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**When the teacher becomes a bully – comparative  
case study of British and American cases**

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### **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně a výhradně s použitím uvedených zdrojů.

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## Abstract

The bachelor thesis examines the topic of teachers engaging in bullying behaviours. The aim is to gain insight into the nature, prevalence, causes, and impact of teacher maltreatment and to raise awareness of this issue. Content analysis and comparative case study were carried out to explore and compare the similarities and differences of teacher bullying in the UK and the USA. The results showed a high prevalence of teacher bullying in English-speaking countries (c. 30%) as well as inconsistent anti-bullying legislation.

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## **Introduction**

Teachers play a crucial role in our society, serving as our educators, role models, and support systems. They are the ones who teach us fundamental skills such as reading, writing, and maths, while also instilling critical values and attitudes that shape our personal and professional development. But what happens when the same individuals who are intended to guide and inspire us instead opt to misuse the trust and authority given to them?

Bullying is a pervasive issue that affects educational institutions worldwide, leaving a lasting impact on students' physical and mental well-being. While we typically associate bullying with students bullying their peers, teacher-on-student bullying is an equally destructive form of harassment.

Since the topic of teachers engaging in bullying behaviours is often overlooked and ignored in our society, I believe it is essential to raise awareness of this issue in order to gain a better understanding and develop effective prevention and intervention strategies. The aim of this thesis is therefore to examine teacher bullying with its factors, causes, prevalence, and impact.

My bachelor thesis is divided into a theoretical and practical section. The theoretical part deals with forms of bullying, the roles involved in bullying situations, assessment of the position teachers have in our society, the factors that may lead teachers to engage in abusive behaviour towards their students, and finally the impacts of teacher bullying on their well-being. The practical part is focused on the examination of teacher bullying in English-speaking countries, particularly in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Through content analysis of previous research, I will inspect and compare the prevalence of teacher bullying as well as anti-bullying legislation in the UK and the USA. Additionally, two specific cases of teacher maltreatment will be examined and compared in the last chapter of this thesis.

# **1. Definition of bullying**

Bullying is defined as a continual, systematic abuse of power. It is persistently hostile behaviour that is unprovoked and intended to injure the victim physically, psychologically, or socially. Bullying can occur when one or more persons abuse their authority over one or more victims who are unable to defend themselves (Dupper, 2013, p. 9). What is important to stress is that bullying is not a mutual disagreement or dispute between two people of similar strength (whether physical or psychological), there needs to be an asymmetric power relationship between them to consider the conflict bullying (Olweus, 1993, p. 10).

Bullying is discussed mainly in the relation to school bullying between peers. However, bullying as such is a complex phenomenon present in our society since the beginning of time. Evolutionary scientists claim that “striving for social dominance” is a part of human nature. Looking back on history, there is an indication that humans desire to have certain superiority over others. Therefore, it is not surprising that this type of aggressive behaviour can be seen even nowadays in different social circles and situations. Bullying occurs often in an environment where people are in contact with each other constantly which means that school and workplace are the main grounds for conflict (Dupper, 2013, p. 6).

When describing bullying one must comment on different forms of this behaviour.

## **1.1. Forms of bullying**

Many authors differentiate between two main types of bullying: direct and indirect. Direct bullying is a noticeable behaviour that harms and humiliates the victim. Both the bully and the target are aware of the fact that the bullying is happening. Physical bullying is a typical form of direct bullying. It is a physical attack on the victim who is harmed by kicking, hitting, hair-pulling, punching, choking etc. Verbal bullying also falls into this category with acts such as name-calling, taunting or threatening (PACER’s National Bullying Prevention Center, 2019; Dupper, 2013, p. 10).

On the other hand, indirect bullying is a hurtful behaviour that is covert, subtler, and often anonymous. The victim does not know what is happening and often finds out only after it has already happened. The bully excludes the target from social groups and events through the spreading of rumours and damaging one’s reputation. Indirect bullying is much more difficult to address because of the fact that the person who is responsible for doing the harm is

anonymous. Another problem that comes into the equation is that indirect bullying is socially nuanced, meaning that a casual observer does not immediately view the behaviour as seriously harmful (PACER's National Bullying Prevention Center, 2019).

Dupper (2013, p. 10) also recognizes two other types of bullying – cyberbullying and sexual bullying. Cyberbullying means using an electronic device such as a computer or mobile phone to harm, threaten or humiliate the victim's reputation and social status. This involves private messaging, semi-public communications, public communications, and sexting. Cyberbullying is sometimes considered to lie in the category of indirect bullying because of its anonymous manner.

Sexual bullying is based on making fun of one's sexuality and gender. Therefore, this can include joking about rape, spreading rumours about one's sex life, or touching bodily parts without consent. Moreover, sexual bullying is also pressuring someone to act in a sexual way and exhibitionism (Dupper, 2013, p. 10).

## **1.2. Teacher bullying**

As previously mentioned, bullying comes in many forms and is prevalent in our society as a whole. The power disparity between children in a classroom is what most people picture when bullying is described. Bullying between peers has been a topic of discussion for many years among the general public, media, educators, and even parents. Many investigations have been conducted to examine school bullying and define terminology such as bully, victim, and bystander in terms of their traits. Using this knowledge, preventative and intervention programs were designed to reduce bullying among peers as much as possible. (McEvoy, 2005, p. 1).

However, the idea that a teacher can be a bully does not get the same attention in our society. We see teachers as our "heroes", role models who can do no wrong and while the vast majority of them are respectful and compassionate, there still exist teachers who bully their students. This type of bullying remains mostly undetected and unrecognized, posing serious problems for schools and students (Dupper, 2013, p. 64).

McEvoy (2005, p. 1) defines teacher bullying as *"a pattern of conduct, rooted in a power differential, that threatens, harms, humiliates, induces fear, or causes students substantial emotional distress."*



Twemlow and Fonagy (2005, p. 2387) define a bullying teacher as “*one who uses his or her power to punish, manipulate, or disparage a student beyond what would be a reasonable disciplinary procedure.*”

## **2. Roles in bullying and their common traits**

In general, bullying incidents involve 3 roles: a bully, a target/victim and bystanders. Some authors also include the role of parents or family.

### **2.1. Bully**

Bullies are the initiators; they target the victim and actively participate in bullying them. Bullies come in different forms, sizes, ages, and genders, however, the typical traits of a bully can help estimate who might be an aggressor in a group setting or who might become one based on risk factors. Aggressors are often those who are dominant and overbearing. They find pleasure in having power over others, controlling them, and abusing a situation when given chance (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 55).

Another trait that has been recorded as representative of bullies is a high level of impulsivity and anger issues. People who engage in bullying behaviours are more likely to be short-tempered meaning it is very easy for them to get frustrated and take their anger out on somebody else (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 54).

When considering the characteristics of a bully, self-esteem is a frequent topic of discussion. Some authors such as Říčan and Janošová (2010, p. 55) believe that low self-esteem and the feeling of inferiority are often traits that compel one to become a bully. However, other authors do not share this opinion. For example, Barboza (2009) detected through research on adolescents that bullies mostly have average or above-average self-esteem meaning people who bully do not do it only because they feel bad about themselves (Barboza et al., 2009, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 15).

Lack of empathy, social skills, and knowing what others may be feeling is sometimes mentioned as a bullying trait but more recent studies have shown that this may be true only in a few cases (Sutton, Smith and Swettenham, 1999, as cited in Rosen et al., 2020, p. 20). Especially aggressors who participate in indirect bullying need strong social skills in order to manipulate other individuals. Therefore, they do not lack social and emotional intelligence and are aware of the consequences for the victim (Putallaz et al., 2007, as cited in Rosen et al., 2020, p. 20).

Lastly, a substantial reason for someone to become a bully is if they were bullied themselves in the past. This correlation is visible across different age groups and in different positions –

whether that be between students in school, between co-workers, or between a student and a teacher. Teachers who experienced bullying in their childhood tend to bully their own students significantly more. Studies have also shown that one of the main reasons why teachers behave aggressively is a reaction to previously being the victims of student bullying. The specific reasons and factors for bullying done by a teacher will be discussed further in this work (Barboza et al., 2009, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 15; Twemlow et al., 2006, p. 193).

## 2.2. Victim

Victims are those who are hurt, humiliated, and experience some type of aggression originating from a bully. Similarly to bullies, victims also possess some common characteristics. The most prevailing trait is being viewed as different in some way. For example, looks and conspicuous external features such as being obese, wearing glasses, or not being conventionally attractive can lead to a risk of having to face bullying. Race and especially the colour of one's skin is unfortunately another prevalent factor (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 59).

People who are presumed or known to be part of the LGBTQ+ community are at great risk of being bullied. It is a sad reality that about 85% of LGBTQ+ have been verbally bullied and 40% have also experienced physical harassment according to a research conducted by *Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN)* in 2009 (GLSEN, 2010, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 41). Students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and learning disabilities are commonly victims of bullying. Additionally, people with medical conditions are also at risk of becoming targets (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 61; Dawkins, 1996, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 19).

Victims of bullying are often shy, quiet, and introverted with limited social connections. They can also be rather sensitive, taking every bit of critique to heart. Being isolated in a group setting and not “fitting in” is a large reason one becomes a target of aggression (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 61).

Another rather crucial trait of becoming a victim is coming from a family with low socio-economic status or low educational status. Those people are more commonly bullied not only by their peers, but also by teachers. For instance, Ba-Saddik and Hattab (2012) discovered that boys living with a single parent with low education were at a bigger risk of experiencing bullying than others (Ba-Saddik and Hattab, 2012, as cited in Gunsfre, 2022, p. 11).

### 2.3. Bystander

Bystanders are the third important member of bullying situations; they are the ones who witness the hurtful situation and watch it happen yet do not typically act to stop it. The frequent case is that bystanders know that bullying is wrong and they feel guilty, but they hardly ever support the victim fearing they could become a possible target of aggression. Bystanders play a critical role in bullying incidents since studies have shown that they influence the power of an abuser and the longevity of bullying. Only about 20% of witnesses defend the victim, however when they do then they are successful 50% of the time. Even if they do not effectively stop the abuse altogether, victims feel and appreciate the support, and are less likely to be depressed or anxious. On the other hand, bystanders are also likely to join the bully in order to gain social status, security, and safety (Salmivalli et al., 2010, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 24).

When considering teachers bullying students, bystanders can be peers, colleagues, or school administrators. Even though other teachers are usually not present in class and do not witness bullying with their own eyes, they are aware of unprofessional behaviour and bullying of their colleagues. Sadly, as in peer-on-peer bullying, even bystander teachers are not likely to take the initiative in responding to the hurtful situation (McEvoy, 2005, p. 7).

Based on his research on teacher bullying, McEvoy (2005, p. 7) notes that even if students complain to the principals or other teachers about their concerns, they are mostly met with disregard for bullying. Therefore, students often feel that they cannot confide in school officials and that even if they do, nothing will change.

The typical response of a student asked about teacher bullying was: *“It seemed like no matter how many complaints there were about a teacher, nothing was ever done. Or, they have someone observe the classroom but the teacher would change [his/her] behavior to really nice and caring.”* (McEvoy, 2005, p. 7)

### **3. Teachers and their role**

In order to understand why teachers might resort to abusing their power and start bullying students we have to examine the position which teachers have in the classroom and our society as a whole. Teachers play a substantial role in schools not only on an educational level but also on a social one. Together with parents, they bear the responsibility for the morals and integrity of the next generation, therefore influencing the future world (Tadege, Seifu, & Melese, 2022, as cited in Dirsa et al., 2022, p. 33). Through creating a positive learning atmosphere and motivation, teachers are expected to help develop their students' knowledge, talents, and skills needed in their careers and later lives (Dimiyati et al., 2021, as cited in Dirsa et al., 2022, p. 33).

On a day-to-day basis, there are several responsibilities that teachers have to fulfil in their profession starting with planning and preparing for lessons, actually teaching the material to the students, marking work, or providing additional support to the pupils who need it. However, teachers' duties often go beyond these activities. They are under a great amount of pressure to also keep up with administrative, extra-curricular, or supervisory responsibilities (Parsons, 2005, p. 38).

On a social level, teachers deal with issues such as having disruptive students with no manners in their classroom who use foul language, cheat, or simply do not respect any authority. Moreover, problems also arise when parents refuse to believe anyone but their child, blame the teacher for bad grades and sometimes even go as far as verbally abusing and intimidating the teacher to achieve what they want for their child. Naturally, when the child sees this lack of respect, it only intensifies the tension in the relationship with the teacher (Parsons, 2005, p. 38–39).

#### **3.1. Imbalance of power**

The imbalance of power comes into question when discussing what role teachers have in schools. There is a clear hierarchy in schools – principals possess more power than teachers and teachers subsequently hold power over their students. Educators are naturally those who have the right to order in the classroom, and the pupils/students must obey them. Students are therefore in a vulnerable position in which they might feel that they cannot object or fight back. This can become an issue when teachers stop using their authority for maintaining healthy discipline in the classroom and abuse it instead (Parsons, 2005, p. 39).

While power imbalance is present in schools around the world, there are also significant cultural differences in the position of teachers in society due to national identities, values, and thought orientation (Varnum et al., 2010, as cited in Seet et al., 2021, p. 3). For instance, in Asia, there is much bigger reverence for teachers as authorities than in Western countries, this being reflected in the distance of power between teachers and their students. Therefore, it is essential to examine teacher bullying not only in a general sense but also based on the country the bullying situation takes place in (Hallinger, 2010; Hofstede Insights, 2020, as cited in Seet et al., 2021, p. 3).

### **3.2. Classroom management and bullying**

As outlined in the previous chapter, working as a teacher comes with many aspects and skills which need to be mastered. Classroom management may be one of the most significant ones since it is essential in establishing a positive school climate and learning environment in which students feel safe, motivated therefore being able to grow both academically and socially. The narrow interpretation of the term classroom management is that it only concerns controlling students and their behaviour, with discipline and compliance as the main focus. (Allen, 2010, p. 2). However, effective classroom management in a broader sense includes much more, starting with developing supportive relationships within the classroom, organisation, monitoring of students, prevention, and reaction to misbehaviour (Evertson and Weinstein, p. 5).

Problems arise particularly with pre-service and new teachers since their knowledge of classroom management is often very limited. Generally, there are three ways in which teachers learn about classroom management: from their experience as students, from their college classes, or field observations and student teaching. Learning good classroom management skills from observation of veteran teachers can be tricky, since they may not model proper strategies, or their classroom management skills might simply be inadequate in general. Naturally, pre-service teachers frequently rely most heavily on what they learn in their college or university courses, but once they begin their careers and must respond to disruptive student behaviour, they are often surprised by how ill-prepared and stressed out they feel (Allen, 2010, p. 3). More often than not, there seems to be a disconnect between what is taught in university and what actually occurs in classrooms (Brouwer & Korthagen, 2005; Shkedi and Laron, 2004, as cited in Stoughton, 2007, p. 1025).

Feeling unprepared and unsure of one's abilities can negatively influence the teachers' professional performance as well as how the students view them. Self-efficacy is a concept created by psychologist Albert Bandura. In connection to teaching, teacher self-efficacy is the perception educators have of their abilities to motivate students, organise lessons, or maintain classroom discipline (Bandura, 1997, as cited in Friedman and Kass, 2002, p. 683–684). Teachers with higher levels of self-efficacy and self-concept appear to be much more organized, they focus on resolving issues instead of avoiding them and they are more receptive to trying new teaching techniques. This is then positively reflected in their students' social and academic development. On the other hand, a lack of confidence in one's abilities can lead to the selection of unsuitable classroom management strategies, creating a chaotic environment that does not support learning or constructive social interactions. Being confident in one's competence, therefore, seems to be essential as it influences both the teacher's and student's performance and school climate (Lazarides and Warner, 2020, p. 1).

The notion of how discipline and classroom management should look has evolved significantly throughout history. Prior to the mid-twentieth century threats and punishments were the main forms that were used to establish authority and discipline in both family and school environments (Dupper, 2010, p. 16). Since then, parenting and teaching styles have been explored by many psychologists. Baumrind (1971) is considered to be the first psychologist to describe three different parenting styles – authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. She researched how parents and their behaviour influence children's development. Typical traits of the authoritarian parenting style are control, rigid enforcement of rules, and harsh punishments. Children usually have almost no freedom and they must obey their parents without any questions. On the other hand, permissive parents are passive, they do not limit their children or reinforce almost any rules. Children are given a great amount of freedom, but they lack structure. Authoritative parents stand in the middle – the rules which are laid down are reasonable and enough freedom is granted to the children for them to be able to gain independence. This approach has been assessed as the best out of the three for its balance of structure and the freedom it gives to the child (Baumrind, 1971, p. 22–23). Additionally, Baumrind made a connection between parental behaviours and the probability that kids will either bully others or become victims. According to her research, children who grow up with authoritative parenting are less likely to engage in bullying situations, whereas children who experience authoritarian and permissive parenting styles are much more likely to become either a victim or a bully (Baumrind, 1996, as cited in Allen, 2010, p. 6–7).

In relation to parenting styles, Sullivan et al. (2004, p. 72) divided teaching styles into three very similar categories. He also determined the authoritative teaching style as the most beneficial for a positive classroom environment and the psychological and academic development of students. Teachers who utilise this type of classroom management are able to maintain control of the class, have a clear vision, but still give students the freedom to develop their own opinions and autonomy within limits. Moreover, Sullivan et al. (2004, p. 73) suggest that similarly to parents, teachers' behaviour and practices influence the school environment, therefore contributing to whether bullying culture occurs in the school or not. Teachers who use an authoritarian teaching style contribute to bullying culture by modelling extreme dominance and hierarchy similar to the one seen in bullying. Not only do they create negative student-teacher relationships, but their threats, aggression, and punishment are often on the verge of active teacher bullying (Sullivan et al., 2004, p. 73). In contrast, disinterested or permissive teachers do not establish any rules, lack observation skills and instead of taking a clear stand, they compromise and allow unacceptable behaviour in their classroom (Sullivan, 2004, p. 80–81).

Needless to say, a crucial part of classroom management is dealing with the disruptive behaviour of students. Disruptive behaviour negatively influences the learning of students as it shortens the amount of instruction time and more importantly creates conflict between teachers and students. Because of this, great effort has been made to identify useful and effective behavioural strategies. Allen (2010, p. 8) suggests that one of the most beneficial approaches is *Positive Behaviour Support (PBS)*. This approach uses behaviour analysis to understand the context and intent behind a student's inappropriate behaviour to prevent it and improve the quality of their life. *Positive Behaviour Support* generally encourages teachers to take a more proactive and positive approach to deal with students' disruptive behaviour rather than merely reacting to it (Allen, 2010, p. 8). Every misbehaviour serves its purpose for a student and it might occur for reasons such as: obtaining something (attention) or avoiding something (schoolwork). By determining the purpose of misbehaviour, teachers are able to satisfy the need in a more appropriate way (Barbetta et al., 2005, p. 12). Barbetta et al. (2005, p. 12) also advise against the tendency to use the same classroom management strategies repetitively after seeing they do not work. For instance, raising one's voice frequently only increases negativity in the classroom and students often become desensitised to it. Instead, a more beneficial approach is to redirect students, change the seating arrangement, or do proximity control by walking toward



a student who is not paying attention. Feedback or praise of appropriate behaviour is also crucial, especially for those with more serious problems (Barbetta et al., 2005, p. 13).

Additionally, it appears to be beneficial to enforce appropriate behaviour by telling students what they should do instead of what not to do. For instance, instead of saying “Don’t touch!” teachers should opt to tell the students to “Look with your eyes!” (Wise, 2017). *PBS* also encourages teachers to establish rules in the classroom that are simple, easy to understand, and limited – four to six rules seem to be the most effective number as it does not overwhelm the students. Students should also play an active role in rule setting so that they are more likely to follow them. Frequently reviewing rules and actually following through with consequences consistently helps students learn appropriate behaviours which improves the classroom environment and relationships (Barbetta et al., 2005, p. 14). Of course, *Positive Behaviour Support* is only one of many classroom management approaches that are considered to be effective and beneficial. However, it seems that the principles and strategies suggested by PBS approach seem to be rather common in establishing positive student-teacher relationships and preventing disruptive behaviour. Each teacher should contemplate and try what is suitable for their own teaching practice.

All in all, there seems to be a common agreement that teachers and their teaching styles do influence bullying culture in schools. Apart from Baumrind (1971) and Sullivan et al. (2004) whose theories have already been discussed, Roland and Galloway (2002, p. 309–310) also found a strong connection between classroom management and bullying in their study of Norwegian primary school students. Teachers who were empathetic, proactive and organised their classroom in a way that prevented chaos and disruptive behaviour, positively influenced the amount of peer-on-peer bullying. We can therefore assess that learning effective classroom management strategies is a crucial ability that all teachers should focus on for their own well-being as well as the students’.

### **3.3. Role in peer-on-peer bullying**

It is also relevant to discuss more thoroughly what role teachers play in preventing and stopping peer-on-peer bullying in schools. As previously mentioned, unfortunately, teachers can also become bystanders of bullying, entirely ignoring that a harmful situation is happening right in front of them. If the victim dares to speak up, he or she is often met with disregard, the teacher making light of the situation, not wanting to get involved. Frequently, teachers say that it is

better when children deal with conflicts among themselves. However, it is necessary to know how to assess the situation and answer the question of what is only “innocent teasing” between pupils, and when it becomes serious (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 66).

It has been proven over the years that it is extremely beneficial when teachers actively participate in prevention and understand the nature of bullying. Prevention is carried out in many ways depending on the country’s or district’s anti-bullying program. A common trait in preventing bullying is establishing a positive classroom climate and student-teacher relationships since it is easier for students to confide in teachers who they see as affable, polite, and trustworthy. Therefore, a frequent association is: the better the student-teacher relationship, the less probability of bullying occurring in the classroom (Roland and Galloway, 2002, as cited in Smith, Pepler, and Rigby, 2004, p. 3).

The second widespread strategy is naturally providing information to the students about bullying in ways that feel natural, for example through discussion, literature or role-play. Children are taught about the harms of bullying or how to ask for help when one is being victimised. Special emphasis has also been placed on developing empathy and tackling the issue of prejudice, racism, and sexism. Apart from this, techniques such as learning assertiveness, anger management, or setting boundaries appear to be extremely helpful for healthy interaction in schools (Rigby, 2003, as cited in Smith, Pepler, and Rigby, 2004, p. 3).

It is well-known that bullying occurs most often in school halls and stairwells (47.2%) and classrooms (33.6%), especially during breaks (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 18). That is why supervision and monitoring of students during the time spent outside of class is crucial to stopping bullying from taking place. On a similar note, having security devices and cameras installed in schools is also connected to a higher probability of students reporting bullying (Dupper, 2013, p. 17).

When prevention fails and a bullying incident occurs, teachers are, once again, those who have an essential position in the investigation and resolution of bullying. The method of the investigation depends on the circumstances of each case. There are two main ways for a teacher to know that something is going wrong in the classroom. The most obvious one is that the victim, another student (bystander), or the parents of the victim inform the school about the situation. The second scenario involves teachers observing their students and noticing possible warning signs (Kolář, 2001, p. 109).

These signs of bullying can be either direct or indirect, depending on whether or not the teacher is directly present at the time of the incident. Direct signs of bullying may include mockery, humiliation (humiliating nickname or comments), teasing, punching (even if the punch is not particularly strong, but the victim does not defend themselves), or domineering commands which the target automatically submits to. Indirect signs of bullying may include isolation from other students and staying close to teachers during breaks, an obvious appearance of sadness or anxiety of the victim, signs of physical harm (bruises, abrasion, wounds), or damaged belongings (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 75–76; Sullivan et al., 2004, p. 13). However, it is often the case of teachers not recognizing bullying, especially pre-service teachers, since they do not possess the necessary skills or knowledge to do so. Teachers are also much more likely to report lower prevalence of bullying than their students since they often overlook warning signs and do not consider name calling and gossiping as a form of bullying (Allen, 2010, p. 5).

Nonetheless, after detecting warning signs, teachers are naturally obligated to address the situation. However, it is necessary to consider the timing of the investigation. If there is a low chance of conviction of the aggressors or the victim does not agree with making the matter public in fear of revenge, then it may be wiser to “store” the available information for the future and try to protect the victim in the meantime. Unfortunately, an investigation can make matters worse for the target of bullying and it is therefore important for the teacher to know the right time to intervene (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 77–78).

According to Kolář (2001, p. 113), the basic procedure of bullying investigation starts with an interview of a teacher with the informers and victims, then witnesses, and lastly with the suspected bullies. The order is set in this way since it prevents the bully from influencing their classmates, fabricating a story, and later lying in unison. The goal of talking to the informer is to gather as much information on the matter as possible. First, the teachers should encourage the student to speak freely about the situation and after that inquire about more details. The teacher needs to ascertain: what happened exactly, when, where, who is the bully, who is the victim, alternatively how many bullies or victims there are, how long has the violation been happening, etc. It is imperative to carefully document the testimony and organize it into quality evidence. In order to determine whether the information provided is reliable and consistent, it is also crucial to take the relationship between the informant and the victim into account.

When interviewing the target, hope and encouragement that bullying will be resolved need to be clearly expressed by the teacher. However, the educator still needs to remain objective before reaching any conclusion in case the accusations are untrue. Nevertheless, protective measures are to be installed to avoid the bully wreaking revenge on the victim for reporting the incident. For instance, safe escort to and from school can be very beneficial to avoid possible confrontation (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 82).

Typically, the second step in the investigation process is choosing and interviewing the witnesses. The choice of whom to question depends on the relationship between the witness and the victim, their character, and naturally, the probability of them lying. The teacher interviews the witnesses and asks similar questions as before gaining additional details and perspective of the situation. With the obtained information, it is easier for the teacher to estimate the severity of bullying and consider the possibility of involving professional help such as a specialised educational psychologist. The severity of bullying is dependent on the degree of brutality, frequency of harm, and total duration of bullying (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 82–83; Kolář, 2001, p. 114).

The interrogation of the aggressor is the final step and the culmination of the whole investigation. Dishonesty and denial are expected – teachers need to evaluate not only what is said but also observe the bully’s nonverbal language. A confrontation between the bully and victim is usually not recommended since it can intimidate the target into retraction of their previous statement and overall traumatise them even further (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 83–84).

Having ascertained all available information from the target, witnesses, bully, and parents, the school (and teachers) decide on the repercussions depending on the severity of the case. Typically, some type of punishment is installed such as detention, suspension, “time-out”, etc. for the bully to understand that actions have consequences (Kolář, 2001, p. 123). Needless to say, punishment does not resolve the issue entirely and significantly more needs to be done to restore a healthy school dynamic. The person who bullied needs to reconsider their actions and work together with teachers and counsellors on learning empathy and respectful behaviour. It may require a long period of time to notice any positive changes in attitude. As for the victims of bullying, protection must be put in place – this requires measures such as rigorous monitoring at school, repetitive individual counselling, and maintaining contact between the school and parents (Říčan and Janošová, 2010, p. 100).

## **4. Causes of teacher bullying**

Why do some teachers resort to violence and some do not? What characteristics do teachers who bully have, what are the potential causes of teacher bullying and the factors which can be associated with student victimisation? Those are the questions that the researchers who explore teacher-on-student bullying aim to answer. Better understanding of this phenomenon can help us implement measures to prevent this type of abuse of students from happening. Some of the factors which are reported in several studies in correlation to teacher-on-student bullying include teacher characteristics, their competence as an educator and the cycle of violence.

### **4.1. Teacher characteristics**

As part of their research on bullying, Sharpe (2011), McEvoy (2005) as well as Khoury-Khassabri (2012) have investigated the characteristics of teachers who bully. Sharpe (2011) explored teacher bullying in her two studies of university students and bachelor teacher candidates in Ontario, Canada. In the first study, students were questioned about teacher victimisation they have witnessed while on their observation placement. The characteristics such as the age and gender of the teachers who perpetrated bullying were discussed. According to Sharpe (2011, p. 91), a teacher bully is c. 42 years old on average. Students also reported that the majority of teacher bullies were female (59%). Additionally, teachers who bullied seemed to dislike a large number of children, they were very defensive about their teaching style, lacked patience with students and were negative people in general (Sharpe, 2011, p. 92–94). In the second study Sharpe conducted, undergraduate university students were questioned on their own experiences with bullying as elementary students in retrospect. The age of teachers who abused students ranged from 20–60 years old with the average of early 40s. The gender also corresponded with the first study with majority of female teachers (56.9%) being the perpetrators of bullying (Sharpe, 2011, p. 106).

While Sharpe found that female teachers were more likely to engage in bullying incidents, others who conducted research on teacher bullying did not confirm this. For instance, Twemlow et al. (2006) and Khoury-Khassabri (2012) found no significant difference in gender which would indicate that female teachers are more prone to maltreatment of students.

As for the years of experience, McEvoy's study (2005, p. 6) suggests that teachers who have been teaching for more than 5 years are more likely to engage in bullying. What may be

rather unexpected is that Khoury-Kassabri (2012, p. 134) discovered that there is a higher probability of teachers with higher education to resort to physical violence.

## **4.2. Work competence and classroom management**

Classroom management abilities and work competence have been heavily associated with teacher bullying. As previously discussed in chapter about classroom management, classroom management is essential for establishing positive learning environment. If teachers lack these abilities it appears that it might lead to chaos and them using practices which are not appropriate and often damaging to students. Sharpe (2011, p. 92) found significant correlation between teacher bullying and poor work competence. Teachers whose instruction strategies were not diversified, who were defensive about their teaching style and methods and who had problems with dealing with disruptive behaviour were much more likely to use harsh disciplinary actions and bully their students. James et al. (2008, p. 167) also found connection between insufficient knowledge of classroom management and bullying. It appears that sarcasm and yelling at kids are two actions that some teachers consider as appropriate classroom management techniques. In the study by Twemlow et al. (2006, p. 193), teachers saw lack of disciplinary training and administrative support as the possible causes of teacher bullying.

The study with special importance in research of this aspect was conducted by Khoury-Kassabri (2012). She investigated the relationship between teacher efficacy and aggression toward students. Her study suggests that the confidence in one's abilities is not only crucial for improving teaching strategies and student's learning outcomes, but also for managing one's behaviour towards students. 25% of teachers reported that with more training to prevent and deal with school violence, their own self-efficacy would be higher and the prevalence of violent teacher behaviour lower (Khoury-Kassabri, 2012, p. 134).

Overall, there seems to be problem with classifying which disciplinary actions are acceptable, and which are not. Oftentimes, teachers have different views of what good classroom management looks like and they tend to normalise behaviours which are not beneficial for creating positive student-teacher relationship and learning environment in general. Teachers may often justify their behaviour by saying it is necessary for meeting the instructional goals. In the study by Zerillo and Osterman (2011, p. 249), American elementary teachers were asked about their views on classroom management strategies and teacher bullying. The results demonstrated that there is a large gap of perception of what is good classroom management. Some teachers perceived belittling or denial of access as acceptable

behaviours to use in the classroom, since they did not intend to hurt the student and were only aiming to enforce discipline in order to fulfil their educational objectives.

### **4.3. Cycle of violence**

Another aspect that may be associated with teacher bullying is the cycle of violence. The cycle of violence is a theory that assumes that violence creates more violence and that harmful behaviour repeats itself. Children who grow up in abusive households and are harmed by their parents are prone to doing the same in their future relationships. They either become abusive to other people or become victims of abuse once again as violence and negative relationship patterns is all they know (American Psychological Association, 2010). Furthermore, the National Institute of Justice discovered that childhood maltreatment and neglect significantly raised the risk of future delinquency and adult crime by 29% (Widom and Maxfield, 2001, p. 1). In relation to this theory, connection to bullying can be made. People who experience abuse or bullying themselves appear to often play both roles in bullying situations – of the victim and the bully. Bully-victims have negative attitude towards themselves and lack social skills needed to resolve issues in relationships. Twemlow et al. (2006, p. 193) found a correlation of teachers' past experiences with the tendency to bully themselves. Teachers who experienced bullying in their childhood were much more likely to also replicate this behaviour when they were the ones in a powerful position as educators.

According to Twemlow et al. (2006, p. 193), teachers who engage in bullying behaviour can be divided into two types based on reports of teachers and previous study of peer-on-peer bullying. Similar to the findings on bullying among children, there are also two distinctive types in context of teaching called sadistic bully and bully-victim. Teachers that are sadistic bullies are known for their dislike of children, their spitefulness, their use of student humiliation as a means of putting a halt to disruption, and their mocking of children with special needs. Needless to say, some people are not suited for teaching and might go into this profession to abuse the power it comes with. However, Twemlow et al. (2006, p. 194) reports that only a small number of teachers who engage in bullying behaviour are connected to this type. The scenario of teachers being a bully-victim appear to be much more likely, as they often have to deal with disruptive behaviour and sometimes they also encounter behaviour that borders on bullying. Teacher bully-victims regularly miss class, fail to enforce rules, and enable peer-on-peer bullying to take place in their classroom.

## **5. Emotional and educational consequences of teacher bullying**

Another crucial part of the research takes into consideration how bullying affects the victim and their physical and psychological health. Naturally, the first studies which explored this problem were focused mainly on the consequences of peer-on-peer bullying, however, more recent studies show that teacher abuse has a rather similar impact. Some authors including McEvoy (2005, p. 3) argue that teacher-on-student bullying is even more damaging to students than between peers. The reason for this assumption is that students may often feel extremely helpless and trapped in a situation where teachers hold a great amount of power over them in form of grades. Additionally, attendance is often required for passing a class and students are therefore forced to stay in an environment that may be extremely toxic to them.

The consequences of bullying that the victims might endure can be seen especially in worsened well-being of the victims. A common denominator of depression, social anxiety, low self-esteem as well as suicide ideation was found to be bullying (Greene, 2006, p. 71, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 19). McEvoy (2005, p. 2) reports that targets of teacher bullying often feel fearful, angry, and over time also experience severe self-doubt about their competencies as a student. Certain confusion is connected to being victimised by a teacher; students may wonder why they were the ones targeted which leads them to blame themselves for the abuse they endure.

Delfabbro et al. (2006, p. 82–84) found that victims of bullying were more likely to be less satisfied with their life and their appearance. Victims also had lower self-esteem, with girls experiencing more difficulties with their self-confidence compared to boys. Additionally, bullying also impacted the relationship of victims to substance usage. Compared to those never bullied, the targets of teacher bullying were much more likely to consume alcohol, cigarettes, marihuana, or other drugs on a weekly basis (on average by c. 20%). This further shows just how damaging teacher maltreatment can be and how it may manifest itself in ways that may not be previously considered. Needless to say, drug usage at a young age could have a detrimental effect on the victims' future lives, their physical and psychological well-being. For instance, alcohol use increases the risk of many health issues such as cancer, liver and heart disease, or stroke (Poznyak and Rekve, 2008, p. 2018).

In relation to the emotional consequences of bullying, Delfabbro et al. (2006, p. 13) also found that bullying has a severe impact on the academic and social lives of victims. Bullying



by teachers was linked to both the students planning to leave school earlier and also teachers rating them to be less competent to attend and complete higher education. As for the social aspect, victims of teacher bullying were more likely to be socially alienated and disliked by their peers. Similar results were shown in the study of American middle school students by Datta, Cornell and Huang (2017). Students who were victimised by teachers were much more likely to be less academically engaged and their GPAs (Grade Point Average) were frequently lower in comparison to those who reported not being bullied. Student reports also revealed that victims did not take pride in their school as a whole and they often viewed their school environment as unfair (Datta et al., 2017, p. 344). Additionally, Fromuth et al. (2015, p. 131) reported that 30% of victims skipped school because of how they were treated by a teacher and a similar percentage of students answered that a teacher made them feel bad about themselves and their abilities.

Stress caused by bullying and teacher maltreatment is also associated with the physical response of the body. Victims of bullying have a higher chance of suffering from psychosomatic complaints such as headaches, stomach aches, insomnia, or loss of appetite. This correlation, for instance, is shown in the study by Modin et al. (2015, p. 392), which found that students who were both bullies and victims displayed the worst health compared to those who did not come in contact with bullying. Similarly, those who were bullied by their peers and teachers also showed significant signs of reduced overall health. However, targets of bullying were not the only ones affected on a psychosomatic level. The whole class and particularly the female bystanders' health were more likely to be negatively impacted by the occurrence of bullying in their proximity.

To further demonstrate how much impact teacher bullying can have, a study by Monsvold et al. (2011, p. 327) explored the correlation between patients with personality disorders and teacher maltreatment. The likelihood of teacher bullying in primary and secondary school was notably higher in patients with psychological problems than in the psychologically healthy group. Respondents who suffered from both anxiety and depression at the same time had the highest prevalence of bullying among patients with other types of co-morbid personality disorders. These results prove that being mistreated by a teacher could amplify one's prepositions of developing personality disorders.

## **Practical part**

The second part of my bachelor's thesis is devoted to an investigation of teacher bullying in English-speaking countries, with a particular emphasis on the UK and the USA. The aim of my research is to examine the similarities and differences of teachers bullying their students in those two countries.

The research objectives therefore are:

- To compare the prevalence and nature of teacher bullying in English-speaking countries.
- To examine anti-bullying laws in the UK and the USA.
- To examine the differences of legal actions taken in specific British and American cases of teacher bullying.
- To examine the development and outcome of bullying for the offender and the victim in the specific cases.

The two methods which will be used to achieve the best possible results are content analysis and case study. Previous studies from English-speaking countries will be analysed to determine the prevalence, nature and form of teacher bullying. Anti-bullying laws in the UK and the USA will be discussed and compared both in general sense and in connection to the specific cases of bullying. Furthermore, two specific cases of teacher-on-student bullying from the USA and the UK will be examined and compared with the focus on the development and outcome for the offender and victim.

## **6. Content analysis of previous research on teacher bullying**

There has been a considerable amount of research conducted on the topic of bullying over the last decades and scientists have strived to detect the most common risk factors, types of bullying behaviours, consequences, and also the prevalence of bullying in the school environment. On account of the extensive research, a great amount of awareness has been brought to this subject and anti-bullying programmes have been designed to prevent or restrict bullying to a minimum. However, mainly peer-on-peer bullying has been in the limelight and only a few studies have specifically focused on bullying between teachers and their students. There are numerous reasons for the lack of research – one of them being that observation of teachers may not reflect the reality of their behaviour during lessons and therefore fail to reveal the true extent of teacher

bullying in schools (Hyman et al., 1997, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 65). Another significant reason may be the hesitation of schools to allow research for fear of worsening their relationship with teacher unions. Even if permission is granted, teachers appear to often be unwilling to discuss this phenomenon honestly (Twemlow, Fonagy and Sacco, 2004, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 65).

Although studies on teacher bullying have been sparse and far in between, an increased number of scientists in the last two decades have started to research the prevalence and impact of teachers abusing their power in several countries such as Australia (Delfabbro et al., 2006), the USA (Whitted & Dupper, 2008; Twemlow et al., 2006), or Ireland (James et al., 2008).

## **6.1. Prevalence of bullying**

Delfabbro et al. (2006, p. 71) conducted research on peer and teacher bullying in 25 South Australian secondary schools. The 1,284 students who participated in the study by filling out questionnaires were on average 15.2 years old. The prevalence of peer-on-peer bullying was slightly higher than teacher bullying – 168 pupils (about 13%) reported being often victimised in comparison to 133 children (about 10.4%) who reported being often bullied by a teacher. As for the aspect of gender, boys were more likely to become victims of bullying by both their teachers and peers, especially on a physical level. Boys who attended single-sex government schools had the highest rates of bullying. When it comes to the prevalence of different forms of victimisation, the most common ones were psychological – being made fun of and called names (Delfabbro et al., 2006, p. 79–82).

In the USA, Whitted and Dupper (2008) investigated teacher-on-student bullying in an alternative educative setting. Out of 50 students, 86% reported being a victim of at least one physical mistreatment incident and 88% of at least one psychological one (Whitted and Dupper, 2008, p. 329).

The highest frequency of physical maltreatment included teachers not allowing students to go the bathroom (70%), teachers grabbing them roughly (38%), and pushing them (28%). As for psychological bullying, the most common forms of abuse included being yelled at (66%), being isolated from other children (64%), and being ignored by a teacher (56%). Moreover, the incidents appeared to not be isolated – for instance, 36% of students experienced being directly yelled at more than four times and 38% were not allowed to go to the bathroom more than four times. In addition to this statistic, students were also questioned on their WSE (Worst School

Experience) and reported that adult maltreatment upset them almost twice as much as peer-on-peer bullying (Whitted and Dupper, 2008, p. 334–337).

In comparison to other studies on the subject, the results of this research revealed a significantly higher prevalence of teacher-on-student bullying. This could be due to factors such as the relatively small number of students who participated in the study, as well as the distinct character of the entire school environment. The students had specific behavioural issues for which they were referred to these alternative schools. Naturally, there is a certain difficulty associated with knowing how to handle these problems that teachers in traditional schools may not have to face, giving them a higher proclivity to behave inappropriately (Whitted and Dupper, 2008, p. 337).

This phenomenon was also examined from the perspective of teachers in the study of Twemlow et al. (2006). 116 teachers from seven American primary schools responded anonymously to a survey that inquired about their thoughts and opinions regarding bullying they had personally encountered as well as how they perceived the actions of their co-workers. Almost half of the teachers (45%) admitted to having bullied a student; 29.9% answered that it happened a few times. As for the perception of their colleagues, 70% of the respondents reported that they think teachers bully students in isolated cases and approximately 16% of them stated that they know one teacher who bullied students in the past year (Twemlow et al., 2006, p. 192).

Research on bullying behaviour was also conducted in Ireland by James et al. (2008); it examined bullying in secondary schools at two points in time and in two locations – in 2003 in the northeastern area and in 2005 in Dublin (James et al., 2008, p. 162). Both rounds of the study showed very similar results in the prevalence of teacher-on-student bullying. 30.8% and 30.7% of students reported suffering from teacher maltreatment. In connection to the gender of the victims, no significant difference was found in both rounds of research. Psychological forms of bullying such as students being ignored and called names by teachers were the most common in both of these instances. Physical harm was much less frequent than psychological, nevertheless, boys reported being victimised in this form more than girls. On the other hand, bullying was also examined from the other side with students as the bullies. Approximately 28% of students in the first round and 16% in the second one admitted to bullying their teacher. Boys rated significantly higher in the probability of becoming a bully in both rounds by c. 10%.

Notably, the most common form of bullying which involves name-calling and ignoring remains the same as teacher-on-student bullying (James et al., 2008, p. 164–167).

To summarise, the four studies analysed were chosen to showcase different approaches of research in three English-speaking countries in a similar timeline. There were certain similarities in results that could be observed, such as the form of victimisation. Among the studies where types of bullying were discussed, psychological abuse (specifically being called names and being ignored) were by far the two most frequent. The prevalence of teacher bullying appears to vary based on different approaches, who the respondents were, and how the authors of the studies classified bullying in general. Some of them only questioned if the students were ever bullied by an educator and others also asked about the frequency in more detail. However, three out of four studies showcased rather similar results of approximately 30% of students being victimised by a teacher more than once. That is certainly quite a high percentage considering that teacher-on-student bullying seems to be ignored in our society and not taken as seriously as peer-on-peer bullying.

## 7. Anti-bullying legislation in the USA and the UK

It is important to discuss what type of anti-bullying legislation is implemented and how it protects students from bullying whether that be bullying between peers or by a teacher. Since American and British political and legal systems are rather different, it is also relevant to investigate how bullying policies differ in each of these English-speaking countries.

### 7.1. Anti-bullying legislation in the USA

When investigating American anti-bullying legislation, it is necessary to consider the nature of the political and law system in the United States. The USA is a federation consisting of 50 different states with each state having its own state laws and policies. Addressing any issue including bullying on a nationwide level is therefore rather complex. As of 2023, the USA has no federal law which specifically regards bullying. However, in some instances, bullying and discrimination harassment intersect, and federally-funded schools are required by law to deal with it when it is motivated by race or ethnicity, national origin, sex (including sexual orientation and gender identity), disability, or religion. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022a). The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice enforce the civil rights laws which deal with bullying on the basis of discrimination:

- *Title IV and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964* (discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language and national origin)
- *Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972* (discrimination on the basis of sex)
- *Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (discrimination on the basis of disability)
- *Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act* (discrimination on the basis of disability)
- *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)* (discrimination on the basis of disability)

(U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021a)

Bullying is therefore addressed through state laws, policies, and regulations rather than a federal statute. Following the Columbine school tragedy and bullying-related suicides, Georgia became the first state to address bullying in its legislation in 1999 (Stuart-Cassel et al., 2011, p. 11). Since then, anti-bullying legislation has been enacted in all 50 US states, the District of Columbia, and US territories in an attempt to prevent bullying and its negative effects. The

specific details of anti-bullying policies vary by state, but they generally require schools to have a written anti-bullying policy, to investigate reports of bullying, and to take appropriate disciplinary action. However, specific consequences for children who bully are usually not prescribed, only a few states specifically mention sanctions such as suspension, expulsion, or transfer to a different school (Cornell and Limber, 2016). Schools are also often required to provide training to staff on how to identify and respond to bullying (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022b). Most states (42) address bullying in both state laws and policies; Arizona, Colorado, Texas, Arkansas, Missouri, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Hawaii have implemented only state laws (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022a).

One of the states with the harshest anti-bullying laws is thought to be New Jersey. *The Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights* was approved in New Jersey in 2011 and compels schools to report every instance of bullying in detail to the state board of education. Schools then receive a safety score which is posted on the district's and school's website (§18a:17-46). They are also required to start an investigation within one school day and it must be completed within ten days of the incident. This law also mandates increased training of teachers on suicide prevention as well as to employ an anti-bullying specialist in each school. Additionally, the legislation gives students much greater protection as they are no longer required to be a part of any group that is the subject of discrimination in order to be taken seriously. As a result, all students are provided protection by law with regard to bullying (Garden State Equality, 2011, p.1–2). The state of New Jersey recently (2022) imposed even harsher guidelines for schools to follow when dealing with bullying instances. Confirmed bullying or harassment episodes are recorded in the student's file, and if a student engages in such behaviours three times, the school is required to create an individual intervention plan. Moreover, there is an online form that parents or guardians of students can use to report harassment or bullying (Department of Education New Jersey, 2023).

Montana, in comparison, was the last US state to enact any kind of anti-bullying legislation in 2015, and its legal framework is still one of the weakest. For instance, Montana does not mandate that school districts provide their staff with training on how to recognize, prevent, and deal with instances of bullying. Districts are also not required to create programs or procedures for the prevention of bullying by Montana's anti-bullying regulations (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021b).

As for teacher-on-student bullying, there is currently no comprehensive anti-bullying legislation that relates specifically to bullying by a teacher (McEvoy, 2005; Sylvester, 2011, as cited in Dupper, 2013, p. 65). Just a select few states, including Utah, Mississippi, New York, and North Carolina, explicitly address teacher bullying in their legislation. In these states, school employees are subject to the same laws against harassment and bullying as students (O’Neal, 2014, p. 176). In other states, teachers might be included as perpetrators of bullying if the definition of bullying is broader. For instance, Montana, New Jersey, or Oregon define bullying in a general sense which means that it could potentially cover instances of bullying or harassment by teachers, in spite of them not being explicitly mentioned in the law (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021b, c, d). However, for example, the states of Texas and Ohio define bullying specifically in terms of peer-on-peer bullying (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021e, f). Additionally, most anti-bullying state legislations emphasise the role of a teacher as an active member of the prevention and investigation of bullying which implies that school staff should strive to keep all interactions in schools positive (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022d).

Another legal mechanism that holds teachers accountable is employee codes of conduct that require professional behaviour and prohibit any form of verbal and non-verbal aggression, derogatory language, or abuse toward other employees, students, or parents (Riverside County Office of Education, 2017, p. 1–2). Additionally, teacher-on-student bullying might be addressed through school district policies that include general sections on the protection of students against harassment and bullying (San Francisco Unified School District, 2022). Anti-discriminatory federal laws which were mentioned previously also relate to teacher bullying. Teachers who bully students on the basis of any race or ethnicity, national origin, sex, disability, or religion are in direct violation of these laws and what is more, the schools or districts may be held responsible for failing to take appropriate action to stop and resolve such discriminatory behaviour (Cornell and Limber, 2016; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021a).

## **7.2. Anti-bullying legislation in the UK**

In the UK, all schools are required by law to have some type of anti-bullying policy to prevent bullying, however, the content which is included is determined by the specific schools in each country – England, Wales, Scotland, or Northern Ireland (Long et al., 2020, p. 4–5). Each country has its own guidance on how to deal with bullying which generally includes the



definition of bullying, the procedures for reporting and investigating incidents, and strategies for prevention and response to bullying incidents (Long et al., 2020, p. 12).

As for anti-bullying legislation in England, Section 89 of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006* states that all schools should promote good behaviour and discourage bullying of any kind. All students, faculty, and parents must be informed of the school's behaviour policy, which should include these measures. *The Equality Act 2010* is also crucial in protecting people from discrimination based on race, gender, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation. Schools are required to have an anti-bullying policy that is consistent with the *Equality Act 2010* and to take appropriate steps to prevent and respond to bullying (UK Government, Department for Education, 2017, p. 5). This Act is in effect in Scotland and Wales in addition to England, although sections of the Act allow the Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly to introduce further legislation. *The Northern Ireland Act of 1998* transfers topics relating to equal opportunities and discrimination (Long et al., 2020, p. 20). Moreover, *the Children and Family Act of 2014* imposes obligations on schools to guarantee that students with special educational needs participate equally in school activities as students without such needs (UK Government, Department for Education, 2017, p. 5).

England's anti-bullying guidance is called *Preventing and tackling bullying* and it contains detailed information on how to deal with bullying. For instance, the importance of prevention, a respectful environment, early intervention, or addressing cyberbullying is highlighted. There are no prescriptive disciplinary procedures; rather, the severity of them is determined by the nature of the occurrence and the policies of the individual schools. Similarly, the procedure of how to report bullying is left to schools to decide (UK Government, Department for Education, 2017, p. 10–13). Nonetheless, unlawful acts such as assault or violence, theft, persistent harassment or intimidation, and hate crimes should be reported to the police (Long et al., 2020, p. 16).

Scotland's anti-bullying guidance was issued in 2017 and it is called *Respect for all: national approach to anti-bullying for Scotland's children and young people*. In comparison to England, the Scottish Government anticipates that each school and local government will create policies that incorporate the recommendations, however, they are non-statutory, meaning they are not legally binding (Long et al., 2020, p. 21). Scotland's guideline is considerably more explicit than England's and it outlines exactly what each school's anti-bullying policy should include. For example, it includes a list of strategies for preventing

and dealing with bullying as well as a process for documenting incidences (Scottish Government, 2017, p. 24–28).

Wales' *Right, Respect, Equality* published in 2019 is a statutory anti-bullying guidance that is by far the most detailed out of all of them (Long et al., 2020, p. 6). A wide range of bullying-related topics is covered in it, including the duties of the school, the function of the governing body, and methods for preventing and dealing with bullying situations. This guideline also calls for schools to provide a variety of means for students to report bullying and it specifies a variety of intervention techniques, for example mediation, restorative approaches or school sanctions (Welsh Government, 2019, p. 65).

Northern Ireland addresses bullying in the *Addressing Bullying in Schools Act (Northern Ireland) 2016*. This document is by far the least detailed and it only includes the definition of bullying and the requirement that prevention and reporting of bullying should be implemented in schools. However, no specific approaches or methods are mentioned (The National Assembly for Northern Ireland, 2016).

Similar to the USA, the UK also does not have a specific law that solely relates to teacher-on-student bullying. Nonetheless, there are certain mechanisms in place to hold teachers accountable if they mistreat students. According to the *Education (Teachers' Misconduct) Regulations 2012*, teacher misconduct is defined as any behaviour that falls short of the standards expected of a teacher and includes conduct that is damaging to children's welfare or that erodes public confidence in the teaching profession. These regulations also outline the procedures for handling claims of teacher misconduct, including teacher-on-student bullying. The school or local authority investigate the allegations of teacher maltreatment based on available evidence which is then referred to the executive agency of the Department for Education, the Teaching Regulation Agency (TRA). TRA investigates the misconduct further and determines if sanctions should be imposed and if so which ones. (Teaching Regulation Agency, 2022, p. 3).

In addition to these regulations, teacher-on-student bullying also breaches the general protection of children and students. Schools and their staff are required to provide legal protection for children's welfare and to safeguard children and young people according to the *Children Act 1989*. Moreover, Part 6 of the *Equality Act 2010* specifically refers to schools and prohibits any type of discrimination, harassment or victimisation of pupils in the admission

process or in the manner in which students are educated (UK Government, Department for Education, 2017, p. 5–6).

## **8. Cases of teacher bullying**

The last part of my bachelor thesis is the analysis and comparison of two specific cases of teacher-on-student bullying in the UK and the USA. The two cases were chosen based on similar context, the form of maltreatment, and also the timeline of the incident to demonstrate the nature and impact of teacher bullying in the UK and the USA. Additionally, the decision of which cases to analyse was based on the amount of information available in order to remain as objective as possible given that the sources on this issue are scarce and potentially biased since the majority of the material originates from news media articles.

### **8.1. The case of Akian Chaifetz**

The first case which will be examined is one of the most high-profile cases of teacher bullying in the USA. It is the case of Akian Chaifetz, an autistic boy from 2012. At the time of the incident, Akian Chaifetz was ten-year-old pupil at Horace Mann Elementary School in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. The case was made public after Akian's father Stuart Chaifetz published a 17-minute YouTube video *Teacher/Bully: How My Son Was Humiliated and Tormented by his Teacher and Aide* describing the incident and showing proof of teacher maltreatment (Chaifetz, 2012). Since the release of the video, it has gained a great amount of attention (5 million views), sparked outrage, and raised awareness of the problem of teacher bullying.

Stuart Chaifetz shared that his son has always been gentle and loving, but after the start of the school year at Horace Mann Elementary School, his behaviour changed significantly. He began to behave violently, hitting his teachers and throwing chairs. Because of this, his father Stuart began to wonder what might have changed for this type of behaviour to occur and set up an IEP meeting (individualized education programme meeting) with the school staff (Chaifetz, 2012). According to Chaifetz, during the meeting with the behaviourist, Akian did not demonstrate any violent behaviour which lead him to believe that something else was happening in the classroom. Due to Akian's autism and communication difficulties, his father thought that the only way to ascertain the truth was to send his son to school with a covert tape recorder (Skoufalos, 2012). The 6 ½ hour-long audio revealed rather concerning treatment of Akian as well as the whole class by the teacher and the teacher's aide. Not only were the teachers discussing their personal lives and having inappropriate conversations about alcohol, but they also yelled and swore at Chaifetz's son. In the audio, which served as a proof, teachers

were telling Akian to shut up several times, made fun of him, and called him “such a bastard” after he could not stop crying (Sherriff, 2012).

Naturally, Chaifetz took the recording to school officials of the Horace Mann Elementary School who immediately started to investigate the case and responded to the incident by firing the teaching aide Jodi Sgouros. However, a special-education teacher of 23 years Kelly Altenburg who is under the protection of teacher tenure was first placed on paid leave before being reassigned to a different school in the same school district (Giordano, 2012). Altenburg claimed that she was not present during the time Akian was verbally bullied and that she had never heard any of the alleged remarks even though the audio revealed that she laughed at Sgouros’ remarks (Giordano and Boccella, 2012).

Chaifetz himself did not take any legal action against Altenburg, however, an educator Pat Gesualdo filed a federal complaint on Akian’s behalf through a non-profit organisation *Drums and Disabilities* which focuses on helping children with autism through music. Gesualdo used the federal *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* in his complaint, namely Section 504, which covers instances in which children with disabilities are not given the proper treatment and are discriminated against (Skoufalos, 2012; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021a). The aim of the lawsuit was the passage of new anti-bullying policies which would include teachers. Furthermore, the zero-tolerance legislation would no longer take teacher tenure into account and teachers who bully would be dismissed automatically (Skoufalos, 2012). The outcome of this lawsuit is not entirely clear, since the details of the settlement were not disclosed publicly. However, the anti-bullying laws remained the same and teachers are still protected by teacher tenure even nowadays, 11 years later.

Teacher tenure is a regulation that offers protection to teachers and makes dismissal of them more difficult for school boards and administrators. Thanks to it, tenured teachers experience more stability and security, as it is significantly harder to fire them for insignificant reasons. One of the main objectives of teacher tenure implementation is to protect teachers from patronage firing or losing their job due to teaching about controversial topics such as evolutionary biology. While each US state has its own policy concerning the timeline of teacher tenure, in general, teachers have to teach at a public school for 3 years to be considered for it (Meador, 2020). In New Jersey, this process takes longer, and teachers get their tenure after 4 years (Schwartz, 2012).

In order to dismiss a teacher who is protected by tenure, the school board or administrators are obligated to provide tangible evidence of inefficiency or misconduct together with proof that they provided the support and tools for the teacher to fix the issue. That could be potentially very problematic since schools could be aware that a teacher is ineffective, abusive or otherwise unprofessional, but having to document that a teacher has failed to meet the district's requirements and then defend this evidence in a hearing is extremely time consuming (Meador, 2020). Because of this, schools might choose to ignore the problem rather than deal with it. In relation to teacher bullying, we could conclude that teacher tenures cause a number of issues. As we can see in this particular case, the teacher who allegedly took part in harming the student was protected by this regulation and remained in the same position in a different school of the same district – though there was tangible evidence that they did not behave appropriately. Needless to say, teacher tenure has been a topic of discussion, however, only a few states such as Florida or North Carolina have chosen to abolish this policy (Meador, 2020). The question that stands is how many children who are mistreated by teachers and get the courage to speak up are silenced because this type of legislation.

## **8.2. The case of Joanna Hyde**

The second case which I have chosen as the subject of my investigation of teacher bullying is the case of primary school teacher Joanna Hyde from 2009. When allegations of abuse against Joanna Hyde surfaced, she was a young teacher in the second year of her position at Ysgol Y Berllan Deg in Cardiff, Wales (Morris, 2009). Parents were concerned after their children aged nine and ten started to show signs of psychological abuse and contacted the headmaster of the school, Mari Phillips. Phillips took their concerns seriously and started to closely monitor Hyde's behaviour, offering her help and assistance. During observation of her lessons, Phillips stated that she noticed Hyde having a strong tendency to favour certain students, while others were ignored and did not have an opportunity to ask questions. (Independent, 2009).

What is even more important are the allegations which parents made. One parent claimed that their child was extremely frightened of Hyde and refused to go to school because of her. Other parents claimed that their child started to have nightmares and wet bed at night because of Hyde's maltreatment. The mother of another student described that her child was clearly shaken by Hyde and that they would run straight to their bedroom after arriving from school and put on pyjamas to finally be somewhere where it was quiet and calm. The need for peace and quiet was due to the fact that Hyde often yelled at the children in class for reasons they did

not understand (Morris, 2009). Hyde's colleagues also reported that they have noticed her call her students names such as "a wimp" and "a clown". Additionally, one student was so terrified that he requested that his mother to dye his red hair brown, so he would not stand out to Hyde as much (BBC, 2009).

All of these allegations were presented in a hearing where a panel from the General Teaching Council for Wales evaluated Hyde's misconduct. Hyde did not show up for the hearing and was not represented, although she acknowledged in writing that her actions amounted to improper professional behaviour and she resigned from her position. The panel came to the conclusion that Hyde engaged in bullying and intimidating behaviour in addition to disobeying rules of conduct and school ethos (Morris, 2009). With Hyde's expression of regret and inexperience taken into account, the panel stated that Hyde was suspended for one year and could reapply to be a teacher after completing the training in positive behaviour management (Independent, 2009). In addition, a teaching union member expressed sorrow about the hearing's failure of mentioning her health, which allegedly had an impact on her actions at the time (BBC, 2009).

### **8.3. Comparison of cases**

Comparing and discussing the similarities and differences of the two specific cases is also of big importance. Both of them were crucial in starting the conversation on the maltreatment of students and teacher bullying. Especially Chaifetz's case had a great impact on public awareness of this issue since it involved a viral YouTube video, petition, and the maltreatment of a boy with special needs. Both incidents highlighted the need for more student support to shield them from abusive teachers. Although there is some child protection legislation in place in the USA and the UK, teacher bullying is not a consistent part of anti-bullying laws.

In addition to the lack of cohesive legislation and procedures concerning teacher-on-student bullying, teacher tenure might also be rather problematic. While teacher tenure does not exist in the UK, many US states including New Jersey, where Chaifetz's case occurred, still have this policy. It appears that teacher tenure may not be an ideal policy because it seems to provide too much protection to teachers who are incompetent or even abusive. Teachers who are protected by tenures may feel too secure and not provide their best efforts in the classroom since they are aware that it is extremely difficult for school boards to dismiss them. Even in the case of Chaifetz, the teacher was only moved to a different school where she could continue

working in the same position seemingly without any consequences. On the other hand, the British case showcased that student protection might be stronger in the UK than in the USA. After receiving concerns from parents, the headmaster started to immediately investigate the situation and engaged the General Teaching Council for Wales which prohibited the teacher from teaching for one year and also ordered training if the offender wished to return to teaching. When not having to deal with teacher tenure, the possibility that schools will investigate incidents of teacher maltreatment seems to be higher.

In both of these cases, pupils were involved in psychological and verbal bullying. They had to listen to the teachers and aides yelling at them, calling them names, and overall humiliating them. This had severe psychological and academic consequences for the children as some of them became fearful, did not want to attend school, and started to have nightmares.

Overall, these cases demonstrate the serious nature of teacher bullying and the impact it can have on students, their families, and the wider community. Effective policies and procedures should be in place in schools and educational institutions to prevent and address bullying situations, as well as to guarantee that teachers who engage in such behaviour are held accountable. Moreover, the incidents also showed the significance of parents advocating for their children and their safety.



## Conclusion

This bachelor thesis aimed to examine the issue of teachers engaging in bullying behaviours and shed light on this under-the-radar phenomenon. Bullying as a systematic and ongoing abuse of power takes on many forms whether that be physical, psychological, or verbal. There are three main roles in bullying situations – bully, victim, and bystanders with each role having its characteristic traits.

Teachers and their classroom management abilities play a key role in developing a positive learning environment in which students feel safe and motivated. Authoritative teaching style as well as *Positive Behaviour Support* have been regarded as the most effective in preventing disruptive student behaviour and bullying culture. When it comes to teacher-on-student bullying, there are a few theories of why teachers might resort to treating their students in an inappropriate manner. Studies have shown that there is a strong connection between teachers' poor classroom management abilities as well as their self-efficacy and bullying. Teachers who had insufficient knowledge of classroom management and lacked disciplinary training were much more likely to bully students. Another possible cause of teacher bullying is the cycle of violence, teachers might be more likely to resort to bullying behaviour because they themselves have been abused in the past or they are bullied by students in the classroom and they replicate the same behaviour. Nevertheless, bullying has been proven to have severe emotional and educational consequences on the victims. Victims of teacher abuse tend to have social anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem.

The practical part of my bachelor thesis investigated teacher bullying in English-speaking countries with an emphasis on the UK and the USA. The content analysis of previous studies has shown that teachers bullying students might not be as exceptional as one might think. The research demonstrated a prevalence of 30% on average in most English-speaking countries. As for the form of teacher-on-student bullying, psychological maltreatment (specifically being called names or being ignored) has been much more frequent than physical abuse.

Both the UK and the USA have implemented some type of anti-bullying legislation. The USA has no federal law regarding bullying, however, civil rights laws might also overlap with bullying based on discrimination. All 50 US states address bullying in their legislation in the form of state laws, policies, or regulations. The specifics of anti-bullying legislation vary by state, with New Jersey being regarded as having one of the strictest ones. Teacher-on-student

bullying is not explicitly addressed in most US anti-bullying legislation with the exception of Utah, Mississippi, New York, and North Carolina. Other than anti-bullying state laws, employee codes of conduct, as well as anti-discrimination federal laws are the mechanisms that hold teachers accountable. In the UK, all schools are required to install some type of anti-bullying policy, however, the content of them depends on the specific school and country. England and Wales have statutory anti-bullying guidance while Scotland and Northern Ireland address bullying in non-statutory documents. Similar to the USA, the UK does not have legislation that solely relates to teacher bullying. Incidents of teacher maltreatment are dealt with it through the *Education (Teachers' Misconduct) Regulations 2012* and the Teaching Regulation Agency.

The cases of Akian Chaifetz and Joanna Hyde have shown the serious nature of teacher bullying and its impact on students and their families. The American case demonstrated the liability of teacher tenures which might lead to incompetent or even abusive teachers staying in the education system. Overall, both of these cases illustrated the need for cohesive legislation and regulations regarding teacher maltreatment.

In conclusion, this thesis has provided a comprehensive examination of the pervasive problem of teacher bullying. The study has revealed that teacher bullying is more widespread than previously assumed, highlighting the need for policies and interventions to prevent and address such behaviour in schools. By shedding light on this problem, this thesis will hopefully prompt further investigation, especially in the Czech Republic where it is yet to be researched.

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## **List of abbreviations**

GLSEN – Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network

IEP meeting – individualized education programme meeting

LGBTQ+ – lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and/or questioning

PBS – Positive Behaviour Support

TRA – Teaching Regulation Agency

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

USA – United States of America

WSE – Worst School Experience

## Anotace

|                     |                       |
|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Jméno a příjmení:   | Martina Škařupová     |
| Katedra nebo ústav: | Ústav cizích jazyků   |
| Vedoucí práce:      | Mgr. Barbora Bačíková |
| Rok obhajoby:       | 2023                  |

|                             |   |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Název práce:                | Šikana ze strany učitele – případová studie britských a amerických případů  |
| Název práce v angličtině:   | When the teacher becomes a bully – comparative case study of British and American cases   |
| Anotace práce:              | Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá šikanou studentů ze strany učitele. Předmětem zkoumání jsou formy šikany, její výskyt, příčiny a dopad.                                   |
| Klíčová slova:              | šikana, role učitele, šikana ze strany učitele, vedení třídy, legislativa proti šikaně, diskriminace  |
| Anotace práce v angličtině  | This bachelor's thesis examines teacher bullying of students. The forms of bullying, prevalence, causes, and impact of teacher bullying are the subject of investigation. |
| Klíčová slova v angličtině: | bullying, role of a teacher, teacher-on-student bullying, classroom management, anti-bullying laws, discrimination  |
| Přílohy vázané v práci:     |   |
| Rozsah práce:               | 50 stran  |
| Jazyk práce:                | Anglický jazyk  |