A Comprehensive Approach to Bullying Prevention in Azerbaijani Schools

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Conflicts between children are often viewed with indifference by adults. School officials and parents feel that it is pointless to intervene because they do not take such conflicts seriously, thinking that this is how children grow up and learn to solve their problems on their own. But what is actually going on, how should these situations be characterized? Don't the stories of children who live solitary lives, who don't form bonds with anyone, who fall behind in their classes, and who commit suicide in the face of bullying show how serious the issue really is?

In Azerbaijan, bullying was actively discussed on social media for the first time when, on April 4, 2019, at school #162, 13-year-old Elina Hajiyeva committed suicide due to bullying. It turned out that, although Elina had informed her teachers and parents about being bullied, the school administration had not taken any measures to improve the situation. School authorities even deliberately delayed calling for medical help for the injured student and, after her death, blamed her parents for not bringing her up right. As details of the incident came to light, it was revealed that Elina was exposed to moral, physical, and homophobic forms of bullying at school: "Elina Hajiyeva had just come to this school. According to her classmates, no one was friends with her. Nargiz (her name has been changed), her only friend in a parallel class, says that students, including high school students, often beat her up: 'When Elina cried in the bathroom, the girls would watch her and laugh. I myself saw how an 11th grader beat her up, and how they often pushed Elina around and humiliated her. For example, when she was

walking down the hallway, 9-10 students would come up to her and spit on her or take her glasses from her'" (Zeynalov 2019).

In online discussions, it also became clear that the school itself and a large number of its students were unaware that psychological and physical pressure, like that which Elina experienced, directed against any student is bullying behavior. Therefore, there had not been in place any bullying prevention or any plans for how to fight it as it occurred. Although Elina's mother repeatedly told the school about the situation, school authorities did not take any action. Moreover, instead of showing appreciation to Elina's friend who defended her and informed the school about the bullying, and taking preventative measures immediately upon learning of the bullying, they warned her that she herself would face the same problems if she continued to defend Elina (Zeynalov 2019). Such cases demonstrate yet again that the education system in Azerbaijan needs serious changes to ensure the protection of social rights, as well as the importance of implementing these changes without delay.

In order to analyze all of this and point to some solutions, this article will explain what bullying means, the forms it takes, and who is at risk of bullying. The article will then describe what kind of programs and projects a school can implement with its own internal resources to prevent bullying. The biggest changes in this area could be brought about by relevant initiatives from district education departments, decisions made by the Ministry of Education, and the planned implementation of programs and projects to combat bullying across the country. Therefore, this article will stress the importance that such program changes should come from these governing bodies.

Bullying is also a violation of the principles of social justice. Social justice is a concept that expresses the importance of equal access for all to wealth, medical care,

welfare, and opportunities. (Clingerman 2011, 337). In a society that does not provide equal opportunities, it is not surprising that among growing children there are many instances of injustice, such as bullying. In addition to the importance of providing guidelines on the principles of social justice in schools, this article will highlight how the violation of this principle relates to bullying. Also, while drawing attention to the school's main staff members involved in combating bullying, it appears that there are no social workers on staff. In advanced countries, in the field of education, social workers are considered the first line of defense in combating school bullying. In addition, this article will explain in depth the importance of the work of social workers for schools, as well as for the communities and districts where the schools are located.

Due to the scarcity of statistical data on Azerbaijan, it is not possible to study the extent to which conditions which contradict the principles of social justice, such as bullying, homophobia, sexism, and hate speech, are prevalent in schools today. Without any data or statistics about incidents of bullying in schools, it is impossible to know what kind of programs ought to be created across the country to prevent bullying and similar behaviors. Therefore, this article will explain the effects and the importance of conducting surveys about bullying in schools. In addition, there is a need in the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan for a bill defining bullying, its nature, and the places where it occurs, and requiring the establishment of anti-bullying programs in schools. This article will also discuss what is important to consider during the drafting of the bill, and what positive changes will occur thanks to the implementation of such a law.

What is Bullying?

Bullying, which refers to aggressive behavior between school-age children beginning in primary grades, can occur later in any shared living spaces, such as high school, university, the

workplace, and even nursing homes. Bullying, which describes aggressive behaviors in the abovementioned locations, can be defined as an inclination to cause someone harm, to intimidate someone, or to force someone to do something. Such behavior can be characterized as bullying, especially when it is directed at powerless individuals with few social privileges, who can easily be degraded or oppressed and who are not in a position to defend themselves. Bullying is not an isolated incident but occurs periodically, and it is usually committed by physically strong children against others (Barhight et al. 2013, 375). Bullying can take various forms, such as giving someone a nickname, using obscene and derogatory language, physically harming the victim if they don't do something, blackmailing them, threatening to damage their belongings or to harm their younger siblings, or alienating them from a group. Bullying not only causes negative changes in the psychological state of the victim, such as depression, introversion, antisociality, and suicidal thoughts, but also disrupts the education process in educational institutions. Bullying is therefore a major public health risk, and its prevention in schools is considered very relevant (Barhight et al. 2013, 375).

According to global statistics, in a survey of children between the ages of 12 and 18, 20% have been victims of bullying, while 30% admit to having bullied others in one way or another (Facts About Bullying 2019). In 85% of all cases of bullying, it is witnessed by other children (Barhight et al. 2013, 375). Bullying occurs not only among children at school; it can also be observed among university students and in the workplace. Although school bullying is one of the most prevalent forms of aggressive behavior in Azerbaijan, the issue of bullying has yet to be studied here, nor have the socio-psychological or clinical aspects of the issue been researched. Therefore, I will support my views on the nature and prevention of bullying by citing studies carried out by researchers in the US, UK, and other European countries. I

think that, while the causes and nature of bullying in schools in these countries may not be exactly the same as in Azerbaijan, there are many similarities. Therefore, the trends in the academic literature that I have used in this article will help explain the overall picture of the causes and consequences of bullying in Azerbaijan.

There are always two parties involved in bullying — the bully and the victim. A third party, however, is also often involved in bullying — the bystander.

Along with deficiencies in their upbringing, the actions of bullies are usually determined by negative perceptions about their intellectual qualities and social status. Sutton and his colleagues, however, after researching the causes of bullying behavior, have argued that bullies are not lagging behind in their ability to understand social processes and draw conclusions, and are indeed superior to others in terms of certain intellectual abilities (Sutton et al. 1999 cited in Arsenio and Lemerise 2001, 60). In their view, such individuals use their intellectual abilities to manipulate and control others. Bullies often have social and physical advantages and regularly bully the same people. Most bullies tend to want to draw attention to themselves and to be dominant. Often, the parents of such individuals exercise little control over them and fail to establish discipline. Some researchers also support the view that bullies display a lack of empathy. According to a study conducted in Italian schools, being uncaring and callous was a determining factor in high school boys who engaged in bullying (Ciucci and Baroncelli 2014, 73). In addition, among bullies there are also socially isolated individuals with low self-esteem, who care about how they are perceived by others.

A *bullying victim* is usually someone with fewer social opportunities, making it easy to bully them, and as a result, the probability that the bully will face punishment is low. According to a researcher from the University of Ljubljana,

among 10-19-year-olds, girls are more likely to be subjected to bullying, while boys are more likely to be bullies (Pečjak and Pirc 2017, 27). Among schoolchildren, if a bullied individual does not have a friend group, if they are somehow isolated, and if they do not have the sympathy of their teachers and the administration (the latter situation is deplorable and a sign of the teachers' lack of professionalism), then the probability that they will be the victim of bullying is high. Bullying victims often dress, behave, speak, or look different than other people and they have different communication skills. When such people fail to conform to socially accepted norms, their risk of becoming bullying victims increases. Usually, a group of popular students in a class or a school bully other unpopular students who are ordinary and who have no abilities that set them apart in the eyes of others.

In most cases, occurrences of bullying in schools are *witnessed* by other students. A witness to bullying or a *bystander* has the potential to stop the bullying. People who do not remain silent in the face of bullying and who take immediate action against it are called *upstanders* and the action they take during the incident counteracts the bullying victim's feeling of isolation. At the moment bullying occurs, however, bystanders may not know what to do, who to report it to, or that they should report it at all, and so they may not attempt to prevent the bullying. The most deplorable situation is when they join in with the bully. Often, bullying victims feel isolated, become depressed, and develop a number of psychological problems because bystanders fail to act. Bullying at school may be witnessed by students, teachers, school staff, and parents.

Bullying also has a negative psychological impact on bystanders and in many cases it is very difficult for them to prevent bullying. What kind of negative psychological impact bullying can have on children who witness it has been studied based on surveys of 12—16-year-olds at 14 schools in the UK

(Rivers et al. 2009). It has been found that witnessing bullying can cause a student to relive a traumatic event that they have seen previously, thereby causing psychological tension. Moreover, even if a student knows that they should help the bullying victim, they may not out of concern for their own safety and then feel guilty because of it. Also, if they help, they may be in a constant state of stress, fearing that they themselves will be the bully's next target. On the other hand, a student may be afraid to show disloyalty to the group they belong to by reporting an occurrence of bullying, and therefore refuse to help a bullying victim (Brown 2015).

Regardless of children's previous experiences, what they do when bullying occurs may vary depending on the specific situation. For example, while a student who has previously been bullied may hesitate to do anything to stop the bullying, another student with the same experience may actively help stop the bullying. According to a study by Barhight and her colleagues, emotional children make more of an effort to prevent bullying than unemotional children. Researchers divided a group of children into emotional and unemotional groups based on changes in their heart rates which occurred after watching bullying videos. They also concluded that for a student to prevent bullying, they must be confident that they will be able to do so successfully. These researchers, who stress the significance of student effectiveness, presuppose that the sense of effectiveness students feel about themselves is a positive predictor of whether or not they will interfere when bullying occurs (Barhight et al., 2013, 377). Therefore, school psychologists and social workers, in working with students who have been bullied or who have witnessed bullying, can encourage the development of positive interpersonal behavioral indicators and abilities, as well as inner strength, so that the students will show more initiative in helping rather than being bystanders.

Types of Bullying

Bullying itself is divided into several types based on the forms in which it occurs. The most common types are *physical*, *verbal*, *homophobic bullying* and *cyberbullying*.

Physical bullying includes actions such as hitting, beating, playing tricks, taking someone's things and throwing them, and shoving. Physical bullying can also take the form of sexual harassment and coercion. While this type of bullying starts to occur in primary grades, it is most commonly found in grades 5-8 (ages 11-14). Physical bullying is usually committed by individuals who are physically stronger than the victims. Such individuals generally have a positive view of violence, they do not follow school rules, and often incite others to violate these rules. The victims of physical bullying, however, are usually children from families of low social status, physically small, of a different ethnicity, religion, race, or sexual orientation, or with physical and mental disabilities. Although bullying does not currently violate any law in Azerbaijan, in both the real and virtual worlds there are certain bullying behaviors, such as harassment, physical and sexual violence, and inciting someone to commit suicide, which are criminal in nature and can be identified as crimes.

Verbal bullying can take the form of insulting someone, excluding someone from a group, making accusations against someone with obscene language to embarrass them in front of others, swearing at them or calling them by a nickname. Verbal bullying has a negative psychological impact on the victim, isolating and belittling them. Although it is commonly thought that verbal bullying is used mostly by girls to show dominance, boys also use verbal bullying. Since verbal bullying leaves no physical injuries, it is less likely that school administration, teachers and parents will notice it. This type of bullying can negatively impact an individual's self-expression or personal image, and it can also lead to emotional and psychological problems and cause severe depression. Victims of verbal bullying may resort to harmful habits and even attempt suicide if psychological support is

not provided.

In Azerbaijan, one of the countries where homophobia is most prevalent, it is very common among students to insult each other with homophobic epithets and obscenities. *Homophobic bullying* occurs when the bully subjects the victim to bullying based on their supposed or known sexual orientation. This type of bullying is often directed at students whose clothes or behavior differs from those of others, or who have a close friend or family member who is gay. Even when these assumptions are not justified, students who are simply different from others are also subjected to homophobic bullying. As is clear from the case of Elina Hajiyeva, her classmates and schoolmates humiliated her, calling her a "lesbian," because of differences in her appearance (dying her hair, wearing different clothes, differences in her behavior, etc.). It is important to note that the word lesbian here is not the same as saying that a person's sexual orientation is lesbian. When this word is used by homophobic students to humiliate others, that is considered homophobic bullying. It is also a type of bullying to address someone with the words *gey* [gay], *mavi* [blue], or *qızbibi* [sissy] (all of which are derogatory words referring to gay men in Azeri) in order to humiliate them. Since these words are often used by people who don't see them as homophobic or insulting, it seems normal to children to use them. "An adolescent who, in the home environment, is repeatedly exposed to homophobic epithets that include pejorative word use or denigrating phrases in relation to LGBT identities, behaviors, or attractions could also learn to mimic this behavior in other contexts such as school" (Orue and Calvete 2018, 96).

Homophobic bullying can be both verbal and physical. If a person fails to conform to society's gender norms or exhibits taboo clothing, behavior, or personal opinions, then they may be subject to severe physical abuse by others. Some people are even injured or killed as a result of homophobic bullying, particularly trans* people (*trans* with an asterisk is used as

an umbrella term for all trans* identities). The organization Stonewall, which carries out a survey in UK schools, has found that about half of LGBTQ students and 65% of trans* students have been victims of homophobic bullying (Bradlow et al. 2017). Although it is not possible to compare these figures with Azerbaijan since no bullying surveys have been conducted in Azerbaijani schools, these figures must be much higher given the fact that Azerbaijani society is very homophobic (Country Ranking, Rainbow Europe 2019).

Cyberbullying is deliberate and repeated harm against a person committed using a computer, cell phone, or other electronic devices (Hinduja and Patchin, 2018). Cyberbullying can take the form of messaging, e-mailing, posting hurtful comments or rumors about someone on social media, or posting pictures or videos. The fact that cyberbullying is a form of repetitive and deliberate behavior further exacerbates its negative effects. Studies of schools in the US have found that 25-30% of students in grades 6-8 have been victims of cyberbullying. Teenagers are at a greater risk of cyberbullying because they often share a lot of personal information about themselves online (Roberto et al. 2014, 1030). There are several characteristics of cyberbullying: (1) the cyberbullying victim may not be aware of any negative content posted about them on social media. Even the identity of the poster can remain unknown, which makes cyberbullying a more difficult type of bullying to control; (2) since online content can be shared and sent many times a post about a cyberbullying victim can spread rapidly and reach a wide audience; (3) cyberbullying is also one of the most callous types of bullying because the cyberbully is not in physical proximity of the victim and is often unaware of the negative effects of their actions and of the dangerous consequences of such behavior. As a result of cyberbullying, students develop serious emotional problems that can cause them to experience feelings of insecurity, anxiety, agitation, and fear. This situation can create stress and depression and cause them to consider suicide.

A victim of cyberbullying may not know what to do, so the school administration should explain to students the proper ways of preventing cyberbullying. First of all, students should be given instructions on how to keep their personal information (phone numbers, passwords, or online user names) confidential. A cyberbullying victim should save as proof the negative messages they receive or screenshots of the negative social media posts about them on their computer or phone. A cyberbullying victim can present this evidence to their parents, a teacher or social worker, and the school administration, and report inappropriate images and posts shared on social media sites. Another issue is that, when cyberbullying occurs, certain people like and share those posts. Students should be told that, even if they feel pressured in such situations, they should not join in with the cyberbully by liking and re-sharing their content. A cyberbully should be stopped and if the victim is unaware of the cyberbullying they should be informed (Pacer National Bullying Prevention Center 2018).

Bullying: A Social Justice Problem

It has been observed that the places where bullying most often occurs are those in which the principles of social justice are not well-developed. According to the definition of social justice cited above, the principles of social justice require that an individual, when interacting with society, should be provided with opportunities equal to those of the rest of that society. "The goal of social justice, in one definition, is 'full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs'" (Bell 1997, 3 quoted in Polanin and Vera 2013, 304). Violation of these principles is one cause of bullying in schools. Bullying is not just a negative attitude that school-age children have toward each other, it is a form of behavior that comes from broader social experience. The situation in society in which one group with social, economic and other privileges dominates and controls another group is also a cause of bullying in schools.

Schoolchildren who see adults discriminating against others because of their socioeconomic status, skin color, or other differences (they can learn this at home from parents, neighbors, or relatives, and also from teachers at school) usually view these actions against others as normal, learning and accepting that discrimination against such people is natural. "When youth possess unfavorable and stereo-typed attitudes toward groups of children, they may engage in acts of culture-based intolerance" (Polanin and Vera 2013, 305). While it would be controversial to say that bullying is the most significant consequence of social injustice, it is certain that students learn about oppression in school through bullying — witnessing it, experiencing it, or being bullies themselves — and they employ it in their later lives (in the form of community violence, domestic violence, etc.).

Bullying Prevention

The fight against bullying is a multi-step and multifaceted process. Each school should treat bullying prevention as a priority in its action plans, and should take a number of preventative measures over the course of the school year. This action plan, naturally, should be supported by district education departments and local executive authorities, and schools should be provided with the resources to successfully implement these activities. In order to implement an anti-bullying campaign across the country, all institutions and administrations related to education must, in addition to drafting legislation and orders, call for changes in the curriculum and the creation of anti-bullying programs. The following examples illustrate what preventive measures can be taken by schools (the primary location where bullying currently occurs) and school administrations:

Every school should inform its entire staff, from teachers to bus drivers, about bullying, its definition, its effects, and where it may occur (e.g. at school, on the way to school, in locations near the school where it can't be seen). In dealing

with this issue, a close relationship between teachers, school administrators, students and parents is very important. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University conducted a study using a database from the US National Education Association, which has as members 2,163 teachers and 2,901 other school staff members, finding that "school climate and school connectedness are multidimensional constructs that include school safety, quality of relationships, discipline practices, and aspects of the physical environment" (O'Brennan et al. 2014, 871). Teachers who have close relationships with their students are more likely to gain their confidence and, when bullying occurs, students feel more comfortable informing them about it. With close cooperation between school staff and teachers, equal contributions are made to the creation and review of school regulations, and staff welcome each other's opinions. The study also found that when teachers were familiar with anti-bullying rules, they felt more responsibility in the fight against bullying. "This line of research suggests that when teachers feel that they have the skills to intervene in bullying or perceive they can help change the school norms related to peer victimization, the more likely it is that they will take a proactive stance on reducing bullying at school" (O'Brennan et al. 2014, 877). Anti-bullying programs for teachers as well as for students must be certain to place particular emphasis on bullying aimed at LGBTQ individuals (Orue and Calvete 2018, 103).

To prevent bullying, every school can develop its own set of anti-bullying rules. These regulations can be displayed in a place where everyone can read them, and the participation and duties of teachers, students, and parents in their implementation can be specified. This set of rules should be hung in very visible places in the school or in each classroom, and, in addition to displaying it on a screen or billboard, it should be sent to parents at home either directly or with the students. Using its own resources, the school can even, with the help of the students, produce a

video against bullying, explaining how it is defined and how it is prevented, or reflecting the school's bullying regulations, and show it on constant repeat on mounted screens. The school administration should place surveillance cameras in appropriate locations and in appropriate numbers around the school. They should also ensure that the surveillance cameras are placed in corners not visible to others, far from the primary locations of student activities.

When bullying happens, students may not recognize it as bullying and may not know what to do as it occurs. Therefore, every semester in its curriculum, each school should provide information and organize compulsory class discussions about bullying and the role that students can play in solving the problem of bullying. In addition, students should be given tips on how they can actively help a bullying victim, and they should attend educational discussions which will help create feelings of empathy for bullying victims and intolerance for bullies. For example, students should be provided with a roadmap that clearly identifies who they should turn to and who to report the incident to first whenever any bullying is witnessed. They must also be trained not to hesitate to stop bullying and to support the bullying victim in order to save them. For example, if a student is unable to speak up to a bully, (for their own safety) they should understand that they can help through actions such as picking up the victim's backpack and finding and returning the things that the bully had dumped out and thrown away. Students must be taught never to engage in any behaviors that could lead to bullying, and they must be encouraged not to support bullies. They should know that, openly or in secret, they should always support the victim. Students should also be informed that they can make efforts to prevent bullying using peaceful methods.

Social psychologists who study bullying believe that it is advisable to make the development of a sense of empathy a part of bullying prevention and of the upbringing of students with inclinations toward bullying. "Empathy is a fundamental human

characteristic that influences both prosocial and antisocial behavior" (Noorden et al. 2015, 637). "[Empathy's] cognitive component refers to a person's ability to *comprehend* another person's emotions" (2015, 638, emphasis in original). This means that before engaging in bullying, a person can understand how the bullying victim will feel and how they will be shocked. The affective component of empathy "refers to a person's capacity to *experience* another person's emotions" (2015, 638, emphasis in original). Empathy is not emotional, it is driven by a mental state, and it is most commonly observed in older people. Therefore, empathy can be developed in students, and it is advisable to train students on how others feel as a result of bullying and what causes bullying behavior (2015, 653).

Schools also need to be more proactive in *training student leaders* and using their help in the fight against bullying. Student leaders should receive training on communication skills, conflict resolution methods, and bystander strategies. "Bystander strategies" refers to a strategy of sequential steps that a student can take to stop any bullying that they witness. These trainings should explain a set of knowledge about how to stop bullying effectively as it happens and what steps to take afterwards, and student leaders should be trained to use it at the first opportunity.

School community events are a list of events organized primarily by the school administration and which are considered important. Theatrical performances and poetry competitions, where parents are also invited, student marathons such as "Run Against Bullying!", or an anti-bullying themed week or month have a major impact in creating bullying awareness. Examples of creative anti-bullying events include anti-bullying art exhibitions, illustrations made from students' handprints on the school's wall under the title "We Support Each Other," or events in the school district with the theme of restoring social justice offering free or discounted entry for students.

After school, the family members that students spend the most time with are their parents, and therefore parents also play a direct role in identifying and stopping bullying. Parents must learn how to supervise their children properly and try to work closely with teachers and the school. The parent must first be able to pay attention to their child's behavior, because their child could be either a bully or a bullying victim. If a child is observed to be depressed, does not want to go to school, falls behind in their classes, comes home with certain cuts and scratches, often loses their belongings, has torn pages in their books and notebooks, has frequent mood shifts, or uses hopeless, suicidal language, then the parent may suspect that their child is being bullied at school or outside of it.

If a child speaks to a parent about an incident, they should be given the opportunity to talk about the incident in detail and if necessary the parent can help by asking questions. In order to ameliorate the situation, if the incidents recur, the parent must take action and contact the school for an evaluation of the bullying. If bullying is known to occur, it is imperative to write down the incidents on a sheet of paper and save copies, as complaints that are not written down are often not taken seriously. Also, a record must be kept of how the school evaluated the complaints that it received. It may be that homeroom teachers, other teachers, and even the student's classmates are unaware that the student is being bullied. Therefore, a parent or legal guardian should meet with their child's homeroom teacher, the school social worker or psychologist, and administrative staff to inform them about the issue. Parents should try to speak about bullying at parent-teacher conferences and school-related meetings. As stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every child has the right to feel safe at home, at school and in the community in which they live (UN 2008). Therefore, parents should take their children's bullying problems seriously and protect them from becoming bullying victims to the greatest extent possible.

School Staff: The Social Worker Problem

The staff code of conduct in Azerbaijani schools is drafted and approved by the school administration and the trade union committee in accordance with the working conditions of the school (Internal Model Code of Conduct for General Education Schools 2010). However, the extent to which psychologists and social workers are involved in the development of such important rules is unclear. Moreover, if we take a look at the school staff, we see that there are no social workers among the staff members who will be directly involved in preventing socially significant issues such as bullying. Yet social workers play an important role in the solution of such problems and in behavioral training, such as developing among the students a sense of empathy towards each other.

Although institutions of higher education have been training social workers in recent years, without creating a unified classification of social service work as a structure for their professional recruitment, the problem of establishing a social workforce in schools remains unresolved. Social workers, however, are urgently needed in schools. Although the work of social workers is similar to that of school psychologists, social workers are often able to work more broadly with individuals and groups on their place in society and their integration. Psychologists, however, may test a person's mental health and, based on the results, conduct consultations and meetings focused on their mental health.

School social workers, however, work with students in a variety of ways. They also maintain close contact with the school's administrative staff, teachers, and parents. A school social worker is very important not only for the school, but also for the district, the village, or the settlement where the school is located. A school social worker is a person who establishes a link between a school and other resources outside the school. Therefore, the social worker is not a psychologist, but plays an important role more broadly in

connecting a student to outside resources related to their problems, teaching additional life skills, and developing confidence and optimism in the student. The school social worker not only plays the role of an advocate for improving the students' welfare, but also engages in activities that play a role in addressing issues that disrupt education, such as attendance, bullying, meeting the needs of the community, home visits, suicide, and work with students with disabilities. Together, school psychologists and social workers, in close collaboration with the school administration, teachers, and parents, can help to draft and implement the code of conduct regulating behavior at school.

Having a classmate who was injured or committed suicide as a result of bullying is very traumatic for the other children. Therefore, a school psychologist or social worker must implement a predetermined action plan when a suicide attempt occurs. This includes prompt steps such as immediately informing the parent about the incident, calling for medical assistance, and informing the police. So as not to shock the other students with the news, secure messaging should be employed. It is also very important to provide moral support to the parent, the school principal should visit the parent's home, and the school should be with the parent at difficult times. When reporting the incident to the media, you must be sure that at the end of the report, information, psychological support centers, and hotlines (if available) are provided to help students and parents in the same position.

If the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare developed joint systematic internship programs and required every social worker to complete those programs, it could bring about major positive changes in the operation of schools and in the general community where a school is located. These two agencies should work closely with existing social work public unions in Azerbaijan to facilitate the long-term implementation of structural proposals or changes to the programs that they have created and recommended. In

addition, these two governing bodies should lead the creation of a single center that will conduct research on countrywide social work action plans, conduct training, draft program updates and guiding principles, and enable social work organizations and individuals to use them. For example, in the United States, one of the most advanced countries in terms of the structure and practice of social work, the National Association of Social Workers, which promotes the professional development of social workers, sets basic standards for social work, and works to improve social policies, has developed the following guiding principles for school social workers:

- Proactively identify policy issues and reforms that affect schools;
- When an incident occurs, immediately take the actions required by law (a social worker has the authority to inform the appropriate law enforcement authorities without the permission of the school administration if they observe signs of physical violence, etc., on a student's body, or to contact the police if school staff do not properly perform their responsibilities, such as calling for urgent medical assistance, in a timely fashion);
- Strive to create a school environment or hold consultations that make students feel at ease;
- Verify that school regulations are equitable;
- Advocate for positive behavioral changes;
- Strive for equitable education for all students;
- Work with students, parents, teachers, administration staff, and community members to attain equitable education;
- Use ecological systems theory (ecological systems theory identifies the environmental factors in a child's development at the microsystem, mesosystem, and macrosystem levels, and identifies effective interventions accordingly);
- Establish preventive programs that promote positive

behaviors and socio-emotional development;

- The ethical code includes regulations such as using data to inform and creating small groups for short-term interventions (National Association of Social Workers, 2012);

It is clear that social workers are essential for building a positive school environment. The anti-bullying programs that they develop can directly contribute to a reduction in bullying incidents.

Conducting Bullying Surveys

It is essential for schools to conduct bullying surveys internally to determine how widespread bullying is, who is at risk of bullying, and what urgent measures should be taken. Confidential questionnaires filled out by students provide extensive information about a school's internal environment. The school administration, as well as professionals and agencies specializing in this field, can identify various factors which contribute to bullying by examining the results of these surveys. A school social worker or skilled professionals can be tasked to develop the surveys, and they can be designed to reveal details about the family situation, a family history of bullying, and the student and their parents' level of satisfaction with the school. Such surveys also inform school staff about the frequency of bullying and the locations where it occurs. Given the fact that bullying incidents are kept secret by students and often are not reported to the school administration and teachers, the importance of conducting a school survey becomes clear.

Questionnaires aimed at determining a school's internal environment as it relates to bullying include questions regarding the following things: the number of bullying incidents, whether bullying is reported, bullying hotspots, ideas about what is needed for a student to feel secure at school, school staff's ideas on security, and ideas about what

the school can do to prevent bullying. Such surveys are usually conducted at the beginning of the school year, or at the beginning and the end. This type of survey is best conducted simultaneously for each class (or simultaneously for specific classes). In this case, students will not have an opportunity to discuss the questions and answers with each other, and their answers will be more transparent (truthful) (Assess Bullying 2017).

A survey is a tool that allows a school to assess its internal environment. The school can easily determine the results of the surveys and what steps should be taken according to those results, and then implement appropriate programs. The school should notify teachers, students, and parents of the results of bullying surveys. In its annual statistics, the Ministry of Education should include bullying incidents and children at risk of bullying in its list of school indicators, and integrate conducting, processing, and analyzing school surveys in collaboration with schools into the primary action plan of district education departments.

Drafting Anti-Bullying Legislation

There is no law specifically on bullying in the legislation of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Legislation must be drafted to address such gaps in the law. Elina Hajiyeva's case should have prompted the relevant agencies to draft a bill against bullying. That incident revealed that there is a lack of awareness about bullying in Azerbaijani schools and a lack of preparation for bullying prevention, which can potentially lead to traumatic events such as suicide. When drafting an anti-bullying bill, it is necessary to define bullying and the forms it can take in detail. In schools, information should be made available about the causes of bullying and the situations in which it is likely to occur.

The following should be taken into account when drafting an anti-bullying bill: (1) a detailed explanation or definition

of bullying should be provided; (2) it should be stressed that bullying is in conflict with the welfare of the bullying victim, as well as the laws of the state, the school regulations, and the rights of the residents or community members of the school district; (3) a clear, step-by-step explanation of how bullying should be reported when it occurs should be given; (4) the importance of joint discussions between the parties involved, school staff, and parents should be indicated, along with making relevant evaluations and the possibility of social workers, psychologists, and advisers working with the bullying victim and the bully (ILCS 2017). A lawsuit may be filed against a school that fails to meet its obligations under these laws. Rather than punishing the school and the bully, however, the bill should focus on how the education system and the schools can implement programs to prevent bullying (Cornell and Limber 2015, 338).

Conclusion

In Azerbaijani schools, there is a lack of information about bullying, its manifestations, and its prevention. In order to prevent this and ensure that students receive their education in bullying-free schools, anti-bullying programs should be established without delay. Every school can create anti-bullying regulations internally and monitor their implementation. Schools should have an interest in conducting bullying prevention activities with their own resources, such as class discussions, public events, and parent meetings. To this end, school staff should be trained in the prevention of bullying and other behaviors in conflict with social justice principles, so that they gain skills and a correct understanding of the issue. There should be government agencies to assist schools in this matter, and tasks and instructions should be developed in conjunction with schools and education departments. Training may be provided by higher authorities, education departments, or social work agencies. The Ministry of Education and other relevant ministries, as well as the competent agencies, should start developing

programs that will bring about positive changes in the organization of social work in Azerbaijan. Although there are many students studying social work, there is still no place for them on school staffs. Social work programs are still in their early stages. This process should continue and be systematized, and social workers should continue their activities to improve school environments. It is social workers that play a major role in regulating the internal environment in schools, raising students' spirits, teaching them social justice principles, and connecting students and parents with various resources.

Along with statistical data on Azerbaijani schools' positive education indicators, etc., the official website of the Ministry of Education, as well as other statistics agencies, should compile and display statistics on bullying, discrimination, homophobia, and hate speech. Every school should incorporate annual student surveys in its action plans in order to review their own internal environments, to determine the percentage of bullying incidents, their location and character, to identify at-risk students, and to assist in the collection of countrywide statistical data. To this end, the Ministry of Education should issue specific instructions, and district education departments should provide technical assistance to schools. Surveys provide the opportunity to study the school environment, and in analyzing them, the character of bullying incidents is determined and relevant preventive programs can be developed.

In Azerbaijan, no legislation has been drafted against bullying. The drafting and implementation of a bill that defined bullying in detail and required the establishment of specific programs for its prevention would be a major contribution to bullying prevention in schools. Bullying is a serious problem in students' maturation process, it is a type of behavior that can leave deep trauma, and its prevention is one of the most important issues facing schools and education systems.

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