

Russian Teenager: Attitude towards Psychological, Physical and Sexual Violence

Adamchuk DV¹, Smyslova MM¹ and Sobkin VS^{2*}

¹Research Associate of the Institute of Sociology for Education, The Russian Academy of Education, Russia

²Ph.D in Psychology, Member of the Russian Academy of Education (RAE), Director of the Institute of Sociology for Education RAE, Russia

Abstract

This article is based upon two sociological research projects carried out by the Institute of Educational Sociology of the Russian Academy of Education. The first study took place in 2010-2012, as part of the programme initiated by ISE RAE "A teenager in the former USSR: 20 years later" in Moscow, Riga and Chisinau. The second research was conducted in 2012 in Krasnoyarsk region and was dedicated to the study of teenagers' attitude towards deviant behavior (smoking, alcohol and drugs abuse) and their orientation to the healthy lifestyle.

Keywords: Adolescence; Attitude to sexual violence; Bullying, Interpersonal relations; Microsocial environment

Introduction

This article is based upon two sociological research projects carried out by the Institute of Educational Sociology of the Russian Academy of Education. The first study took place in 2010-2012, as part of the programme initiated by ISE RAE "A teenager in the former USSR: 20 years later" in Moscow, Riga and Chisinau. It included a wide range of various topics (educational, professional and migrational plans of teenagers, orientation in cultural field, social activities of teenagers, manifestation of tolerance etc.) [1-6]. This article will only deal with the data concerning Moscow schoolchildren (993 children from 9th and 11th grades) and will analyze their opinions regarding bullying. The second research was conducted in 2012 in Krasnoyarsk region and was dedicated to the study of teenagers' attitude towards deviant behavior (smoking, alcohol and drugs abuse) and their orientation to the healthy lifestyle. This research also studied the sexual behavior of schoolchildren and their attitude to sexual violence. It comprised 1540 children from 7th, 9th and 11th grades. This survey was implemented in the framework of a research programme that has been started in 2002 [7,8].

The data presented in the article defines the special features and extent to which bullying and sexual aggression is common among modern Russian schoolchildren. At the moment in Russia there is an outburst of teenage crime, deviant behavior and teenage suicide. At the same time, information about crimes (delinquent behavior) is registered by the official Ministry of Home Affairs statistics, as opposed to cases of bullying and sexual aggression, which are often undiscovered. In the absence of any organized national wide monitoring systems for such negative factors, the data obtained from local sociological researches becomes especially valuable, as it allows to estimate how widespread bullying and sexual aggression are, as well as extrapolate the results to the modern lifestyle of a Russian teenager.

It might seem at first that bullying and attitude towards sexual violence are two rather remote topics, however, in our opinion, these specific themes should be analyzed in order to describe the micro social environment of a modern Russian schoolchild, and preliminary estimate how often a teenager is confronted. In the article we will try to reveal and describe the impacts of demographic and social stratification factors on teen attitudes towards various forms of violence. We assume that adolescent could avoid seeking empathy and psychological support when suffering from sexual violence because of fear of becoming a victim of bullying.

Teenagers' Attitude towards Psychological and Physical Violence: Bullying

Questions concerning the interpersonal relations of teenagers with their peers during age of adolescence have the utmost importance, as they determine the specific psychological features of this development stage [9-13]. Hence the key attention is drawn to those points which are connected with deformation of the personal relations and influence the social wellbeing of a teenager in class. Due to this, such social phenomenon as bullying presents an especially interesting subject for research.

Psychological literature defines bullying as a combination of various social, psychological and pedagogical problems which determines a process of continuous (individual or group) physical or mental violence towards a person who cannot protect themselves in this situation [14]. An experience of being bullied is very traumatic for its victim and has a bad influence on a teenager's personality, his self-concept, self-esteem, as well as his value system and behavioral patterns with his peers [15].

In this part of the article we will try to study how widespread are the seven bullying types defined by D. Lines [16]: physical and psychological. It will describe the influence of social-demographic and social-stratification factors to the attribution of a teenager to the "risk group" (in our case a chance to become a victim of school bullying).

To determine those schoolchildren who have ever encountered psychological violence from their classmates, respondents were offered a question phrased like this: "Have you ever been mocked, taunted or ignored by your classmates?" To detect those who have encountered physical violence, we asked respondents this: "Have you ever been a victim of beating, had your belongings damaged, forced to do something you didn't want to do (for example, give away your breakfast, money, etc) by your classmates?" Answer options were as follows: "Yes,

***Corresponding author:** Sobkin VS, Ph.D in Psychology, Professor, Member of the Russian Academy of Education (RAE), Director of the Institute of Sociology for Education RAE, Russia, Tel: +90-0216-348 02 92; E-mail: sobkin@mail.ru

Received November 20, 2014; **Accepted** December 22, 2014; **Published** December 29, 2014

Citation: Adamchuk DV, Smyslova MM, Sobkin VS (2014) Russian Teenager: Attitude towards Psychological, Physical and Sexual Violence. Social Criminol 2: 114. doi:10.4172/2375-4435.1000114

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it happens often”, “Yes; it happens sometimes”, “No”. We should note that these options estimate not only presence or absence of such cases, but their frequencies as well. Analyzing this material, we considered the answers of high school children to both questions, which allowed us to identify those who either encountered various combinations of school violence, and those who felt comfortable in the school environment.

42.8% of Moscow high school children have never faced any psychological or physical violence. The rest have more or less often fallen victim of bullying inside the class. The most common type of bullying is occasional psychological violence without physical impact (46.6% of schoolchildren have to face it). It is worth mentioning that physical violence is almost always accompanied by psychological one.

Bullying victims: gender and age factors

Analyzing the obtained material shows that girls feel more comfortable at school than boys. Thus, boys say less often than girls that they had never encountered any violence (37.2% and 48.4% accordingly; $p=.005$). At the same time they more often mention occasional psychological violence (50.3% and 42.9% accordingly; $p=.02$) and occasional physical violence (3.0% and 0.6% accordingly; $p=.006$). This correlation between the girls’ and the boys’ answers is explained by higher aggressiveness of male subculture, where mockery and physical aggression displays can be considered normal and even be approved of by classmates.

Not less important is the studying of the age dynamics of the answers. The higher the age, the higher the amount of children who have never faced any kinds of violence from their classmates (9th grade: 36.0%, 11th grade: 48.8%; $p=.0002$). Simultaneously the percent of children who have sometimes faced psychological violence goes down (from 51.7% in the 9th grade to 42.8% in the 11th grade; $p=.009$). These facts, in our opinion, reflect rather characteristic age-related changes in adolescent subculture. At the same time they can be evidence of teenager’s changing attitude towards various aggression displays: something which in the 9th grade was seen as mockery and harassment and was felt more acutely, later on is experienced less affectively. This can also explain the decrease in frequency of occasional psychological violence and the increase of happy teenagers (who neither encounter psychological nor mental violence). On the other hand, we may suppose that the perspective of soon graduation and the change of environment loosen tension in social interaction between classmates.

Bullying victims: family income and parents’ education factors

The material we obtained has shown that there is a distinct tendency of the family’s financial well-being influencing the experience of a teenager as a bullying victim: the higher the income of the family, the better this teenager will feel at school. Hence, children from well-off families are the most comfortable among classmates, they often report absence of any kinds of violence (highly prosperous – 48.8%, middle class – 40.2%, low income – 34.3%; $p \leq .05$). As opposed to this, children from low income family are regularly experiencing physical and psychological violence (low income – 2.9%, highly prosperous – 0.1%, $p=.006$). The same tendency shows in the occasional psychological violence at school (low income – 8.6%, highly prosperous – 0.8%, $p=.001$).

This information reveals a serious social problem: financial wellbeing of a family determines the emotional condition of a teenager at school. This goes greatly against the democratic principles of school education which are officially declared.

We should note that the similar results were received also during

the analysis of how parents’ education influences schoolchildren’s wellbeing. Children, whose parents have only secondary education, much more often encounter physical and psychological violence than those whose parents have higher education (5.0% and 0.01% accordingly; $p=.0001$). They also report more cases of regular psychological violence (7.5% and 2.0% accordingly; $p=.03$) and occasional displays of physical and psychological aggression (12.5% and 3.7% accordingly; $p=.01$).

Thus, the gathered material suggests that social-stratification factors (education and financial status of a family) directly influence the social life of a teenager at school: children from low social strata much more often get into the “risk zone” and become victims of violence.

Teenagers’ Attitude towards Sexual Violence

The analysis of the official Ministry of Internal Affairs statistics from 2004-2008 [17] shows that on average more than 8000 crimes classified as rape or as attempt of rape are registered per year. Specifically, more than 10% of these crimes are committed by underage or with their direct participation. Although it is obvious that the official statistic does not reflect the real situation in this area. Thus, experts in criminal psychology note that these crimes have high latency, which causes most of them to stay unreported. There are two types of latency of a sexual crime: “artificial” and “genuine” latency. The first type is caused by mistakes in law proceedings and low quality of police work. The official Ministry statistics is based solely upon the amount of suits filed to court. At the same time during 1997-2003 there was a distinct increase of suits which were rejected from court – from 1.45 rejections to 2.8. In other words, from 4 rape reports only one result in a lawsuit. The second type – “genuine” latency, means that because of such factors as fear of publicity and disbelief in law force the victim will not report rape or attempt of rape to police. Prosecutors office survey claims that only 10-15% of victims will apply to law enforcement office [18].

This indicates that the real amount of such crimes overcomes the official statistics by times. It can also be supposed that situations where underage children are involved have high “genuine” latency due to the age specifics of such victims.

Considering the high prevalence of such crimes, we offered our respondents a number of questions.

One of them estimated the presence of sexual violence victims in the respondent’s circle (“Is there anyone among your classmates who has ever been raped or was under a sexual attack?”). The answers show that in fact every tenth teenager indicated that there are such victims around them (11.0%). Among boys the percent of children who are aware of this is considerably higher than among girls (14.4% and 8.2% accordingly, $p<.05$). It is also noteworthy that among children who have had a sexual experience the percent of awareness is almost 3 times higher than among those who had never had such experience (19.9% and 7.3% accordingly, $p<.001$).

The special interest is drawn to analyzing the reasons as to why someone could become a victim of sexual violence, from teenagers’ standpoint. Our data shows that main reasons are stated as “bad luck”, “provocative appearance”, “carelessness” (Table 1).

The data shown in the table demonstrates that girls more often state “carelessness” and “provocative behavior” as the reasons than boys.

We should note that the age dynamics is the most visible regarding such reason as “provocative looks”. Among the 7th grade boys 20.5% indicate this, when in the 9th grade – already 37.0% ($p=.02$). Among girls the split is 26.7% и 35.7% ($p=.02$) accordingly. This allows to

Reasons	average	boys	girls	p=
Was just unlucky (was in the wrong place in the wrong time)	32.8	33.1	31.9	—
Provocative looks	32.3	31.3	33.1	—
Carelessness (coming into an elevator with unknown people, walking alone in the street at night)	25.5	20.9	29.2	.0004
Loss of self-control because of alcohol or drugs	17.1	17.9	15.9	—
Provocative behavior	17.0	15.0	19.4	.03
Other	1.3	2.2	0.7	.008

Table 1: Teenagers' opinions about reasons of sexual violence (%).

Reason	average	boys	girls	p=
It will cause negative reaction from people (mockery, blame, insults etc)	25.0	22.0	26.8	—
Everybody will know it happened	27.2	19.0	33.3	.01
Noone will be able to help and understand anyway	19.4	13.0	23.6	.02
It is humiliating and shameful to be a victim of rape	21.1	26.0	17.1	.05
It is a personal problem and you should deal with it yourself	15.9	21.0	12.2	.04
Other	4.3	7.0	1.6	.03

Table 2: Division of answers to the question why a victim of rape should not apply for help (%).

Address of application	average	boys	girls	p=
You should let your parents know first	66.2	59.3	71.4	.0001
You should visit a clinic and get checked	19.9	17.2	21.7	.01
You should apply to police	12.5	19.3	11.8	.0001
You should contact a professional psychologist	8.7	8.9	11.8	.04
You can only trust this to your closest friend	5.9	6.5	6.8	—
You should not tell anyone and deal with the problem yourself	2.0	4.4	1.0	.0001

Table 3: Teenagers' opinion about where to ask for help in case of sexual violence (%).

draw a conclusion that together with growing up the critical attitude to clothing also increases, as well as reflection on appearance which may cause sexual aggression. Notably, the sharp increase of such answers corresponds with the age marked with distinct physical changes of teenagers. We must add that among girls the age-based dynamics shows in regards with other potential reasons for violence. Thus, "provocative behavior" is marked in the 7th grade by 13.4% and in the 11th grade by 20.5%. "Loss of self-control because of alcohol and drugs" becomes the most topical for schoolgirls of the 9th grade (22.0%). Comparatively, among 7th and 11th graders this reason is stated by 13.4% and 11.4% accordingly. At the same time, such reason as "carelessness" declines in importance: among 7th graders it is stated by 35.0% and among 11th graders only by 25.9% ($p \leq .05$).

The special interest is directed to the difference between the answers of teenagers who have or have not any sexual experience. So, those who lead sexual lives, much more often believe that sexual aggression may be caused by "provocative looks" – 38.7%. Among those who does not have sexual experience this percent is 29.3% ($p=.0002$). At that, teenagers who never had sexual experience more often state such reason as "carelessness" (27.9%), and among those who lead sexual lives the percent of such answers is 18.7% ($p=.0003$). In other words, teenagers who lead sexual lives are more inclined to explain sexual aggression by the behavior of a victim itself, than by circumstances or carelessness towards safety rules, as do their peers who have not yet started sexual life.

While dealing with the subject of sexual violence, we should emphasize that the most important topics here are legal, psychological and medical aid to the victim. The difficulties are, firstly, that the society has no fixed attitude towards a victim of sexual violence, and secondly, due to a serious trauma, not every victim is able to apply for help. Taking this into account, we look with a special attention at judgments which teenagers have regarding whether a victim should report violence, and reasons why this report should not be done.

To the question "If a rape took place, should the victim report it?" there was 70.7% of positive answers. Among girls the percent of positive answers is higher than among boys: 76.0% and 64.1% accordingly ($p=.0001$). 4.2% of respondents (6.7% of boys, 2, 3%, of girls; $p=.0004$) think that you should tell nobody about what happened. Every forth (25.1%) respondent found it hard to give a certain answer.

Generally the shown data indicates that the majority of teenagers are oriented to asking for help in case of rape. The special interest is drawn to the analysis of those respondents who think that you should not ask for anyone's help.

Reasons to why you should avoid asking for help are very different (Table 2).

It is obvious from the answers in the table that there are clear differences between the replies of girls and boys. For boys the most important reason is "shame and humiliation" because of rape (26.0%, for girls — 17.1%, $p=.05$). However, girls are more inclined to explain the reason by fear of publicity "everybody will know (33.3%, for boys — 19.0%, $p=.01$). Thus, if boys accentuate personal humiliation, girls care more for social rejection of a victim.

Notably, age-related dynamics is visible only regarding one option: "It will cause negative reaction from people (mockery, blame, insults etc.)". In the 7th grade it is indicated by 30.8% of teenagers, and by 11th grade this percent declines to 21.3% ($p=.05$).

In general the data shown in Table 2 indicates that fear of becoming a victim of bullying prevents adolescents from seeking psychological support. This confirms our assumption made in the beginning of this article about the impact of a bullying on seeking support in case of rape.

And lastly, we offered teenagers to answer a question about where you should apply for help if rape took place (Table 3).

As shown in the table data, most teenagers (66.2%) think that in

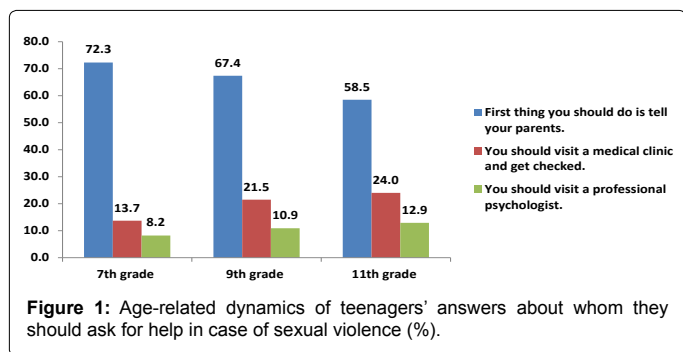


Figure 1: Age-related dynamics of teenagers' answers about whom they should ask for help in case of sexual violence (%).

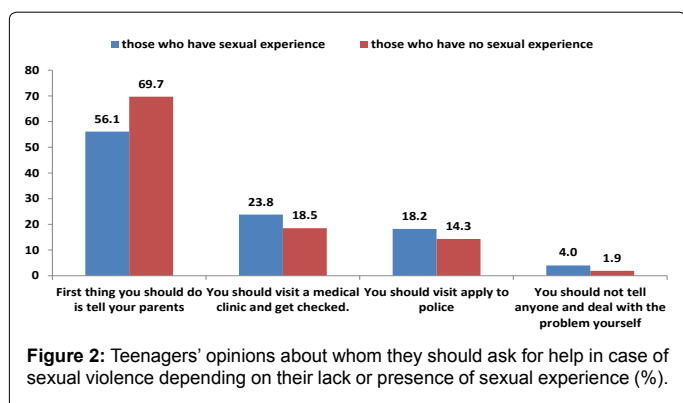


Figure 2: Teenagers' opinions about whom they should ask for help in case of sexual violence depending on their lack or presence of sexual experience (%).

case of rape the first thing you should do is tell your parents. Every fifth (19.9%) believes that you should visit a medical clinic. A very interesting fact is that only 5.9% would trust this problem to a close friend. Thus, regardless of the growing importance of interpersonal intimacy, teenagers are more inclined to feel that discussing sexual violence with their parents is the thing to do if sexual violence were to take place. It is from parents that a schoolchild will seek protection, support and understanding in a difficult situation of personal humiliation. This, in our opinion, very clearly illustrates the special importance of parent-child relationships during adolescence.

The answers also represent the gender-related dynamics: girls more often choose to apply for help to "parents", "medical clinic" and "psychologist". Boys are more likely to address to "police", and also they more often believe that "you should deal with this yourself".

Rather obvious is also the age-related dynamics. Thus, with increasing age the percent of those who chooses addressing to parents declines, and at the same time there is an increase of those who chooses to visit a medical clinic and a professional psychologist (Figure 1).

Thus, between the 7th and the 11th grades we can see growth of the readiness of teenagers to independently solve problems regarding sexual violence, without applying to parents. At the same time is it notable that during growing up there is an increase of answers related to physical and mental health ("medical clinic" and "professional psychologist"). As for those who choose to ask "police" for help, their percent does not change significantly. This proves that the level of "genuine" latency of such crimes, which was mentioned earlier, is important not only for younger teenagers and high school children. Especially interesting is to compare the answers from teenagers who did have and who had no sexual experience (Figure 2).

The data displayed on the diagram shows that teenagers who never had any sexual experience are more liable to ask parents for help. At

the same time, teenagers who have some sexual experience, state that the victim should "deal with the problems themselves", "visit a medical clinic" or "apply to police". This information is remarkable, because they allow to suppose that sexual experience, which is often considered as an element of teenager's probation of grown up life, is really not only connected with the violation of age norm, but also with the achievement of certain personal and social maturity. Essentially, the presented results prove are evidence of changes in the parent-child relationship, of increase of independence and teenager's readiness to be responsible for his behavior and its consequences, as well as for his physical and mental health. In this aspect sexual experience may be viewed as a kind of indicator of psychological autonomy of a teenager and his readiness to separate from parents.

Conclusion

There is a very distinct problematic side in the modern teenagers' social and psychological wellbeing: every other respondent has encountered some form of physical or psychical aggression from classmates. The data analysis showed that the possibility of becoming a victim of violence is determined by a range of demographic and social-stratification factors. The weaker social groups are more often under risk in school environment.

A modern Russian teenager faces manifestations of sexual aggression not only from the media, but in their real life too. It is notable that those teenagers who have had sexual experience are aware of victims of sexual violence among their circle three times more often than their peers who never had any sexual experience. Additionally, schoolchildren who lead sexual life will more often explain sexual violence with the provocative looks and behavior of a victim, than with circumstances or carelessness, as would do their classmates without sexual experience.

Most teenagers will seek help in case of sexual violence. We should note here, that psychological climate of a complete family has positive influence on the teenager's readiness to deal with a traumatizing situation and apply for help. It is from parents that a schoolchild will seek protection, support and understanding in a difficult situation of personal humiliation

Analyzing answers of those teenagers, who have had sexual experience regarding possible solutions of the situations of sexual aggression, allows concluding that they are ready to be responsible for their behavior and its consequences, as well as for their physical and mental health. In this aspect sexual experience may be viewed as a kind of indicator of psychological autonomy of a teenager, his readiness to separate from parents.

To sum up, we should note that analyzing even those questions of manifestation of aggression which were addressed to schoolchildren not directly indicates that the teenager's environment itself contains an aggressive (illegal) component, which usually is a "hidden layer" of interpersonal relationships in the micro social surroundings of a schoolchild. The threat to become a victim of bullying or danger of ostracism prevents the teenager from seeking psychological support.

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