



Teacher Victimization in Educational Institutions: Analysis of the Legal Environment

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Annotation. The article assesses the legal possibilities of protecting teachers from violence in Lithuanian educational institutions. It analyses how the legal framework ensures the right of teachers to protection from violence at work and to assistance. It is concluded that the concept of violence against teachers is not clearly defined in legislation, the legal framework does not sufficiently protect teachers from violence and is more oriented towards the protection of pupils.

Keywords: *teacher victimization, violence prevention, physical violence, psychological violence, bullying, cyber violence, economic violence.*

Introduction

Violence against teachers and teacher victimisation is a relatively new area of research and has recently received considerable attention. Recent international research shows that researchers have tended to focus on verbal and physical violence against

teachers (McMahon et al., 2023) and, to a lesser extent, on the property damage suffered by teachers (Reddy et al., 2023). Many recent studies suggest that teacher victimisation is associated with negative outcomes, such as lower work satisfaction and weak peer relationships (McMahon et al., 2020), which can affect teachers' psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Moon et al., 2023). It should also be mentioned that teacher victimisation is linked to broader educational outcomes, including pupil achievement and school climate (McMahon et al., 2020; McMahon et al., 2024).

Several factors contribute to violence against teachers. These include socio-demographic characteristics of the educational institution (Reddy et al., 2023), the levels of curricula (Sakamoto & Pitner, 2005), or individual teacher characteristics (e.g., age, experience, gender) (Ghadban et al., 2023; Gråstén & Kokkonen, 2021). Interpersonal dynamics within schools also play a role. Research shows that interactions with colleagues involving bullying, humiliating behaviour, or conflicts contribute to teacher victimisation (Hyun & Wilcox, 2018; Moon et al., 2022), and that teachers feel victimised by administrative decisions or actions, a lack of communication or assessment that is perceived as unfair or unsupportive (Astor et al., 2023). Workplace bullying, manifesting as repeated mistreatment, humiliation, or intimidation from colleagues, supervisors, pupils or their parents, can have wider psychological effects (Ghadban et al., 2023; Kapa & Gimbert, 2018). Such experiences contribute to stress, social anxiety, burnout, and post-traumatic stress disorder, leading to self-destructive behaviour (Li et al., 2023; McMahon et al., 2023; Yang et al., 2022; Peist et al., 2020). Thus, teacher victimisation is recognised as a complex, multilayer phenomenon involving harassment or aggression in the workplace from a variety of sources, including pupils, their parents, colleagues, or administrators (Kapa & Gimbert, 2018; Kapa et al., 2018; Benbenishty et al., 2019; Payne & Gottfredson, 2019; Sorrentino & Farrington, 2019; Moon & McCluskey, 2020).

Research on teacher victimisation in Lithuania was carried out two decades ago: the problems of teacher safety at school (Pruskus & Balevičiūtė, 2011) and teachers' fear of school (Gudonis & Šeipūnaitė, 2008), the manifestations of violence against teachers by pupils (Pivorienė & Jurkonytė, 2008), and the causes, manifestations, and consequences of violence against teachers (Pruskus, 2009) were all analysed. Recent studies in Lithuania analysed the prevalence of violence against teachers (Meškauskaitė, 2017), the experience of violence by teachers and other educational staff in educational institutions (Diržytė et al., 2023), and the links between teachers' victimization forms and their satisfaction with life (Diržytė et al., 2024).

There is a lack of research, both internationally and nationally, highlighting the possibilities and recommendations for protecting teachers from violence and ensuring their safety. As the problem of violence against teachers is multilayer, it is necessary to analyse it not only from a psychological, educational perspective, but also from the legal one.

The aim of this article is to assess the legal possibilities of protecting teachers from violence in educational institutions in Lithuania based on international practice and national doctrine. The following problematic questions are raised: how does the legal framework ensure the right and the legitimate interests of the teachers to be protected from violence at work? How does the national legal doctrine guarantee the right of teachers who are victims of violence in educational institutions to comprehensive specialised assistance?

Research methodology

Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) (Deplano & Tsagourias, 2021) was used. The methodological framework of the research on the analysis of the legal environment of teachers' victimisation in educational institutions is constructed by combining two classical methodological approaches of legal studies: the normative and the sociological (Hoecke, 2011). The normative legal theory emphasises the legal norms as rules of conduct in the study of order to explain more precisely how they should work in practice. Sociological legal theory emphasises that the meaning of legal norms is revealed through their actual implementation. This study combines these two approaches by analysing not only the formal legal regulatory framework (normative approach) but also its application in practice in order to assess how effectively the existing regulation protects teachers from specific forms of violence in the workplace and ensures their right to comprehensive specialised support (sociological approach).

For data collection the method of document analysis was chosen (McConville & Chui, 2017), allowing to analyse both international and Lithuanian legislation and case law. The documents were searched in the official registers of court decisions of Lithuania and the European Union (infolex.lt, echr.coe.int, and eur-lex.europa.eu) using the following keywords: “teacher”, “pedagogue”, “private life”, “child”, “infliction of pain”, “physical violence”, “psychological violence”, “cyber-violence”, and “economic violence”. Lithuanian case law was reviewed from 2010 to 2025, and cases from the European Court of Human Rights were examined from 1993 to 2025. The analysis of Lithuanian case law was based on the date of entry into force of the current Criminal Code. The documents were selected using a targeted criterion selection method (Patton, 2015), following the following selection guidelines: relevance of the documents and cases to the research problem, relevance of the application and interpretation of the legal norms in national practice, and the possibility of identifying gaps in the law or practical implementation challenges. The following documents were selected for analysis: rulings of the Supreme Court of Lithuania (n=16), judgements of the European Court of Human Rights (n = 7), decisions of the Constitutional Court of Lithuania (n = 2), and legal acts (n = 4).

The method of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) was used to analyse the data (Kahwati & Kane, 2020; Watkins & Burton, 2018), allowing for a systemic assessment of the peculiarities of the different legal systems and their application practices. In addition, the methods of law interpretation belonging to the general research methods of legal science were used (Tidikis, 2003): the systemic method, which allows to analyse legal norms as an integral system of interrelated elements; the logical method, which helps to disclose the interrelationships of legal norms and their interpretative possibilities; the teleological method, which is aimed at the interpretation of legal norms in accordance with their aim and purpose. Such a combination allows for a comprehensive assessment of the legal regulation of teacher victimisation in both normative and practical terms, revealing its strengths and problematic aspects.

Legal definition of violence in the context of teacher victimisation

A person shall be protected against any unjustified external influence of other persons on his life, health, freedom of physical activity, and any interference with his mental and spiritual state, his intellectual and creative expression (Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, 2000). The protection of the human right to physical and mental integrity, *inter alia*, against criminal acts, is a constitutionally important objective, a public interest (Constitutional Court of the Republic of Lithuania, 2012). In the broadest sense, violence is any act or omission which has a physical, psychological, sexual, economic, or other impact on a person and which results in physical, material or non-pecuniary harm to that person. The concept of violence against teachers could be defined accordingly. However, in this particular case, it is necessary to look at the territory (school), the subjects, and the objectives of the violence in order to clarify and define the concept more accurately and precisely. The scientific literature proposes a broad definition of violence against teachers, considering any physical or verbal aggression, suicide, use of physical violence, victimisation, bullying, as violence, including all negative processes that take place either inside or outside the school which are associated with the school (Kapa & Gimbert, 2018; McMahon et al., 2020).

The European Trade Union Committee for Education and the European Federation of Education Employers (2013) guidelines for education state that violence of any kind experienced by a teacher from a pupil or his/her parents is considered third-party violence, which is understood as any physical violence, verbal aggression, threat of reprisal, and that the perpetrator of the violence is not a colleague at work. With regard to the damage caused to health and/or safety at work, the European Union standards are applicable to the prevention of third-party violence. Third party violence does

not include violence and harassment between workers. The European Trade Union Committee for Education and the European Federation of Education Employers (2013) identify the following forms of third-party violence: physical, psychological, verbal and/or sexual violence; disrespect or threats of reprisals; discrimination on the grounds of sex, race and/or ethnic origin, religion, beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation and other grounds; damage to property; violation of dignity and honour; cyberbullying and/or cyber harassment through the use of various information and communication media or technologies.

The European Court of Human Rights (2021) notes that violence in educational establishments is not and shall not be tolerated in any form, but that demands for discipline, respect for school rules, respect for oneself and for others are not and shall be regarded as a stimulus or provocation of violent behaviour. Discipline is an integral part of the educational process and the right to education (European Court of Human Rights, 1993). The only means that are not tolerated in educational institutions are violent and coercive acts.

Article 2 (25) of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania (2011) (hereinafter referred to as the “Law”) provides that the concept of violence is understood as defined in the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence of the Republic of Lithuania (2011) and distinguishes three specific forms of it: bullying, cyberbullying, and neglect of a child.

Despite the reference to the Law on Protection against Domestic Violence of the Republic of Lithuania (2011), the concept of violence as defined therein can be applied in a broader sense (as the concept was constructed in the context of the scope of regulation of the said law and the specific legal goodness protected). Meanwhile, violence in the educational institution experienced by teachers, in addition to its general forms, has its specific manifestations (e.g., parents’ unreasonable constant demands or reproaches to teachers, unjustified complaints, use of obscene words, firecrackers, throwing objects at another person, sticking one’s leg out, spitting, shouting in the classroom, etc.) (Diržytė et al., 2024). Thus, this provision of the law is not in line with today’s realities and does not reflect specific manifestations of violence against teachers in educational institutions.

Legal definition of forms of violence in the context of teacher victimisation

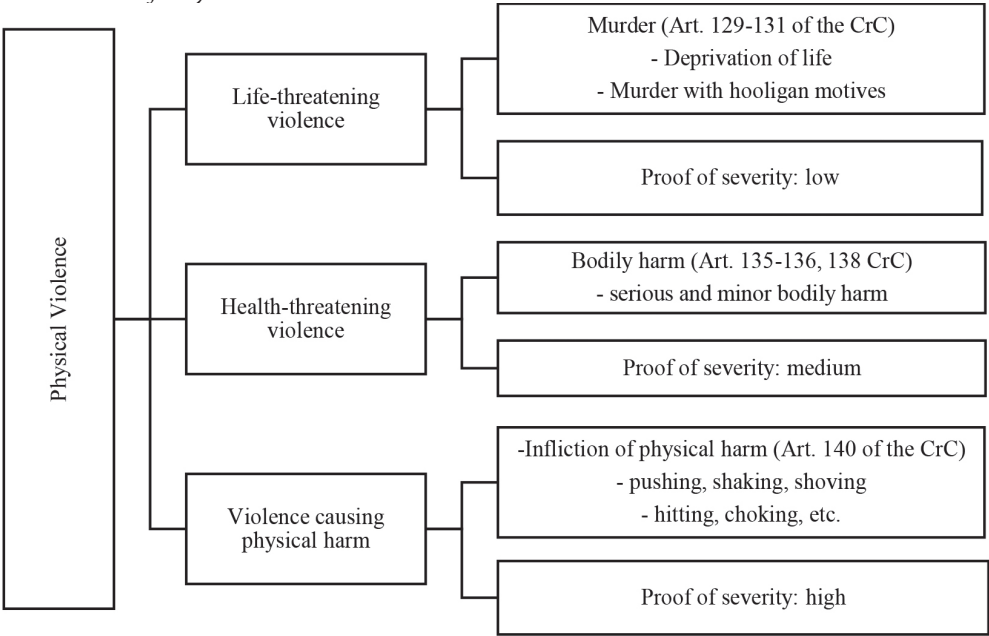
As regards common forms of violence, it should be noted that Lithuanian law criminalizes almost all forms of violence, but criminal liability is considered an *ultima ratio* measure, which is applied only in exceptional cases. Criminal liability for violence

(regardless of who the victim may be) only arises when the acts committed are considered to be of general danger. The legislator does not define the concept of violence when criminalising it. The definition of the forms of violence is left to case law, which is developed by analysing specific cases (facts), in accordance with the applicable laws (including specialised laws) and constitutional jurisprudence.

Physical violence

It should be noted that the Law on the Approval and Entry into Force of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Lithuania (2000) (hereinafter referred to as the “CrC”) provides the most comprehensive details on the forms of physical violence: murder (Articles 129 to 131 of the CrC of the RoL, 2000), bodily injury (Articles 135, 136, 138 of the CrC, 2000), infliction of physical pain (Article 140 of the CrC, 2000), etc. The stricter criminal liability is designed to protect constitutional values such as life and health. As already mentioned, physical violence can take many forms and lead not only to bodily harm but also to the loss of life (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
The Forms of Physical Violence



Although the killing of teachers by pupils is not frequent, it is possible that a teacher’s life may be taken on the basis of hooliganism in the form of unprovoked aggression, assaulting and killing the victim in the absence of a personal relationship between

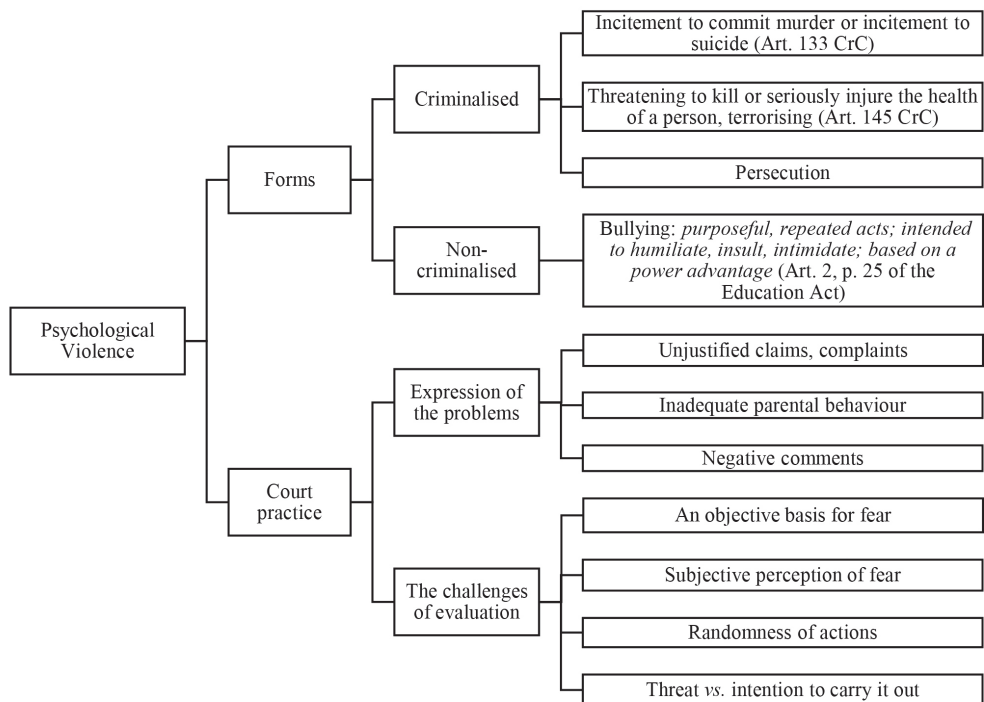
the perpetrator and the victim, or on the basis of a negligible pretext. These incentives are characterised by the fact that the act is without a reason and clearly inadequate (Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2017a; 2022b; 2022a).

Physical violence also includes bodily harm, various injuries, such as inflicting pain (e.g., pushing, shaking, pulling hair, choking, hitting, etc.), physical injuries to the body (scratches, cuts, burns, etc.). In other words, physical violence can take the form of any intervention on another person's body, with real, tangible consequences, i.e. physical pain, minor or non-severe injuries, or death. It should be noted that in case law, there are no major difficulties in proving and applying criminal liability for murder or grievous bodily harm, but most problems arise in proving the infliction of pain. Pain cannot be determined by medical doctors, as each person's perception (sensation) of pain is very individual. However, it should be stressed that case law holds that mere physical contact with another person's body is not sufficient for criminal liability, but that it must be established that the victim actually experienced pain or other physical suffering as a result. In determining this circumstance, account shall be taken of the degree of pain normally inflicted on a person by similar acts, as well as of the age and state of health of the victim, the danger to his or her health, the intentions of the person inflicting the physical effect, and other circumstances indicating the seriousness of the acts committed and the reality of the pain caused. It is important, in terms of provability, that the sensation is so expressed that the victim's pain is perceived by others or that medical attention is sought (Supreme Court of Lithuania 2016a; 2016b; 2017c; 2018). Furthermore, in each individual case, it is assessed and determined whether the person's behaviour allowed others to understand that he or she was in pain, e.g. whether it was expressed to the arriving police officers or medics, or to those around the victim, or whether medical attention was sought, medication was administered, etc.

Psychological violence

In the context of criminal law, psychological violence is understood as any deliberate act that intentionally affects the psyche of another person, making him or her fear that further actions by the threatening person may lead to serious and extremely negative consequences. As regards psychological violence, the CrC criminalises only the most dangerous manifestations of psychological violence: incitement to suicide or suicidal behaviour (*Article 133 of the CrC*, 2000); threats to kill or seriously impair the health of a person, terrorising (*Article 145 of the CrC*, 2000), etc. Psychological violence also includes stalking, where unwanted contact with the stalked person is sought (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
The Forms of Psychological Violence



The case law of the Supreme Court of Lithuania has established the rule that systematic intimidation of a person by means of psychological violence may consist of threats to kill or seriously impair health, to cause fear, anxiety, or insecurity (e.g., repeated insults, threats of harm, harassment, open surveillance, frightening night calls, immoral SMS messages, etc.) (Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2010; 2011, 2013a; 2014a; 2020a). The case law notes that such acts require systematicity, must be carried out within a relatively short period of time, and the subsequent acts must be linked to the previous ones, and not be random acts (Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2013b). The case law has consistently taken the position that, objectively, systematicity requires at least three acts of an intimidating nature committed within a certain period of time, which is not very long, and which show the perpetrator's intention to act in a purposeful manner, while subjectively, it shows the perpetrator's intent to intimidate the person. Several acts committed over a period of time, which are not linked by a common intention, cannot be regarded as systematic (Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2022c).

It should also be emphasized that systematic intimidation is always directed at a specific person with the aim of causing him psychological discomfort. The totality of the factors which the victim associates with the negative psychological impact is

individual in nature and, therefore, when assessing the reality of the threat, it is essential to take into account the victim's perception of it (Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2013b; 2022d); however, it should be noted that the perception of the victim is not the only criterion for determining the fact, content, and reality of a threat. The victim's perception must also be based on objective data which show that the person was actually intimidated. Although it is not necessary to establish the reality of the threat that the threatener actually intended to carry out the threat, it is always necessary to ascertain that the victim had an objective basis for fearing for his or her life or health and that the perpetrator intended the victim to be in such a state (Supreme Court of Lithuania 2016c; 2017b; 2020a).

Article 2(25) of the Law defines only one aspect of psychological violence – bullying. Bullying is defined as deliberate and repeated acts inflicted by a person or a group of persons with a psychological or physical superiority on another person with the intention of bringing that person or group of persons into disrepute or humiliating dignity, of insulting or hurting him or her, or of otherwise causing the person psychological or physical harm. Such acts are usually carried out by people who have greater influence or power over another person, or who want to make another person feel less powerful or powerless. Pupils or their parents are no exception. Bullying cannot be seen as a consequence of interpersonal conflict (because in conflict one person can humiliate and ridicule another). Bullying is the purposeful and deliberate belittling of a person with the intention of destroying him.

As for psychological violence experienced by teachers, it should be noted that it can go far beyond bullying and exceed its limits or be under bullying level. Psychological violence against teachers can also include unreasonable demands (from parents or pupils themselves) for grades, parental behaviour that unreasonably and inadequately hyperbolizes children's rights (while forgetting about their duties), constant complaints against teachers, various negative comments about the educational methods used, comments made to the child (even if they are presented in a nice way), and etc. The analysis of experiences of violence against teachers in educational institutions reveals that teachers avoid contacting law enforcement authorities or courts regarding unfounded complaints, harassment, collection or dissemination of information, etc. (Diržytė et al., 2023), and therefore, the Lithuanian case law is not well established on this issue.

Economic violence

Economic violence is defined as a person's actions related to the use or distribution of money and the constant threat not to give money, i.e., any form of financial control. It is believable that in this particular case, any destruction or damage to property can also be considered as a manifestation of economic violence (*Article 187 CrC*, 2000). The offence is a substantive offence, so that in each case it is necessary to establish the consequences, namely the destruction or damage of the property in question, and

the causal link between the offender's act and the consequences. However, the value of the property damaged or destroyed is relevant for the purposes of criminal liability. The very high value property is defined as property with the value exceeding the amount of 900 MSL, the high value property is property with the value from 400 MSL to 900 MSL, and low value property is the property with the value from 3 MSL to 10 MSL (*Article 190 of the CrC, 2000*).

Cyber- violence

Cyber-violence has become a very popular form of violence in recent times, including constant and persistent attempts to contact, bullying in correspondence, derogatory comments, defamation, the distribution of fake audiovisual material (*deep fakes*), threats of physical or sexual violence against a person, the disclosure of personal information about someone else or the threat of such disclosures, revenge pornography, and the sending of unwanted sexual content. It should be stressed that this form of violence is not criminalised by the Lithuanian legislator, although some manifestations of it can be found in the CrC. One of them concerns the unlawful disclosure of information about a person's private life (which is understood in a broad sense and includes the inviolability of personal, family and home life, honour and reputation, the person's physical and mental integrity, the confidentiality of personal facts, the prohibition of publication of confidential information received or collected, etc.) without the person's consent (*Article of 168 the CrC, 2000*). Analysis of international legal instruments reveals that even a neutral photograph accompanying a story in which a person is portrayed in a negative light constitutes a serious invasion into the private life of a person who does not seek publicity (European Court of Human Rights, 2020), and restrictions on the right to an image have been treated quite strictly, noting that an image of a person is extremely close to the person himself and the dissemination of an image may restrict privacy more than the dissemination of verbal information alone (European Court of Human Rights, 2003; 2004). A person whose right to an image has been violated has the right to seek an injunction to stop such acts and compensation for material and non-pecuniary damage (Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2020b). It should be noted that the dissemination of information of a general nature or of information made public by the person himself does not in itself entail criminal liability. The unlawfulness of the collection and dissemination of information in the criminal sense cannot be linked to the collection of any kind of information about a person, by any means of collection, without assessing the specific nature of the information collected, the purpose of the collection, the duration of the collection, the amount of information collected.

Another form of cyber-violence found in the CrC is defamation, which is the dissemination of information about another person that is true, regardless of the source of the information (*Article 154 of the CrC, 2000*). What is important is that the perpetrator is aware of the untruthfulness of the information he or she is disseminating and is

willing to act in this way (e.g., Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2013c). Furthermore, case law emphasises the need to distinguish between the dissemination of news or opinion and the dissemination of information that is not true.

According to the Supreme Court of Lithuania, an opinion must be expressed honestly and ethically, without deliberately concealing or distorting facts and data; reasonable and objective criticism is protected if it is expressed in a proper manner – without insulting the person, without seeking to humiliate or belittle him or her, and with a positive aim – to highlight the shortcomings of the person or his or her activities and to eliminate them. Subjective reasoning shall be regarded as defamatory (insulting) when it is dishonest, has no objective factual basis, and implies negative public attitudes towards the person about whom it is expressed. Opinions expressed in an unethical, dishonest manner, without any arguments or facts, or withholding certain facts, have also been recognised as defamatory (Supreme Court of Lithuania, 2025). An insult does not fall within the protection of freedom of expression if it amounts to meaningless belittling, for example, when the sole purpose of the statement is to insult the person (European Court of Human Rights, 2010; 2011; 2016).

The Supreme Court of Lithuania emphasises that criminal liability, as an *ultima ratio* measure, should be applied for the most serious violations of a person's private life (including insults and defamation). As this type of liability is not the only form of legal liability that may be imposed on the offender, it is important to establish whether the offender's conduct has indeed reached a level of seriousness which, when assessed in the light of the principles of reasonableness, proportionality, justice and other general principles of law, would justify the imposition of criminal liability. If the violation of private life does not reach the level necessary for criminal liability, a person gains the right to demand that the information disseminated, which is defamatory of his or her honour and dignity, and does not correspond to reality, be denied, and that the person be compensated for the material and non-pecuniary damage caused by the publication of such information, in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 2.24 of the Law on Approval, Coming into Force and Implementation of the Civil Code of the Republic of Lithuania (hereafter referred to as the 'CC') (CC, 2000).

As regards the application of criminal liability, it should be noted that criminal law applies to a person who has reached the age of 16 years on the date of the commission of the offence (in exceptional cases, criminal liability applies when the person reaches the age of 14 years). Thus, for the offences under the above-mentioned articles of the CrC, pupils, their parents, their colleagues, or the school administration can be held liable.

The right to assistance for teachers – victims of violence

Article 23(4) of the Law provides that in cases of violence by teachers or other employees of an educational institution or when they experience violence, the head of the educational institution shall immediately, but no later than the next working day, notify of the pedagogical psychological service of the municipality concerned or the relevant provider of psychological assistance with whom the executive authority of the municipality has concluded a contract for the provision of psychological assistance, and shall recommend that the abuser or the person who has been abused seek psychological assistance.

Accordingly, in order to protect teachers' rights more effectively, it is proposed to add to Article 23(4) of the Law an obligation for the head of the institution to immediately contact the law enforcement authority in case of violence against teachers or other educational staff: '*<...> in cases of violence by teachers or other employees of an educational institution or when they are subjected to violence, the head of the educational institution shall immediately, but no later than the next working day, notify of the fact of the violence the law enforcement authority, the pedagogical psychological service of the municipality concerned or the relevant psychological assistance provider with which the executive body of the municipality has concluded a contract for the provision of psychological assistance <...>.*'

It should also be noted that the Law does not provide for comprehensive assistance to a teacher who has experienced violence in an educational institution. The legislator limits itself to provisions of a recommendatory nature. In other words, the protection of the rights of a teacher who has experienced violence is "realised" when the head of the institution informs the pedagogical psychological service of the municipality concerned and makes a recommendation to the teacher to contact it.

It is considered that this provision does not guarantee effective and comprehensive protection of teachers' rights. The emotional/mental health of the person (the victim) is often affected by the violence, and as a result, the latter does not find the inner resources (e.g., feels guilt, shame, fear) to seek help. It is therefore proposed that the Law should make it compulsory to provide psychological support to a teacher who has suffered violence.

In order to effectively protect the rights of teachers, the development of memos for teachers who are subjected to violence by pupils should be considered. Such memos would contain a list of initial actions: 1) not to blame oneself; 2) not to tolerate any form of violence, as ignoring violence can be detrimental to one's physical and mental well-being, concentration, and performance; 3) to seek and obtain emotional support (one must tell about the experienced violence to someone one trusts); 4) to make records or collect evidence; 5) to cooperate actively with the investigation; and 6) to be proactive (to initiate or participate in workshops, to publicize such incidents, and etc.).

The existence of such memos would help the teacher both psychologically and legally when deciding on the next steps to be taken.

It should be noted that Article 23 of the Law establishes a mechanism for protection and prevention against bullying or the dissemination of information in cyberspace, but a detailed analysis of the Article allows for a reasonable conclusion that the protective measures established by the legislator are aimed only at ensuring the rights of the pupil (child).

In this context, it is proposed to establish an obligation for the head of an educational institution where a teacher who has been subjected to cyber-violence works to inform the Communications Regulatory Authority.

Teachers can also seek protection of their rights through punitive means (by prosecuting the perpetrator) or civil means (e.g., by bringing actions for damages, defamation, etc.). However, any legal process entails significant financial and emotional costs, as in some cases prosecution can only be initiated if the victim complains (e.g., Article 140 of the Criminal Code: Infliction of physical pain or negligible health impairment). If violence against teachers (in its various manifestations) is considered to be a phenomenon of public importance, a pre-trial investigation would be initiated *ex officio* by the pre-trial investigation authority upon the discovery of such a fact. Thus, without considering the fight against violence against teachers to be in the public interest, the intervention of the public authorities in this process and the prevention of such violence depends on the will of the victim or on the gravity of the consequences.

Discussion

Recently, public discourse and scientific research have increasingly focused on the safety of teachers in the workplace. However, current legislation only partially guarantees the rights and psychosocial well-being of teachers who have experienced violence. The study results disclose that although Article 23(4) of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania stipulates that the head of an educational institution must inform the pedagogical psychological service or other assistance provider about any incidents of violence, this provision remains recommendatory in nature, as teachers are only offered to seek help. This echoes the findings of Mollo (2024), who emphasizes that ensuring teachers' safety from violence depends on the understanding and application of existing education legislation governing the duty to take action. McMahon et al. (2020) emphasize the need for safe procedures that allow teachers to report incidents of violence at work and protect them at the same time.

The problem with this regulation becomes apparent in the context of psychological trauma – people who have experienced violence often lack the inner resources (e.g., they feel guilt, fear, or shame) to take the active steps necessary to get help. According to

research data (Diržytė et al., 2023), victims often avoid formal procedures for seeking help, especially when their effectiveness is not guaranteed. It is therefore necessary to consider amending the law to provide for mandatory psychological assistance for teachers who have experienced violence.

It has been established that currently, the head of an educational institution is not legally obliged to inform law enforcement authorities even in cases where violence clearly falls within the scope of the Criminal Code. This means that legal responsibility for acts of violence often arises only after a complaint has been received from the victim, rather than after the violation has been identified by state institutions. It is therefore necessary to make it mandatory for the head of an educational institution to report violent acts to law enforcement authorities, especially when there are grounds to believe that a criminal offence or crime has been committed. According to McMahon et al. (2017), lack of administrative support is a problem for many teachers who have experienced violence.

The results of the study also highlighted the problem of cyberbullying against teachers. Although the law establishes preventive and protective measures against bullying, they apply exclusively to students. This one-sided focus ignores the increasing number of cases where teachers become victims of cyberbullying: their images are distributed, humiliating or sexual content is sent to them, and distorted or defamatory information is made public. According to Kopecky and Szotkowski (2017), cyberbullying or prolonged and intense cyberbullying has a clear impact on teachers' emotional and physical health. The study found that cyber regulation is not clearly defined, and its criminalization is fragmented (e.g., Article 154 of the Criminal Code on defamation or Article 168 on unlawful disclosure of information). Therefore, in this context, it is appropriate to consider extending the legal regulation by providing for the duty of the head of an educational institution to inform the Communications Regulatory Authority when cyberbullying against a teacher is detected. This would ensure a response to violations not only in psychological terms but also in technological terms, involving the responsible authority in the coordination of actions. This problem is analyzed in international studies (Pyżalski et al., 2022; Tomczyk, 2025) emphasizing that although victims of cyber violence use individual coping strategies, coordinated action by all stakeholders (students, their parents, teachers, administrators, law enforcement, and policymakers) is necessary to reduce the problem of cyberbullying.

It has been established that, in terms of legal liability, criminal proceedings are currently often initiated only on the basis of a complaint by the victim (e.g., in the case of Article 140 of the Criminal Code). However, violence against teachers often has a broader significance than an individual conflict – it affects the safety of the entire community, trust in institutions and the professional status of teachers. Therefore, the question arises as to whether, in such cases, the state should take the initiative and

initiate an investigation *ex officio*, treating the case of violence as a matter of public interest.

According to Berlanda et al. (2019), teachers feel unprepared and lack the means to overcome violence when they encounter it. The results of our study revealed the need for a comprehensive approach to legal assistance for teachers who have experienced violence. Criminal liability should be used as a last resort (*ultima ratio*) only in cases where other means of dispute resolution are insufficient. It is therefore necessary to promote the use of civil remedies (e.g., compensation for damages, protection of honor and dignity), ensuring that victimized teachers have access to legal aid and emotional support. This echoes the findings of Melanda et al. (2019) that teacher victimization is a complex phenomenon and that, in order to achieve systemic change, comprehensive support must be provided at the individual, school, community, and societal levels.

Conclusions and recommendations

Lithuania's legal framework does not sufficiently protect teachers from violence - although Lithuanian legal acts regulate violence prevention, it is more focused on protecting pupils, while teacher victimisation remains a secondary issue. Violence against teachers at school is dealt with by general statements or suggestions, but these are not individualised, there is little mention of protecting the rights of teachers who have experienced violence, and the problem is addressed by addressing the causes of children's misbehaviour and attempting to change societal attitudes.

The concept of violence against teachers is not clearly defined and in Lithuanian legislation; it lacks psychological, economic, and cyber aspects. It should be suggested that Article 2 (25) of the Law on Education of the Republic of Lithuania should be amended by including definitions of economic violence, cyber violence (which would include bullying) and psychological violence, which would include not only the impact on a person's psyche, intimidation, threats, and harassment, but also interference in private life (unlawful gathering and publication of information). Violence against teachers could be defined as any form of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, unfair treatment, harassment, obscene gestures or comments, cyber bullying, data collection and disclosure, which results in a real or potential threat to the health, dignity, reputation, property damage, or disruption of the teaching process. The concept of violence against teachers shall be defined and detailed in the school's local regulations, which shall also be communicated to parents.

National legal doctrine does not provide for a clearly regulated mechanism to guarantee compulsory specialised assistance to teachers who have experienced violence. The provision of assistance is often left to the teacher's individual decision, but due to stress, fear or stigmatisation, teachers may avoid contacting the authorities. In this context, it

is suggested that Article 23 (4) of the Law be supplemented and be worded as follows: <...> in cases where teachers or other employees of an educational institution use violence or are subjected to violence or abuse, the head of the educational institution shall immediately, but no later than the next working day, notify of the fact of the violence the law enforcement authority, the municipal pedagogical psychological service, or the relevant provider of psychological assistance with which the executive body of the municipality has concluded a contract for the provision of psychological support. A teacher who has been subjected to violence must receive psychological assistance free of charge, without delay, at the latest within 5 working days after the notification of the violence. The duration of the psychological assistance shall be determined by the psychologist, taking into account the totality of the circumstances of each episode of violence and taking into account the procedure for the provision of psychological assistance laid down by the Minister of Education and Science. A teacher who has been subjected to violence shall have the right to legal aid free of charge <...>”.

To effectively protect teachers' rights, consideration should be given to developing Guidelines for teachers who experience violence from students, their parents, colleagues, or the administration. Such guidelines would include a list of initial actions: 1) do not blame yourself; 2) do not tolerate any form of violence, as ignoring violence can harm your physical and mental well-being, concentration, and performance; 3) seek and obtain emotional support (it is essential to tell someone you trust about the violence experienced); 4) make recordings or collect evidence; 5) actively cooperate in the investigation; 6) be active (initiate or participate in seminars, publicize such cases, etc.). The existence of such Guidelines would help teachers both psychologically and legally when deciding on further action.

Acknowledgment

The research is funded by the Lithuanian Research Council (LMTLT), contract number: S-MIP-24-108, 2024-2026.

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Mokytojų viktimizacija ugdymo įstaigose: teisinės aplinkos analizė

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje pateikiama mokytojų viktimizacijos ugdymo įstaigoje teisinės aplinkos analizė. Straipsnio tikslas – remiantis tarptautine praktika ir nacionaline doktrina įvertinti mokytojų apsaugos nuo smurto ugdymo įstaigoje teisinės galimybes Lietuvoje. Keliami šie probleminiai klausimai: 1) kaip teisinis reguliavimas užtikrina mokytojų teisę ir jų teisėtus interesus į apsaugą nuo smurto, patiriamo darbe; 2) kaip nacionalinė teisinė doktrina garantuoja mokytojų, nukentėjusių nuo smurto ugdymo įstaigoje, teisę į kompleksinę specializuotą pagalbą. Taikytas kokybinės lyginamosios dokumentų analizės metodas. Nustatyta, kad Lietuvos teisinė bazė nepakankamai užtikrina mokytojų apsaugą nuo smurto. Nors Lietuvos teisės aktai reglamentuoja smurto prevenciją, jie labiau orientuoti į mokinių apsaugą, o mokytojų viktimizacija išlieka antrinis klausimas. Smurto prieš mokytojus sąvoka Lietuvos teisės aktuose nėra aiškiai apibrėžta, stokojama psichologinio, ekonominio ir kibernetinio smurto aspektų. Smurto prieš mokytojus sąvoka turi būti apibrėžta ir detalizuota mokyklos lokaliuose teisės aktuose, su kuriais supažindinami ir tėvai. Nacionalinė teisinė doktrina nenumato aiškiai reglamentuoto mechanizmo, kuris garantuotų mokytojams, patyrusiems smurtą, privalomą specializuotą pagalbą. Pagalbos teikimas dažnai paliekamas individualiam mokytojo apsisprendimui, tačiau dėl patiriamo streso, baimės ar stigmatizacijos mokytojai gali vengti kreiptis į institucijas.

Esminiai žodžiai: mokytojų viktimizacija, smurto prevencija, fizinis smurtas, psichologinis smurtas, patyčios, kibernetinis smurtas, ekonominis smurtas.

Gauta 2025 03 25 / Received 25 03 2025
Priimta 2025 06 27 / Accepted 27 06 2025