**Bullying at school.**

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**3836 words**

**Introduction**

«Hatred paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it». Martin Luther King Jr said. It clearly stands out from this quote that negative attitudes towards the surrounding environment and violence only worsen life. What cannot be left neglected is the fact that bullying is one of the most common problems of social and educational spheres, leading to physical and mental health problems among people. According to National Center for Educational Statistics, more than one out of every five (20.8%) students report being bullied globally.

Nobody can deny that everyone has the right for life and liberty, regardless of his/her race, gender, disability, religion, appearance, age, finance, educational status and so on. For me it is important to contribute towards formation of equality, tolerance and justice in the society. Along with desire to be helpful in coping with this issue, interest in this widespread problem motivates me to start working on the project in order to find answers to the main research question.

I am partially biased towards this topic because many acquainted people face with discrimination, coercion or abuse relationships. Therefore, it affects the quality of my work and the results of the research can be not objective. By this I mean that making this project and searching for particular information can have references to my personal perspective.

It is expected that outcome of this research will be a brochure or an approach. A brochure can be aimed to collect all needed information about bullying for children and scholars, while an approach can be targeted to experience suggested methods of tackling this issue and show how effective measures in practice are.

**Context**

To begin with, bullying is a common phenomenon that has a negative effect on social and educational spheres. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, bullying is the behavior of a person who hurts or frightens someone smaller or less powerful, often forcing that person to do something they do not want to do. Under the term «school bullying» it is customary in psychological literature to accept a whole set of social, psychological and pedagogical problems affecting an individual or group's process of prolonged physical or psychological violence against an individual who cannot protect himself in this situation (Delwyn P. Tattum, David A. Lane, «Bullying in schools», 1989). R. J. Hazler (Breaking the Cycle of Violence: Interventions for Bullying and Victimization, 1996) also states that bullying can occur whether individually or in groups and creates a destructive relationship in which a dominant subject («offender») consistently displays conduct that causes confusion of a less dominant subject («victim»).

There are different types of bullying that people experience. The first one is physical and it includes hitting, kicking, tripping, punching, damaging properties, and other physical attacks. Generally, this type of bulling is the most obvious form. Bullying is not limited to physical violence and can result in behavior that offends the self-esteem of others, undermines self-esteem, i.e., psychological violence. Means of psychological bullying are insult, creating a tense atmosphere, harassment, methods of alienation / isolation from a group of students and social exclusion, contempt, spreading rumors behind their backs, lying stories, ignoring, criticizing, quarrelling, ridicule, torturing, intimidation, etc (Smith P.K, Sharp S., «School bullying: insights and perspectives», 1994). Adding to the point, a new form of bullying has arisen with the advent of the Internet, triggered by the use of digital technology and its facilities such as SMS, email, social media.

D. Olweus («Bullying at school: basic facts and effects of a school based intervention program», 1994) argues that offenders can be characterized as individuals with a high potential for general aggressiveness. They «attack» in one way or another, not only on their victims, but also on teachers, relatives, show a more positive attitude towards aggression than «witnesses» and «victims». Olweus also found that the «offenders» feel successful and self-confident.

Victims are generally sensitive, anxious; physically weak, have low self-esteem, few friends, and prefer to spend time with adults (Olweus, «Bullying at school: what we know and we can do», 1993). A typical victim of bullying is an introverted child with behavioural disabilities, negative self-beliefs and social difficulties (Cook et al., «Predictors of Bullying and Victimization in Childhood and Adolescence: A Meta-analytic Investigation», 2010). These features can be both consequences of bullying, and its premises – «signals» to other children that the child is easy to make a victim (Fekkes, «Do bullied children get ill, or do ill children get bullied A perspective cohort study on the relationship between bullying and health related symptoms», 2006).

The position of witnesses («bystanders») is taken by the majority of participants in situations of bullying. According to Canadian data, 68 percent of high school students have witnessed school harassment (Trach et al., «Bystander responses to school bullying: A cross-sectional investigation of grade and sex differences», 2010). Almost all children (but the older, the less often) report feeling bad for the victim, but less than half try to help those (Olweus, «The Olweus bullying prevention program», 2007). Although the witnesses’ reaction is extremely important for what is happening: joining the witnesses' harassment and even the slightest encouragement (the smile, etc.) serves as a reward for the persecutors, as well as the resistance or acceptance of the person.

According to a research of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 2011, 66.2% of Kazakhstani scholars experienced school violence, 63.6% of them as witnesses, 44.7% as victims, and 24.2% admitted to committing violent acts. The current anti-bullying policy has already achieved some success, but there are still problems that must be solved. Along with the shortcomings in the rules of psychological services’ work, the country has not developed large-scale public awareness of the importance of creating a safe psychological environment in schools (Informational- analytical centre –«modern education» magazine, 2016).

From social lens, abusive relationships and bullying have disruptive impact on development of community. As it was mentioned before, violence at school is the reason of mental health issues and causes a rise of suicide risk. Furthermore, students experience stress and the academic performance deteriorates.

From cultural point of view, because of bullying at school aggression or coercion possibly can become social norm. It means that this behaviour directly affect the mentality and values of a society. Adding to the point, bullying leads to conflicts between people of various groups, especially discrimination and racism have become a severe predicament of different ethnic groups’ representatives.

**Aims**

This research explores the issue of bullying and its effect on social development. The main aim is to find out the best measures to tackle a problem. Moreover, it is important to pinpoint attention on the information about the frequency of bullying cases in schools of our city and its consequences. It seems that the most beneficial approach will be an increase in understanding the current situation and why people should respect other individuals.

Therefore the main questions to research are:

* How often do local students face bullying?
* What are the main reasons for this phenomenon?
* What is the most effective way of bullying prevention in the school environment?

The outcomes of the research are intended to help students to overcome bullying. As a result, by future results of the research, it will be possible to spread essential data among people and organize an event to inform students about this problem.

**Methods**

The first research method that will be used is a survey. It gives opportunity to be anonymous in order to get more sincere answers. That is why it will be easier to find out trends or common bullying cases among students.

Questions in the survey will be about personal experience of each student and their opinion about it. The main aim is to identify how often students face bullying, what is the reason for it and its consequences. Furthermore, it will be beneficial to identify their role in these situations (aggressor\ victim\ witness) and understand behaviour of each side.

Students of the middle and high schools (approximately 100), which are located in Ust-Kamenogorsk city, will be the targeted population of the research. The topic was narrowed to bullying at school, as the first manifestation of the violence among children often occurs in this type of educational institutes.

Additionally, by help of a specialist it is possible to verify the survey’s conclusion and improve it from psychological aspect. There are some possible weaknesses of the survey such as unwillingness of students to recognize themselves as a bully.

Interview is the second method that will be conducted in the research. It is necessary to interview an expert of psychology due to the fact that specialist of psychological domain has more knowledge and practical experience.

It is obvious that the interview with a specialist in this sphere contributes to realization of the nature of bullying and violence at schools. The main purpose of the interview is to find out the most effective way of bullying prevention (it answers the last research question). Moreover, probably asking questions about the result of the survey will lead to more comprehensive understanding of bullying cases in our city.

It should be acknowledged that school psychologists possibly will be biased and hence the weakness of the interview is a subjective result. The comparison of the results of the interview and the focus group discussion will verify the research. As it was mentioned before, interviewee often express a personal opinion and using the conclusion of the focus group can improve quality of data and make it more objective.

Focus group is the last method that will be used in the project. This type of research method will ensure various perspectives of this issue. Hence, the main aim of this method is to reduce biased attitude towards the phenomenon and improve objectivity of the project.

The focus group discussion will consider the same question as the interview (about the best way of bullying prevention) and evaluate the results of other types of research methods. Adding to the point, 3-5 students who faced bullying are the targeted population of the focus group discussion.

Needless to say that simultaneous detailed analysis of results of the focus group and the interview will lead to getting more relevant and accurate data. Nevertheless, the main drawback of the focus group discussion is a possibility of unequal participation of the people and reluctance to uncover own traumatic experience.

**Results**

The first method that was used is a survey, which showed how often students face bullying, what is the reason for it and its consequences. It was expected that approximately 100 students will participate in this survey and in the end 93 responses were received. It should be acknowledged that 60.2% of surveyed students belong to 14-16 years old age group, while 29% of these people are 17-19 years old and 10.8% of respondents are 11-13 years old.

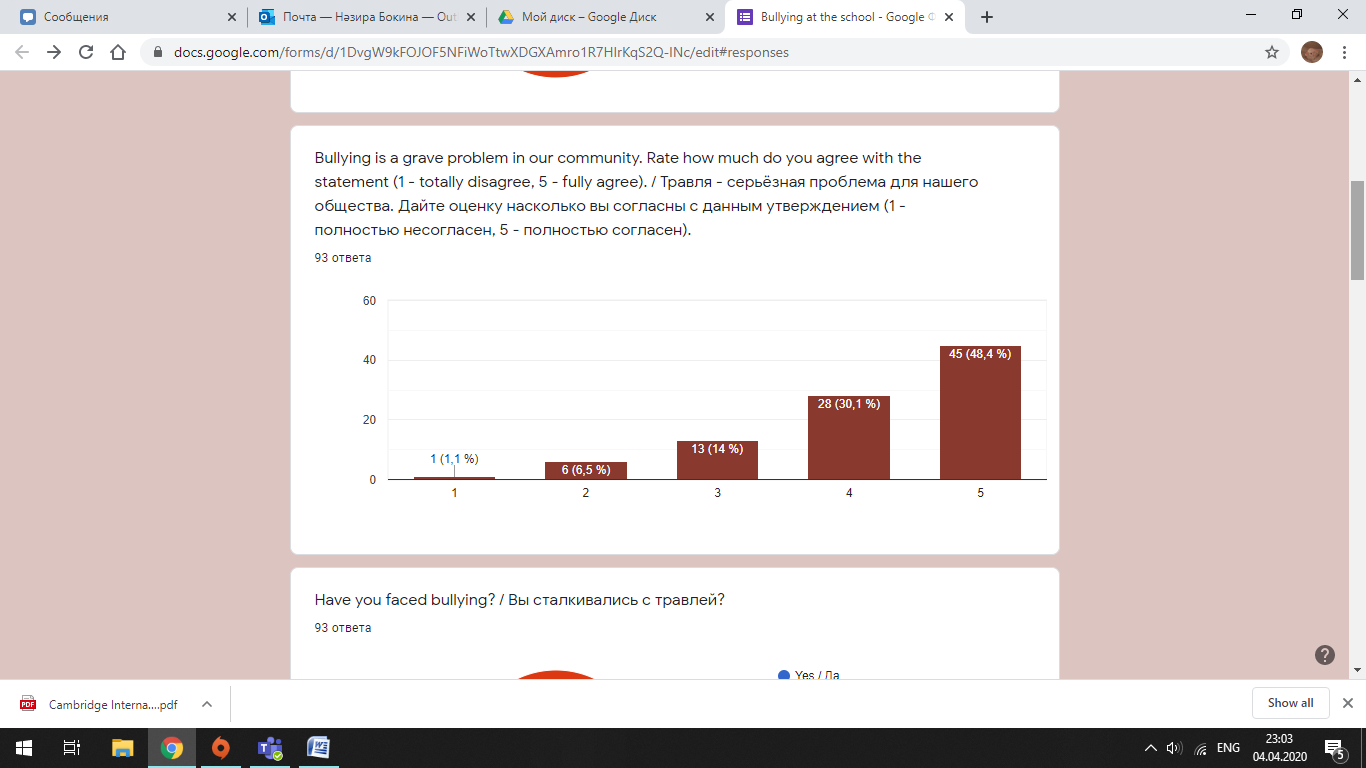
It is important to draw attention to the fact that 48.4% of students fully agreed that bullying is a grave problem and only one person (1.1%of respondents) totally disagreed with this statement. Therefore, it can be argued that certain measures should be undertaken in order to reduce the severity of the issue.

Figure1. Gravity of bullying.

51.6% of local students faced bullying and the rest of them (48.4%) do not have any experience.

Regarding the roles in bullying, 30.1% of surveyed people cannot refer themselves to certain role in bullying. Just over 10% of respondents stated that they bullied someone, 31.2% of them recognized themselves as a victim and 53.8% of local students witnessed bullying at the school. It must be said the percentage of people who did not uncover their role in bullying is relatively high because of possible personal reasons such as psychological barrier or trauma.

Turning to the faced types of bullying, 24.7% did not face any type of bullying, 32.3% of surveyed audience experienced cyber bullying and 17.2% of students were exposed to physical aggression. The overwhelming majority of survey participants (65.6%) were confronted with verbal bullying.

As for the reasons for this phenomenon, the most popular options are:

* aggressors assert themselves (60.2%);
* being jealous or angry because of victim (50.5%);
* student has a learning disability or emotional/behavioural disorder;
* appearance (43%).

Looking meticulously at the listed reasons, it can be said that the main cause of bullying cases is bully’s behaviour, and not of the victim.

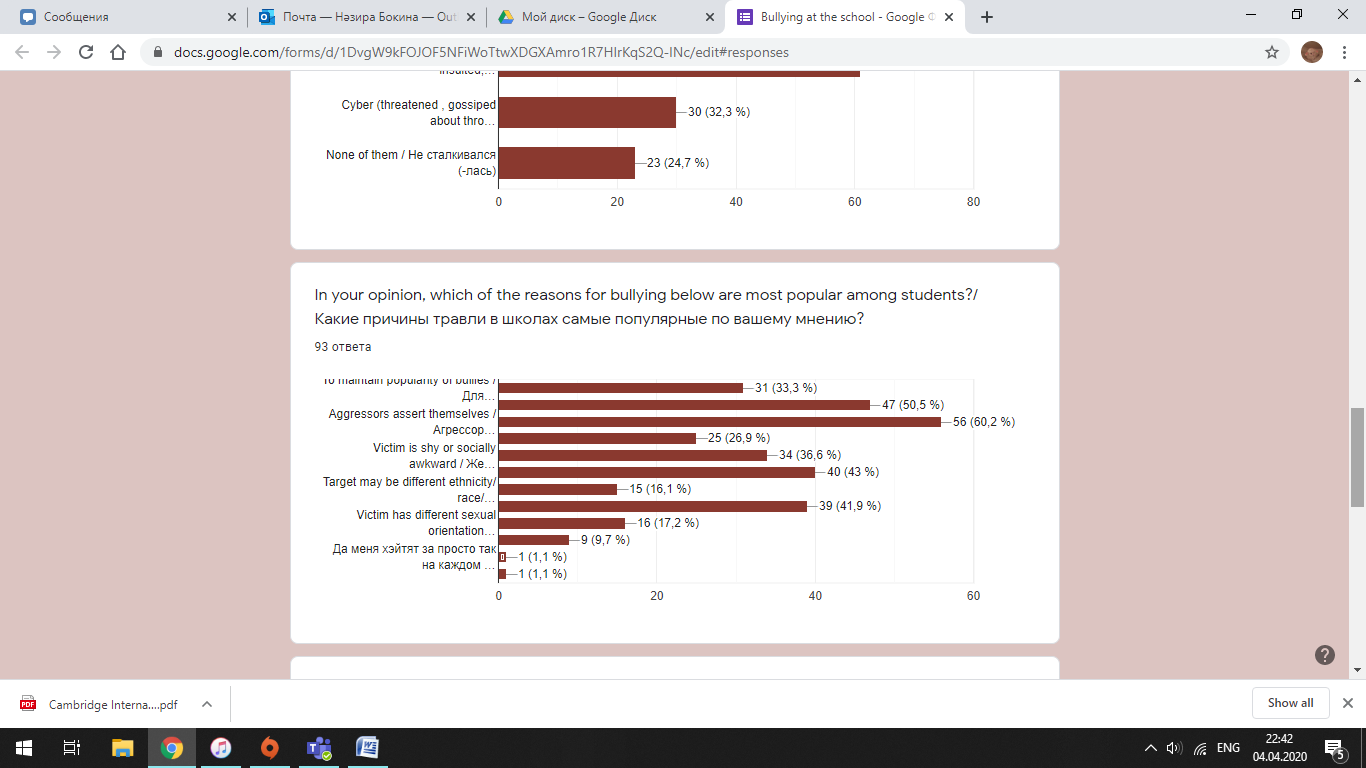


Figure 2. Reasons for bullying.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **To which role can you refer yourself in bullying?** | **If you saw someone being bullied at the school, what would you do?** | | | | | |
| Tell to parents | report to the school authorities | resolve independently | ask a psychologist's help | do nothing | bully the victim |
| bully | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 | 2 | 1 |
| bystander | 3 | 12 | 23 | 7 | 5 | 1 |
| victim | 3 | 3 | 15 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| none of them | 4 | 6 | 13 | 0 | 2 | 0 |

Table 1. The cross tabulation between role in bullying and witnesses’ actions.

As the cross-tabulation table shows that most students, especially witnesses try to resolve the situation independently. The results of this survey demonstrate that

* 46.2% of respondents prefer intervening and protecting victim,
* 21.5% of local students would report to the school authorities,
* 10.8% of survey participants would do nothing.

In other words, this data represents the mistrust and unwillingness of students to ask a school psychologist for help.

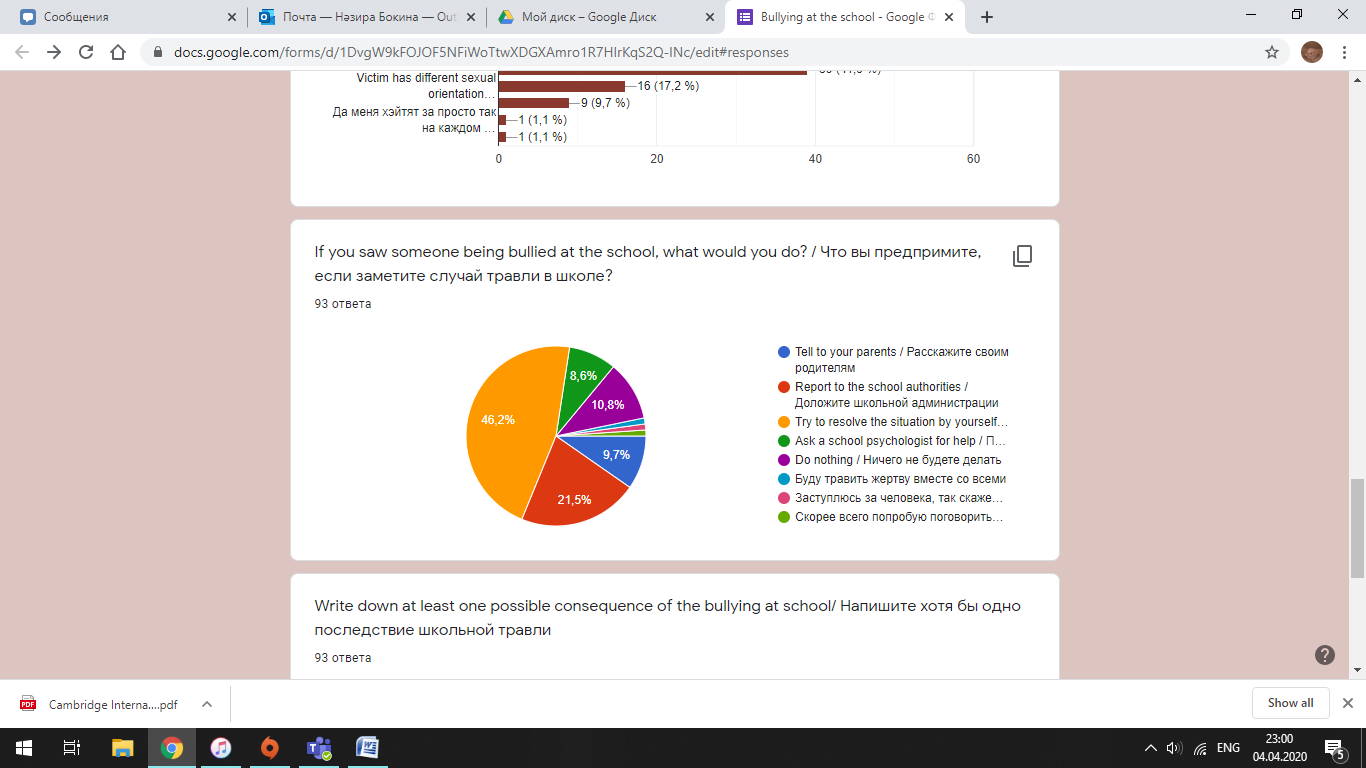
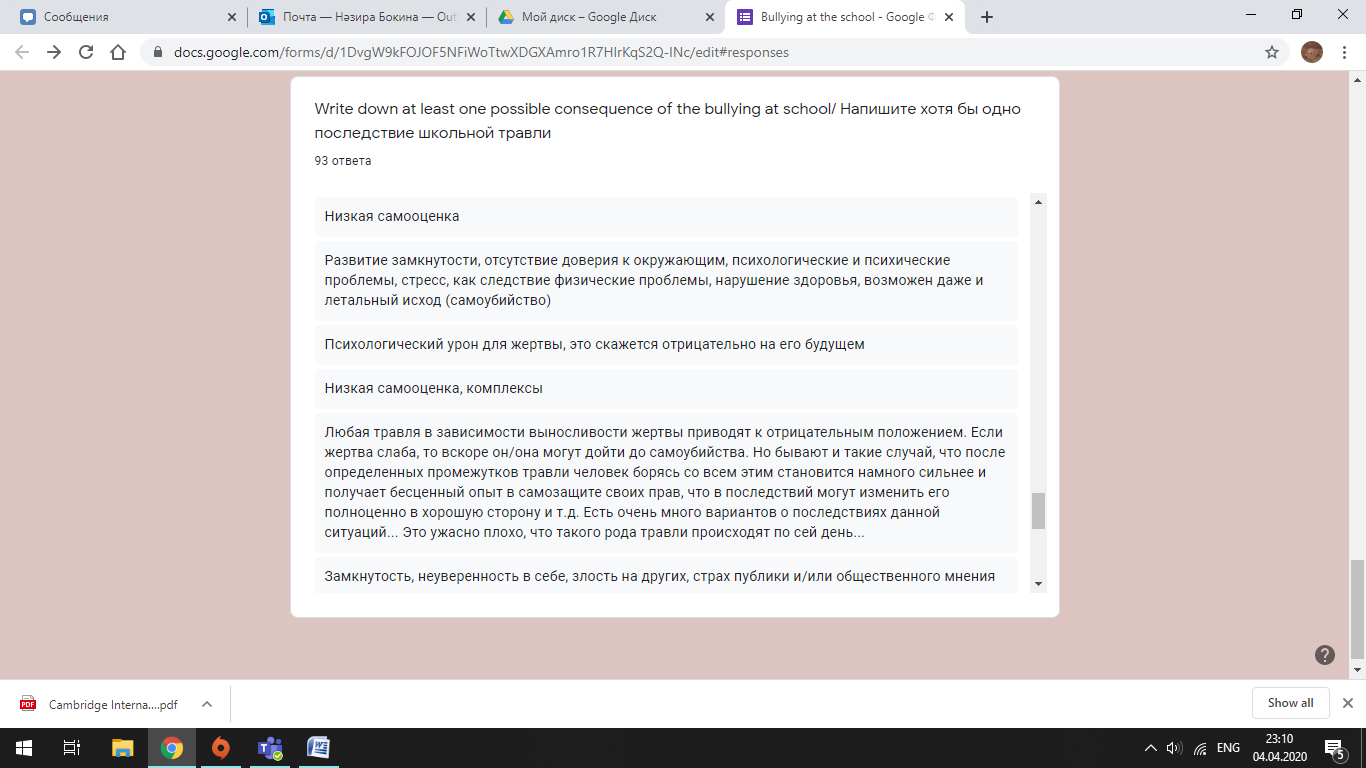
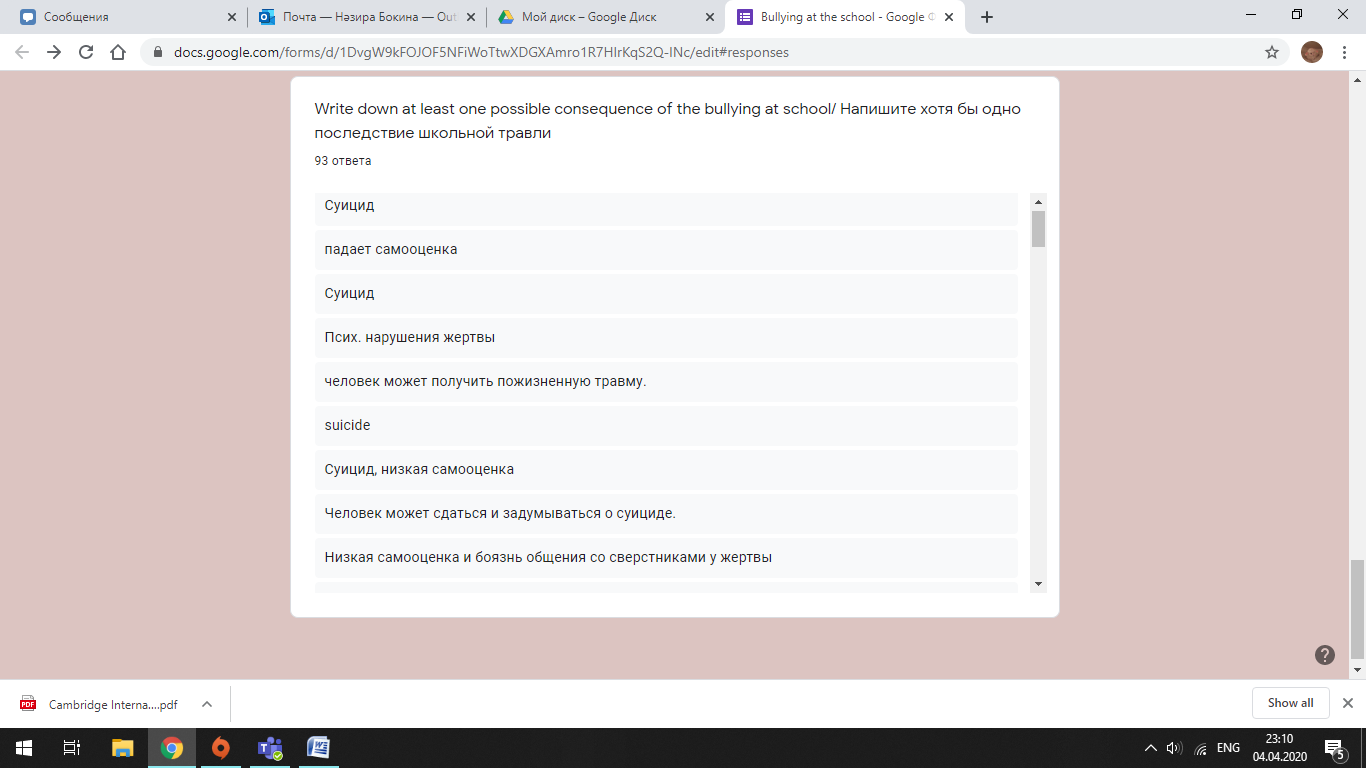


Figure 3. Actions that witness should implement.

Regarding the bullying consequences, it should be acknowledged that many students mentioned:

* Psychological problems: personal stagnation, depression, suicide and self-harm (32%);
* Low self-esteem (19%);
* Deterioration of academic performance (17%);
* Shyness, stage fear, introversion and communication problems (16%);
* No influence (13%);
* Motivation to self-development for victims (3%).

After analysing the answers to the question about consequences, it becomes obvious that the common trend is psychological issues.



Figures 4 and 5. Consequences of bullying.

The following method was interview, which was conducted with school psychologists. According to both psychologists, students seldom ask for professional help probably because the school creates conducive psychological environment or they do not want to draw the attention. In the majority of cases students are looking for a psychological support because of stressful situations. Turning to the question about bystanders’ actions, school psychologists emphasize the measures that can be implemented by witnesses. In their opinion, it depends on the type of bullying and list of actions should be thoroughly considered.

Furthermore, they recommend to be careful and to report the situation to school authorities/social workers /counsellors /psychologists, as these people play a significant role in bullying prevention. It should be acknowledged that psychologists understand the importance of their figure in bullying cases and that is why they provide immediate assistance.

They also pay attention to the school prophylactic events that aimed to form peaceful atmosphere (curatorial hours, psychological hours, dissemination of booklets) and works with some individuals. Moreover, they claim that the school should keep students informed about this issue and introduce special programme.

Regarding methods that will increase the understanding of the problem, school psychologists are convinced that the most effective way of preventive measures are face-to-face conversations and psychological trainings due to the fact that each student requires an individual approach.

After conducting the interview, it becomes clear that the results of the interview and survey verify each other because some students and psychologists believe that bystanders should report to the school authorities. However, the majority of students think that it will be better for a bystander to get involved and independently help the victim.

The last conducted method was focus group discussion. Firstly, there were three participants (one bully, one witness, one victim) that were not acquainted and wanted to stay anonymous. Despite the fact that they have different experience in bullying, their answers are quiet similar.

After getting all answers, it was obvious that a bystander tries not to interfere in other people’s relationship. However, it seems to this person that it will be better to appeal to the administration or teachers, as their authority should point to the problem. Moreover, witness strongly believes that social workers and school counsellors do not play an important role in such cases, because bullies do not change their attitude and these services can give advice to victims to change their behaviour. It seems to witness that rewarding positive behaviour is the most effective way of bullying prevention.

From victim’s point of view, the best strategy for witness is trying to clarify the situation and offering help, but more importantly reporting the case to respective worker. Additionally, victim thinks that school counsellors are oftentimes the only available source of support in the school; hence they are essential in providing help and they have an authority over students, which put them in a good position to give advice. Victim argues that providing efficient mental support, organizing transparent workspaces and ensuring constant supervision are the most effective measures of bullying prevention.

Person who bullied others believes that witnesses should resolve the situation by themselves and protect victims from violence. Along with this opinion, bully bolsters the concept that everything depends on the participants of bullying case and school psychologists are powerless in this question. It should be said that this person thinks that the best approach in resolving this problem is to set strict punishment for aggressors.

The confirmation of the results of focus group discussion by the data of other methods shows that the best actions for witness are offering support to the victim and reporting to the school authorities. Nevertheless, most students think that school social workers play insignificant role in these cases, while psychologists perceive these people as a key part of resolving the problem. Adding to the point, the comparison of psychologists’ and participants of focus group discussion answers demonstrates that the most efficient method prevention is increase of awareness among children about this problem.

**Conclusion**

It seems that the main aim of the research is almost achieved. Despite the fact that all questions were answered, the results were generalised and it requires further research in order to get more precise data. The hypothesis is confirmed because research results approve the importance of increasing the awareness about this problem among students. The degree of validity is relatively high as reliable sources of information were used in secondary research and the results of conducted research methods describe general trend of bullying.

In response to each of the research questions it is possible to make the following conclusions:

* How often do local students face bullying?

According to the conducted survey, every second local student was confronted with bullying. However, the number of respondents who do not have any experience decreased while conducting the analysis, and the minority of students stated that they «did not face any type of bullying» in the question about experience form of bullying. Probably incorrect formulation of the question and lack of proper explanation lead to misunderstanding among survey participants. Consequently, it will be incorrect to generalise to the whole targeted population.

* What are the main reasons for this phenomenon?

After considering obtained answers from the survey, it becomes obvious that the most popular option is «aggressors assert themselves». Additionally, D Olweus claimed that the «offenders» feel successful and self-confident. Afterwards, as it was predicted the main cause of bullying is an inappropriate and aggressive behaviour of bullies.

* What is the most effective way of bullying prevention in the school environment?

The results of conducted interview and focus group discussion support the hypothesis owing to the evidence that the most beneficial action is an increase of concern about this issue. It must be mentioned that the list of such measures includes:

Curatorial hours, psychological hours, dissemination of booklets;

Frequent face-to-face conversations and psychological trainings;

Provision with efficient mental support and constant supervision;

Introduction of special programme.

What compounds the problem is disinclination of students to participate in such prevention work. Along with this, a large number of survey respondents and participants of focus group discussion are convinced that school social workers can exacerbate the situation and thus psychologists admit the fact that students seldom seek help from them. The majority of witnesses who took part in the survey stated that they would make an attempt to stop bullying without any assistance of school workers. It is clearly represents the mistrust towards school psychologists and that is why the efficiency of measures listed above can be low.

It is necessary to note that the overwhelming majority of students revealed only destructive impact of bullying such as psychological issues and communication problems. Nevertheless, it was unanticipated that some of them will consider positive consequences.

From the research as a whole it is possible to conclude that undoubtedly increase of realising the gravity of the problem contributes to the reduction of destructive effects of bullying.

**Evaluation**

What regards the strong sides of the research, it should be highlighted that the secondary research gives reliable data on bullying and the primary research has logical results with evidence. Nevertheless, there is a week connection between context and primary research due to the lack of information about the most effective way of bullying prevention in the secondary research. Moreover, the conclusion is partially trustworthy and reliable because of tenuous interaction of primary and secondary research. Looking at the research methods, it must be said that focus group discussion and interviews confirmed the answer to the question about most effective measures. However, the survey was aimed to answer the rest questions and it has not direct connection with other methods.

To improve the quality of the conducted survey the sample group should be enlarged. It must be acknowledged that about 100 students took part in the survey, mainly students of several schools. That is why it is important to differentiate the participants by the schools in which they study. Additionally, to obtain more precise information clarifying statements should be added to the question about the experience (ex: \*if you witnessed bullying, then choose “yes”).

Taking into account the second research method, the number of interviewees should be increased in order to get more valid answers. Furthermore, social workers of other schools should be interviewed because this action will provide the research with information about psychological conditions in public schools of Ust-Kamenogorsk city.

Taking into consideration the last research method, some suggestions can be proposed. The platform for the focus group was a WhatsApp messenger and consequently it was difficult to control participants owing to the fact that one person dominated in the chat. To insure that everyone participates equally the focus group discussion should be conducted face-to-face.

As it was mentioned the majority of participants study or work in NIS, where psychological help and environment are on the relatively high level. Hence, it is questionable to confidently generalise the results of research to the larger area (other schools).

**Further research**

To enhance the confidence in conclusion and its degree of generalisation research methods should be re-conducted with the suggestions listed above. In other words, in each research method targeted audience should be extended.

As it was assumed bullying is widespread problem among students globally. The initial perspective on this issue has not changed because the results of the research show that it is essential to take all necessary measures to minimize its negative effect.

The topic for further research can be related to bullying at working place. It is obvious that targeted audience for surveys and interviews should be workers with bullying experience. The main aim of this work possibly will be to compare bullying at workplace and at school and find out correlation between them. Adding to the point, it will be interesting to understand impact of age on the susceptibility to the bullying.

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**Appendix**

**Survey**

This survey explores the aspects of the bullying at schools. With your help it will be possible to identify how often students of our city face bullying, common reasons and effects of this phenomenon.

\*do not worry; the survey will remain completely anonymous. Thank you for participation!

How old are you?

* 11-13
* 14-16
* 17-19

Bullying is a grave problem in our community. Rate how much do you agree with the statement (1- totally disagree, 5- fully agree)

1

2

3

4

5

Have you faced bullying?

* Yes
* No

To which role can you refer yourself in bullying?

* Bully
* Bystander (witness)
* Victim
* None of them

If yes, what kind of bullying it was?

* Physical
* Verbal
* Cyber

In your opinion, which of the reasons for bullying below are most popular among students? (Multiple choice)

* To maintain popularity of bullies
* Target has low self-esteem
* Being jealous or angry because of victim
* Aggressors assert themselves
* Difference in financial background
* Victim is shy or socially awkward
* Student has a learning disability or emotional/behavioral disorder
* Target may be different ethnicity/race/nationality
* Eye-catching appearance
* Victim has different sexual orientation
* Another option

If you saw someone being bullied at the school, what would you do?

* Tell to your parents
* Report to the school authorities
* Try to resolve the situation by yourself
* Ask a school psychologist for help
* Do nothing
* Another option

Write down at least one possible consequence of the bullying in schools

**Interview**

The main purpose of the interview is to find out the most effective way of bullying prevention at the school. Furthermore, it will lead to better realization of the nature of bullying. That is why yours practical experience and in-depth knowledge in this domain are important for the research. Thank you for participation!

1. How often do students ask for your professional help? (try to compare with the results of the conducted survey)
2. What actions can be implemented by a witness of the bullying case and which of them will be considered as the best approach?
3. What role specifically can school social workers and school counselors play in preventing bullying in order to diminish the frequency of this phenomenon?
4. Which methods will increase the understanding of the issue among children and importance of being respectful to each other?

\*it is semi-structured interview. Coincidently, questions will be added or removed.

**Focus group discussion**

To begin with, the main aim of this method is to reduce biased attitude towards the phenomenon and improve objectivity of the project. The participation of everyone is important due to the fact that this type of research method will ensure various perspectives of the problem. Thank you for participation!

1. What strategies do you use when you witness bullying? What actions can be implemented by a witness of the bullying case and which of them will be considered as the best approach?
2. Do you think that school social workers and school counselors play a significant role in preventing bullying? Why do you think so?
3. What is the most effective way of bullying prevention in the school environment?