



A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO THE PREVENTION OF SCHOOL-BASED AND DIGITAL VIOLENCE: EDUCATION AS A FOUNDATION FOR PSYCHOSOCIAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

This article examines a comprehensive framework for preventing violence in both school and digital settings. Faculty members of the Department of Psychology at Fergana State University designed and validated a questionnaire for detecting incidents of violence in schools. Based on the survey results—and in partnership with the “Contribution to the Future” Charitable Foundation and UNESCO’s Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE)—a practice-oriented course was developed for teachers, psychologists, and students. The course integrates international best practices and recent legislative acts of the Republic of Uzbekistan in the fields of child protection, education, and cybersecurity.

Keywords: Digital violence–bullying; cyberbullying; school violence; psychosocial well-being; prevention; legislation; psychologically safe educational environment.

Introduction

In today’s world, one of the most powerful trends is the rapid advance of digitalization and artificial intelligence. This phenomenon represents both a global challenge and a civilizational shift whose full impact humanity has yet to comprehend. Paradoxically, education and science—although theoretically tasked with analyzing technological trajectories and forecasting their consequences—often find themselves reacting belatedly, forced to restructure only after the change is under way.

Digitalization now permeates every sphere of life, transforming education, communication, and leisure, while simultaneously prompting a search for new



scientific and pedagogical paradigms. The pace and direction of digital innovation confront the academic community with tasks that demand not only critical reflection but also the formulation of coherent, coordinated strategies for systemic collaboration. For example, integrating digital tools into educational systems—and bridging the informational gap between generations of users (teachers and students)—requires a systematic reassessment of how information technologies affect the psyche and consciousness, both positively and negatively.

Digital technologies profoundly reshape childhood and adolescence, influencing core social processes: how children learn and access information, form friendships, sustain social ties, spend their free time, and interact with society at large. Psychologists warn that digital dependency poses serious mental-health risks for school-aged children, including heightened exposure to cyberbullying, social isolation, and increased anxiety.

Current Context and Key Threats

The emergence of large-scale digitalization has created an unprecedented challenge for psychological and educational science. Although the phenomenon is both global and multifaceted, the field has yet to formulate an unambiguous, evidence-based response. Experts emphasize that pervasive online connectivity exposes children to new threats that jeopardize their well-being, including breaches of safety and privacy—cyberbullying, sexting, harmful or extremist content, identity theft and misuse of personal data, cyber-fraud and financial scams, as well as the rapid dissemination of fake news and misinformation.

Aggressive behavior that once remained within school walls now migrates into cyberspace. Compared with face-to-face bullying, cyberbullying poses a higher risk of repeated victimization because text, images, and videos posted online are difficult to remove. Distinctive features of online abuse include

- **Anonymity**, which affords perpetrators a sense of elusiveness and impunity while amplifying victims' helplessness;
- **Physical and psychological distance**, which decreases empathic concern on the part of aggressors;
- **An unlimited audience**, whereby the number of bystanders or supporters can escalate uncontrollably;
- **Round-the-clock access**, making harassment potentially continuous.



Despite these differences, cyberbullying, like traditional bullying, is characterized by repetition, intentionality, and an imbalance of power.

Heterogeneous Forms of Cyberbullying

Because online abuse takes multiple forms, the phenomenon includes, but is not limited to:

- **Impersonation**—spreading false or defamatory content while posing as the victim, often without the victim’s knowledge;
- **Exclusion**—deliberately blocking an individual from online groups or activities;
- **Flaming**—hostile, inflammatory exchanges in digital communication;
- **Stalking**—persistent online pursuit, including repeated threatening messages;
- **Harassment**—recurring insults or degrading remarks sent directly to the victim;
- **Outing or doxing**—coaxing personal information and subsequently disseminating it without consent;
- **Non-consensual sexting**—sharing intimate or nude images of a person without authorization.

Cyberbullying, therefore, constitutes a form of aggression enacted through digital platforms—social networks, messaging apps, online games—that has become particularly prevalent among school-age users who spend increasing amounts of time on the Internet. Recent studies indicate that roughly 30 percent of children and adolescents encounter cyberbullying at least once in their lives.

Escalating Aggression and the Need for a Comprehensive Preventive Strategy

Psychologists and educators express growing concern that the accelerating digitalization of society is accompanied by rising levels of aggression among children and adolescents. School-based and digital violence—namely, bullying and cyberbullying—has therefore become a socially significant issue. The most severe consequences of cyberbullying include suicidal behaviour, the development of depressive and anxiety disorders, self-harm, the use of psychoactive substances, and a wide range of psychosomatic symptoms.

The rapid expansion of digital technologies and the attendant increase in information load for school-age children underscore the need for a comprehensive



approach to prevention within the educational system. In Uzbekistan, the cyberbullying problem is not yet as acute as in more highly connected countries, owing to relatively lower Internet penetration (particularly in rural areas, which account for roughly half of the population), cultural and mental-set specificities, national child-rearing traditions, and limited proficiency in Russian and English among a considerable share of young people. Nevertheless, recognition of the seriousness and inevitability—albeit somewhat delayed—of this challenge has prompted proactive measures.

At Fergana State University, psychologists from the Department of Psychology have designed, validated, and administered a questionnaire to identify bullying and cyberbullying incidents in educational settings. Building on the survey findings, and in partnership with the “Contribution to the Future” Charitable Foundation (Sberbank, Russian Federation) and UNESCO’s Institute for Information Technologies in Education (UNESCO IITE), the team developed a practice-oriented training course for teachers, school psychologists, administrators, and students entitled “A Comprehensive Approach to Preventing School-Based and Digital Violence: The Role of Education in Promoting Psychosocial Well-Being”. The relevance of this initiative is reinforced by policy decisions adopted at the national level. Like many other countries, Uzbekistan must respond to the challenges posed by globalization and a digitally transforming world. On 15 May 2025, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On the Protection of Children from All Forms of Violence” enters into force, establishing fundamental guarantees for safeguarding the rights of minors. In parallel, the Law “On Cybersecurity” underscores the importance of creating a safe educational environment. Together, these legislative acts provide the legal foundation for systemic, evidence-based efforts to prevent school-based and digital violence and to foster the psychosocial well-being of children and adolescents.

Methods

A mixed-methods design was employed, combining systematic observation, comparative analysis, and a student survey based on an author-constructed questionnaire. In addition, data from group discussions with teachers and psychologists were analyzed in parallel with the survey results. The respondents were undergraduate students from regional universities. Instructional materials



were developed in accordance with UNESCO international standards and well-established anti-bullying programmes (Olweus; KiVa).

The “Perception of Bullying and Cyberbullying” psychodiagnostic questionnaire contains items that assess four core domains:

1. Perception of bullying
2. Personal involvement and reaction
3. Evaluation of the role of adults and the school
4. Interest in learning and prevention

Responses are scored on a four-point scale (0–3), reflecting the respondent’s maturity and readiness for constructive action. Aggregate scores are interpreted on a three-tier scale: high (76–100 % of the maximum), medium (40–75 %), and low (< 40 %). The instrument was validated by calculating Cronbach’s alpha and conducting factor and correlational analyses.

Results

The aim of the present study was to examine how university students perceive bullying and cyberbullying using a bespoke 43-item questionnaire. The instrument covers four thematic scales: (1) Perception of bullying, (2) Personal involvement and reaction, (3) Evaluation of the role of adults and the school, and (4) Interest in learning and prevention. Data were obtained from 72 students (94 % female; M = 18.7 years).

Findings by Scale

Scale 1: Perception of Bullying Items 6, 7, 9, 14, 26, 43

Approximately 14 % of students report witnessing bullying *frequently or constantly*. At the same time, more than 80 % acknowledge that bullying constitutes a serious problem within the educational environment. Nevertheless, over half of the respondents point to a degree of *tolerance* toward bullying on the part of both peers and adults. Most students can identify behavioural indicators of victimisation—including social exclusion and marked changes in emotional state. Conclusion: Students perceive bullying acutely; however, they believe that those around them under-estimate the gravity of the problem.

Scale 2: Personal Involvement and Reaction Items 10–13, 15–19, 28–29

A clear majority (> 70 %) are willing to intervene if they feel supported by adults; yet only about one-third declare a readiness to protect a victim independently.



Nearly half admit they are uncertain about the appropriate course of action in such situations. More than 80 % condemn aggression and accept personal responsibility for the collective climate.

Conclusion

Students show a predisposition to act but lack confidence and practical know-how for effective prevention.

Scale 3: Evaluation of the Role of Adults and the School *Items 20, 30–35, 38–42*

Virtually all respondents believe that adults are responsible for combating bullying and should intervene. Roughly 92 % hold school administrators accountable when they fail to act. However, fewer than half are aware of existing youth-support centres or anonymous reporting channels. Participants propose developing school regulations aimed at fostering a culture of non-violence. Conclusion: Young people expect decisive action from schools and adults, yet their awareness of available mechanisms remains low.

Scale 4: Interest in Education and Prevention *Items 21–25, 27, 36–37*

More than 80 % express interest in training programmes that raise awareness about bullying. Three-quarters support the creation of online resources—specifically a Telegram channel—featuring educational content on prevention. Students emphasise the importance of involving both parents and teachers in preventive initiatives.

Results of the Study on Perceptions of Bullying and Cyberbullying

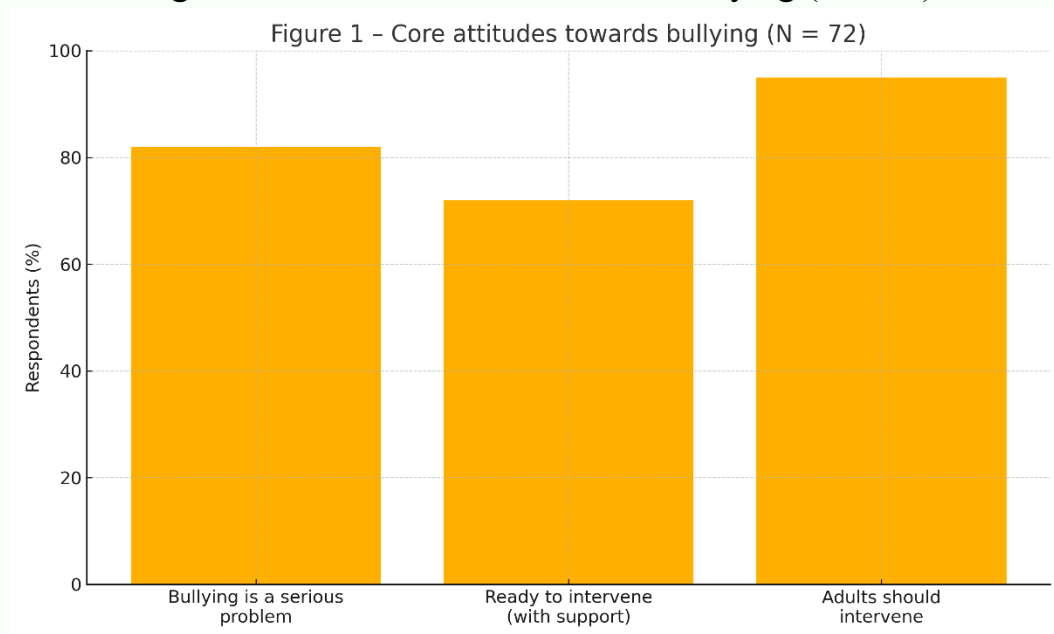
Table 1 – Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

Characteristic	Value
Sample size (N)	72
Female (%)	94
Mean age (years)	18.7

Table 2 – Key Survey Indicators by Scale

Scale	Indicator	Respondents (%)
Perception of bullying	Frequent/constant cases reported	14
Perception of bullying	Bullying viewed as a serious problem	82
Perception of bullying	Tolerance from peers/adults	55
Personal involvement & reaction	Ready to intervene (with adult support)	72
Personal involvement & reaction	Ready to protect victim independently	33
Personal involvement & reaction	Unsure how to act	50
Role of adults & school	Adults should intervene	95
Role of adults & school	School administration responsible for inaction	92
Role of adults & school	Aware of support centres	45

Figure 1 – Core Attitudes Towards Bullying (N = 72)



Conclusions

The survey confirmed the presence of multiple forms of school-based and digital violence among students. While most respondents showed a keen interest in educational and awareness-raising initiatives, they also reported limited knowledge of protection mechanisms and response algorithms. These findings highlight the



need to embed structured violence-prevention modules in the school curriculum. A four-module course has therefore been developed:

1. Concepts of bullying and cyberbullying
2. Recognition of, and response to, victimisation
3. Building a psychologically safe school environment
4. The role of adults in prevention

Overall, the data reveal that adolescents are highly sensitive to the problem of bullying, possess a strong sense of fairness, and are motivated to learn. At the same time, they lack practical skills, and school structures remain insufficiently engaged in prevention efforts.

Recommendations

To curb the spread of bullying in educational settings, the following measures are advised:

- Develop training programmes that teach evidence-based response strategies and promote non-violent communication skills;
- Strengthen institutional accountability on the part of school administrators for timely intervention;
- Create anonymous, easily accessible platforms for psychological and legal support geared toward adolescents;
- Expand information and outreach activities aimed at parents and teachers.

These results can serve as the foundation for a comprehensive prevention programme designed to enhance adolescent well-being within the educational environment.

Discussion

Cross-cultural assessments of cyberbullying are complicated by varying definitions, disparate measurement tools, and the cultural specificities of the countries studied (see *Children's Well-Being in the Digital Age*, HSE, 2019, p. 19). Comparative analyses with international research (Olweus; Salmivalli; Pepler, among others) indicate that the most effective strategy is a holistic approach engaging all stakeholders in the educational process—students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Practice-oriented training not only raises awareness but also reduces violence in schools and fosters a healthier psychosocial climate.



Conclusion

A psychologically safe educational environment is essential for unlocking students' potential and mobilising their internal resources. Such an environment cannot be achieved without systematic efforts to prevent bullying and cyberbullying. The course and diagnostic tools developed in this project should be piloted in regional schools and universities; this will make it possible to construct an effective intervention-and-prevention model that aligns with internationally recognised standards. We therefore recommend introducing the programme across educational institutions in Uzbekistan as a mandatory component of pre- and in-service training for teachers and school psychologists.

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