навчання, медіацію та співпрацю між усіма учасниками освітнього процесу. Закцентовано увагу на активній участі всіх зацікавлених сторін у боротьбі з булінгом, адже лише спільними зусиллями можна створити безпечне та підтримуюче освітнє середовище

Ключові слова: насилля; студенти; освітнє середовище; психологічна підтримка; антибулінгова програма; інклюзивність; безпека