

# School Bullying and Violence The Role of Media

International Online Conference

May 15 - June 9, 2006

## Conference Report



Education and Culture

**Socrates**  
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## Introduction

School bullying and violence is a phenomenon that is in the focus of public attention in most Western societies. Since the 90's there has been a growing awareness on the problem of SBV followed by an increasing number of studies, the development of programs and in recent years also the establishment of a growing number of web resources (cp. Smith, 2005, Minton & O'Moore, 2004.).

When focusing on the latter point - web resources on SBV – various questions come up such as:

- What kinds of web resources on SBV are available?
- What are the potentials and the benefits but also the limits and dangers of web resources on SBV?
- How do users and experts judge the reliability and quality of web resources on SBV?
- Which role do web resources play in the process of SBV prevention?

The answers on these questions are as unsatisfying as surprising: There is no clear answer as web resources on SBV have not been subject of research yet. Of course there are commented link lists, anecdotic user reports about the usability of web sites or publications and studies emphasising the importance of web resources (e.g. Jäger et al., 2003; O'Moore, 2004). Nevertheless, so far there is no systematic research dealing with one of the questions above. Considering that not only much time but also much money is invested in creating web resources on SBV this is not only surprising but rather astonishing.

The fourth online conference of the VISIONARIES-NET project aimed at bringing together participants from several European countries who are interested in the way School Bullying and Violence (SBV) is reported by the media. The conference also hosted SBV experts who shared their knowledge and experience, and provided professional advice on how the information about SBV should be treated.

The conference focused on a couple of topics like *what is the role of media in School Bullying and Violence, how can media participate at the prevention of SBV, how do the media reports on SBV influence the development or prevention of SBV.*

In this report we give an overview about the conference's main objectives, its structure, its participants and of course its main outcomes.

## **VISIONARIES-NET: the project behind the online conferences**

The online conference “School Bullying and Violence: the Role of Media” is one of the five online conferences that took place as part of the VISIONARIES-NET project funded by the European Commission within the Socrates Minerva program. Before we present some selected outcomes of this conference we first would like to outline some basic ideas of our project, its background, objectives and the partners that cooperate in this project.

### **Background and starting point of the project**

School and juvenile violence have been rising constantly over the past decade and have wide-ranging implications on our societies (cp. Jäger, Bradley and Rasmussen, 2003). The growing number of national and International conferences on violence in school point out the importance of meetings and networks. Nevertheless, it is obvious that only a very limited number of experts and practitioners get the chance to participate in conferences and exchange their experiences with others, especially on an International level.

The Internet offers new possibilities: One of the benefits of online-discussions or conferences is that they have the potential of bringing together users with different backgrounds - e.g. in terms of culture, education, experiences or citizenship – who would hardly meet in real life.

The overall idea behind this project, the VISIONARIES-NET project, is that in spite of all differences in terms of culture, educational or professional background, age and target group (pupils, parents, researchers etc.) we assume that there are many people from different countries who face similar problems and who can learn from each other.

In the VISIONARIES-NET project we invite people affected by and dealing with school bullying and violence to online conferences in order to facilitate discussions, to analyse the situation in a selected field within the broad topic of school bullying and violence and to work out common, sometimes innovative solutions.

### **The VISIONARIES-NET project, its partners and sponsors**

The VISIONARIES-NET<sup>1</sup> project is a European cooperative project from institutes and organisation from four European countries - Germany, France, Spain and Romania. The partners are:

- Centre for Educational Research, University Koblenz-Landau, Germany (co-ordination)
- Department of Education, Faculty of Sciences of Education, Universidad de Córdoba, Spain
- European Forum for Urban Safety, Paris, France
- CONCEPT Foundation, Bucharest, Romania

The project started in October 2004 and ends in November 2006 and it was supported by the Socrates/Minerva program of the European Commission.

The VISIONARIES-NET project builds on the VISIONARY project (2000-2003) – also funded by Socrates/Minerva program of the European Commission - that focused on

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<sup>1</sup>VISIONARIES-NET is an acronym for ‘violence in school - initiative on the net archiving resources for European states: net of experts’.

implementing a European Internet portal on school bullying and violence that aimed at providing information and facilitating communication on school bullying and violence ([www.bullying-in-school.info](http://www.bullying-in-school.info)). The portal includes background information, link collections, news section and much more and it was created by partners from Germany, Denmark, Finland, Portugal and the UK.

As a part of the VISIONARIES-NET project this portal was completely updated and extended by additional sections such as blogs, best practice sections and online polls. Apart from this the portal is available in three further languages now: French, Spanish and Romanian.

## **Objectives of the project**

As mentioned above one of the main ideas behind the VISIONARIES-NET project is that in spite of differences in terms of countries, cultures or educational background people can learn from one another.

The VISIONARIES-NET project mainly addresses persons engaged in different kinds of activities related to violence prevention in school. Its main objective is to bring these persons together in online conferences that unite selected groups of experts and practitioners.

Apart from networking the participants of the online conferences, another goal of the project is not only to inform a broader public about the conferences' outcomes but to include them in the discussion process. This will be realized by means of web logs that aim at publishing selected outcomes of the conferences' discussions and that encourage users of the VISIONARY portal to continue the discussion.

## **The Online Conference “SBV: the Role of Media”**

The online conference ‘School Bullying and Violence: the Role of Media’ was the fourth from five online conferences of the VISIONARIES-NET project. An overview about the other online conferences can be found at <http://www.bullying-in-school.info/en/content/forum-conferences/online-conferences.html>

## **Objectives of the conference**

The objective of this conference was to bring together participants from several European countries who are interested in the way School Bullying and Violence (SBV) is reported by the media. Furthermore it aimed at bringing together and networking people who share similar interests.

The conference focused on the following topics:

- what is the role of media in School Bullying and Violence
- how can media participate at the prevention of SBV
- how do the media reports on SBV influence the development or prevention of SBV
- how can the media be a vector of safety feeling about SBV
- how can the media valorize actions dealing with SBV
- how can the media be an alternative to crisis situations

Furthermore the conference aimed at giving the participants the opportunity ...

- to meet others people interested in the role of media in SBV
- to find out more about approaches and ideas from other parts of the world
- to learn and profit from others who deal with the same problems and challenges
- to network with experts from other countries and cultures

## Concept, Methodology and Duration

### The conference: an asynchronous forum that is open for four weeks

The online conference was not an online conference in the traditional sense that includes multimedia online presentation and is limited to a 2-3 days period.

The “heart” of the conference was a virtual meeting room in form of a so called *asynchronous forum* that was open 24 hours a day to our participants. The form of an asynchronous forum was chosen because there were participants from different countries and time zones and because none of the participants should have been excluded by the time discussions take place or the techniques that were used. In an asynchronous forum, postings from other participants can be read and commented whenever the participants want, so that the participation can easily be integrated in the participants’ time schedule.

The forum was open for *four weeks*. As all participants were supposed to be involved in several other activities, a timeframe was chosen that is long enough to accommodate the participants’ professional and other responsibilities and give both – the participants and the moderators - enough flexibility to participate at the online conference. Experiences show that it takes some time to establish good discussions, especially when crossing time zones and when the discussions include intercultural exchange.

### The topics: the participants help precising the topics

The **topics** that were discussed in this conference highly **depended on the interests** of the participants. The participants were considered to be the experts for the potential as well as the challenges and the limits of Internet resources. For this reason we came back to their expertise for specifying the topics to be discussed at this conference.

In order to make sure that the experiences, interests and expectations of all participants can be considered for the selection of the topics of the week and the single discussion threads a method was applied that resembled the so called **Delphi approach**. According to a definition of Linston and Turoff (2002) the Delphi method “may be characterized as a method for structuring a group communication process so that the process is effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem.” One significant element of a Delphi study is that in a multi-level process a series of questionnaires is applied to a group of pre-selected experts. This series of questionings aims at structuring a field of research that is widely unstructured and which has not been subject of research yet. Within the VISIONARIES-NET project a modified Delphi approach was applied. Questionings of all participants preceded the discussions related to the topics of the week. All participants were asked to answer 3-4 short questions related to each of the four topics of the week. The participants’ answers were categorised and served as a starting point for the conference’s discussions.

## **The structure and framework of the conference**

As mentioned above the conference's forum was open for a time span of four weeks. According to our original plan it was foreseen to open a new topic of the week with the beginning of the week. For each **topic of the week** it was intended to focus on 2-3 selected topics in separate threads. In order not to have too many discussion threads open at the same time all open threads related to the former topic of the week were intended to be closed once the new threads related to the new topic of the week were opened. In practice this original plan was handled rather flexible in order not to interrupt good and productive discussions and to give participants more time to contribute to the discussions. In consequence the topics of the week partly overlapped so that more than 3-4 topics were open at the same time.

In a four-weeks-conference with several parallel discussions and numerous postings, that is open for 24 hours a day for most participants it's hardly possible to follow all discussions. Therefore the main points of the discussions were summarised in form of short **summaries** for all threads in the topic of the week section. Apart from this a **periodically newsletter** was sent to all participants of the conference in order to inform them about new threads, new summaries or interesting topics that came up in the discussions.

## **The conference blog: continuing the discussions with a broader audience**

It is one of the conference's purposes not to restrict it to a limited group of experts but to include a broader audience of Internet users. For this purpose selected outcomes of the conference were published in a weblog at the VISIONARY portal in order to inform the users of the blog about the conference's outcomes and above all in order to continue the discussions with a broader public.

The conference blog is available at <http://blog.bullying-in-school.info/>

## **Participants and moderators of the conference**

The target groups of the online conference were journalists, media policy makers, researchers, invited guests, NGO or educational institutions representatives.

The fourth online conference "School Bullying and Violence: the Role of Media" was moderated by:

Oana Mateescu (Romania) (main moderation)  
Joaquín Mora-Merchan (Spain) (co-moderation)  
Thomas Jäger (Germany) (co-moderation)  
Agnès Pradet (France) (co-moderation)

The conference included the following 33 participants:

Adrian Lungu (Romania)  
Ana Dinescu (Romania)  
Ana Rudico (Republic of Moldova)  
Aurel Graur (Romania)  
Luciana Grosu (Romania)

Nadia Koltcheva (Bulgaria)  
Alena Sindlerova (Czech Republic)  
Amal Abbass-Saal (UK)  
Georgiana Capuerde (Romania)  
Oliviero Facchinetti (Italy)  
Barbara Frye (Czech Republic)  
Chris Schuepp (Germany)  
Maria Ines Ferreira de Miranda (Brazil)  
Sue Sanders (UK)  
Helga Johannessen (Norway)  
Imelda Kemeza (Uganda)  
Ioana Avadani (Romania)  
Magda Barascu (Romania)  
Andy Tomko (USA)  
Rinus Rodenburg (The Netherlands)  
Raya Ribbius (The Netherlands)  
Viorica Cretu (Republic of Moldova)  
Antonio Jesus Rodriguez Hidalgo (Spain)  
Olga Yoncheva (Bulgaria)  
Bekir Canli (Turkey)  
Raymond Portelli (Malta)  
Kevin Perry (Denmark)  
Zelia Maria Mendes Biasoli-Alves (Brazil)  
Juan Calmaestra (Spain)  
Jordi Collell (Spain)  
Myroslava Debelyuk (Ukraine)  
Howard Small (New Zealand)  
Anne-Lise Vang (Norway)

## Questionnaire

Prior to the beginning of the conference a questionnaire was sent to the participants aiming to establish the topics to be discussed during the online conference. The questionnaire comprised five questions and the answers received were the starting point for the discussions.

### School Bullying and Violence: The Role of Media

#### Questionnaire

This questionnaire aims to precise the topic „School Bullying and Violence: The Role of Media" that will be discussed in our online-conference.

- 1) In your opinion, how is School Bullying and Violence reflected by the media in your country?
- 2) Which do you think are the benefits and/or disadvantages of the media involvement in SBV? Please try to use a short example to support your opinion.
- 3) How do you think media may contribute at reducing/preventing SBV?
- 4) What can you personally do or what have you previously done to contribute at reducing/preventing SBV?
- 5) Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to our topic „School Bullying and Violence: The Role of Media"?

## The conference's topics and main outcomes

### Topic 1 (first week of the conference): Reports of SBV in media

#### Thread 1: Information sources on SBV

The discussions started from some questions raised by the moderators. Specifically, these were:

For journalists: How do journalists gather information when they decide to write about SBV? Where do you look for information about SBV?

For people working with media: What have you been asked by journalists when you were supposed to inform them on a specific issue? What do you think it would be helpful to be published and it is not and why?

*"For any type of story -- based on an event or more in-depth -- I would try to get statistics of reported bullying, talk to a counselor (many bullies who are caught must seek counseling), and, yes, try to find a victim of bullying."* (Barbara Frye, Czech Republic)

Among the information sources on SBV, participants identified: schools, statistics of reported bullying, officials, victims of bullying, parents, teachers, students and police. The information usually requested by journalists regards: details about the victim (the name, personal

information as home address, pictures etc), facts, who is responsible, who will be punished, victims of SVB.

An important issue was raised during the discussion: *“I would like to draw attention of how little "media relations skills" some of these potential sources have (...).The most frequent reaction is "we don't talk" - which is tantamount hiding the dirt under the carpet. The journalists are persistent creatures, if they cannot talk to expert sources they will talk to whoever wants to talk to them - hence the distorted message.”* (Ioana Avadani, Romania)

Several messages were centered on the issue of victims’ exposure by media. Regarding the victims participation at TV, the following ideas have been presented:

- victims should present their point of view, their side of the story;
- victims who participate at interviews or talk shows should be strong enough to deal with the media, to cope with the pressure and the exposure
- victims who agree to be exposed by media should be persons able to pass the message along
- victims should be aware of their rights and risks when they are exposed by media

## **Thread 2: Type of reports on SBV**

We have started the discussions based on the outcomes of a questionnaire that we have sent to participants prior to the beginning of the conference. One of the common points in all responses we have got is that one can always find news about school violence acts and heavy incidents, whereas in-depth analysis are sporadic.

During this discussion, we aimed to explore together the following questions:

- How is SBV reflected by media in your country?
- Which is the best dosage between too many news and the absence of news on the subject
- How do you think that SBV reports in media should look like and why?

*“Media have to offer information to the public. The information has to be checked and neutral, offering a broad perspective - it means more than one voice - on a topic. Why? Because otherwise is an opinion, is no more information.”* (Ana Dinescu, Romania)

In many countries, the SBV issues are reflected as isolated cases, they are not regular subjects for the media. The SBV issues appear in media only when sensational things happen. Bad news is always news. However some media (newspapers, radios, TVs) report more frequently about the SBV issues, whereas others have even reports on SBV solutions.

*“What is more important than the dosage, is the way the topic is dealt with, not making it sound sensational but being discussed in an open clear and unbiased way, with an emphasis on self help and other solutions rather than accusations. Whilst the topic should be given its due importance, too much often will reduce the interest of the general public on the issue.”* (Raymond Portelli, Malta)

It was also discussed the fact that too many reports on SBV are as bad as the absence of news on SBV due to the fact that the general public might lose interest on the subject. But it is also important the fact that the high number of news on the subject means that the phenomenon of SBV is widespread which could be a signal of alarm.

It was underlined the fact that media’s role is to inform and not to give solutions or make accusations, the reports have to be neutral, verified, unbiased and based on multiple facts. As it was presented during the discussions ‘media doesn't teach us how to think, but it tells us

what to think about'. It is up for the other social actors to act on this issue.

Also, some prevention solutions came up during the discussions, as for example training the teachers on how to deal with SBV problems.

### Thread 3: Definitions on SBV

- there are four factors that contribute to the development of a **bullying behavior**: 1) a negative attitude from the parents or the person who takes care of the child or adolescent; 2) a tolerant or permissive attitude facing the child's or adolescent's aggressive behavior; 3) parents who employ authority and violence to control the child or the adolescent; and 4) the child's or the adolescent's natural propensity to be arrogant. According to the same author, most bullies are boys, but girls can also be bullies. The girls who are bullies use, sometimes, indirect approaches like gossip, manipulation of friends, lies, and the exclusion of someone from a group (SMITH; SHARP, 1994)
- **all verbal and physical behavior with the intention to hurt, to intimidate, to insult or to offend the integrity and dignity of a person**; behavior like giving nicknames, ridiculing, spreading false rumors, teasing, harassing, taking things forcefully /and not against the will of the person and physical violence
- **all forms of abuse** (emotional, sexual, physical or others) **among the school stakeholders** ( student to student, adult to student, student to adult, and so on)
- bullying is when one person (or more) practice psychic or physical power towards another person (or more) in powerlessness
- cyber bullying is when a person (or more) practice psychic power towards another person (or more) in powerlessness

## Topic 2 (second week of the conference): How to handle media

### Thread 1: Rights and risks of victims exposed by media

In the second week of the conference the discussions focused on the topic of *rights and risks of victims exposed by media*. The topic was opened based on the discussions from the first week of the conference

The discussion aimed to answer the following questions:

- which are the rights and which are the risks of victims' media exposure?
- when do you think that a victim should be/may be exposed by media and when do you think that the victim shouldn't/may not?
- who should advise the victims on this issue?

It was generally agreed within the discussion that young people's identity should be protected by media. Journalists should not publish the names of the victims of any act of violence. The victim should have the right to decide if his/her story should be made public or not

*A victim "has the right to be informed before the article is published, a victim has the right to decide if the strangers will find out about his/her story, a victim has the right to decide if he/she wants to share his/her pain or not"* (Ana Rudico, Republic of Moldova)

“Every case of bullying is different and has its distinctive features” (Helga Johannessen, Norway) Therefore, there should exist some advisory services for victims, in order to empower them if they want to tell their story, as well as to advise them on both the rights and risks brought by media exposure.

It was also discussed the fact that the bullies don't appear in the media coverage “*Why do the bullies never appear? Sometimes it's more "educational" to see/hear that the bully has no reasons for the bullying than to see the victim and put more pressure on him/her...*” (Chris Schuepp, Germany)

Furthermore, the discussions showed that:

- media and parents have a very important role in educating both the victim and the public
- parents are not always on the children's side
- teachers should intervene and protect the children

## **Thread 2: Media relation skills**

The topic “Media Relations Skills” was discussed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the 4<sup>th</sup> online conference, titled “School Bullying and Violence: The Role of Media”. The conference gathered 33 participants from 19 countries from May 15 to June 9, 2006. Journalists, media policy makers, researchers, SBV experts, communication practitioners, NGO and educational institutions representatives shared their views, knowledge and experience on how the information about SBV should be reflected by media

The questions we proposed in order to find out which are the basic media relations skills that one should have when dealing with SBV issues were:

- Which are the basic media relations skills that those who deal with SBV issues should have? We refer here at victims, teachers, parents, peers, NGO representatives etc?
- How may these media relations skills be transmitted?
- How can one improve his/her basic media relations skills?

Some of the participants said that media should present fact based information “*I like numbers and experts as it is my job to sell fact-based information to my readers*” (Adrian Lungu, Romania). Statistics, facts, research studies provide valuable and usually trustworthy information not only for journalists but also for the public

Also the victims' testimonies and statements are considered by the conference participants as very important. It was also underlined that articles or news presenting both pros and cons views on an event are more credible than those presenting only pros.

“*So, what I try to say is that the reaction depends on who is listening to the story*” (Anne-Lise Vang, Norway). The reaction depends on the characteristics of the target groups (those who are listening to the story), therefore the message sent through media should be adapted so that it is understood by the target group.

It is important that victims acknowledge that there are others in similar situations and that there are solutions for solving the problem “*I also do believe that when I interact with media, I can show other victims that there is a way out of problem, you are not alone, look at me, I am a grown up now, and still going strong etc*” (Anne-Lise Vang, Norway).

### Topic 3 (third week of the conference): Mass media targets and effects

#### Thread 1: Effects and media programs

We have started the discussion due to the fact that **media content include many other things apart from news**. If we take the example of a TV, there are news and also movies, entertainment programs, documentaries, talk shows and, of course commercials.

In the last years in several countries, there were several research reports indicating an increasing number of scenes depicting violence in TV programs. The same reports state that the effect of such TV programs is to encourage cases of violence in everyday life.

So, the questions we had for the participants were:

**Do you agree or disagree with that and why?**

**Can the violence from media programs activate or generate violent behaviors?**

**What do you think that can be done and who should do what?**

One of the most important issues presented in the discussion was that parents have a crucial role in shaping media habits of their children and that parents should choose what their children are allowed to see on TV

One participant presented the case of France where in 2002, a report has been made about the "Evaluation of the sociological, psychological effects and esthetics of the inflation of violence to television". This was the first (and last) French study about it. The study recognizes "a net effect of the impact of the diffusion of violent spectacles on the behavior of young people". It also notes a delay of France compared to its European neighbors in the implementation of regulatory instruments at the same time effective and authorized by all the partners against the development of this violence. *"According to this study there is not such a big influence of the media except on very young people"* *"According to me, media can have an influence on people who are already violent"* (Agnes Pradet, France).

Some studies say that TV programs have a small influence, others state that TV programs influence the violent behavior a lot. Therefore, studies actually prove the state of being of a society at a given moment.

An article which reviewed the research about the TV influence on violent behavior said that the violent behavior increased at 70% of the studied people after TV exposure and that the influence of TV was relevant with previously aggressive people

#### Thread 2: Audience and its competence

In the third week of discussions we proposed to explore **the role of media audience**, more precisely of media target groups. Knowing the target group of a medium (newspaper, magazine, TV or radio) or of a program is very important so that to formulate and send a message as effectively as possible. **Without knowing whom we talk with we do not know how to talk**. Understanding the target groups, knowing their characteristics and information needs help us all in making our communication activity more relevant. Therefore, we invited the participants to talk about the information we must know about the audience before starting any type of communication initiative?

Participants talked about one theory in mass communication which states that the audience has a media competence and, consequently, it “uses” media to get specific gratifications (aka advantages). Broadly, the theory says that **members of target groups are aware of their information needs, are active and use media to answer those needs, they evaluate** how satisfied are and **use different media to answer different needs that have different gratifications.**

The participants agreed that media can also create needs and profile a new audience. They also said that one should first study and find out which media is the most popular with the group that one wants to address. This does not mean that other forms of media are ignored, but that the major emphasis is put on the first to reach maximum audience.

*”I think that one should first study and find out which media is the most popular with the group that one wants to address”* (Raymond Portelli, Malta). **First we have to define whom we want to address** and then **to study thoroughly the media's audience habits**, so that to identify the most popular media.

It was also highlighted that prior to choosing the media we must **define the message**. Why now? From various reasons, including the fact that there are theories saying that **the channel makes the message.**

#### **Topic 4 (fourth week of the conference): Methods of working with media**

##### **Thread 1: Working with media in a positive way**

Following the participants’ suggestions and initiatives we opened in the fourth week of the conference the topic *“How can we work with media in a positive way on SBV?”*

*“I think that media have a very important role dealing against bullying: they allow us to know more about the problem, to raise awareness of people etc. If we want to use media in a positive way I think that like researchers, teachers, school staff... we should distinguish clearly what SBV is and what is not, putting the problem in its correct place”* (Joaquin Mora-Merchan, Spain).

Participants suggested that the most important thing to be done is to raise awareness, to make governments recognize the existence of SBV and to advocate for relevant legislation.

*“There are media and media. One has to be careful where one addresses the problem. There are media who use information for sensationalism”* (Raymond Portelli, Malta). The media have a very important role in presenting the facts as they are. It’s then up to educators to transmit the messages they want to.

During the discussions it was highlighted that there are different ways of media reactions among countries. In countries like Moldova there is no interest in issues like SBV, probably due to the fact that home violence is such a common fact that other associated issues are still considered taboo.

The British media are very keen to ignore the daily homophobia in schools.

In Norway for example, the media focus on SBV was enormous, and researchers believe that

media focus contributed at the decrease in the number of victims. However, when media focus stopped, the SBV control was lost again.

## **Thread 2: Inventory of methods**

*“We should not discuss over what a teacher/school/government is supposed to do, let's find a method they can use to stop bullying. We must not forget that teachers are parents as well. And they have children who may be victims, too. E.g. I was a teacher and my son has been bullied for 6 years! And I did not know what to do.*

*I really think that it is important to make an inventory of methods and their pros and cons. This way we might find a uniform mix usable by teachers/schools etc” (Rinus Rodenburg, Netherlands)*

We also invited the participants to find the means to approach journalists. Also the participants were encouraged to nominate some methods of involving media in SBV prevention.

As far as journalists' approach is concerned, participants concluded that one should contact journalists always based on facts, stories, information, otherwise he/she risks to be misunderstood, no matter how "noble" the cause. Journalists can also be approached by inviting them to pay a visit to a center like parents' council or center for victims' counseling. It was underlined that previously one should establish with the journalists the basic norms regarding the victims' privacy. Such visits may be included in a kind of informal information initiatives, so as to help journalists to know more about a specific issue.

One major question was raised: “What happens if the media don't respect the victim's privacy”. The following answers were formulated:

- In Norway if journalists break their promise about not revealing the identity of the victim one can complain to <http://www.presse.no/np.asp>
- To diminish the effects one should rise awareness about the phenomenon
- Journalists should have a deontological code that should be respected in its relationship with the victims *”To diminish the effects, you have now the occasion to rise the awareness about the phenomenon, taking into account the deontological point of view for the media” (Ana Dinescu, Romania)*
- One can avoid the "publicity" in such cases by inviting in such tours editorial directors of media outlets

Below you will find an overview of anti-bullying methods used or advised by anti bullying organizations in The Netherlands:

1. teaching children to think positively about themselves and others – the method is based upon: trusting each other, helping each other.
2. teaching a child to become less vulnerable by both verbal and physical training
3. establishing behavior rules together with pupils

Regarding the media's role in prevention and/or reacting on SBV, the following example from Norway was presented. There is a new Norwegian anti-bully program: two well known TV stand up comedians offer pupils a speech “Humor and bullying”.

Last but not least, participants discussed about media literacy programs to help children and

teenagers to cope with different types of violence portrayed by media.

## **Talking with Chris Schuepp**

We also had on the conference site a special thread where the participants were invited to talk to a special guests Mr. Chris Schuepp. Mr. Schuepp is working with the UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, coordinating the Young People's Media Network in Europe & Central Asia. The main outcomes of the discussions held in this thread were:

### **What can we expect from "the media" concerning SBV?**

#### **Sensational coverage or sensitivity?**

#### **Making the problem bigger or giving solutions?**

- it really depends on where the stories are published and how they are published.
- most SBV cases are rather "local"
- the pressure of the community is very important
- the central media is mainly interested in presenting the big cases of SBV
- an important criteria in headlines must be the number of persons involved in the event, which brings statistics into the picture
- statistics on SBV are necessary to be presented in media because these are news the whole nation needs to read
- an important aspect that must be taken into consideration is what benefits a victim can obtain by participating in interviews and what is the right media to use

### **What kind of news do we want in the media?' And what do we want to achieve?**

- the aim is to lower the degree of SBV in our societies, i.e. that young people understand that bullying and violence are wrong
- concerning the news we want in the media: people can only influence the media so that they achieve their goals

### **Do the bullies ever appear in the media?**

- there are different types of bullies in the mass media
- it would be rather difficult for an active bully to appear in the media programs because he/she would be exposed and consequently in a high risk situation
- it is better to present in media why a person became a bully rather than to allow the bully to tell his/her story
- ex-bullies should be given credit, telling their stories and showing how they stopped the wrong-doing may have a positive effect

### **Are you aware of a monitoring that identifies all (or the great majority) of the SBV forms, of some research showing its probable effects and of some studies indicating possible measures?**

Proposed solutions:

- 1) Try to build confidence in the victim and help him/her find a group of friends who support him/her to match the number of bullies
- 2) Isolate the "bully leader" and crack the bully group
- 3) Try and crack the bully group first by taking out the "weaker" bullies, exposing the bully

leader and leaving him on his own

Con's arguments for those written above:

- for point 1: it has to be achieved solidarity instead of splitting the group up in two opposite gangs

- for points 2 and 3: these would lead to isolation

Proposed solution: confront the bully and his/her parents to what is going on and present to the parents the fact that their child has the role of the leader

- the media coverage of happy-slapping makes the whole thing worse

- journalists are not enough aware of what a huge effect on young people their reports, articles, news pieces can have

- some "social responsibility training" for journalists would be necessary on this front

- the change in the group dynamic caused by the involvement of students who weren't bullies or victims is one of the main factors of success in the intervention-prevention programs [Smith, Pepler & Rigby (eds.) (2004). *Bullying in schools. How successful can interventions be?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.]

- researches have shown that the bully ends up worst then his/her victim

### **Groups involved in SBV:**

There can be distinguished bullies, victims, but also bystanders who support in a passive or active way to the bullies (mainly) and/or the victims (but they don't need to be directly involved in the aggressive act)

## **Conclusions and Outlook**

The online conference "School Bullying and Violence: the Role of Media" tried to explore the way media reports school bullying and violence.

We first started by giving a couple of definitions on school bullying and violence. Then we identified the information sources that journalists use when writing about SBV, we discovered the different types of media reports from different countries and the way SBV is approached in these countries. We explored the subject of the rights and risks of the victims exposed by media. There was a general agreement that victims of SBV should be protected by the media and there was suggested that there should be some advisory service for the victims. We discussed about the skills one should have in relationship with the media. We discussed about media's role and it was agreed that it should be of informing and offering neutral and fact based information to the public. We discussed about the different media and their target groups and about the messages sent through media. We also approached the subject regarding the influence of media on children's behaviour and about the importance both media and parents have in educating children. There were also discussed different methods of working with media.

The discussions of this conference can be regarded as a starting point that aims at stimulating further discussions and research. Though the outcomes of the conference drew a picture of the role media has in SBV, there are still many aspects that can be approached on this issue, that

couldn't be discussed to time limitations of a 4-weeks-conference with a limited number of participants.

There are numerous questions that can be answered and thus contribute to the conference's outcomes like e.g.:

- What is the role of media in School Bullying and Violence?
- How can media participate at the prevention of SBV?
- Can media be a vector of safety feeling about SBV?
- How do media reports influence the development of prevention of SBV?

The discussions revealed that media has a very important role in school bullying and violence, it can help rising the awareness about the phenomenon; it can contribute to the prevention of SBV. It is also a very powerful tool, if used right, for those fighting against SBV. People working with media have to know how to choose and collaborate with the right media in order to reach their target groups. The information sent through the media can be very valuable.

It is necessary for the media to be aware of the victims' rights regarding media exposure and of the risks victims are exposed to if the media doesn't respect those rights.

Good collaborations between the media and those involved in the fight against SBV can contribute a lot to the process of preventing this phenomenon. The outcomes of this conference are also presented on the conference blog, not only to inform people but also to invite them to be part of the discussions.

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Conference Blog of the VISIONARIES-NET Project. <http://blog.bullying-in-school.info>

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Online Conference "School Bullying and Violence: the Role of Media", May 15 - June 9, 2006. <http://conference3.bullying-in-school.info>

VISIONARY – A European Internet Portal on School Bullying and Violence. <http://bullying-in-school.info>