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Socio-psychological aspects of bullying as a form of deviant behavior in adolescence

Abstract

This article examines the problem of bullying among adolescents in secondary schools. The purpose of the study is to analyze the socio-psychological aspects of bullying as a form of deviant behavior in adolescence, as well as to identify the features of its role structure and its relationship with adolescent aggression. The empirical base of the study consisted of 138 students in grades 7–8 from secondary schools in Karaganda, Temirtau and Abai (mean age = 13.5 years). The diagnostic instruments included E. G. Norkina's Bullying Structure methodology and the Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ). The obtained empirical data indicate a pronounced role differentiation within the bullying structure: boys are more likely to occupy the roles of defender and victim, whereas the bystander role predominates among girls. A statistically significant association was found between the initiator role and physical aggression, while the emotional (anger) and cognitive (hostility) components of aggression were relatively independent of role position. Thus, bullying is conceptualized as a structured group phenomenon characterized by a clear distribution of roles. The findings highlight the need to develop targeted prevention programs that take into account not only gender-specific patterns of involvement in bullying, but also the relationship between behavioral aggression and dominant roles.

Keywords: bullying, adolescents, deviant behavior, role structure, aggression, gender differences, school environment.

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Жас өспірім кезіндегі девиантты жүріс-тұрыстың бір түрі ретіндегі буллингтың әлеуметтік-психологиялық аспектілері

Аңдатпа

Бұл мақалада жалпы білім беретін мектеп жағдайында жасөспірімдер арасындағы буллинг мәселесі қарастырылады. Зерттеудің мақсаты — жасөспірімдік кезеңдегі девиантты мінез-құлықтың бір түрі ретіндегі буллинктің әлеуметтік-психологиялық аспектілерін зерттеу, сондай-ақ оның рөлдік құрылымының ерекшеліктері мен жасөспірімдердің агрессивтілігімен өзара байланысын анықтау. Зерттеудің эмпирикалық базасын Қарағанды, Теміртау және Абай қалаларындағы жалпы білім беретін мектептердің 7–8 сыныптарында оқитын 138 оқушы құрады (орташа жас — 13,5 жас). Диагностикалық құралдар ретінде Е. Г. Норкинаның «Буллинг-структура» әдістемесі және Басса–Перри агрессивтілік сауалнамасы (ВРАQ) қолданылды. Алынған эмпирикалық деректер буллинг құрылымында айқын рөлдік дифференциацияның бар екенін көрсетеді: ұлдар «қорғаушы» және «жәбірленуші» рөлдерін жиі иеленсе, қыздар арасында «бақылаушы» рөлдік позициясы басым болып табылады. «Инициатор» рөлдік позициясы мен «физикалық агрессия» арасында статистикалық тұрғыдан мәнді өзара байланыс анықталды, ал агрессияның эмоционалдық (ашу) және когнитивтік (өшпенділік) компоненттері рөлдік позицияға қатысты салыстырмалы түрде тәуелсіз болып шықты. Осылайша, буллинг рөлдердің нақты бөлінуімен сипатталатын құрылымдалған топтық құбылыс болып табылады. Зерттеу нәтижелері буллинге қатысушылардың гендерлік ерекшеліктерін ғана емес, сондай-ақ мінез-құлықтық агрессия мен басым рөлдердің өзара байланысын ескеретін мақсатты профилактикалық бағдарламаларды әзірлеу қажеттілігін көрсетеді.

Түйінді сөздер: буллинг, жасөспірімдер, девиантты мінез-құлық, рөлдік құрылым, агрессия, жыныстық айырмашылықтар, мектеп ортасы.

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Социально-психологические аспекты буллинга как формы девиантного поведения в подростковом возрасте

Аннотация

В данной статье рассматривается проблема буллинга среди подростков в условиях общеобразовательной школы. Цель исследования заключается в изучении социально-психологических аспектов буллинга как формы девиантного поведения в подростковом возрасте, а также в выявлении особенностей его ролевой структуры и взаимосвязи с агрессивностью подростков. Эмпирическую базу исследования составили 138 учащихся 7–8 классов общеобразовательных школ городов Караганды, Темиртау и Абая (средний возраст — 13,5 лет). В качестве диагностического инструментария использовались методика Е. Г. Норкиной «Буллинг-структура» и опросник агрессивности Басса–Перри (ВРАQ). Полученные эмпирические данные свидетельствуют о наличии выраженной ролевой дифференциации в структуре буллинга: мальчики чаще занимают позиции «защитник» и «жертва», тогда как среди девочек преобладает ролевая позиция «наблюдатель». Существует значимая взаимосвязь между ролевой позицией «инициатор» и «физической агрессией», при этом эмоциональный (гнев) и когнитивный (враждебность) компоненты агрессии оказались относительно независимыми от ролевой позиции. Буллинг представляет собой структурированное групповое явление с четким распределением ролей. Результаты подчеркивают необходимость разработки адресных профилактических программ, учитывающих не только гендерные особенности участников буллинга, но и связь поведенческой агрессии с доминирующими ролями.

Ключевые слова: буллинг, подростки, девиантное поведение, ролевая структура, агрессия, гендерные различия, школьная среда.

Introduction In the contemporary world, the issue of psychological safety of both specific social groups and individuals has become particularly salient at the levels of public policy, social institutions, educational organizations, and interpersonal relations. This trend is driven by increasing social tension, the transformation of value orientations, and the growing number of risk factors that adversely affect mental health and psychological well-being. Contemporary society demonstrates an increasing prevalence of destructive forms of social interaction, including bullying, hating, aggression, and other manifestations of social pressure, which have a negative impact on individuals' psychological well-being and social adaptation. Psychology, as a major field of scientific inquiry and professional practice, has increasingly focused on the study of bullying as a social-psychological phenomenon within the interactional structures of various collectives—occupational, educational, military, and other social groups—formed through processes of social interaction and joint activity.

Bullying, conceptualized as school-based harassment, constitutes one of the most destructive forms of deviant behavior in the educational context. It is characterized by recurrent and systematic acts of physical, psychological, or social violence aimed at establishing dominance, inflicting harm, or enforcing the social exclusion of a victim who lacks the capacity to effectively defend themselves [1]. Adolescence, as a sensitive period for identity formation and the establishment of social hierarchies, creates heightened vulnerability to involvement in bullying cycles, both in the role of aggressor and victim [2]. The consequences of bullying may assume a systemic and long-term character: victims often develop anxiety and depressive disorders, experience a decline in academic performance, and exhibit symptoms of learned helplessness; aggressors reinforce destructive behavioral patterns; while bystanders internalize norms of indifference and tacit acceptance of violence [3].

Contemporary research indicates that bullying in educational institutions remains a widespread phenomenon, with its forms becoming increasingly diverse due to the influence of digital technologies, particularly in the form of cyberbullying. This issue has acquired a global dimension, rendering its investigation relevant across different countries and cultural contexts. At the National Congress of Educators held on October 5, 2023, the President of the Republic, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, addressed the issue of school bullying, stating: “Unfortunately, cases of harassment and even violence among students continue to occur, which, in turn, provoke children to commit suicide. Bullying causes irreparable damage to the emotional state and health of children and adolescents, negatively affects the learning process, leads to social withdrawal, and results in mental disorders. The state must ensure the protection of children’s rights and safety. Bullying must be eradicated once and for all” [4].

In the Republic of Kazakhstan, according to sociological surveys, 17.5% of children experience bullying on a periodic basis, and 6.8% of surveyed adolescents report being subjected to harassment and intimidation by their peers 2–3 times per month. Additionally, 14.1% of children aged 11–15 years acknowledge their own participation in bullying behaviors towards peers [5].

At the same time, the number of empirical studies aimed at quantitatively assessing the prevalence and structural characteristics of bullying forms in specific regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan remains limited, highlighting the relevance and necessity of further scientific investigation in this area.

Literature reviews The research tradition on bullying traces its origins to Scandinavian studies in the second half of the 20th century, when the first systematic empirical investigations into school harassment were conducted in Sweden and Norway. In the 1960s–1970s, P. P. Heinemann [6] introduced the concept of *mobbing* as a form of group persecution, and later, during the 1970s–1990s, D. Olweus developed the methodology for studying bullying and provided its scientific definition, which has been widely adopted in the international literature. Bullying is conceptualized as repeated aggressive behavior characterized by a power imbalance, directed against less protected individuals. Olweus and colleagues formulated the concept of bullying—(derived from the English term *bully*)—defining it as harassment, discrimination, and systematic victimization. Subsequently, the phenomenon

attracted the attention of international researchers, notably D. A. Lane, who in 1989 published a study on school bullying and emphasized the necessity of an integrated approach to its investigation within educational psychology. This work represents one of the early contributions to the academic understanding of bullying as systematic violence rooted in social interactions among students. These studies consistently characterize bullying as repeated aggressive behavior aimed at less protected individuals, intended to establish dominance and exert psychological suppression over the victim [7].

In the international scholarly literature, the phenomenon of bullying is conceptualized as a complex and persistent socio-psychological phenomenon characterized by a set of invariant features. In D. Olweus' classical framework, bullying is defined as systematic aggressive behavior directed at causing harm to another student, accompanied by a power imbalance between the aggressor and the victim [1]. Similar positions are reflected in the definition provided by the National Association of School Psychologists (USA), which conceptualizes bullying as dynamic and repeated patterns of verbal and non-verbal behavior carried out with the intent to cause harm, in the context of a real or perceived power asymmetry [8, 9].

Expanding upon these approaches, V. E. Besag emphasizes the motivational aspect of bullying, framing it as recurrent physical, psychological, social, or verbal attacks by individuals possessing formal or situational superiority against those unable to effectively defend themselves, aimed at causing suffering and attaining subjective gratification for the aggressor [10]. Subsequent research has further contributed to the differentiation of the concept of bullying, highlighting its core characteristics: intentional harm, repetition of aggressive behavior, and power imbalance between aggressor and victim [11]. Taken together, these conceptualizations allow bullying to be understood as intentional, repeated aggressive behavior rooted in power asymmetries and sustained by both social and individual-psychological factors. In scholarly research, bullying in the school environment is often conceptualized as an observable form of interpersonal behavior manifested in interactions among students and leading to the emergence of feelings of resentment, psychological discomfort, and stress in the victim [12]. This approach emphasizes the behavioral nature of bullying and its immediate emotional consequences for the participants involved. Expanding on this perspective, R. J. Hazler (1996) notes that bullying may be perpetrated by an individual or a group and constitutes a systematic violation of social interaction norms, within which a dominant actor ("the bully") repeatedly exhibits aggressive or humiliating behavior toward a less dominant actor ("the victim"). According to the author, the key psychological mechanism of bullying lies in the «bully's» attainment of subjective gratification derived from perceived superiority based on the victim's physical or psychological vulnerability, as well as in the pursuit of self-affirmation and the devaluation of others to enhance one's social status. In turn, K. Rigby (2000) draws attention to the long-term consequences of bullying for students' mental health, emphasizing that systematic victimization in the school context can significantly undermine the psychological well-being of children and adolescents. The negative impact of bullying, according to the author, is exacerbated in conditions of insufficient social support from peers, teachers, and family members, thereby increasing the risk of emotional and behavioral disorders [13].

Within the Russian scholarly tradition, one of the earliest systematic attempts to conceptualize violence in the school environment was undertaken by I. S. Kon, who drew the attention of the research community to this issue and defined bullying as a form of physical or psychological terror aimed at subordinating one individual to another and instilling a persistent sense of fear in the victim [14]. In subsequent studies, the concept of school bullying was substantially expanded. In particular, O. Malantseva emphasizes that bullying in the educational environment encompasses not only prolonged physical and psychological violence perpetrated by an individual or a group against a student lacking the capacity for effective self-defense, but also constitutes a complex of social, psychological, and pedagogical problems affecting multiple levels of school interaction [15]. In a similar vein, O. L. Glazman conceptualizes bullying as a stable pattern of group interaction, in which an individual is subjected over an extended period to intentional harm or discomfort inflicted by another person or a group possessing greater power or authority [16]. As a result, contemporary Russian scholarship has

developed three complementary approaches to the study of bullying: the dispositional approach (focusing on the personality traits of participants), the temporal approach (emphasizing critical periods of vulnerability), and the contextual approach (analyzing group dynamics and school climate).

Within the Kazakhstani scholarly literature, recent years have witnessed a sustained increase in interest in the issue of bullying in the school environment, driven both by the relevance of this phenomenon and by the necessity of developing effective preventive measures within the educational system. In this regard, Kazakhstani researchers have conducted a comprehensive theoretical analysis of the problem of bullying among schoolchildren, emphasizing the importance of systematic prevention of this phenomenon in the practices of general education institutions [17].

Contemporary research within the Kazakhstani academic context addresses various aspects of the bullying phenomenon, including its emerging forms associated with the development of the digital environment. In particular, studies focusing on cyberbullying highlight that the widespread use of information and communication technologies contributes to the transformation of traditional forms of bullying and extends its manifestations beyond the boundaries of the school setting [18]. The author notes that cyberbullying exerts a pronounced negative impact on the mental health of children and adolescents and is associated with the formation of adverse social and behavioral patterns, especially during adolescence.

Overall, the findings of Kazakhstani studies indicate the necessity of a comprehensive approach to the study and prevention of bullying, one that takes into account both the socio-psychological mechanisms underlying its emergence and the influence of the digital environment on the forms and dynamics of aggressive behavior among schoolchildren.

Thus, the application of conceptual approaches to the definition of bullying ensures the theoretical continuity of the present research and provides a foundation for the empirical analysis of bullying characteristics among adolescents in Kazakhstani schools.

This understanding of bullying is methodologically significant for analyzing the phenomenon within the context of Kazakhstani general education schools, where students' interpersonal interactions are shaped by both universal developmental patterns of adolescence and sociocultural factors. In particular, the specific features of the school environment in the Republic of Kazakhstan—including the pronounced role of group hierarchy, the importance of status within the student collective, and the limited availability of systematic preventive programs—may contribute to the consolidation of stable forms of aggressive behavior and victimization. Moreover, power asymmetry in the Kazakhstani school context often manifests not only through physical dominance but also through social status, academic achievement, and the level of peer social support, thereby broadening the scope and increasing the relevance of the problem of understanding bullying.

The study of bullying in the school environment constitutes a pressing and significant task of contemporary psychological and pedagogical science, as this phenomenon exerts a substantial impact on students' psychological, social, and emotional development. A systematic investigation of the causes, conditions of emergence, and mechanisms of the spread of bullying is essential for the development of effective preventive programs aimed at creating a safe educational environment and supporting adolescents' psychological well-being.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in 2025 in the Karaganda region, (in general education schools located in the cities of Karaganda, Temirtau and Abay). The sample consisted of 138 students from Grades 7–8 (mean age =13.5 years, including 72 girls (52.2%) and 66 boys (47.8%). The sample was formed using a cluster sampling method followed by voluntary participation. Ethical principles of research were strictly observed. Written informed consent was obtained from parents or legal guardians, and verbal assent was obtained from minor participants. Anonymity and confidentiality of the collected data were guaranteed. Diagnostic procedures were administered by practicing psychologists employed in the participating educational institutions.

To identify the bullying role structure within student groups, E. G. Norkina's «Bullying Structure» questionnaire was employed, which is designed to assess adolescents' role positions in situations of school bullying [19]. The bullying structure is conceptualized as a specific socio-psychological system comprising initiators (bullies), assistants of the initiator, defenders of the victim, victims, and bystanders (witnesses). The instrument consists of 25 items, three of which are specifically aimed at identifying instances of violence in the classroom and allow for the detection of aggressive manifestations originating from both students and teachers.

To assess adolescents' levels of aggressiveness, the Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) was used [20]. The questionnaire includes three subscales—anger, physical aggression, and hostility—as well as a composite aggression index. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale.

To identify statistically significant differences between the variables, Fisher's angular transformation criterion and the Mann–Whitney U test were applied, while Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationships between the studied variables. The analysis also included descriptive statistical methods, such as the calculation of frequency distributions, percentages, and arithmetic means. Statistical processing of the empirical data was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.0.

Thus, the aim of the study was to analyze the socio-psychological aspects of bullying as a form of deviant behavior in adolescence, as well as to identify the characteristics of the role structure of bullying and the level of adolescents' aggressiveness within the educational environment.

The object of the study is adolescents' deviant behavior in the educational setting.

The subject of the study comprises the socio-psychological aspects of bullying as a form of deviant behavior in adolescence.

Research Hypotheses: There are statistically significant gender differences in the distribution of role positions within the bullying structure: boys are more likely to occupy active roles (initiator, defender), whereas girls more frequently assume passive roles (bystander); Adolescents' levels of aggressiveness differ significantly depending on their role within the bullying structure, with initiators and their assistants exhibiting higher levels of physical aggression, anger, and hostility compared to other role groups; Gender differences in aggressiveness are present, such that boys demonstrate higher levels of physical aggression, while girls exhibit more pronounced emotional (anger) and cognitive (hostility) components of aggression.

Results and discussion. The results obtained using E. G. Norkina's «Bullying Structure» questionnaire indicate that adolescents' roles in bullying situations are distributed as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of Bullying Role Positions Among Boys and Girls (n = 138)

Role Position	Boys(n=66)	Girls (n=72)	Fisher's ϕ^* -test	Significance Level (p)
Initiator	9 (13.6%)	11 (15.3%)	–0.32	> 0.05
Assistant	3 (4.5%)	5(6.9%)	–0.68	> 0.05
Victim	13 (19.7%)	8 (11.1%)	2.67	<0.01
Defender	32 (48.6%)	22 (30.6%)	4.45	<0.001
Bystander	9 (13.6%)	27 (37.7%)	–6.34	<0.001

Analysis of the distribution of role positions among boys indicates that the most frequent role is defender (48.6%, 32 participants), suggesting that male adolescents are relatively active in protecting peers and willing to intervene in conflict situations. The victim role accounts for 19.7% of participants (13 boys), indicating that a portion of male adolescents are vulnerable and susceptible to aggressive behaviors from peers. The roles of initiator and bystander are equally represented at– 13.6% each (9 participants), reflecting a moderate presence of direct aggression among boys, as well as participation in passive observation of conflict events without direct involvement. The role of assistant to the initiator

is the least frequent – 4.5% (3 participants), indicating a relatively low willingness among boys to actively support aggressors. Overall, the sample of boys is dominated by defensive roles, while active aggression is moderately expressed, accompanied by some passive observation. Among girls, the most frequent role is bystander – 37.7% (27 participants), indicating a substantial proportion of passive participation in conflict situations and a tendency to merely observe bullying behaviors without direct intervention. The role of defender accounts for 30.6% (22 participants), reflecting girls' readiness to actively support victims and provide assistance in conflict situations. The role of initiator is represented by 15.3% of girls (11 participants), while the role of assistant to the initiator accounts for 6.9% (5 participants), indicating a relatively low propensity among girls for active aggression. The victim role comprises 11.1% (8 participants), reflecting the presence of vulnerable adolescents susceptible to peer harassment. Thus, the distribution of role positions among girls demonstrates a predominance of passive and defensive roles, with a comparatively low proportion of active aggressive positions. These findings are consistent with both international and domestic research, which indicates that girls more frequently assume the roles of bystanders and defenders, exhibiting empathy and engagement in supporting peers. To assess gender differences in the distribution of role positions, Fisher's angular transformation (ϕ^*) was applied. The analysis revealed that gender differences in the roles of «initiators» and «assistants» were not statistically significant. However, the proportion of boys in the «victim» role was significantly higher than that of girls ($\phi=2.67$; $p < 0.01$). In the «defender» role, boys also significantly outnumbered girls ($\phi= 4.45$; $p < 0.001$), whereas in the «bystander» role, the proportion of girls significantly exceeded that of boys ($\phi= -6.34$; $p < 0.001$). The observed gender differences are consistent with the findings of Hazler [11] and Bochaver & Khlomov [2], which indicate that boys are more likely to occupy active social roles, whereas girls tend toward passive observation. The high proportion of defenders among boys may be associated with social expectations that prescribe an active stance in group interactions. The predominance of bystanders among girls may reflect both a conflict-avoidance strategy and fear of social disapproval when intervening in bullying situations.

The next stage of the study involved assessing adolescents' levels of aggressiveness using the Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ), with the results presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Mean values (M) and standard deviations (SD) on the BPAQ scales among boys and girls

Scales	Boys		Girls		Mann–Whitney (U)	Significance Level (p)
	M	SD	M	SD		
Physical aggression	21.5,	6.2	22.8	5.9	2210.5	> 0.05
Anger	16.8	5.1	15.9	4.8	2356.0	> 0.05
Hostility	19.2	6.0	18.1	5.5	2287.0	> 0.05

The analysis of aggression components among boys using the Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire revealed that physical aggression represents the dominant form of aggressive behavior. This finding indicates a pronounced orientation of aggressive responses toward the behavioral, externally expressed level, manifested in a tendency toward the use of physical force, impulsive actions, and direct forms of aggression in interpersonal interactions.

Anger, as the affective component of aggression, was less pronounced, suggesting that emotional excitability and irritability are less likely to function as independent leading triggers of aggressive behavior among boys. In many cases, aggressive actions may be characterized not by emotional reactivity, but rather by instrumental or habitual patterns of behavior. Hostility represents the cognitive component of aggression and encompasses suspiciousness, negative attitudes toward others, and a tendency to perceive social interactions as threatening.

This suggests the presence of negative social expectations and distorted social perception among some participants, which may serve as a cognitive background for aggressive behavior, but do not appear to be dominant compared to behavioral forms of aggression.

The analysis of the aggression structure among girls revealed the predominance of physical aggression. This indicates that aggressive behavior in this group is primarily behavioral and overt in nature, manifesting itself in a tendency toward direct actions, impulsive reactions, and potential conflicts in interpersonal interactions. Contemporary research increasingly documents changes in the patterns of adolescent aggression and other forms of deviant behavior among girls. In particular, Poteat and Espelage report an increase in aggressive manifestations among female adolescents, linking this trend to the transformation of gender roles and the growing influence of social media, including the spread of cyberbullying [21]. Such changes are especially pronounced in adolescence, where social interaction is increasingly transferred to online environments, thereby lowering barriers to verbal and indirect forms of aggression. As noted by Leschied et al., since 1995 the rate of violent offenses among adolescent girls in Canada has increased, while a decline has been observed among boys [22]. The accelerated rise in violence among girls raises important questions regarding the underlying causes and the specificity of this gender gap. The increase in aggressive behavior among girls may be associated both with broader social changes (including the weakening of traditional gender norms and the expansion of socially acceptable behavioral patterns) and with the influence of virtual environments, which tend to normalize and, in some cases, romanticize aggressive or risk-related forms of behavior. The low prominence of anger indicates that emotional outbursts and irritability occur relatively infrequently and do not constitute a leading factor in aggressive behavior. At the same time, this pattern suggests the presence of a certain level of emotional tension and a tendency to experience irritation, resentment, and internal dissatisfaction, which are more often restrained and do not escalate into overt aggressive actions. Such a profile may reflect difficulties in emotional self-regulation while maintaining externally socially acceptable behavior. Hostility, as a cognitive component of aggression, is characterized by a relatively low level of negative attitudes, suspiciousness, and internally directed aggression within this group. This finding supports the conclusion that the majority of aggressive manifestations among girls are oriented toward observable behavioral expressions rather than covert internal processes. Nevertheless, the presence of cognitive forms of aggression—manifested in suspiciousness, negative perceptions of others, and a tendency to interpret social situations as unfair or threatening—indicates that for a considerable proportion of girls, aggression may take a latent, internally experienced form and is not always expressed through overt behavior.

No statistically significant differences were found between boys and girls on the scales of physical aggression, anger, and hostility according to the Mann–Whitney U test ($p > 0.05$).

To examine the relationships between aggression components measured by the Buss–Perry Aggression Questionnaire (BPAQ) and role positions identified using E. G. Norkina’s «Bullying Structure» method, Spearman’s rank correlation analysis was applied. A statistically significant positive correlation was revealed between the role position of «initiator» and the scale of «physical aggression» ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$). Boys occupying more active and dominant positions within the peer group demonstrated higher levels of physical aggression. No statistically significant associations were found between the other BPAQ scales (anger and hostility) and the role positions identified by E. G. Norkina’s «Bullying Structure» method (assistant, victim, defender, and bystander). The obtained data indicate that overt behavioral aggression, specifically physical aggression, among boys is closely associated with their dominant role positions within the group, whereas the emotional and cognitive components of aggression (anger and hostility) remain relatively independent of role position.

The obtained results support the conceptualization of bullying as a structured socio-psychological phenomenon encompassing distinct role positions, each associated with specific behavioral and personality characteristics. The predominance of the defender role among boys may reflect the influence of gender-related social expectations that prescribe active intervention and the demonstration of strength in interpersonal conflicts. In contrast, the prevalence of the bystander role among girls may be interpreted as a strategy aimed at avoiding direct confrontation and maintaining social equilibrium within the group. According to findings from international studies, adolescents occupying the aggressor role are characterized by elevated levels of aggression, low empathy, and a pronounced tendency toward

dominance [23]. The statistically significant association identified in the present study between the bullying initiator role and the level of physical aggression corroborates these findings and highlights the leading role of the behavioral component of aggression in the formation of dominant positions within the bullying structure. The results also align with evidence indicating that victims of bullying are more likely to be adolescents with low self-esteem, limited social resources, and heightened vulnerability within the system of interpersonal relationships [23]. Involvement in bullying situations exerts a substantial negative impact on adolescents' mental health and is associated with an increased risk of depressive and anxiety symptoms, as well as impairments in academic performance and social adjustment [24].

The negative consequences of bullying affect not only victims but also the aggressors themselves. Research indicates that adolescents who exhibit persistent aggressive behavior are characterized by reduced academic motivation, a propensity for deviant forms of behavior, and difficulties in establishing constructive interpersonal relationships later in life [25]. This allows aggressive behavior to be conceptualized as a significant risk factor for maladaptive social adjustment. From a bullying prevention perspective, the role of the school environment and the social norms regulating interpersonal interactions becomes particularly salient. Passive bystander behavior and insufficient involvement of educators may contribute to the perpetuation of aggressive patterns within peer groups. In this regard, the findings of the present study emphasize the necessity of fostering a safe and supportive educational environment that incorporates programs aimed at developing empathy, constructive interaction skills, and adolescents' sense of social responsibility.

Thus, bullying should be understood as a systemic phenomenon requiring a comprehensive socio-psychological approach focused on reducing aggression levels and preventing deviant behavior in adolescent populations.

Conclusion The conducted theoretical and empirical study made it possible to analyze the socio-psychological aspects of bullying as a form of deviant behavior in adolescence and to identify specific features of its role structure within the educational environment. The obtained results confirm that bullying is not an episodic manifestation of aggression but rather a stable socio-psychological phenomenon reproduced within the system of interpersonal relations of adolescent peer groups. The empirical data indicate the presence of a clearly differentiated role structure of bullying, including initiators, assistants, victims, defenders, and bystanders. It was established that the distribution of these roles demonstrates pronounced gender specificity. Boys significantly more often occupy active and socially salient positions – namely defenders and victims whereas the bystander role predominates among girls, suggesting a tendency toward passive coping strategies in response to bullying situations. Testing the first hypothesis revealed that gender differences in the distribution of role positions are selective in nature: statistically significant differences were identified for the roles of «victim», «defender», and «bystander», while no significant gender differences were found for the roles of «initiator» and «assistant». This indicates that overt aggressive behavior in the context of school bullying does not exhibit rigid gender determination, whereas patterns of participation in and responses to aggression are mediated by social expectations and gender-related norms. The second research hypothesis received partial support. A statistically significant positive correlation was found between the role of bullying initiator and the level of physical aggression, indicating the key role of the behavioral component of aggression in the formation of dominant positions within the bullying structure. At the same time, the emotional (anger) and cognitive (hostility) components of aggression were found to be relatively independent of role position, highlighting the specificity of the mechanisms underlying aggressive behavior in the school context. The third hypothesis, concerning gender differences in overall levels of aggression, was not supported statistically. The absence of significant differences across the aggression scales suggests that the intensity of aggressive manifestations in adolescence is primarily determined by involvement in specific role interactions rather than by gender alone. Overall, the findings of this study expand current understanding of the socio-psychological mechanisms of bullying in adolescent settings and underscore the importance of analyzing bullying within the context

of group dynamics and role interactions. The obtained data contribute to the development of domestic research on deviant behavior and highlight the significance of a comprehensive approach to bullying prevention within the educational system of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The practical significance of the study lies in the potential application of the results for the development and implementation of targeted bullying prevention programs in general educational institutions. Accounting for the role structure of bullying allows for a shift from universal preventive measures toward tailored strategies for the psychological support of specific student groups. The findings of the study may be applied within professional development and in-service training programs for teachers and school psychologists to foster a comprehensive understanding of the socio-psychological mechanisms underlying bullying and to support the design of integrated programs aimed at ensuring psychological safety in the educational environment.

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