

ENABLE Anti-bullying Program in Hungarian Schools

Anna Siegler, Dóra Eszter Várnai, Tamás Hoffmann,
Bence Basa & Éva Jármí

Abstract

Opposite to some international trends, the prevalence of bullying has recently been increasing in Hungary. To tackle the issue of school violence, various approaches emerge as a solution. ENABLE anti-bullying program was developed by the European Schoolnet and it was adapted in Hungary in 2016. The program targets 12-18-year-old students and uses the social and emotional learning (SEL) approach. This paper presents the Hungarian implementation process and how ENABLE activities support the transformation of explicit knowledge about bullying (e.g. definition, roles, consequences), the development of skills (such as intervention in bullying situations and supporting the victim), and finally shape anti-bullying norms and attitudes. General experiences and difficulties of the program implementation are discussed.

Keywords: prevention, bullying, ENABLE program, SEL

Introduction

Bullying is a widespread phenomenon that can significantly affect young people's lives. Nationally representative data from the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children Study (HBSC) shows that around 30% of Hungarian youngsters are involved in offline or online bullying. Regarding offline victimization, 28.4% of 11-18 year-old students reported to have been bullied at least once and 9.5% has been chronically bullied. The rate of regular perpetrators is 6%. When considering online victims, 17.8% of young people reported that they have been bullied online at least once, whilst the rate of those having bullied others online at least once is 12.7% (Németh & Várnai, 2019). With these rates, Hungary is considered to be moderately-highly affected by offline or online bullying (Inchley et al., 2020). Children who seem to be uninvolved in bullying situations can still be witnesses or be affected indirectly. Notably, bullying is a matter of public health, impacting the life outcomes of both bullies and victims, in varying ways (Masiello & Schroeder, 2014). Peer violence is a strong risk factor for several negative behavioural, health, social, and/or emotional problems, the experience of school bullying functions as a stepping stone towards undesirable life outcomes (Arseneault, Bowes & Shakoor, 2010). Therefore, a bullying prevention program could serve as a crime prevention program, as well as a form of promoting public health. Cross-national comparisons draw attention to the

importance of national efforts to address bullying as the prevalence of bullying behaviour decreased in countries where prevention and health promotion efforts are supported continuously (Molcho et al., 2009).

According to their comprehensive meta-analysis of the effectiveness of bullying prevention programs, Gaffney, Ttofi and Farrington (2019) state that anti-bullying programs have the power to significantly reduce bullying perpetration and bullying victimization. Their results suggest that anti-bullying programs reduce school-bullying perpetration by approximately 19–20% and school-bullying victimization by approximately 15–16%. The most effective programs have been found to be multicomponent, schoolwide programs that contain parent training, improved playground supervision, disciplinary methods, school conferences, videos, information for parents, classroom rules, and classroom management (Farrington & Ttofi, 2009), individual counselling and teacher training (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007). Prevention programs were found to be more effective in schools with more positive student-teacher relationships (Richard, Schneider & Mallet, 2012), targeting older students in middle or secondary schools versus students in primary schools (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011). It was also observed that higher implementation fidelity leads to stronger program outcomes (Durlak et al., 2011), and according to Merrell et al. (2008) programs are much more likely to show effects on attitudes, self-perception and knowledge than on bullying behaviour.

There are several different programs or approaches available for schools. One of the popular approaches of school anti-bullying programs is the socio-emotional learning approach. Social and emotional learning (SEL) is a structured way to improve a wide range of students' social and emotional competences and impact bullying at the individual and peer levels of the school social-ecology. SEL has been shown to be an effective component in comprehensive bullying prevention and other interventions targeting problems such as substance abuse (Vreeman & Carroll, 2007; Smith & Low, 2013).

Besides many advantages, school bullying prevention programs demonstrate some challenges as well. For example, it takes a long time for anti-bullying attitudes and norms to develop, thereby resulting in reduced levels of bullying and better school climate. For this reason, educational administration seeks solutions that can lead to visible results in a shorter time frame. One such strategy that has been proposed is the use of police officers in schools. Devlin, Santos and Gottfriedson (2018) evaluated the efficacy of school resource officers as an intervention against bullying in 480 schools in the United States. Their findings indicate that school resource officers do not have a reducing effect, similar to policies that use metal detectors and video monitoring to address school violence, which are also ineffective, because school violence is an issue that encompasses more than instances of injury by physical force, e.g. exclusion, manipulation, gossiping (Scott, Nelson & Liaupsin, 2001). Such results confirm that programs that focus on components such as teaching social and emotional competency skills, improving relationships between students and adults, and creating a positive school environment may be more effective.

The ENABLE program

The ENABLE (European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments) program is an EU-funded project which combats bullying and contributes to the wellbeing of young people aged 11-14 through social and emotional development and peer education. The ENABLE high school program builds on the recognition that peer group relations notably influence learning processes and school belonging. While a hostile classroom environment distracts students' time and energy, the feeling of emotional and physical safety provides an optimal condition for development. ENABLE takes a holistic and sustainable approach to reduce bullying by involving students, staff and parents/carers. Using the social and emotional learning (SEL) approach, the program addresses how relationships can be maintained, restored, and how emotions play a crucial part in managing social life. The SEL approach encourages students to reflect on their own and their peers' behaviour, and contributes to the development of skills that support bullying prevention, e.g. self-regulation, assertiveness, social problem solving. The original program covers the following program elements: the SEL module, which is a set of 10 social and emotional learning activities (lesson plans), the Peer support module (that includes materials for peer support leaders and for peer supporters as well), parent's pack, ENABLE research and impact assessment tool, and resources for communication.

Hungarian implementation

Based on the prevalence data of school violence in Hungary and schools' subjective experiences of increasing bullying, in 2016 the Hungarian Educational Authority decided to adapt the ENABLE program and introduce it to schools. During the Hungarian adaptation, some of the original program elements were changed, mainly due to fewer examples or adverse experiences of peer support systems. The main program elements in Hungary cover: SEL module (10 lesson plans) with resources, AB (anti-bullying) module (10 lesson plans) with resources, teachers manual and training manual for school staff, an information booklet for parents, an intervention tool to tackle acute cases of bullying, and an evaluation toolkit. Since 2019 annually 600 school psychologists or teachers have been trained in the program. The SEL module is recommended for classes in which a high resistance on behalf of participating students can be expected, where there is no experience for non-traditional class activities or elaboration of sensitive topics, and where students require the development of self-insight or basic SEL skills. The AB module predominantly targets the development of anti-bullying class norms and attitudes and it is recommended where there is an existing experience in elaboration of sensitive issues (e.g. in classes trained in drama pedagogy) and where students require more intensive activities. These two modules can be applied consecutively, starting with the SEL module.

Program elements

Lesson plans

The target group for the 10 lessons in both modules are 12-18-year-old students. The units are designed as a sequence and they are suggested to be carried out in the class every 2-4 weeks. The lessons contain diverse elaboration methods: individual work, pair work, small group work, frontal instruction, group discussion, watching videos, and using applications.

Table 1. Content description of the two types of lesson plans

Lessons	SEL module	AB (anti-bullying) module
1.	<i>Who am I?</i> : introduction of socio-emotional intelligence as an important and valuable skill	<i>What is bullying?</i> : the nature of bullying, definition of bullying
2.	<i>How are you?</i> : developing a vocabulary in emotions and inner states	<i>Why do people get bullied for?</i> : reasons for victimization
3.	<i>Reading emotions</i> : categorization and use of emotions	<i>Why do people bully others?</i> : reasons for perpetration
4.	<i>The nature of bullying</i> : bullying roles, definition, thoughts and feelings of victims, perpetrators, defenders, bystanders	<i>Myths about bullying</i> : misbeliefs regarding peer violence
5.	<i>It is not bullying, just...</i> : tackling moral disengagement	<i>Reactions to bullying</i> : emotional and behavioural responses, consequences of bullying
6.	<i>How to intervene in bullying situations?</i> : direct and safe intervention in bullying situations	<i>Indirect support</i> : bystander's role, supporting the victim
7.	<i>Supporting the victim</i> : reducing adverse effects of bullying	<i>Indirect support2</i> : developing a prosocial class climate
8.	<i>Steering emotions</i> : coping with negative emotions as a background of bullying	<i>Direct intervention</i> : safe intervention for different types of bullying
9.	<i>Foundations for change</i> : benefits of the program on individual and class community levels	<i>Reporting bullying</i> : promoting help seeking behaviour
10.	<i>What's next?</i> : goal setting for the future	<i>Our class</i> : developing and ritually accepting class level anti-bullying rules

Teacher's manual with resources

Teachers, school psychologists or other experts working in schools can participate in the three-day training to prepare for the program implementation. They learn about the lesson plans in both modules, about the intervention tool, the evaluation methods and some techniques to introduce the program for parents, school principals or colleagues. Within the training, participants can practice the most important class level activities and they are provided with a teacher's manual. This manual contains detailed lesson plans and the necessary resources. The manual explains the main aims of each lesson, presents the estimated time for preparation and execution of the activities, the detailed instructions for warm-up, main activities

and closing summaries, possible alternatives for activities, further considerations, optional homework, and available multimedia tools.

Parent's pack

Parents are important partners in school anti-bullying programs, and therefore it is of key importance to educate them about the appropriate attitude towards peer violence. In the ENABLE program, it is recommended to invite parents to the school and inform them about the bullying phenomenon, the program itself and how their children can benefit from the activities. Besides, parents' meetings or in case such meetings cannot be organized, an online information booklet is available for parents or caregivers containing the most important messages. The booklet explains to parents what bullying is and what it is not, how prevalent it is in Hungarian schools, what are the most important signs of bullying, what parents can do if their child is involved either as a victim or as a bully, what they can do against cyberbullying and how they can participate and support school anti-bullying programs.

Intervention tool to tackle acute cases of bullying

This intervention tool is suggested to be regularly used in schools in order to tackle acute cases. The regular bullying case management ensures that bullying does not remain hidden, in fact, it will be tackled and if victims seek help it will be taken seriously, and so it is worth reporting bullying. Targeted discussions are led by teams within the schools and are aimed to express support for the victim, provide defence and enable him/her to talk about his/her needs in the situation. Then an effort is made to raise the awareness of perpetrators that bullying happened and give them an opportunity to put things right. Therefore, a restorative, confrontative approach is suggested for leading these discussions. The indicated interventions not only involve discussions with victims and bullies, but also includes selected prosocial classmates who are asked to get involved in supporting the victimized classmate. The school teams are able to run discussions with involved parties once the cases of bullying come to light. Both school staff and parents are given information about bullying and advice concerning how to detect it, which hopefully leads to more awareness and skill in identifying ongoing bullying.

Evaluation toolkit

The evaluation toolkit has two main components: pre-post and peer-nomination questionnaires. Both evaluation tools are administered to the students at the same time in an online form, in the classroom during school hours. The data from these questionnaires are stored and analysed by Eötvös Loránd University.

First, the *input and output questionnaires* help the program impact assessment by monitoring change in prevalence, attitudes and competences. Control classes with similar conditions, but without intervention, also participate in the data collection in order to investigate whether the possible impact is really due to the program itself. The following topics are included in the questionnaire package: demographic

questions, perceived severity of bullying, the prevalence of online and offline bullying perpetration and victimization, intervention intention, bullying attitudes, a 3-item-empathy scale, items measuring social-emotional intelligence (e.g. I can talk about my feelings, I try to take other's perspectives), teacher support, classmate support, class climate, and the perceived effort of the school to reduce violence. The output questionnaires are planned to be administered after the 10-hour-school activity at the end of the school year.

The second evaluation tool is a *peer-nomination questionnaire* that is intended to be administered and handled by program implementers (class teacher or school psychologist) using the software eSzocmet. At the ENABLE teacher training, this form of evaluation is suggested for implementers to enable them to uncover the current bullying situation in their class: to identify those at risk and the students who should be mobilized to defend the victims. For the administration of the peer-nomination questionnaires, students have to provide their names, which are stored anonymously, and only teachers, can identify the students. To comply with ethical standards, parents are informed about both questionnaires prior to the data collection, and students can refuse the participation at any time. The questionnaire aims to reveal the hidden structures, subgroups, alliances in the class. However, besides common sociometric questions (positive and negative peer nominations to explore sympathy, community functions, popularity and different skills within the class), the questionnaire includes an additional three items measuring bullying involvement: e.g. peer nomination for the role of victim, perpetrator and defender.

Program evaluation in Hungary

Since the beginning of the Hungarian implementation of the ENABLE program in 2016, two phases of the program evaluation have taken place. First, the pre-post questionnaire from the evaluation toolkit has been piloted in the 2017/2018 academic year, involving 776 students (case and control students) from 24 schools. This study provided an opportunity to review the adaptation of the evaluation instruments, compare the prevalence nationally and internationally, and specify the implementation process. Two years later, following the adaptation work of measuring instruments, the pre-intervention part of the evaluation process was administered at the beginning of the academic year 2019/2020 around October-November, by a total of 1.166 students enrolled in grades 6–10 (51.6% female) from schools in Hungary. There were 390 students from control classes, whilst 777 students from ENABLE intervention classes, participants ranged in age from 10 to 18 years ($M=12.87$, $SD=1.5$). Prevalence data were compared with data from available representative national surveys, while the responses of the experimental and control groups were compared using independent sample t-test.

On March 16, 2020, Hungarian schools were closed due to the COVID-19 epidemic. This change not only hindered the administration of the classroom-based output questionnaires expected in spring, but also interrupted the program

implementation. For these reasons, we could not carry out the program impact assessment as planned, instead we initiated a different progress evaluation method: feedback questionnaires targeting implementers. This type of evaluation helps to track the progress of program design and implementation, it provides an opportunity to reflect on the program. The program implementers were asked to provide feedback regarding their experience with ENABLE anti-bullying program. The questionnaire contained questions in the following topics: general circumstances of the program implementation (in which class, how many occasions etc.), the perceived reception of the program by students and school staff, the perceived effectiveness of the program from different aspects (e.g. in reducing bullying, in improving class climate), implementer's fidelity to the original lesson plans, the program's fitness to class' needs, and possible unexpected events during implementation. For the present study, percentage of relevant answers were reviewed.

Results

In the pilot survey the prevalence for traditional bullying victimization and bullying perpetration was higher than on a representative sample of Hungarian adolescents (Németh & Várnai, 2019). According to our initial data we concluded that students having been bullied are more sensitive and demonstrate stronger anti-bullying attitudes and higher intervention intention. This suggests that the anti-bullying program should target non-involved students' attitudes first. When comparing pre and post data, we found that students who participated in the ENABLE program considered the schools' efforts for reducing bullying significantly higher than control students ($t(247)=3,458$; $P=0,00$). Throughout the academic year the number of students who would intervene in case of bullying raised significantly among ENABLE students (from the initial 46.2% to 52%), while it remained unchanged in control students (48.46%) (Siegler, Várnai & Jármi, 2019). It has to be noted that the number of students having been bullied or having bullied others also increased among both ENABLE and control students over time, which might have been due to increased sensitivity for bullying cases or increasing social fatigue during the school year.

In 2019 regarding traditional bullying, 41.6% of students reported that they have never been bullied, while 17.6% reported having been victimized at least two or three times a month. 78.1% of students have never been bullied online, the rate of regular (at least 2-3 times a month) online victims is 3.6%. Regarding perpetration, 52.7% reported that they have not bullied others at all, 6.9% have bullied others more than two or three times a month. About cyber perpetration we can state that 86.5% have never bullied others online, and 1.9% have done it regularly. These prevalence rates did not differ significantly between control and ENABLE students but prevalence rates in involved schools (and those from the pilot survey) seem to be somewhat higher than the national representative data, especially regarding occasional victimization or perpetration. It may refer to the higher involvement in

participating schools or it may be due to other methodology reasons (Németh & Várnai, 2019). Students consider the severity of bullying cases in their school of an average of 3.71 points on a five-item scale and there was no significant difference found here between control and intervention classes. In classes where students scored higher on the measures of empathy and socio-emotional intelligence, the intention to intervene in bullying cases was found to be higher. Again, classes with higher scores for socio-emotional intelligence are characterized by stronger anti-bullying attitudes. Results from both the pilot and the final data collection concluded that bullying attitudes significantly correlate with bullying involvement.

Finally, 28 program implementers filled in the program feedback questionnaires. Most of the implementers led the lessons together with the class teachers. Some implementers (17.9%) thought that students liked the lessons *very much*, and according to most of them (75%) students *somewhat* liked the program. The implementers thought that students' interest towards the program increased to a greater extent than principals' or fellow teachers' interest. Regarding program effectiveness, 85.8% of participants considered the program as effective and they thought that the program's biggest advantage lies in increasing explicit knowledge about bullying. 75% of implementers considered the continuation of the program and 50% thought it is worth the efforts (34.1% thought it is moderately worth the efforts). 46.6% of the participants reported that some students had difficulties getting involved in the ENABLE activities and discipline problems arose occasionally.

Conclusion

Based on our evaluations and experiences, the ENABLE program is an effective anti-bullying instrument. Pre-intervention data showed that participating schools have a higher prevalence of peer violence which can be interpreted as an increased problem awareness. Although the program's impact assessment was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the currently available data shows that ENABLE is an appropriate program for educating students about bullying and that it promotes safe interventions in bullying situations. Students consider ENABLE as an important effort of the school to reduce bullying and they value it. During the adaptation of this anti-bullying program, evidence-based knowledge and specialties of Hungarian schools were taken into account. ENABLE covers the most important and effective program elements, such as class level interactive activities, teacher training and a detailed manual, evaluation tool, intervention tool to tackle acute bullying cases, and information for parents. The Educational Authority of Hungary supports this program and offers free training for 600 teachers or other school experts annually.

However, there are some conclusions to be drawn for successful program implementation. First of all, schools have to be dedicated to the program as it requires extra efforts from teachers and from the school as a community. Class level activities are best led in pairs (ideally the classteacher and the school psychologist). It

involves double human resources which have to be supported and valued by school principals. According to our results, the reason for possible program infidelity (change of the original lesson plans) originates from the lack of time. This means that implementers are not provided with an appropriate time frame: they either do not have time for 10 lessons or/and they have a shorter time frame occasionally (instead of double lessons or 60 minutes, they only have 30-40 minutes for one activity). As class-level activities contain role plays or situation games, it requires competent and highly trained school personnel. Less confident teachers rarely choose these kinds of activities and this may limit the use of the program, especially in special student populations.

The intervention tool for tackling acute cases of bullying is also an activity that teachers or school staff have to do as an additional duty. It is also a time-consuming process until students and the school community get used to the consistent management of acute cases. At first it may be hard for students to determine what needs to be reported and this may lead to over- or further underreporting of violent actions. It takes time until the community realizes that there is an agent for managing these cases who will intervene. However, for victims the reliability and transparency of school bullying management policy are very important in order to increase the intention for reporting. Ideally, the anti-bullying efforts of a school are proclaimed in a written anti-bullying action plan that is developed and accepted by the whole community. Universal and shared concerns on bullying can ensure the equal and transparent treatment of peer violence and this can be presented for parents as well. The research draws attention to the importance of schoolwide prevention efforts that provide positive behaviour support and involve all school staff in prevention activities (Ross & Horner, 2009). On the side of education administration, systematic follow-up of participating schools, constantly revised and updated program resources are key elements for further program development.

The ENABLE anti-bullying program is a developing project in Hungary. After the adaptation, it was piloted, updated and then schools started to implement it. A program impact assessment was planned and data was collected. Parallely, teacher training took place and new trainers joined the training team. Lately, based on similar initiations, a side project was started that tackles cyberbullying in the form of online activities. Besides this, the ENABLE program has many potentials to develop, for example, introducing alternative activities for lower school graders or for special schools enrolled by special populations. On the school level, ENABLE activities can be extended with other anti-bullying initiatives e.g. restorative organizations, drama activities, anti-bullying theatres.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by Grant No. 2018-1.2.1-NKP-2018-00006 of the National Excellence Program of National Research, Development and Innovation Office (NKFIH), and the first author was supported by the ÚNKP-20-3 New National

Excellence Program of the Ministry for Innovation and Technology from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund (ÚNKP-20-3-II-PTE-558).

References

- Arseneault, L., Bowes, L. & Shakoor, S. (2010): Bullying victimization in youths and mental health problems: 'much ado about nothing'?. *Psychological medicine*, 40(5), 717-729.
- Devlin, D. N., Santos, M. R. & Gottfredson, D. C. (2018): An evaluation of police officers in schools as a bullying intervention. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 71, 12-21.
- Durlak, J. A., Weissberg, R. P., Dymnicki, A. B., Taylor, R. D. & Schellinger, K. B. (2011): The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*, 82(1), 405-432.
- Farrington, D. P. & Ttofi, M. M. (2009): School-based programs to reduce bullying and victimization. *Campbell systematic reviews*, 5(1), 1-148.
- Gaffney, H., Ttofi, M. M. & Farrington, D. P. (2019): Evaluating the effectiveness of school-bullying prevention programs: An updated meta-analytical review. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 45, 111-133.
- Inchley, J., Currie, D., Budisavljevic, S., Torsheim, T., Jåstad, A., Cosma, A., Kelly, C. & Arnarsson, Á. M. (Eds.) (2020): *Spotlight on Adolescent Health and Well-Being. Findings from the 2017/2018 Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) Survey in Europe and Canada*. International report. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe.
- Masiello, M. G., Schroeder, D. & Giacarella, A. (2014): *A public health approach to bullying prevention*. Washington, DC: American Public Health Association.
- Merrell, K. W., Gueldner, B. A., Ross, S. W. & Isava, D. M. (2008): How effective are school bullying intervention programs? A meta-analysis of intervention research. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 23(1), 26-42.
- Molcho, M., Craig, W., Due, P., Pickett, W., Harel-fisch, Y. & Overpeck, M. (2009): Cross-national time trends in bullying behaviour 1994-2006: findings from Europe and North America. *International Journal of Public Health*, 54, 225-234.
- Németh, A. & Várnai, D. E. (2019): *Kamaszéletmód Magyarországon: Az iskoláskorú gyermekek egészségmagatartása elnevezésű, az Egészségügyi Világszervezettel együttműködésben megvalósuló nemzetközi kutatás 2018. évi felméréséről készült nemzeti jelentés*. Budapest, Magyarország: L'Harmattan.
- Richard, J. F., Schneider, B. H. & Mallet, P. (2012): Revisiting the whole-school approach to bullying: Really looking at the whole school. *School Psychology International*, 33(3), 263-284.
- Ross, S. W. & Horner, R. H. (2009): Bullying prevention in positive behavior support. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 42(4), 747-59.
- Scott, T. M., Nelson, C. M. & Liaupsin, C. J. (2001): Effective instruction: The forgotten component in preventing school violence. *Education and Treatment of Children*, 24(3), 309-322.
- Siegler, A., Várnai, D. & Jármí, É. (2019): *Az ENABLE program hazai adaptációjának hatásvizsgálata-reflexió a kezdeti eredmények és felmerülő nehézségek mintázatára*. Elhangzott: a Magyar Pszichológiai Társaság XXVIII. Országos Tudományos Nagygyűlése, Debrecen.
- Smith, B. H. & Low, S. (2013): The Role of Social-Emotional Learning In Bullying Prevention Efforts. *Theory into Practice*, 52(4), 280-287.
- Ttofi, M. M. & Farrington, D. P. (2011): Effectiveness of school-based programs to reduce bullying: A systematic and meta-analytic review. *Journal of experimental criminology*, 7(1), 27-56.
- Vreeman, R. C. & Carroll, A. E. (2007): A Systematic Review of School-Based Interventions to Prevent Bullying. *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, 161(1), 78-88.

Author affiliation

Anna Siegler, PhD Student, University of Pécs, Hungary

Dr. Dóra Eszter Várnai, Eötvös Lóránd University, Hungary

Tamás Hoffmann, PhD Student, Eötvös Lóránd University, Hungary

Bence Basa, M.A., Totel Kft., Hungary

Dr. Éva Jármi, Eötvös Lóránd University, Hungary

Please cite this publication as:

Siegler, A., Várnai, D. E., Hoffmann, T., Basa, B. & Jármi, É. (2021): Enable Anti-bullying Program in Hungarian Schools. *Comparative School Counseling*, 1, 87-97.

