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## School Bullying: Signs of Social Maladjustment in Offenders, Victims, and Victim-Offenders

Tatyana V. Kapustina<sup>1</sup> , Anastasiya S. Elzesser<sup>1\*</sup> , Lidiya V. Mandrykina<sup>1</sup> , Anton S. Gaidai<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Pacific State Medical University of the Ministry of Health of Russia, Vladivostok, Russian Federation

\* Corresponding author email: der\_falter@mail.ru

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### Abstract

**Introduction.** The goal of the article is the analysis of social maladjustment among schoolchildren involved in bullying in different roles: «Offender», «Victim», and «Victim-Offender». The capabilities of the "Screening method for diagnosing propensity to extremism" (R. V. Kadyrov, T. V. Kapustina, E. V. Sadon, A. S. Elzesser) in a study of bullying are shown. The psychological features of the least studied role of "Victim-Offender" are revealed. **Methods.** The study involved 206 high school students aged 15–18 years. To identify groups of schoolchildren participating in bullying, the «Bullying situation at school» (V. R. Petrosyants) method was used, to determine the severity of social maladjustment – a «Screening method for diagnosing propensity to extremism» (R. V. Kadyrov et al.); the psychological characteristics of the groups were determined using the «Individual typological questionnaire» (L. N. Sobchik), and «Test of aggressiveness» (L. G. Pochebut). **Results.** Signs of social maladjustment were found in all groups involved in bullying, with the most acuteness in Victims and Victim-Offenders. Among the signs of maladaptation were identified: for Offenders – attention-seeking, preference for computer games with predominant components of violence, low mood, and loss of energy; for Victims – closedness and aloofness, low mood; for Victim-Offenders – enmity, sympathy for deviants, closedness. Victim-Offenders combine the maladjustment traits of both the initiator and the target of bullying. Statistically significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the psychological characteristics of bullying participants are determined. Compared with others, the Offenders group expressed such traits as spontaneity, aggressiveness, and nonconformity. Victims have expressed introversion, anxiety, self-aggression, and dependence, as well as a negative correlation with lability. No significant correlations were found for the Victim-Offender group. All bullying participants showed signs of social maladjustment – experiencing loneliness, a negative attitude towards others, and difficulties with trust. **Discussion of the results.** The results obtained are consistent with the facts noted by other researchers, such as the use of bullying by Offenders to increase their position in the informal hierarchy, their pronounced impulsiveness and desire for dominance; introversion, anxiety, and closedness in Victims; trust difficulties, introversion, anxiety, and hostility in Victim-Offenders.

**Keywords:** bullying, adolescents, maladjustment, Offender, Victim, Victim-Offender, aggressor, Screening method, diagnostics of maladjustment

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## Introduction

Social maladjustment contributes to the consolidation of maladaptive variants of personality traits that can be adjacent to accentuations, characterizing the manifestation of dysmorphophobia associated with a negative assessment of others (Yakimova, Kravcova, 2017) and personality disorders (Kudryavcev, 2019). This necessitates the study of signs of social maladjustment of a person experiencing a negative impact from the social environment.

Social maladjustment – is a disorder of integration into society, in which a person “is not able to satisfactorily meet the requirements and expectations that the social environment imposes on him and his social role, his leading activity in this environment” (Nalchadzhyan, 1988, p. 21). Social maladjustment is studied as a disorder in one or another complex of personally significant relationships (Varlamova, 2005), a negative psychological formation in the personality structure (Molodcova, 2017), as a system of deficits in the interactional mechanism of socialization (Kudryavcev, 2021). Social maladjustment is based on a personal trait that mediates the vulnerability of the individual in the process of socialization: accentuation, intrapersonal conflict, inadequate self-esteem, primitive psychological defenses, a tendency to alienation, increased anxiety, frustration, etc. (Molodcova, 2017). Social maladjustment can be a result of a negative impact of the environment on the personality.

Bullying is prolonged physical or psychological abuse by an individual or group against an individual who is not able to protect himself in this situation (Lejn, 2001). As of 2021, bullying in Russian schools can reach 40% of all students (Ivanyushina, Hodorenko, Aleksandrov, 2021). Susceptibility to bullying has a negative impact on the formation of personality since the formation of a personality structure and its character is largely the result of adaptation in society. As Ananiev (2010), “the transformation of interindividual connections that function in certain circumstances of life into intraindividual connections is a prerequisite for the formation of a personality structure and its character” (p. 265).

In several studies, the authors identified the psychological characteristics of a person with social maladjustment: disruption of relations with parents (Posohova, Kolpakova, 2020); hostility, feelings of inferiority, anxiety (Moskova, 2008; Hakimzyanov, 2020), a tendency to loneliness, apathy, and depression, devaluation of the meaning of life (Grishina, 2018; Moskova, 2008; Hakimzyanov, 2020).

The formation of the characteristics mentioned above can be mediated by participation in bullying not only in the role of Victims but also in the role of Offender or Victim-Offender. Thus, there is evidence that Victims of bullying are distinguished by a decrease in school well-being, loneliness and isolation (Hamel, Schwab, Wahl, 2021), high neuroticism and psychoticism (Machimbarrena et al., 2019), a decrease in self-esteem, a decrease in emotional intelligence (Estévez, Estévez, Segura & Suárez, 2019; Zych, Ttofi & Farrington, 2016), self-blame (Wójcik, Thornberg, Flak & Leśniewski, 2022), anxiety, depression, non-suicidal self-harm (Li et al., 2021; Myklestad & Straiton, 2021), elevated risk of suicide attempts (Koyanagi et al., 2019).

Similarly, loneliness with peers, isolation, high neuroticism, and psychoticism are characteristics of Victim-Offender. This group is found to have low levels of empathy (Zych, Ttofi & Farrington,

2016) and tendencies of moral alienation, which increases the willingness to engage in bullying against others (Falla, Ortega-Ruiz, Runions & Romera, 2020; Runions et al., 2019).

Research on Victim-Offenders in bullying also shows changes in personality traits due to social maladjustment: low levels of empathy (Zych, Ttofi & Farrington, 2016), decreased self-esteem in the academic and family spheres, increased anxiety in social interactions, difficulty regulating emotions (Estévez, Cañas, Estévez & Povedano, 2020). Bullying exacerbates pre-existing psychopathic traits such as callousness-unemotionality and impulsivity-irresponsibility (Orue & Calvete, 2019).

The purpose of this article is a comparative analysis of the signs of social maladjustment of personality in all bullying participants.

## Methods

The sample is represented by 206 high school students, including 83 boys and 123 girls, the age of the respondents is from 15 to 18 years. Respondents are students of grades 9–11 of secondary general education schools and private educational institutions in a few Russian cities: Moscow, St. Petersburg, Khabarovsk, Vladivostok, Ussuriysk, and Yeniseisk. The study involves the study of high school students aged 15–18 participating in bullying, so the selection of the sample was based on the principle of its availability. Different schools have different levels of bullying: from 0 to 40% (Ivanyushina, Hodorenko, Aleksandrov, 2021), therefore, regardless of the place of residence, the data of respondents were selected according to the criterion of participation in bullying.

In the first stage of the study, the general sample was divided into four groups based on the results of the analysis of the "Bullying situation at school" (Petrosyanc, 2011). Next, we applied: the "Individual typological questionnaire" (Sobchik, 2017), and "Test of aggressiveness" L. G. Pochebut (Pochebut, 2023), "Screening method for diagnosing propensity to extremism" to determine the form of social maladjustment (R. V. Kadyrov, T. V. Kapustina, E. V. Sadon, A. S. Elzesser) (Kapustina, 2022).

The author's Screening method for diagnosing propensity to extremism was developed to study destructive manifestations in students in an educational environment. The theoretical and methodological basis of the screening method is represented by a wide range of theoretical views on the social maladjustment of a person, studies of radicalization, and individual psychological characteristics of a person with extremist tendencies (Kapustina, 2022).

Extremist personality tendencies are a form of stable social maladjustment and characterize the orientation of the personality, represented by motives, interests, aspirations, beliefs, and ideals, the totality of which creates a predisposition to extremism in the educational environment. The analysis made it possible to identify the criteria for extremist tendencies, which formed the basis of the screening method: signs of depression, experiencing loneliness, declaring superiority, dehumanization, motives for revenge, and a positive attitude towards death. After adapting and validating the screening method, we continued to explore its capabilities by applying social maladjustment to a wider range of phenomena.

Indeed, the high severity of extremist tendencies does not mean that a person will commit an act of extremist violence. At the same time, feelings of loneliness, the motive of revenge as a reaction of anger in response to social failures, ideas about the futility of one's existence and the worthlessness of other people's lives, a compensatory declaration of superiority, the approval of violence and interest in murder and death - all this constitutes the social maladjustment of the individual and with inevitably creates risks of antisocial and/or self-injurious behavior.

It should be noted that the screening method does not have scales; it can only be used to assess the presence and absence of social maladjustment, as well as the degree of its severity. The screening method in the study of social maladjustment has several advantages: 1) veiled collection of information: the purpose of the survey is not obvious, which allows you to bypass the respondent's resistance; 2) high information content due to the use of various forms of questions: semi-closed with answer options, open questions, unfinished sentences; 3) the possibility of identifying various manifestations of social maladjustment through the analysis of answers to open questions.

When measuring personality traits and characteristics using questionnaires in psychology, it is customary to use an ordinal scale (Druzhinin, 2019), therefore, for statistical processing of the obtained data, non-parametric statistics methods were used – the median test, the Kruskal–Wallis test, and the Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Data processing was performed in SPSS Statistica 10.0.

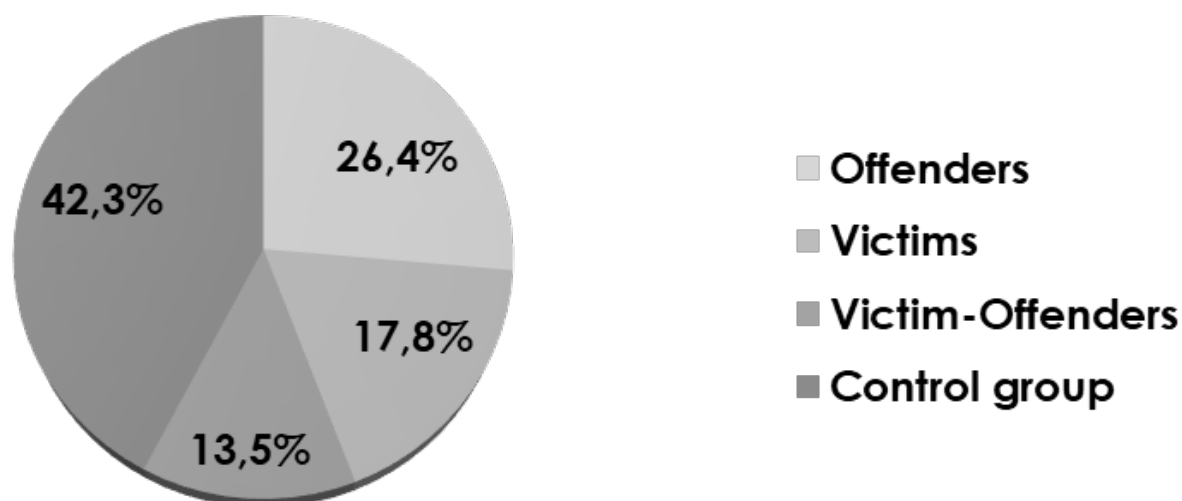
## Results

### ***Bullying situation at school***

According to the results of the “Bullying situation at school” method (Petrostyants, 2011), the following distribution was obtained: Offenders – 55 people (participated in bullying several times during the month), Victims – 37 people (experienced bullying two or more times during the month), Victim-Offenders – 28 people (were subjected to bullying and participated in it once or more within a month), the comparison group – 88 people (did not participate in bullying, were not subjected to bullying or were subjected to only once). The percentage of different groups of respondents is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*Distribution within the sample according to the «Bullying situation at school»*



### ***Screening method for diagnosing propensity to extremism***

According to the results of the “Screening method for diagnosing propensity to extremism” (Table 1), it was revealed that **in the Victims group, the median indicators of the group exceed**

**the tested norm** ( $< 17$ ), which means that there is a tendency to social maladjustment, which may be the result of experienced psychological violence. For groups of Offenders and Victim-Offenders, the obtained values **do not indicate a formed propensity for social maladjustment, however, they exceed those of the comparison group.**

**Table 1**

*The severity of social maladjustment in schoolchildren involved in bullying*

Sample sizes Of/V/V-Of/No	The value of the Kruskal–Wallis test, H	p-level	Median Of/V/V-Of/No
55/37/28/88	46.59	0.0000	16/ <b>18</b> /16/10

Behavioral features were identified in the group of Offenders, Victims, and Victim-Offenders. To the question “Do you strive to stand out among other people? If yes, then how? In the Offenders group, 32 out of 55 respondents answered: “appear brighter” (4), “knowledge” (6), “appearance/clothes/image” (6), “jokes” (4), “character” (8), “to be a leader” (3), “do crazy stuff” (1). In the Victims group, almost half of the respondents (18 out of 37) reported that they strive to stand out: “sincerity” (7), “creativity” (5), “by soul” (6). In the Victim-Offender group, all respondents indicated that they did not seek to stand out from other people. In the comparison group, the answers were distributed almost evenly: most of the respondents (46) answered that they did not strive to stand out, and a smaller part of the respondents (42) gave differently directed answers, indicating a different degree of readiness to stand out, from low: “every person stands out with something” to high: “everyone”, “how can I surprise them, and so that they find the best qualities in me”.

The answers of the Offenders group may indicate the desire of some schoolchildren to take a certain status in the group, stand out and surpass their peers due to the image, character, and behavior that goes beyond social norms and rules, while in the explanations of the respondents of the Victims and Victims groups – Offender there are no such manifestations of demonstrative behavior.

In the key of the screening method, when assessing the severity of social maladjustment, the preference for genres of computer games is taken into account. All students in the Offenders group play computer games, the most common game genres are Shooter (15), Horror (11), and Stealth (14). Victim-Offenders also gave an affirmative answer, the most common genres being “Shooter” (8) and “Horror” (6). This indicates that Offenders and Victim-Offenders prefer games with violent elements. In the Victims group, most of the respondents (15) play computer games, the most popular genres are quests and puzzles (11), RPG (8), and Shooter (5). These are offline games for solving various puzzles and logic tasks, as well as role-playing games, in which you can choose a character and play on his behalf. The choice of offline games speaks to the introversion of Victims, and the choice of the RPG genre may indicate a tendency to distract from the problems in the virtual world and serve as a modern variation of dream retreat as a psychological defense. The Offenders' and Victim-Offenders' preference for games with a focus

on gun violence (Shooter) and shock content (Horror), as well as Stealth for the Offender group, indicates a greater interest in murder and death than the Victims.

To the question "Do you like people who..." many respondents in the Offenders group gave socially acceptable answers, for example, "They are distinguished by courage", "responsible", and "self-confident", however, there were two statements expressing adaptation disorders: "silent", "clowns". Victims also expressed socially acceptable judgments, except for the two responses "I don't like people". In the Victim-Offenders group, in comparison with the groups of Offenders and Victims, **the largest number of answers indicating problems with adaptation is presented:** "rejected" (3), "dislike" (3), and "no" (4). In the comparison group, such socially acceptable answers as "understanding" (8), "honest" (5), and others prevail.

To the question "Trust is...?" most respondents of all groups gave socially acceptable answers. However, in the group of Offenders, there were answers that trust is a "weakness" (2), and "it is not needed" (2). Also, in the answers of a third of the respondents of the Victim-Offender group, there are answers: "... I don't trust anyone" (1), "there is no trust" (4), and "no" (5). In the Victims group, there is a negative assessment of their social experience and fear: "what is not familiar to me" (3), "risk" (1). Respondents of the comparison group did not oppose themselves to others and did not demonstrate intolerance towards others. Thus, we can say that some Offenders, and Victim-Offenders, are forming **a position of refusal of trust, some Victims emphasize that trust is little known to them.**

The screening method offers a question aimed at self-assessment of extraversion/introversion: "Some people need to be among people because they need to interact with them, while others feel lonely among people. What category do you belong to?" In the comparison group, the desire to interact with others prevails (13). In the Offenders group, the majority of respondents also answered, "to the first" (14) and "something in between" (5), in the Victims group, the majority answered "to the second" (15), as did Victim-Offenders (12). This shows that the respondents of the Victims and Victim-Offender groups experience "loneliness in the crowd", their relationships with classmates are formal. The next questions "Is it easy to spoil your mood?" and "Do you often have a headache?" showed that Offenders' mood was "usually irritable" (9), "recently worsened" (7), "usually sad" (5), their head hurts "often" (15) and "recently very often" (5). In the group of Offenders, low mood, irritation, and physical discomfort associated with frequent headaches prevail. The majority of respondents noted a loss of interest in learning activities, the most common reasons being "stopped trying" (6), "laziness" (4), and "growing up" (3).

The mood in the Victims group has "recently worsened" (13), headaches are "sometimes" (12) and "often" (6), while learning difficulties have appeared due to a "lack of desire to learn" (7), "loss of interest" (3), "burnout" (2), "difficulties in the school curriculum" (2). This indicates a decrease in adaptive capacity. In the process of introspection of their past, present, and future, a subset of Victims' respondents labels their past and present as "meaningless" (14). This may indicate dissatisfaction with their school life, with what happened and is happening now in the classroom, about the accumulation of negative experiences.

In contrast, Victims-Offenders are in a "generally good (cheerful) mood" (9), with headaches "rarely rare" (13). For most schoolchildren in the comparison group, it is not easy to spoil the mood, headaches happen "sometimes" (12). The mood in these two groups is quite stable, and no physical ailments are observed. It can be assumed that participation in bullying in Victims-Offenders can perform a compensatory function.

So, the analysis of the respondents' answers allows us to note the signs of social maladjustment among the bullying participants. Offenders are dominated by the desire to attract attention, to demonstrate their advantages. Victim-Offenders and almost half of the Victims demonstrate closeness and aloofness. However, about half of the Victims are distinguished by their desire for authenticity and preserved self-respect and find an outlet in creativity. Offenders and Victim-Offenders prefer games with a predominance of violent components, which indicates a greater interest in the information space on the topics of murder and death than the Victims group. Victim-Offenders, to a greater extent than other groups, demonstrate hostility towards others, or sympathy for people with deviant, antisocial behavior. The position of non-confidence is found in the Victims and Offenders group, but it is most demonstrated by the Victim-Offenders. It can be assumed that the signs of social maladjustment, generated by the role of Victims, are combined with the maladaptation of the bullying initiator, and increase the rupture of ties between the individual and society. Victims and Victim-Offenders experience loneliness among their peers. Offenders and Victims have bad moods, and a breakdown, unlike Victim-Offender, which suggests that they have compensatory mechanisms that even out the emotional background but aggravate the processes of maladaptation.

### ***Individual typological features***

As shown by the statistical analysis of the methodology of individual typological characteristics of L. N. Sobchik using the Kruskal–Wallis test, there are significant differences between the four groups of the sample (Table 2).

**Table 2**

*Psychological characteristics of schoolchildren participating in bullying, according to the method of ITO by L.N. Sobchik*

Scale	Sample sizes Of/V/V-Of/No	Kruskal–Wallis value , H	p-level	Median Of/V/V-Of/No
Extraversion	55/37/28/88	8.44	0.0376	6/4/5/6
Anxiety	55/37/28/88	8.67	0.0340	6/6/6/5
Leadership	55/37/28/88	13.35	0.0039	12/10/10/12
Dependency	55/37/28/88	7.69	0.0528	9/11/9/9
Communication	55/37/28/88	8.87	0.0311	12/9/10/11

In the group of Offenders and schoolchildren who do not participate in bullying, there are high rates on the scale of extraversion and communicativeness, which is consistent with the self-assessment data of these schoolchildren obtained in the screening method.

Anxiety in the groups' Offenders, Victims, and Victim-Offenders is characterized by high rates (6 points). This indicates increased suspiciousness and timidity, which is one of the manifestations of social maladjustment. If bullying is indeed a compensatory strategy, Offenders tend to stand out and may choose to bully people who make them doubt themselves as Victims.

Significant differences were found on the leadership scale; in the median values, the Offenders and the comparison group had the most pronounced leadership indicators ( $H = 7.69$ ;  $p\text{-level} = 0.0528$ ). Apparently, in the process of social maladjustment that the desire for leadership takes the form of bullying. In this case, the desire for leadership turns into excessive self-confidence, and disrespect for others.

Significant differences were found on the dependency scale ( $H = 13.35$ ;  $p\text{-level} = 0.0039$ ); according to the median, the most pronounced indicators were observed in the Victims group. This indicates that respondents tend to avoid conflict and therefore need a benevolent social environment.

### **Test of aggressiveness**

The "Test of aggressiveness" technique by L. G. Pochebut (Table 3) showed that Offenders are characterized by a high degree of verbal aggression, which is consistent with the results of the method "Bullying situation at school".

**Table 3**

*Psychological characteristics of schoolchildren participating in bullying, according to the «Test of Aggressiveness»*

Scale	Sample sizes Of/V/V-Of/No	Kruskal–Wallis value , H	p-level	Median Of/V/V-Of/No
Verbal aggression	55/37/28/88	14.89	0.019	5/4/4/3
Emotional aggression	55/37/28/88	20.67	0.0001	3/3/5/2

High rates of emotional aggression in Victim-Offender indicate a tendency to emotionally distance themselves when communicating, experiencing suspicion, hostility, ill will, and hostility. This is consistent with the data of the screening method, which revealed an unfriendly attitude towards people in general, and a refusal to trust. Aggressive and hostile attitudes can be a defensive posture in connection with the bullying experienced, when Victim-Offenders openly express dissatisfaction, succumbing to provocations.



### **Correlation analysis**

Correlation analysis between the level of social maladjustment and other personal characteristics (Table 4) showed that social maladjustment correlates with such personal characteristics as spontaneity and aggressiveness in the Offenders group. This means that Offenders are impulsive, can commit rash acts, and strive to take a leadership position, quickly turning to verbal aggression.

**Table 4**

*Ch. Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient in the group of Offenders*

Indicators correlated with a propensity for social maladjustment	Sample size	Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient, R	p-level
<i>ITO (L.N. Sobchik)</i>			
Spontaneity	53	0.55	0.0054
Aggressiveness	53	0.56	0.0044
Nonconformity	53	0.61	0.0014
<i>Test of aggressiveness (L.G. Pochebut)</i>			
Verbal aggression	53	0.51	0.0123
Physical aggression	53	0.51	0.0124
General aggression	53	0.48	0.0219

A positive correlation with non-conformity reflects the desire of Offenders to defend their position even contrary to the generally accepted one. Together with impulsiveness and aggressiveness, non-conformity may indicate a potential conflict behavior. According to the "Test of aggressiveness" methodology by L. G. Pochebut, correlations with such scales as verbal aggression (R = 0.51; p-level = 0.0123), physical aggression (R = 0.51; p-level = 0.0124) and general aggression (R = 0.48; p-level = 0.0219). Consequently, with the growth of social maladjustment, Offenders become more aggressive, and attacks and insults become systematic.

In the Victims group, other correlations are identified between the severity of social maladjustment and psychological characteristics (Table 5). The severity of social maladjustment in the Victims group has a negative correlation with extraversion (R = -0.40; p-level = 0.0266) and a positive correlation with introversion (R = 0.50; p-level = 0.0033).

**Table 5**

*Ch. Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient in the Victims Group*

Indicators correlated with a propensity for social maladjustment	Sample size	Value of Spearman's Rank correlation coefficient in the Victims group, R	p-level
<i>ITO (L.N. Sobchik)</i>			
Extraversion	37	-0.40	0.0266
Introversion	37	0.50	0.0033
Anxiety	37	0.47	0.0068
Lability	37	-0.46	0.0076
Addiction	37	0.39	0.0322
<i>Test of aggressiveness (L.G. Pochebut)</i>			
Self-aggression	37	0.47	0.0057

Schoolchildren with social maladjustment may show shyness, and lack of sociability, and demonstrate a focus on themselves rather than on the environment. This can be explained by the fact that single school children become victims of bullying, and subsequently, their tendency to loneliness increases due to the consequences of psychological abuse: the accumulation of negative social experiences, and fear of trust. A positive correlation with anxiety may indicate that the aggressive behavior of peers entails a state of constant tension in anticipation of an attack, and an increase in suspicion and distrust of people. A negative correlation was found with lability ( $R = -0.46$ ;  $p\text{-level} = 0.0076$ ), which indicates the stability of mood and motivation in the Victims group. The positive correlation with dependence ( $R = 0.39$ ;  $p\text{-level} = 0.0322$ ) confirms that it is common for Victims to avoid conflict situations, they need to be in a safe environment. A positive correlation with self-aggression according to the "Test of aggressiveness" method by L. G. Pochebut indicates a weakening of the protective mechanisms of the psyche that occurs with the growth of social maladjustment, which leads to the use of various methods of auto-aggression.

No significant correlations were found for the Victim-Offender group. This can be associated with the heterogeneity of this sample, due to the duality of the roles occupied by the respondents.

For the comparison group, a positive correlation was revealed according to the method of individual typological features of L. N. Sobchik with an aggravation scale characterizing the desire to emphasize existing problems and their complexity ( $R = 0.32$ ,  $p = 0.0021$ ). Thus, in adolescents who are not bullied, with the growth of social maladjustment, the tendency to exaggerate the problems and complexity of their character increases. This can be explained by the oppressive emotional background that accompanies social maladjustment, which causes the growth of aggravation.

### **Findings**

Our data allow us to formulate the following generalized socio-psychological characteristics of three groups of schoolchildren involved in bullying.

Offenders are demonstrative, extroverted, striving for leadership, showing nonconformity, impulsiveness, increased anxiety, and aggressiveness. They often have a reduced, irritable mood, a condition with frequent headaches, and reduced performance. They prefer genres of computer games that are associated with violence. With the growth of social maladjustment, aggressiveness may increase, provoking further maladaptation.

Victims are uncommunicative, lonely, not prone to demonstrativeness, disappointed with the experience of social relationships, and may avoid trusting relationships, but need a benevolent social environment. A significant proportion of respondents formed a negative attitude towards others due to negative communication experiences. Victims are dissatisfied with their school life, their mood is predominantly sad, and there is a decrease in their working capacity. Difficulties in social adaptation are growing, increased anxiety makes you avoid conflicts, and with the growth of maladaptation, tendencies of self-aggression intensify.

Victim-Offenders show anxiety and suspicion, hostility, and emotional aggression, which prevents the establishment of relationships and leads to a lack of trust and loneliness. Prefer games with violent components. Have a stable mood, and do not experience deterioration in performance.

### **Discussion**

So, the results of the study showed that Offenders show demonstrativeness, extroversion, desire for leadership ( $H = 13.35$ ;  $p$ -level = 0.0039), non-conformity ( $R = 0.61$ ;  $p$ -level = 0.0014) these qualities with social maladjustment, they contribute to their manifestation in the role of aggressors. Indeed, offender students strive to avoid isolation, make friends, and take a high position in the team, and bullying is one of the ways to achieve this goal (Naumenko & Mozgovaya, 2021).

As social maladjustment increases, Offenders become more aggressive ( $R = 0.56$ ;  $p$ -level = 0.0044), which, together with anxiety and impulsivity, can lead to psychological and physical violence. These results are consistent with other researchers' findings: bullying instigators are impulsive and have a strong need to dominate (Volk, Provenzano, Farrell, Dane & Shulman, 2021). So, one of the reasons for bullying is the desire of the individual to take a position of power and emphasize his superiority, humiliating the dignity of the Victims (Khaidov & Shalaginova, 2021). The use of ridicule, insults, and slander is a frequent occurrence among children and adolescents (Makarova, 2018).

Victims are introverted ( $R = 0.50$ ;  $p$ -level = 0.0033), lonely, anxious ( $R = 0.47$ ;  $p$ -level = 0.0068) and need a friendly environment. High anxiety ( $R = 0.47$ ;  $p$ -level = 0.0068) in the Victims group is confirmed by data obtained in other studies (Skorobogatova, 2021). It is noted that Victims of bullying are closed in communication and are not ready to be active in the social environment (Hamel, Schwab & Wahl, 2021), which does not allow them to take stable positions in the classroom (Machimbarrena et al., 2019).

Victims have a negative attitude toward others and tend to avoid conflict. According to V. R. Petrosyants, Victims of bullying express a negative attitude towards violence and tend to avoid conflict with the instigators of bullying (2010). There is evidence that the experience of bullying at school age reduces personal adaptive potential, as well as indicators of self-esteem and self-acceptance with an increase in self-blame (Petrosyants, 2011). This may explain why social

maladjustment in Victims is associated with self-injury. The loneliness and tendency of Victims to avoid conflict increase the victimization of the individual (Machimbarrena et al., 2019), increasing the likelihood of being bullied again.

Victim-Offenders are introverted and have difficulty establishing trust. Victim-Offenders play a dual role, they are characterized by the stress of experiencing on both sides, and it can increase anxiety. Their anxiety and hostility can lead to suspicion and aggression. For this group, bullying can be both revenge on Offender (Estévez, Cañas, Estévez, Povedano, 2020) or displaced aggression on another, more harmless student (Reyes, 2022).

In general, the results obtained confirm the data of other authors that social maladjustment is more pronounced in Victims than in aggressors (Estévez et al., 2020).

### **Conclusion**

Thus, statistically, significant differences were found between the socio-psychological characteristics of different groups of schoolchildren involved in bullying, which allowed us to draw the following conclusions:

- 1) All participants in bullying – Victims, Offenders, Victim-Offenders - have signs of social adaptation disorders: experiencing loneliness, negative attitude towards others, and problems with trust, however, not everyone has social maladjustment. Harbingers of social maladjustment in Offenders are manifested in the desire for loneliness, disappointment in the experience of communication, difficulties in trust, hostility towards others, and the choice of asocial methods to achieve leadership positions. The rejection of close and meaningful relationships increases the likelihood of forming an antisocial identification and increases social maladjustment. At the same time, loneliness contributes to the breakdown of social ties and increases maladaptation. Signs of impaired social adaptation in Victim-Offender are manifested in a suspicious and hostile attitude towards people, and a tendency to reject trust. Probably, the opportunity to “recoup” allows them to maintain a stable mood but does not protect against discord in relations with the social environment.
- 2) The manifestation of social maladjustment in different groups of schoolchildren participating in bullying indicates its versatility and poses a difficult task of its psychodiagnostic assessment and psychological correction since the presented portraits of the personality of Offenders, Victims, and Victim-Offenders differ. At the same time, the psychodiagnostic suitability of the screening method for diagnosing propensity to extremism (R. V. Kadyrov, T. V. Kapustina, E. V. Sadon, A. S. Elzesser) for a wider range of problems of social adaptation should be noted, since it includes multidirectional diagnostic criteria that allow you to track signs of maladjustment in individuals who play different roles in bullying: Offender, Victim, Victim-Offender.
- 3) It has been substantiated that participation in bullying as an Offender, Victim, or Victim-Offender contributes to the appearance of signs of social maladjustment. At the same time, the signs we have identified are multidirectional, which makes it difficult to create correction programs, especially short-term ones. This makes it relevant to create a universal program of psycho-correction. We proceed from the position of S. L. Rubinshtein, who pointed out that a person’s self-determination is accomplished through the definition of one’s attitude toward other people (2019). Therefore, one of the targets of psycho-correction in case of maladjustment should be the formation of self-acceptance (increase in the level of

self-satisfaction) and acceptance of others (increase in the level of the need to communicate and carry out joint activities). These target points reflect the signs of social maladjustment and are associated with self-attitude as a reflection of the "Self-Other" interaction and can form the basis of a universal program for correcting maladaptation for individuals occupying different roles in bullying.

- 4) Based on the study, recommendations were developed for school teachers, drawn up in the form of a **memo** (Fig. 2). The memo includes descriptions of the behavioral aspects of Offenders, Victims, and Victim-Offenders, allowing you to recognize the phenomenon of bullying in the classroom at an early stage. Recommendations for actions in case of bullying are also presented. At present, the memo has been introduced at the International Linguistic School of Vladivostok.


**Figure 2**

*Translation of fragment of a memo for teachers*


**CHARACTERISTICS OF BULLYING**

1. BULLYING IS AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR, PURPOSEFULLY CAUSING HARM OR DISCOMFORT TO ANOTHER PERSON.
2. BULLYING IS SYSTEMATIC AND REPETITIVE BEHAVIOR.
3. IMBALANCE IN THE USE OF FORCES, WHEN THE VICTIM DOES NOT RESIST THE AGGRESSION DIRECTED AT HIM, A SITUATION OF INEQUALITY OF FORCES ARISES.


**TRADITIONAL ROLES FOUND IN BULLYING**



«OFFENDERS»  
(STUDENTS WHO PRESENT THEMSELVES AS PARTICIPANTS IN BULLYING)




"VICTIMS"  
(STUDENTS WHO REPRESENT A HIGH DEGREE OF TENDENCY TO BE A VICTIM)




"VICTIM-OFFENDERS"  
(COMBINES TWO ROLES)

EACH STUDENT IN ANY OF THE ROLES LISTED ABOVE HAS PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT NEED TO BE CONSIDERED BEFORE STARTING A CONVERSATION ABOUT BULLYING.



**"OFFENDERS"**

- AIMED AT HIGH ACTIVITY AND SOCIABILITY IN THE TEAM;
- STRIVE TO BE LEADERS IN THE GROUP;
- IN CASE OF A CONTROVERSIAL SITUATION, THEY TEND TO DEFEND THEIR OPINION UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF THE CONFLICT;
- THEY TRY TO STAND OUT AMONG THEIR PEERS. THUS, THEY CAN PUT THEMSELVES ABOVE OTHERS;
- IMPULSIVE, CAN MAKE RASH ACTIONS UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF EXTERNAL CIRCUMSTANCES;
- PRONE TO AGGRESSIVE MANIFESTATIONS (BOTH VERBAL AND PHYSICAL);
- HAVE LOST INTEREST IN LEARNING, PERFORMANCE IS DECREASED;
- PREFER VIOLENT GAMES, ON THE INTERNET, CHOOSE TOPICS RELATED TO CRUELTY AND DESTRUCTION.



**Limitations**

In this study, a sample has been collected that is sufficient to capture the trends in the distribution of signs of social maladjustment among schoolchildren participating in bullying, occupying the roles of Offender, Victim, and Victim-Offender. An increase in the sample can change the proportion of identified signs of social maladjustment within groups and reveal the internal heterogeneity of groups of respondents with a particular role in bullying. The limitations

of the screening method used should also be noted. The absence of scales makes the procedure for assessing the severity of certain criteria of personality maladjustment insufficiently formalized and, therefore, less accurate.

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#### Author Contributions

**Tatyana Viktorovna Kapustina** developed of the research concept, processed statistical data, participated in writing the article, made scientific consultation, final approval of the article.

**Anastasia Sergeevna Elzesser** wrote the literature review on the topic of the article, participated in the interpretation of the data obtained, participated in writing the article.

**Lidia Viktorovna Mandrykina** collected of material, participated in the interpretation of the data.

**Anton Sergeevich Gaidai** analyzed and done the interpretation of the obtained data, participated in writing the article, translated the article into English.

#### Author information

**Tatyana Viktorovna Kapustina** – Cand. Sci (Psychology), Associate Professor of the Department of General Psychological Disciplines, Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Pacific State Medical University” of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, Vladivostok, Russian Federation; WOS Researcher ID: F-1647-2019; ScopusID: 57197811628; AuthorID: 774382; SPIN-code: 5756-0326; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9833-8963>, e-mail: [12\\_archetypesplus@mail.ru](mailto:12_archetypesplus@mail.ru)

**Anastasia Sergeevna Elzesser** – Lecturer, Department of General Psychological Disciplines, Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Pacific State Medical University” of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, Vladivostok, Russian Federation; WOS Researcher



ID: F-1092-2019; AuthorID: 926450; SPIN-code: 1251-6948; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3833-0502>; e-mail: [der\\_falter@mail.ru](mailto:der_falter@mail.ru)

**Lidia Viktorovna Mandrykina** – Student of the Faculty of Public Health, Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education "Pacific State Medical University" of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, Vladivostok, Russian Federation; AuthorID: 1097695; SPIN-code: 6485-0684; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6634-2172>; e-mail: [mandrukina27@gmail.com](mailto:mandrukina27@gmail.com)

**Anton Sergeevich Gaidai** – Lecturer, Department of General Psychological Disciplines, Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education "Pacific State Medical University" of the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation, Vladivostok, Russian Federation; AuthorID: 1094776; SPIN-code: 8846-6430; ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0648-1170>, e-mail: [netparoley@gmail.com](mailto:netparoley@gmail.com)

#### **Information about conflicts of interest**

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.