

SOCIAL EXCLUSION AMONG PEERS AS A FORM OF EXPRESSION OF BULLYING IN A PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION GROUP

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Abstract. *Bullying in preschool age often manifests itself as an indirect form of bullying – i.e. by social exclusion. Experiences of social exclusion in early childhood can have a negative impact on social development, future relationships and emotional well-being of a child. In order to reveal social exclusion among peers as an expression of bullying in the preschool education group, an approach of qualitative research was used. Analysis of a semi-structured interview and pedagogical observation data revealed the following forms of expression of social exclusion among peers as bullying: exclusion from a game/refusal to play together, showing physical distance or verbal resistance to friendship. It was revealed that the initiators of social exclusion among peers are usually 4-5 years old children with excessive mobility and dominance. The results of the study research made it possible to highlight the following factors of social exclusion: special educational needs and certain personality characteristics (aggressiveness, high self-confidence, closedness, sensitivity).*

Keywords: *bullying, peers, preschool group, social exclusion.*

Introduction

The European Union's Children's Rights Strategy emphasizes that pre-school education is particularly beneficial for cognitive, language and social development of children, but it is also recognized that there are still significant differences in ensuring appropriate conditions for children's well-being in the countries of the European Union (European Commission, 2021). The strategy emphasizes the inconsistencies of the legal framework in ensuring the safety, equality and well-being of preschool children in the education sector. On Recommendations for the Implementation of Violence Prevention at Schools' envisages the creation of an environment safe from violence and bullying at schools, emphasizing the application of these recommendations in pre-school educational institutions as well (Lietuvos Respublikos Švietimo ir mokslo ministro įsakymas, 2017).

Researches reveals that bullying among preschool children has its own expression and characteristics (Davis & Gere, 2018; Hwang & Markson, 2020; Rosen, Scott & Higgins, 2023). Due to the peculiarities of preschool children's development, it is difficult to talk about conscious, intentional action in bullying situations and to identify children's aggressive behavior as bullying. However, researchers tend to single out social exclusion as one of the most manifested forms of bullying at preschool age (Enlebaas & Killen, 2016; Skoglund, 2020). It has been identified that social exclusion experienced at an early age affects the development of relationships in the future, has an influence to a child's low self-esteem, social isolation, anxiety, and depression (Ladd, Ettekal & Ladd, 2017; Brendgen & Poulin, 2018; Davis & Gere, 2018; Lee, 2020). Depressive thoughts and feelings when experiencing exclusion in a peer group puts an abused child at risk of being bullied in other social groups in the future (Brendgen & Poulin, 2018).

Bullying in preschool education institutions has been analyzed only fragmentarily by Lithuanian researchers, paying attention to the following aspects: manifestation of bullying among 3-6 years old children (Kerulienė & Užpurvytė, 2017); to the forms of aggressive behavior and the possibilities of their correction among 4-5 years children (Ciparytė & Bagdonas, 2019); to the development of empathy and kindness (Larkina & Valaitienė, 2021; Auškelytė & Valaitienė, 2020), to the theoretical assumptions of violence and bullying prevention (Klanienė, Saveljeva, Skališienė, Stupurienė & Žičkienė, 2022). There is a lack of systematic and consistent research on peer social rejection as a form of bullying expression in preschool age, which could lead to the application of useful bullying prevention strategies in preschool education institutions.

Scientific debates highlight the demand and significance of preschool bullying research (Ozsahin & Yayci, 2021; McGoey, Aberson, Green, & Stewart, 2023) and draw attention to the links between social exclusion and preschool bullying (Koyuturk Kocer & Gultekin Akduman, 2019; Hwang & Markson, 2020; Skoglund, 2020). Bullying in pre-school education institutions has been analyzed only fragmentarily by Lithuanian researchers, paying attention to the following aspects: an expression of child bullying among 3-6 years children (Kerulienė & Užpurvytė, 2017); forms of aggressive behavior among 4-5 years children and the possibilities of their correction (Ciparytė & Bagdonas, 2019); the development of empathy and kindness (Larkina & Valaitienė, 2021; Auškelytė & Valaitienė, 2020) theoretical assumptions of violence and bullying prevention (Klanienė et al., 2022). It is observed that there is a lack of systematic and consistent research on social exclusion among peers as a form of bullying expression in preschool age, which by removing it could lead to the application of useful bullying prevention strategies in preschool education institutions.

The problem of the research. Bullying at preschool age lacks sufficient attention from researchers. It is observed that many researches focus on the

expression and prevention of bullying at school age, but an aspect of bullying at preschool age is being actualized more and more often. Therefore, there is a goal to reveal social exclusion as one of the forms of preschool bullying, and is hoped that this would help to better understand and reveal the phenomenon of bullying of preschool children and predict its preventive opportunities.

The purpose of the research is to reveal social exclusion among peers as one of the forms of expression of bullying in a preschool education group.

Research methods: systematic analysis of literature, semi-structured interviews, pedagogical observation and qualitative content analysis.

Theoretical presumptions of social rejection as a fundamental form of bullying at preschool age

Bullying at preschool age is still a matter of much scientific debate, the characteristics of a child's mental development at this age make it difficult to identify a child's aggressive behavior as bullying (Ozsahin & Yayci, 2021; McGoey et al., 2023). I. Klanienė et al., (2022) state that the manifestations of bullying can be already observed at an early age, but we cannot consider them as bullying until such a phenomenon meets scientifically based bullying criteria (intentional action, repeatability, power imbalance). At preschool age, children are not yet able to fully understand their intentions, i.e. an important element identifying bullying - the conscious intention to hurt, injure, etc. is eliminated. By behaving aggressively, children understand that they behave inappropriately and experience unpleasant feelings, but, due to their natural egocentrism, they are not yet able to understand the negative consequences they have caused to another child (Swit, 2018; Saracho, 2017), i.e. children have not yet reached such a level of awareness that they could realize that they are doing it on purpose, with the aim to hurt another child.

However, a different opinion that children at this age are able to understand the motives of their behavior and recognize the intentions of others prevails, (Kerulienė & Užpurvytė, 2017). At the age of 3 children already have an ability to distinguish between conscious and unconscious actions, at the age of 3-4 they begin to develop emotional awareness, empathy and learn to follow rules. Five-year-old children may already have acquired an ability to distinguish an intentional action from an unintentional one, a sense of moral responsibility develops, which enables to distinguish good deeds from inappropriate ones (Kerulienė & Užpurvytė, 2017; Bulošė & Valaitienė, 2019). The results of the accomplished researches also reveal that the manifestation of bullying is already observed at preschool age (Lee, 2020; Zhong, Zhao, Ai, Zeng & Stone-MacDonald, 2022), a research conducted in Finnish preschools reveals that 12.6% of 3-6 years children in preschools were directly associated with the phenomenon of bullying (Kirves & Sajaniemi, 2012), after conducting a research in Swedish

pre-school educational institutions, it became clear that 6% of the researched participants were classified as being bullied, 10% as bullies and those who experience bullying, and 11% as bullies (Roseth & Pellegrini, 2018). Referring to the research results, it can be stated that the manifestation of bullying is already observed at preschool age.

Bullying among preschool children is more characterized by physical aggressiveness, and a little later, when children gain more linguistic experience, verbal and social forms of aggression appear (Skoglund, 2020; Ozsahin & Yayci, 2021; Klanienė et al., 2022). The forms of bullying are shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1 Forms of bullying and their signs at preschool age (Ozsahin & Yayci, 2021)

One of the most common forms of bullying among preschool children is social exclusion (e.g. exclusion from a game) (Skoglund, 2020; Enlebaas & Killen, 2016). Social exclusion is an integral part of social life in all periods of a person's life, includes various areas of life and an inability to participate in activities available to the majority of people in society. Social exclusion threatens the demand to belong, which is considered to be a central interpersonal motive predetermined by a wide range of human behaviors, emotions, and thoughts (Marinovic & Trauble, 2018). This affects not only the quality of life of individuals, but also the equality and cohesion of society as a whole (Crous & Bradshaw, 2017). Specifying the term of social exclusion, it can be defined as exclusion, dislike and avoidance of a person (Stenseng, Belsky, Skalicka & Wichstrom, 2015).

Social participation in group activities, the importance of friendship, and search for one's place in a group are extremely important tasks that arise at preschool age (Koyuturk Kocer & Gultekin Akduman, 2019; Hwang & Markson, 2020; Swit, Blakely-McClure & Kamper-DeMarco, 2023). A significant developmental step in the life of a preschool child is the first interaction with other peers - as soon as a child enters a preschool educational institution, he, separated from his family, enters a social environment consisting of his peers for the first time. In this social environment child's need to be with other children manifests

itself through group games (Koyuturk Kocer & Gultekin Akduman, 2019), therefore, groups among peers are immediately starting to be formed, where decisions whom to include and whom to exclude are being made (Hwang & Markson, 2020).

The researchers (Killen, Muvey & Hitti, 2013) identify two forms of social exclusion: interpersonal and intergroup rejection. Interpersonal rejection emerges from individual personality traits. Two types of interpersonal exclusion are distinguished - rejected children who are very shy, timid, anxious and vulnerable or rejected children who behave aggressively. The factors that lead to peer exclusion include temperament, insecure attachment, lack of friends, lack of self-confidence, and lack of social skills (Killen et al., 2013; Hwang & Markson, 2020). Intergroup exclusion is associated with differences in gender, race, ethnicity, culture, or nationality (Killen et al., 2013).

Preschoolers experience bullying primarily as exclusion from a game, which is what they fear the most when they are in a peer group. However, it is the most common form of social exclusion that most often occurs among preschool children, and observations reveal that in each preschool education group, one or two children are systematically (their behavior is directed against the same child) and intentionally rejected and removed from the game (Skoglund, 2020). In early childhood, a game is a way to explore the world and understand the relationships between one self and the people around, therefore, regarding the significance of games and knowing that the fear of not having someone to play with is clearly present, rejection during a game can be described as a preschooler's understanding of what bullying is (Helgeland & Lund, 2017).

Friendship status is very important in preschool children's relationships - it has been proven that children of this age are more likely to share their items and toys with children they consider their friends than with children they do not like (Cooley & Killen, 2015). It is observed that at preschool age, children already demonstrate socially exclusive behavior, for example, they intentionally remove another child from playing with a ball, loudly express their desire 'not to make friends', do not give their hand when they need to hold hands or play together (Hwang & Markson, 2020). Younger preschoolers find decisions about social exclusion more primitively, older preschoolers tend to reason social exclusion based on group loyalty or group intentions (Hwang & Markson, 2020).

It is important to note that the quality of early interpersonal relationships affects children's well-being and health in adulthood (Raitanen, Sandberg & Oksanen, 2017), research data reveals a positive relation between peer exclusion problems experienced in preschool and mental health and/or delinquency problems in adolescence and adulthood (Saracho, 2017). Social exclusion experienced at preschool age has a negative impact on the social, emotional and cognitive development of a child. This is associated with problems such as an increased risk of depression, suicide, anti-social behaviour, anxiety and low self-

esteem (Lund, Helgeland & Kovac, 2015). Experience of exclusion in the peer group leads to isolation and lack of motivation (Killen et al., 2013).

D. Olweus, S. P. Limber (2008) note that while assessing the phenomenon of bullying in general, it can be defined as a systemic problem of the entire educational institution. Therefore, when talking about social exclusion as an essential form of expression of bullying in pre-school education institutions, a systematic approach, research and the provision of effective preventive directions are crucial. As the above mentioned researcher states, the presumption of effective prevention is understanding of the manifestation of bullying, therefore, this article pays the greatest attention to the presentation of research on social exclusion as a manifestation of bullying.

Research methodology

The research is based on D. Olweus (1993) theoretical provision that effective prevention is possible only after a complete understanding of the bullying phenomenon (causes, forms, roles of participants, etc.).

In order to reveal social rejection among peers in a preschool education group, two qualitative studies were conducted in March – April, 2022.

Semi-structured interview. The choice of the semi-structured interview method was determined because detailed, structured data is obtained by means of this method, while the interview itself remains informal and takes the form of a conversation (Bitinas, Rupšienė & Žydžiūnaitė, 2008). The following topics were highlighted in the interview: *demographic data, forms of social rejection as an expression of bullying; causes of social rejection as an expression of bullying; characteristics of the participants. The sample of informants was created by means of criterion selection.* 5 preschool teachers participated in the research, and they were selected according to the following criteria: having at least 1 year of experience and working with 2-5 year old children. In the research data informants' answers were marked by assigning the code X (X1, X2, etc.).

Pedagogical observation. The observation method was chosen due to its completeness in analyzing the behavior of the whole group, purposeful assessment of behavior, impartiality (the observation method does not depend on the attitudes of the informants, and it is possible to observe many characteristics and phenomena at the same time (Kardelis, 2016). The closer the researcher gets to the research participants, the better he can understand the object of research and provide more targeted data (Žydžiūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017; Ciesielska, Ohlander & Bostrom, 2018), therefore, it was chosen to conduct pedagogical observation based on the participation criterion (when the researcher himself is a participant in the observational environment). The observation was applied in a preschool education group in order to obtain data about children's behavior, relationships, roles. During pedagogical observation the data was collected in

several stages: 1) an observation program was prepared (observation object, observation elements, a type of observation according to the position of the observer and the methods recording the collected information), 2) a direct organization of observation was carried out (the primary data was registered in the monitoring protocol, systematized, prepared for processing), 3) processing of the collected data, 4) data analysis (conclusions, proposals and practical recommendations were presented) (Kudinovienė, 2008).

The sample of the informants was made by convenience sampling criteria. Pedagogical observation was carried out in a preschool education group (2-5 years old) of the X educational institution, which was attended by 12 children. 6 boys and 6 girls participated in the research (2 years (1); 3-4 years (4); 5 years (7)). The duration of the research - 1 month. The answers of the research participants were marked by assigning a code (M-girls, B- boys).

Qualitative content analysis was used for data processing in both researches. By the method of qualitative content analysis it was trying to obtain repeated and reasonable insights from the given written text - collected information (Kardelis, 2016). The steps of qualitative content analysis are presented in the scientific literature: repeated reading of a text; identification of manifest categories based on keywords; division of category content into subcategories; interpretation and justification of categories and subcategories with evidence abstracted from the text (Žydzūnaitė & Sabaliauskas, 2017).

The research is based on the main ethical principles: volunteering and ensuring personal confidentiality (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016). The individual's freedom to agree or disagree to be a research participant was recognized and respected. A lot of attention was paid to ensuring the anonymity of the participants, the research data is coded without revealing information that violates the privacy of the research participants.

Research results

Trying to reveal the signs of social exclusion as an expression of bullying, it was focused on three aspects: *forms of expression, intensity and location*.

The analysis of the interview data of preschool teachers revealed that social exclusion among peers as an expression of bullying is characterized by three forms, i.e. display of physical rejection, refusal to play and verbally expressed unwillingness to play together. The answers of the informants regarding the demonstration of physical rejection are illustrated by the following statements: '<...>it happens that they do not want to hold hands<...>' (X1); '<...>do not give a hand<...>' (X2); The responses of preschool teachers also reveal cases of refusal to accept to play: '<...>does not allow to play <...>' (X4); '<...>refuses somebody else to join to play <...>' (X5); '<...>if they dislike your friend, they do not accept you in a game <...>' (X1). Another prominent form is the verbally expressed

reluctance to make friends: ‘<...> do not want to make friends, say that directly<...>’ (X2); ‘<...> they respond to the child's attempts to join the activity ‘we do not want to play with you, we will not be friends, get out of here’<...>’ (X4).

The analysis of teachers' answers shows that social exclusion of 2-5 years children among peers as a form of expression of bullying mainly manifests itself in game activities.

The results of the conducted pedagogical observation revealed similar tendencies. The most frequently identified form of exclusion from the game/refusal to play together, which occurred 3 times, in the first case: ‘B5 (4 years old) wanted to join B1 (5 years old) in a game (B1 played together with B4 (5 years old) and B3 (5 years old). B1 was building a lego city with other boys and was playing with cars in it, when B5 tried to play together, B1 said loudly ‘you will not play with us’; in the following situation: ‘B1 (5 years old) did not accept to play M3 (5 years old .)’; in the third case: ‘M3 wanted to join in and play with M1. When M3 approached, M1 said ‘I don't want to play anymore’, left the dolls to M3 and went to the other children. M3 took the dolls and started playing alone.’

A form of social exclusion as a form of an expression of bullying was less frequently observed, 2 times - by displaying physical rejection: ‘M1 (5 years old) did not want to give a hand to M2 (5 years old) during music class on Wednesday’; ‘M1 (age 5) did not want to give a hand to M2 (age 5) during music class on Thursday.’ During the observation, it became clear that the demonstration of physical rejection took place systematically, the situation was constantly repeating with the same participants. This can be treated as a bullying situation, since a repetitive aspect is observed.

The least common form, recorded once - an imbalance of children's physical abilities, the expression of which can be seen in the following situation: ‘B1 (5 years old) is a year older than B5 (4 years old), due to the age difference the boys do not want to play together, B1 has difficulty in understanding B5's statements while playing’ and reluctance to make friends is expressed verbally: ‘M3 (5 years old) wanted to join a group of children: B1 (5 years old), M1 (5 years old), B3 (5 years old) and B4 (5 years old), playing with a doll house . When M3 tried to join, B1 told the children “do not make friends with her’’. It can be observed that even in several different situations the same research participants B1, M1, M3 took part. B1 and M1 initiated 2 situations each. M3 experienced social rejection as a form of expression of bullying in 2 situations. In these situations an essential element of bullying became apparent – *repetition/repeatability*.

The analysis of the research results made it possible to highlight the signs of the intensity of social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying. According to the preschool teachers, who participated in the research, the intensity of cases of social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying varies. 2 informants stated

that they see situations of social exclusion as a manifestation of bullying once a week: ‘<...>not very often, there are rare cases<...>, one case occurs once a week<...>’ (X2); another informant expressed a similar opinion, stating that ‘<...>at least once a week such a situation happens to one or other children<...>’ (X4). 2 informants stated that they notice these situations 2-3 times a week: ‘<...>let’s say, 2-3 times a week<...>’ (X1); ‘<...>often, although not daily, but several times a week<...>’ (X3). 1 informant indicated that situations of social exclusion as a manifestation of bullying are rarely observed (‘<...>bullying in a preschool institution is a rare phenomenon<...>’ (X5).

After the pedagogical observation among 2-5 age group of children, it was observed that social exclusion as a form of bullying is also repeated differently - once per day (B5 and B1); twice a day (M3 and B1); twice a week (M1 and M2; M1 and M3).

Thus, in preschool age, the beginning of bullying is observed, as children express physical and verbal aggression towards their peers constantly, these actions tend to be repeated towards the same children, which reflects one criterion of bullying - repetition.

Teachers were asked in which activities the cases of social exclusion as the cases of expression of bullying are most often observed, and the analysis of data allowed to highlight 3 activities. The first activity emphasized by informants - musical activities: ‘<...>when you have to go dance in a circle<...>’ (X1); ‘<...>in musical activity<...>’ (X3); ‘<...>’. The second activity indicated by the informants - is group games: ‘<...>most often it happens during group games when you do not want to play together<...>’ (X1); ‘<...>when playing, it sets some apart<...>’ (X2). Another prominent activity is outdoor walks: ‘<...>when we go for a walk, then he does not want to hold hands with some children, he goes to others <...>’ (X1); ‘<...>probably most during outings, when everyone has to go in pairs holding hands<...>’ (X4); ‘<...>it is often outside when they do not want to give a hand to someone while walking<...>’ (X5). Similar tendencies are also revealed by the observational data, it turned out that situations of social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying are mostly observed in group game activities, sometimes in musical activities, and rarely in outdoor game activities. So, it can be said that social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying manifests itself in various activities of a preschool education group.

In order to better understand the context of social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying, we were interested in the characteristics of children involved in bullying situations, i.e. bullies and those who initiate bullying.

When examining the statements of preschool teachers about the characteristics of preschool children who experienced social exclusion as a manifestation of bullying in the situations they saw, the following aspects emerged: *closedness, sensitivity, special educational needs, self-assurance.*

The informants mentioned that in most cases closed children experience social exclusion: '<...>closed children<...>' (X1); '<...>are calmer, more closed<...>' (X3). Another characteristic is sensitivity: ('<...>showing emotions clearly, e.g. if they cry a lot<...>' (X1); '<...>more sensitive children are rejected<...>' (X4). One more characteristic mentioned by the informants is special educational needs '<...>children with atypical development<...>' (X3); '<...>with mental, physical illnesses<...>' (X5). The informants attributed a high level of self-confidence to the latter characteristics: '<...> always willing to be the best in games, etc. <...>' (X4); *most of all, others do not like arrogant children with big egos, who 'raise' themselves, e.g. 'give it to me', 'I will win', etc. <...>' (X2). These data highlight the experience of interpersonal exclusion, it can be seen that it is not uncommon for children to experience social exclusion due to certain personal characteristics.*

While analyzing the characteristics identified by preschool teachers, which were common to preschool children, who initiated social exclusion as an expression of bullying in the situations they saw, the following characteristics emerged: *dominance, excessive mobility*. The informants emphasized the characteristic of dominance: *,<...>commanding, who want to dominate in games<...>' (X1); ,<...>rejects probably the most dominant ones, who command others in a group, although it happens that others also reject<...>' (X2). In each group of children, one or more leaders stand out, guiding other children in a group<...>' (X4). Another characteristic highlighted by the research participants is excessive mobility: *,<...>very active children' (X3); ,<...>children who are very active, do not freeze in place<...>' (X5). Preschool teachers also highlighted the age factor as a characteristic of children who initiate social rejection: *,<...>I have noticed that rejection is already visible among older 4-5 years old children, <...>' (X1); ,<...>I would say that the older ones really tend to reject somebody more often than the little ones. They already tend to exclude some children<...>' (X2). These data are also supplemented by observation results, which revealed that older children – i.e. five-year-olds - are more likely to initiate cases of social exclusion, which indicates that the beginning of bullying is formed at this age, as the criterion, common to bullying - a power imbalance - appears.***

Pedagogical observation data revealed that the initiators of social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying were representatives of both sexes. The results did not reveal significant gender differences, although there is research suggesting that forms of social exclusion are more typical for girls (Douvlos, 2019).

Conclusions and discussion

Bullying at preschool age often manifests itself as an indirect form of bullying – social exclusion. A preschool institution is an important place for socialization, the first separation from a family is experienced and new

relationships are formed, therefore, an interaction of social relations with peers becomes an important criterion for understanding one's status, abilities and place in the group. Experiences of social exclusion in early childhood can have a negative impact on social development, future relationships, and a child's emotional well-being (Douvlos, 2019; Skoglund, 2020; Ozsahin & Yayci, 2021).

I. Tanrikulu (2020) emphasizes that the main method children use to communicate at preschool age is a game, so the most painful experience for preschool children is being excluded from it. The results of the research reveal that social exclusion of preschool children by their peers is noticeable and usually occurs by removing another child from a game, by demonstrating rejection physically, and expressing reluctance to make friends verbally. It is observed that most often the cases of social exclusion are recorded during group games activities, music sessions or group activities in the field. These aspects are also reflected in the findings of other researchers that one of the most common forms of social exclusion at preschool age is exclusion from a game or not being admitted to play together (Kirves & Sajaniemi, 2012; Skoglund, 2020; Swit et al., 2023).

M. Killen et al., (2013) distinguish two types of social exclusion: interpersonal (due to individual personality traits) and intergroup (due to differences in gender, race, origin, culture, etc.). The research revealed that children experience social exclusion due to special educational needs or personality characteristics (high self-confidence, aggressiveness, closedness, sensitivity). It has been observed that the cases of social exclusion arise due to interpersonal factors.

The research data responds to the claims of other researchers that one of the main reasons for social exclusion in a group is that they show behavior that is unacceptable to their peers (Hwang & Markson, 2020). The research results of other authors (Wolke & Lereya, 2015; Davis & Gere, 2018; Douvlos, 2019) emphasize that social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying is experienced by children who tend to behave aggressively, are uncommunitave, socially withdrawn, and particularly sensitive. It is also noted that children with special educational needs often repeatedly experience situations of social exclusion (Skoglund, 2020).

Situations of social exclusion are initiated by children who are 4-5 years old and have excessive mobility level and dominance. The research revealed that older children that are 4- 5 years tend to initiate cases of social exclusion, which shows that the beginning of bullying is formed at this age, because a criterion typical for bullying - an imbalance of power - appears. The results did not reveal significant gender differences, although there are researches suggesting that the forms of social exclusion are more typical for girls (Douvlos, 2019).

Three criteria are necessary for the identification of social exclusion as a form of expression of bullying: repeatability, intentional desire to hurt and power

imbalance (Olweus, 1993; Kirves & Sajaniemi, 2012; Hwang & Markson, 2020). The results of the research enabled to highlight two essential bullying criteria of common to social exclusion among peers: repeatability and power imbalance, which allow to identify social exclusion as one of the forms of expression of bullying. The third criterion - an intentional desire to hurt, was not revealed in the research, so, a continuation of the research on this topic and wider discussions among scientists are necessary.

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