Schoolchildren’s safety at school as a condition for quality education. The present article examines the attitude of pupils from Forms 5 to 12 who live in families of different social characteristics towards safety at school. To disclose the attitudes towards safety at school of pupils coming from families of different social characteristics, a written survey method was chosen for the empirical research. 2,064 pupils of Forms 5 to 12 in Lithuanian comprehensive schools participated in the written survey. The pupils’ survey covered the following aspects: the feeling of safety; the experience of relations with teachers and peers; and the experience of being subjected to humiliation by peers and teachers because of the social and financial situation of one’s family or its lifestyle. As proved by the research outcomes, pupils’ safety at school was related to the social characteristics of their families and parents’ social illnesses. The research outcomes brought out the following trends: the better was the parents’ social status, the safer was the financial and social situation of the family, and the safer the pupils felt at school.

Keywords: pupils, quality education, social characteristics of family, safety, school

Introduction

Safety at school and the ensuring of equal opportunities for all schoolchildren is a crucial (pre)condition of quality education at school. Different surveys related to child’s safety at school (the experience of bullying, aggression, or manifestations of discrimination) witness that child’s right to learn in a safe environment is currently not fully guaranteed. In the documents that regulate national education, one of the most important areas is the development of pupil support, including social-pedagogical, in order to ensure socially just and equal educational opportunities. The Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2011) emphasizes that school has to create a safe learning environment for pupils so that they could realize all their rights and never experience violence, humiliation, or fear. In 2012, a working group formed by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Lithuania developed regulations of teacher and pupil interrelations at school. The regulations provided for sanctions for pupils’ inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour to teachers or pupils at school. The document was intended to help the administration and all the staff of schools to ensure a psychologically and physically safe environment for the school community. Education-regulating and different national documents reflecting the assessment of the situation at school (Studies of Prevalence of Violence at Schools, its Forms, Causes, Prevention, and Measures of Assistance, 2008; Indicators of Social Justice in Education, 2009) prove that pupils’ safety at school remains one of the most topical problems to be addressed.

Both researchers and experts of social-educational work keep discussing the definition of safe school. Most of them agree on essential criteria of a safe environment at school: positive relations in the community in which everyone feels its member; the structure of teaching/learning adapted to child’s abilities; and adults encouraging positive behaviour of children and building the skills of pro-social behaviour (Karmaza, Grigutytė, Karmazė, 2007, Olweus, 2008). Therefore, the essential criterion of child’s safety at school is respectful, non-humiliating, democracy and responsibility values-based relations with peers and teachers. Consequently, the major attribute of safety at school is the feeling of safety at school experienced by pupils who live in families of different social characteristics and a positive character of relations with peers and adult educators.

The conclusions of the research conducted in Lithuania (Barkauskaitė, Mikalauskienė, 2011) witness that pupils in Lithuania do not feel safe, especially at the age of 11 and 15 to 16. The safety is most frequently threatened by the bullying and aggression of other pupils. Thus, the conducted research prompts that the issues of pupils’ safety are to be solved by examining how different groups of pupils feel at school, given their age, living place, the type of school, family characteristics, etc. As stated by researchers (Pilkauskaitė–Valickienė, Raižienė, Žukauskienė, 2009; Olweus, 2008; Valeckienė, 2011; Barkauskaitė, Mikalauskienė, 2011), when seeking the safety of the environment, the co-operation of family and school, observation of common rules, and intolerance of bullying are of major importance. Therefore, the significance of safety at school is especially topical for children whose families do not ensure the opportunities of positive socialization. Pupils from families of different social characteristics, and especially of those that do not create favourable conditions for socialization, have individual
expectations with respect to school and different attitudes towards bullying, aggression, violence, and safety itself (Whitted, Dupper, 2005; Berns, 2009; Klaniene, Šmitiene, 2011). That is why it is important to examine the level of safety at school for pupils who live in families of different social characteristics and their attitudes towards safety at school.

The phenomena of safety at school, bullying, correction of aggressive behaviour, and other have been studied by quite a few researchers. Although lately more interest has been paid to the safety of social environment (Rigby, 2000, Entwisle, Aleksander, Olson, 2000; Grube, Lens, 2003; Webb, 2006; Karmaza, Grigutytė, Karmazė, 2007; Olweus, 2008; Zaborskis, Vareikienė, 2008; Barkauskaitė, Mikalauskienė, 2011, and other), the feelings of pupils from different families and their attitudes towards safety at school have not been studied sufficiently, as not all the researchers who studied the issues of children’s socialization related the provisions of children’s safety to the social and cultural family context. Therefore, the attitude of pupils coming from families of different social characteristics towards safety at school has been examined insufficiently. Thus, the topicality of the research problem is predetermined by a shortage of empirical data for the attitudes of pupils from families of different social characteristics towards safety at school.

With the attitude of pupils from Forms 5 to 12 towards safety at school being chosen as the object of study, the aim of the article was defined as the studies of the attitude of pupils from families of different social characteristics towards safety at school.

The research was based on the following methodological provisions:

Theory of positive socialization: it emphasizes that, in order to ensure positive socialization for the young generation, family is to perform its functions in a quality way. The more successful is the primary child’s socialization in the family, the greater probability is that the child will function successfully in the future. A close interrelationship exists between the functions of education performed by family, its quality of life, and positive socialization of child. For pupils who do not have favourable conditions for socialization in the family, school has to create a safe environment in order to remove the hindrances for socialization and create favourable conditions for positive socialization (Sutton, 1999; Kvieskienė, 2005).

Principal ideas of bullying prevention at school by D. Olweus (2008) that accentuated the responsibility of adults in the solution of problems of children’s safety at school. For that purpose, the studies of pupil bullying expression among peers at school and the implementation of prevention of the phenomenon at school were necessary. The creation of a safe environment at school was only possible if the school community was included (the administrative staff, teachers, parents, pupils, specialists, all the school staff) in the creation of a non-aggressive environment in educational institutions. The safe environment strategy is to cover the institutional, group, and individual levels, and at all levels, social-educational work is to be done not only with adults working at school, but also with parents. In order to include pupil’s parents in the creation of a safe environment, it is necessary to study the expectations of families with different social characteristics in the context of creation of a safe environment at school.

Family System Theory (Berns, 2009) that treats family as an entity, given its structure, lifestyle, and the interrelationship of family members. One of the principal family functions is socialization, the distribution of social roles, and emotional and economic support. The family and socialization of its children is affected by the social status, ethnicity, religion, etc. In different families, given the social and financial position of parents, i.e. their place in society, children are raised in different ways, and that makes an impact on their behaviour and academic record. Therefore, the issues of social socialization are to be analyzed in the context of quality of family life.

The theory of social stratification focuses on the structural inequality of different social groups. From the moment of birth, people are involved in a certain social structure which greatly affects the model of an individual’s behaviour in society. A number of authors regard socialization as a communication system between society and an individual. School has to take into account the social-cultural context of pupils’ families in order to mitigate social exclusion of pupils coming from certain family groups. The manifestations of social exclusion of the family decrease their children’s feeling of safety at school, that’s why it is necessary to study the dimensions of social stratification in the system of education, so that school could integrate children into the system of education more successfully. If the educational institution ignores child’s individual expectation and needs, given the social characteristics of different families, it reinforces social inequality (Giddens, 2005). Therefore, an educational institution as an institution of social enlightenment is responsible for the creation of a safe social environment at school.
The article also makes use of the social learning theory that is based on the social cognitive theory and whose most outstanding representative is A. Bandura. The social learning theory emphasizes that a personality is affected by the environment and other people’s behaviour, i.e. permanent interaction of an individual and environmental factors takes place. In the process of socialization, child is learning socially acceptable behaviour by watching other individuals’ behaviour and trying to imitate it after a chosen model. The author believes the social skills are acquired by the principle of modeling, i.e. by watching environment and imitating the models. Bandura notes that man learns behaviour from the environment, and parents, as the principal socialization agents, are of major influence. By model observation, children and adolescents come to understand which behaviour is appropriate, i.e. which kind deserves award and which kind deserves sanctions. Bandura is positive that human behaviour can change with no direct encouragement, just by watching the environment and certain models of behaviour in it. In that way, children and adolescents acquire certain skills, try to adapt them to their environment, and learn them through the direct experience of consequences (Bandura, 2009). Thus pupils coming from families of different social characteristics start school with different social experiences and different understanding of social behaviour, rules, and safety. When school creates a safe environment, it is to take child’s social experience acquired in the family into account.

**Research methodology.** The following methods were employed: theoretical analysis seeking to establish the degree to which the problem in question was investigated; document analysis; and a written survey. In the process of the research project Potential Manifestations of Discrimination at Comprehensive School (2009), an empirical research was conducted seeking to disclose the attitudes of pupils from Forms 5 to 12 towards safety at school. In the written survey, 2,064 pupils of Forms 5 to 12 of Lithuanian comprehensive secondary schools took part. Two-stage selection took place: in the first stage, a representative number of schools was selected out of all comprehensive schools, and in each Form 5 to 12 of those schools, 2 pupils were surveyed (the latter were randomly selected by the researchers and indicated to schools to be surveyed).

Pupils’ responses were analyzed, given the social characteristics of the respondents’ parents. Several social characteristics of the family were identified on the basis of the following criteria: the composition of the family; the number of children in the family; parents’ education; their employment; their financial situation; and problems experienced in the family. The pupils were surveyed on the basis of the family structure (living with both parents; with one parent; with the other having temporarily gone to work abroad; or with guardians); the number of children in the family (one; two; three; three and more); parents’ education (higher; college; secondary; basic); parents’ employment (employed; unemployed (both or one of them)); financial situation (the family was socially supported by the state; by other institutions, by school; children received free meals); social and other problems in the family (alcohol addiction; drug addiction; one of the parents was imprisoned; one of the parents (or guardians) or both were seriously ill). Pupils’ responses were analyzed with their own assessment of the financial situation in the family taken into account (which took place on the basis of the following criteria: the family had enough money to cover basic needs; the family did not have enough money to cover basic needs; the family survived on social benefits, as salaries were not sufficient to cover the basic needs; the family had enough money both to cover the basic needs and also for entertainments, events, and travel; the family was well-off).

1,153 respondents (55.96% female and 911 (44.05% male) from schools of ten counties of Lithuania took part in the survey. Their distribution by age was the following: the largest part were 15 to 16 year old (30%); 10 to 12 year old (22%); 13 to 14 year old (25%), and 17 to 19 year old (23%). The age of the research respondents fluctuated from 10 to 19. A small part of pupils who participated in the written survey were over 19: those were individuals learning in adult schools in accordance with general education curriculum.
The research sample included respondents from 101 places: 33% from cities, 30% from small towns, and 37% from village type settlements. By type of school, 40% learnt in gymnazia, 36% in basic schools, and 24% in secondary schools. Evidently the most difficult thing was to establish the social status of the respondents, as it was defined by a number of parameters, such as the family composition, financial situation, parents’ education, employment, the existence of social problems, etc. Given the said parameters, several questions were formulated; by means of them, the researchers established that the majority of the respondents (72.82%) lived with one parent and merely 18.91% with both of them. The rest of the respondents lived with grandparents or other relatives, guardians, and occasionally alone. Most of the research respondents belonged to the category of an only child (37.77%) or had one sibling (43.17%); 11.56% of the respondents lived in families with three children, and 7.5%, in families with more than three children. Part of the respondents came from the families where mother or father were unemployed: in 15.2% of cases, the mother, and in 10.47% of cases, the father was unemployed. Part of the families received social support and charity. It has to be noted that a great part of pupils knew nothing of the support or charity received by their parents. 27.13% of the pupils indicated their families received support from the state; some others (40, 16%) stated that their parents did not receive support from the state; and 32.71% did not know whether the family received support from the state. The numbers of pupils by charity received in the family were different. The number of pupils who indicated that their families were receiving charity from other institutions amounted to 7.23%; 70.48% of the pupils stated their families did not receive charity from other institutions; and 22.9% did not know whether their families received support from other institutions. Another characteristic of the social status of a pupil’s family was free meals at school. By the said characteristic, the pupils were distributed in the following way: 30.69% of the respondents stated they got free meals at school, and 69.31% stated they did not get free meals at school. The pupils were also asked to mark what kind of social problems they had in the family. The named problems, one (or both) parents had a drinking problem (7.47%); one (or both) parents were drug addicts (1.59%); one (or both) parents were in prison (1.67 proc.); other pupils related difficulties in the family to physical diseases of parents: parents’ disability as a difficulty was named by 4.45% of the respondents, and serious diseases of parents were indicated by 3.55%. The majority of the pupil respondents stated they did not have any serious problems in the family. Another part (287 pupils) indicated other problems in their families: parents’ fights (59.79%), financial situation (15.87%), lack of communication within the family (11.64%), or life without parents (either dead or both gone abroad: 7.4%).

As mentioned above, the social status of pupils’ families was the most difficult thing to define. Frequently such formal criteria as support from the state or other institutions, or getting free meals at school, did not reflect the actual financial situation in the family. Therefore, it was considered appropriate to find out pupils’ assessment of their family situation. The respondents were asked to assess the financial situation of their families. The following answers were received: the family had enough money for the basic needs (33.7%); the family was short of money for the basic needs (5.81%); the family survived on benefits, as salaries were insufficient to cover the basic needs (2.69%); the family had money not only for the basic needs, but also for entertainments, events, and travel (40.12%); and the family was well-off (17.68%).

The questionnaire covered pupil safety in school-related issues: their feeling of safety at school, relations with teachers and peers, and the experienced humiliation of different kinds (physical or verbal) at school. The pupils were asked whether they felt safe at school and whether they experienced bullying or other kinds of humiliation from pupils and teachers due to the social or financial situation or the lifestyle of their family. The research data were analyzed by the SPSS software, and the statistical methods of Chi-square, Kruskall-Wallis, and Mann-Whitney tests were applied.

Research outcomes

Pupils' safety. The methodology of safety assessment identifies the fact of how pupils feel at school as one of the essential parameters. Therefore, in the analysis of children’s safety at school, it was reasonable to establish how pupils felt at school, i.e. how school was implementing the provision to create conditions for pupils to learn in a safe environment. The outcomes are presented in Figure 1:
Figure 1. How pupils feel about safety at school (in %)

As shown by the outcomes presented in Fig. 1, almost a half (47.12%) of the pupil respondents always felt safe at school; almost one third (31.77%) of the pupil respondents felt safe at school frequently enough. The majority (78.89%) stated they felt safe at school. The choice of the answer *seldom* or *never* ask for a more thorough analysis; 4.85% of the respondent pupils seldom, and 4.55% never, felt safe at school. They could be joined by the group of pupils (11.72%) who were not able to give a definite answer about how they felt at school. To sum up, part of the pupils did not have the feeling of being safe at school.

In the analysis of pupils’ attitudes towards safety at school by different social characteristics of family (Mann-Whitney and Kruskall-Wallis, Chi-square criteria), the following trends were identified:

- the pupils who felt safe at school most frequently had mothers with higher education, and fathers with rather high education ($\chi^2=18.00$, $p=0.001$). That demonstrates the relationship between parents’ education and the way of pupils' feeling at school;
- in the comparison of the responses of pupils from different structure families, statistically significant differences were highlighted. The rank distribution proved that the pupils who lived with one parent or guardians felt safer than the pupils living with one parent, the other having gone to work abroad. The pupils who lived with both parents or with grandparents/other relatives felt slightly less safe that the pupils who lived with one parent and guardians, but more safe than the pupils whose parent had gone to work abroad. In conclusion, the pupils who were living with one parent, the other having gone to work abroad, felt the least safe at school;
- the pupils who stated that their family did not have money for basic needs (food, clothes, fees for public utilities) felt less safe at school, as well as those who stated that their family survived on benefits, as the salaries did not cover the basis needs.
- the pupils who had different difficulties in the families also felt unsafe at school. Statistical differences were established between the groups of pupils who experienced difficulties in the families (the parents had a drinking problem or were imprisoned) and not having similar problems.

To sum up, one can state that the research outcomes proved the correlation between pupil’s safety at school and the social characteristics of the family. The following trends were brought out: the higher the parents’ education was, the safer the child felt. The pupils who lived with one parent or guardians felt safer at school. The pupils who felt the least safe came from socially supported families, families who experienced material deprivation, or families with social problems (drinking problems or imprisonment).

The feeling of being unsafe at school was most frequently related to the humiliation experienced both from peers and from adult educators. Therefore, during the research, pupils’ opinions about the experience of humiliation coming from other pupils or educators were examined. The received outcomes are presented in Figure 2.
The analysis of the data presented in Figure 2 allowed to establish that about 2/5 of the pupil respondents (i.e. 41%) had never been subjected to humiliation by teachers, and a similar percentage of the participants of the survey had not experienced inappropriate, humiliating behaviour from other pupils. However, as witnessed by the research data, almost half of the participants of the survey were subjected to humiliation by teachers (48.31%), and a slightly smaller percentage of the respondents (45.28%) were humiliated by other pupils. Thus, one may assume that, during an academic year, pupils at school can be humiliated both by pupils and teachers.

Pupils from the families of different social characteristics had different views of their relations, and the character of the said relations, with teachers and other pupils. In the analysis of the pupils' attitudes towards disrespectful, humiliating behaviour of teachers and pupils by different social characteristics of the family (Mann-Whitney and Kruskall-Wallis, and chi-square criteria), the following trends were established:

- the pupils who stated they felt safe at school more frequently indicated that at school nobody abused or insulted them, called names, or pushed about ($\chi^2 = 16.375$, df=4, p=0.003). The pupils who frequently felt safe at school stated that neither teachers nor pupils ($\chi^2 = 10.946$, df=4, p=0.03) subjected them to humiliation. The comparative analysis of the data received from the respondents allowed to assume that pupil’s feeling of safety at school was related to humiliations both from the teachers and from peers (see Fig. 2);
- in the assessment of the character of relations with peers, parents’/ guardians’ education was significant. A statistically meaningful correlation was established between the experienced humiliation at school and mothers’ education.
- the pupils who came from families receiving social or charity stated they were more often subjected to humiliation by teachers than the pupils from the families receiving no such support. The pupils from the families that did not receive social support more often stated that neither teachers nor pupils humiliated them at school in comparison with the pupils from socially supported families ($\chi^2=13.614$; df=2; p=0.001).
- the pupils’ view of the humiliation experienced from teachers at school was also related to a view of the financial welfare of one’s own family ($\chi^2=39.840$; df=16; p=0.001).
- when comparing respondent families with different social problems (one or two parents having a drinking problem, being in prison, or having a disability), we noticed that the pupils’ views of the humiliation experienced from peers were influenced by one of both parents’ addiction to alcohol.

To sum up, the pupils’ assessment of the humiliations experienced from peers and teachers were related to the composition of the family (the number of children in the family), the financial resources of the family (their sufficiency to cover the basic needs), parent’s education (mother’s education), and social illnesses (alcohol addiction of one or both parents/guardians).

By the next question of the research, we sought to detail the experience of verbal and physical abuse at school. The received outcomes are presented in Figure 3.
As demonstrated by Fig. 3, the percentage of the pupils who stated they were not pushed about or beaten by peers was not very high. Just under one half of the respondents of the research (44.81%) had never experienced physical abuse at school. A still lower percentage of the pupil respondents stated they were not called names or insulted at school (almost 2/5, or 39%). The percentage of the research respondents who gave a negative response was 41.07% in the case of physical abuse and 38.55 in the case of verbal abuse. Consequently, a large percentage of the pupils did not feel safe at school, and their right to learn in the safe environment was not ensured.

By comparing the pupils’ responses by the family socio-demographical characteristics, statistically meaningful correlations were established. The analysis of the pupils’ experience of physical and verbal abuse by different social characteristics of the family (Mann-Whitney and Kruskall-Wallis criteria) established the following facts:

- A statistically significant correlation was found between the humiliations experienced at school and mothers’ education. The children of mothers with higher or college education more seldom experienced physical and verbal abuse from other pupils, while the pupils who had mothers with basic or secondary education most frequently experienced physical or verbal abuse.

- The pupils with three and more children in the family tended to more frequently note that they experienced physical abuse at school than children from the families with one or two children. When assessing the responses on the experience of verbal abuse of children from different family groups by the number of children in the family, no statistically meaningful differences were established.

- The pupils who were getting free meals at school felt humiliated more often than the pupils from other groups. Thus, the pupils from socially supported schools experienced both physical and verbal abuse more frequently than the pupils from other groups.

To sum up, one can state that a correlation exists between the physical and verbal abuse experienced by pupils at school and the social characteristics of their families. The data of the research demonstrated the following trends: the higher the mother’s education, the less the pupils were subjected to physical and verbal abuse at school, and the smaller the number of children in the family, the less physical abuse was experienced by the pupils at school. The pupils who lived in socially supported families (receiving support from the state and other institutions, getting free meals at school, etc.) were more frequently subjected to physical and verbal humiliation than the pupils from other groups. The examination of the data allows to state that there are no essential correlation between the humiliation experienced by the pupils at school and the following social characteristics of the families: the family structure, parent employment, father’s education, parents’ social illnesses, and pupils’ view of the financial situation of their families.
Conclusions and generalization

To sum up the outcomes of the research into pupils’ views of the opportunity to learn in a safe school environment, the following trends were established: part of the pupils in Lithuania did not feel safe at school. In the pupils’ attitudes towards safety at school, the decisive role was played by the relations with their peers and their educators. The greatest impact on the pupils’ insecurity was made by the experience of humiliating relations with other pupils and with teachers. A significant number of the pupils did not feel safe at school due to the experienced verbal and physical abuse.

As witnessed by the research data, a statistical correlation existed between the humiliation and between physical and verbal abuse experienced by the pupils from their teachers and peers and the social characteristics of the family. In the assessment of humiliating behaviour experienced at school, the correlation was noticed between the pupils’ experience and the family composition; the social position of the family; the pupil’s assessment of the financial situation of his family; the education of parents/guardians; and the social problems in the family.

The outcomes of the research brought out the following trends: the humiliation experienced by pupils at school were related to social characteristics of their families (the composition of the family, the number of children in the family, mother’s education, parents’ social status, social illnesses in the family, and pupils’ view of the financial situation of their families). Quality education at school is pretermitted by a number of safety at school-related factors.

References

MOKINIŲ NUOSTATOS Į SAUGUMĄ MOKYKLOJE KAIP KOKYBIŠKO UGDYMO(si) PRIELAIDA

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Santrauka

Mokinių saugumas mokykloje išlieka prioritetine ugdymo(si) pokyčių bei vaikų teisių apsaugos sritimi. Mokinių saugumas mokykloje dažnai tyrinėjamas užsienio ir Lietuvos mokslininkų, tačiau stokojama tyrimų, analizuojančių mokinių saugumo nuostatas, atsižvelgiant į mokinio patirtį, gyvenamąją vietą, šeimos socialinę charakteristiką. Įvairios mokinių aplaskos, susijusios su vaiko saugumu mokykloje (patiriamos patyčios, agresija, diskriminavimo apraškos) rodo, jog vaiko teisė gauti kokybės ugdymo(si) sąlygas, mokytis saugioje aplinkoje nėra pilnai užtikrinta. Šalies švietimą reglamentuojančiose dokumentuose, viena svarbiausių numatytų krypčių – paramos mokiniui, tame tarpe – ir socialinės pedagoginės, plėtra, siekiant užtikrinti socialiai teisingas, lygius švietimo galimybes. LR Švietimo įstatyme (2011) akcentuojama, kad mokyle turi sudaryti sąlygas mokiniams saugiai mokytis aplinkoje, kurioje būtų galimybės realizuoti visas savo teises, nepatirti prievarstos, pažeminimų, baimės. Švietimą reglamentuojančiose dokumentuose, įvairiose nacionaliniuojuose tyrime, kurie prezentuoja situacija šalies mokyklose (Šmarto mokyklose paplitimo, formų, priežasčių, prevencijos, ir pagalbos priemonių tyrimas, 2008; Socialinio teisingumo rodikliai švietime, 2009) atskleidžiama, jog mokinių saugumas mokykloje vis dar vaine labiausiai sprestų problemų.


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