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## Forms of Social Conflicts in Schoolchildren as Perceived by the Children's Teachers

### Streszczenie

Artykuł dotyczy konfliktów społecznych wśród uczniów szkół podstawowych w kontekście ich zaburzeń zachowania w szkole, z perspektywy ich nauczycieli. Przeprowadzono badanie wśród 92 uczniów, którzy zostali wskazani przez nauczycieli, jako uczniowie z zaburzeniami zachowania. Zastosowano Skalę Oceny Zachowań Dzieci dla Nauczycieli (metoda czeska). Rezultaty badania wskazują, że uczniowie z zaburzeniami w zachowaniu są przede wszystkim w konflikcie społecznym z kolegami z klasy. Konflikty obejmują negatywne relacje, w tym agresywne zachowania, trudnych uczniów wobec kolegów, w szczególności młodszych. Wspomniane konflikty są związane z takimi cechami osobowymi jak: wyższa skłonność do kłamstwa, wyższa reaktywność emocjonalna oraz negatywny stosunek do własnego zachowania. Na podstawie wyników i wniosków z badań zostały opracowane zalecenia dla nauczycieli, którzy pracują z uczniami z zaburzeniami w zachowaniu. Zalecenia mogą zostać wykorzystane w doradztwie pedagogiczno-psychologicznym, dla zapobiegania konfliktom społecznym w szkole, w tym agresywnym zachowaniom wśród uczniów.

### Słowa kluczowe

konflikty społeczne, zaburzenia w zachowaniu, cechy osobowe, reaktywność emocjonalna, doradztwo

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## **Abstract**

Our article deals with social conflicts in “troubled” schoolchildren from the perspective of their teachers. Using Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale (Czech method), a total of 92 schoolchildren have been tested. All the children were identified by their teachers as having behavioural difficulties. The children with behavioural difficulties have been found to engage especially in peer-related social conflicts, which involved negative relationships with classmates and aggressive behaviour, particularly in the younger children (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade of compulsory education). The relevant personality traits included a higher tendency to lie, higher levels of emotional reactivity, and a negative attitude towards one’s own behaviour. Based on the results, a recommendation is given to teachers working with children with behavioural difficulties, to aid prevention and render psychological counselling.

## **Keywords**

social conflicts, behavioural difficulties, personality traits, emotional reactivity, psychological counselling

## **Introduction**

In their classes, teachers encounter various types of behaviour. While some pupils are attentive, diligent and hardworking, others are performing less well. These children do not comply with the requirements of the educational environment and their behaviour is disruptive not only to teaching and learning, but also to the relationship between the teacher and the pupil. Problematic children keep disturbing the class and shouting out; they are inattentive and do not fulfil their duties, irritating the teacher and annoying their classmates. Often, they are unpopular in class, and are reprimanded and punished for their behaviour; and are seldom praised. The above is closely connected to the children’s poor school performance. Negative reactions of the teacher, the pupil’s parents and others in the child’s surroundings create a negative self-image in the child and contribute to poor self-evaluation. It is therefore essential that the child is given firm support in his/her learning process and the opportunity to fully develop his/her potential, despite all the difficulties that interaction with the problematic child may involve.

In recent years, the assessment of behavioural difficulties in Czech children has usually been performed using Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008). In her research, Vágnerová (2007, quoted in Vágnerová and Klégrová, 2008) employed a research sample consisting of 50 “younger” schoolchildren (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade of compulsory education) and 50 “older” schoolchildren (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade). The younger schoolchildren were found to exhibit various signs of immaturity (impulsiveness, restlessness, irritability). The author further claims that the pupils’ willingness to comply with the teacher’s instructions decreases with age, while the tendency to neglect homework increases. The younger children with behav-

avioural difficulties also showed a stronger tendency to assert themselves among their classmates, usually by “showing off”. The older schoolchildren were found to be more composed and less impulsive, showing a weaker tendency to react emotionally. On the other hand, they displayed a higher tendency to seek excitement and engage in risky activities. Their attitude to their own behaviour was found to be different and they were less willing to comply with school requirements than the younger children.

Other noteworthy findings were made by Vojtová (2009b), who in 2008–2009 conducted research focusing on 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade children with behavioural difficulties. The research was done through self-assessment of 1596 pupils, revealing that 5–20% of the respondents were aware of certain problematic aspects of their behaviour. Vojtová (2009b) further states that girls showed more self-confidence than boys, adding that because girls’ behaviour is probably less conspicuous than boys’, the teachers tend to view girls as less troubled.

In 2010, research focusing on integrating ADHD children into ordinary classes was conducted at three elementary (compulsory-education) schools in Prague. In addition to ADHD, some of the children were diagnosed with a particular SLD form. The objective of the research was to learn about the children’s relationships with their classmates and teachers, and to find out what impact ADHD and SLD has on teaching and learning. The research was conducted by means of questionnaires administered to 140 respondents, including 76 pupils in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, 38 pupils in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and 26 teachers. The return rate of questionnaires from pupils was 100%, for teachers it was 70 %. The research results confirmed the hypothesis that low-performing children (including those with ADHD and SLD) find it more difficult to establish social relationships and they have a worse relative position among peers than children with average or exceptional performance. Therefore, a question arises as to whether it is ADHD or SLD that causes poor school performance and problematic relationships with peers. The above research further revealed that children with ADHD and SLD do not exhibit a negative influence on the classroom environment, although they do not tend to be popular in class or well-liked by their classmates (as assessed by a sociometric measure of peer acceptance). The research further showed high knowledge levels among the pupils (received from their class teachers) regarding the integration of disadvantaged children and high tolerance levels among the pupils of educational concessions for the disadvantaged children. The pupils were, however, less tolerant of the disadvantaged children’s disruptive and restless behaviour in class (Fryntová and Hubinková, 2011). Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is closely linked to problematic and disruptive behaviour in class as well as to occurring behaviour disorders (e.g. Train, 2001; Vojtová, 2010).

In 2014, research was conducted addressing improper behaviour of school-aged children and the degree to which the children themselves excuse such behaviour. A total of 446

school-aged children attending 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades from six schools in the South-Bohemian Region participated in the research. Of the 446 questionnaires administered to the children, 438 were analysed. The survey employed two sets of questionnaires, with one related to copying and cheating frequency at school, and the other testing the degree to which a positive attitude to cheating vs. adherence to the moral norm of honesty was in evidence. “Cheating” included forging a parent’s signature, lying about absenteeism, and inventing health problems or difficult family situations in order to gain advantages over classmates. According to Vrbová (2014), acceptance of moral norms shows no direct correlation with copying or cheating frequency. Her research further revealed a tendency to neutralize cheating rather than copying. Copying a classmate’s work may not always be viewed as an immoral activity, and so the children do not feel the need to provide an excuse. Moral neutralization helps schoolchildren to cope with the conflict between how they “should behave” and how they “actually behave” (Vrbová, 2014). The results indicate that school-aged children with behavioural difficulties, particularly the older ones, have a relatively low ability (or lack thereof) to judge the adequacy of their own behaviour, consciously breaching social and school norms and rules (Vojtová, 2009a, 2010).

## The objective of the research and hypotheses

Our **research objective** was to identify the most common types of behavioural difficulties in school-aged children from their teachers’ perspective. Our aim was to compare problematic behaviour in male and female children and to determine whether the behavioural difficulties are age-related and area-dependent (village vs city). In addition, we investigated the links between the various problematic behavioural categories.

The following **research hypotheses** were tested:

**H1:** *There is a statistically significant difference between male and female schoolchildren in the overall degree of behavioural difficulties.*

Boys have been expected to display more problematic behaviour than girls. In addition, we expected male children to outnumber female children in our research sample.

**H2:** *There is a statistically significant difference in the degree of behavioural difficulties between the younger (approx. 6–11 years) and the older (approx. 12–15 years) schoolchildren.*

The older schoolchildren were expected to exhibit more of problematic behaviour than the younger children.

**H3:** *There is a statistically significant relationship between overall behavioural difficulties and the children’s relationships with their classmates.*

We expected troubled children to experience disrupted relationships with their classmates.

**H4:** *There is a statistically significant relationship between a tendency to lie and the attitude to one's own behaviour.*

Schoolchildren with behavioural difficulties were expected to excuse their own dishonest behaviour and try to justify it, unable to show perspective in their behaviour in a given situation.

**H5:** *There is a statistically significant relationship between negative relationships with classmates and behavioural aggression.*

We expected the children with negative relationships with their classmates to exhibit an increased propensity for aggression.

## Method

Using the Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008), the troubled children's teachers assessed the behaviour of their pupils. The scale comprises 42 items divided into seven categories (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008). Each sub-category contains six items; the degree of agreement with each item is indicated using a three-point scale (2, 1, 0). The numbers indicate either the frequency of a given behaviour or the degree to which the respondent agrees with a given statement (for instance: 2 – Often, 1 – Sometimes, 0 – Never; 2 – Yes, 1 – Sometimes, 0 – No; 2 – Often, 1 – Sometimes, 0 – Rarely). The higher the number of points for each category (and the total number of points), the higher the degree of behavioural difficulties. The highest number is 12 for each sub-category and 84 for the whole scale. The overall raw score and sub-scores were converted to sten scores. The scale has been preliminarily standardized and adjusted for use in the Czech educational environment.

The category entitled *Behaviour in Class* covers preparation for classes and the child's behaviour in class, including whether he/she is paying attention and following the teacher's instructions, or keeps disturbing or playing truant from school.

The category *Relationships with Classmates* concerns the peer popularity levels vs. proneness to conflict and showing off. It indicates the child's ability level to cooperate and empathize with peers.

The category *Attitude to Teacher* covers the child's ability to respect the authority of the teacher, to accept the teacher's requirements and to comply with them. In addition, the category marks the presence of defiant and provocative behaviour and repeated efforts to attract the teacher's attention as well as teacher-oriented negativism. The category also expresses the level of the teacher's difficulty in working with the child.

The category *Emotional Reactivity and Related Behaviours* (hereinafter referred to as *Emotional Reactivity*) concerns impulsiveness, quick-temperedness, irritability and peevishness vs. the child's composure and ability to self-control others.

The category *Tendency to Aggression* marks the presence of inconsiderateness, cruelty and violence in the child's behaviour towards classmates. The typical behaviours include demeaning others, taking pleasure in hurting others, and destructive behaviour directed at self, others and things (breaking things).

The category *Mendacity and Psychological Stylization* concerns the level of the child's truthfulness vs. denying facts, putting blame on classmates, inventing excuses for one's own misbehaviour or for not fulfilling his/her duties, and also fantasizing ("making up stories") in order to attract attention.

The category *Attitude to One's Own Behaviour* concerns adherence to common behavioural rules, the degree of remorsefulness as a reaction to a morally wrong behaviour and the ability to judge one's own behavioural adequacy in a particular situation. In addition, the category inquires about grievances against the others and awareness of proper, "correct" behaviour accompanied by the inability to translate it into action.

## **Research sample and procedure**

Our research sample consisted of school-aged children with behavioural difficulties. The selection was done by the children's teachers at their own discretion. The selected pupils were then anonymously assessed using the above scale; the data are subjective. A total of nine schools participated in the research: four city schools and five village schools. Data collection was conducted throughout the year 2015.

The questionnaires were administered to the teachers in print form via school counsellors and headmasters who had familiarized themselves with the guidelines for filling in the questionnaires. Each teacher was asked to assess the behaviour of a child they consider "troubled", without providing either the child's name or their own. If a teacher had two or more troubled pupils in their classes, they were free to fill in several questionnaires. Since the children's selections were left to the teachers' discretion, it is likely that some children were assessed by two or more teachers; therefore, the completed questionnaires may not correspond to the number of assessed pupils.

Demographic variables collected about each child included sex, grade, stage of schooling (Czech compulsory, or "elementary", education comprises two stages, with the first stage covering the first five grades and the second stage covering the last four compulsory education grades; throughout the article, we will be using the terms "the younger/older schoolchildren", respectively). The total number of filled-in questionnaires was 92, with 90

% assessing male children (N = 83) and 10 % female children (N = 9). Concerning the questionnaires we received, 45 % (N = 41) assessed the younger schoolchildren (1<sup>st</sup> compulsory education stage), with 55 % (N = 51) assessing the older schoolchildren's behaviour (2<sup>nd</sup> compulsory education stage). Village schools accounted for 53 % of the total questionnaires (N = 49) and city schools for 47 % (N = 43).

Demographic variables collected about the teachers included sex, age and their teaching experience duration. Most teachers were female (N = 79), who accounted for 86 % of the total number. Due to the uneven distribution, the median and the interquartile range were used for age and teaching experience duration rather than the mean and standard deviation. The mean age of the teachers was 40 years (Me = 40; IQR = 18). For our research, the teachers were divided into four age groups: age 23 to 29 years (N = 22; 23.9 %); 30 to 39 years (N = 17; 18.5 %); 40 to 49 years (N = 38; 41.3 %); and 50 to 60 years (N = 15; 16.3 %). The average teaching experience duration was 15 years (Me = 15; IQR = 18), with most teachers having a teaching experience up to five years (N = 25; 27.2 %).

## Results

The raw scores reflecting behavioural difficulties were converted to sten scores, with the pupil's problematic behavioural level being expressed by a number on the 1–10 sten scale. Table 1 lists average sten scores (N = 92) for the categories described above. The higher the scores for a particular category, the more salient (and problematic) the relevant traits are in the child's behaviour. The highest mean values were found for the following categories: *Relationships with Classmates* (m = 7.26; sd = 3.15); *Mendacity and Psychological Stylization* (m = 7.13; sd = 3.24); *Emotional Reactivity* (7.10; sd = 3.48); and *Attitude to One's Own Behaviour* (6.99; sd = 2.83).

**Table 1.** Mean Sten Scores for the Categories of Behavioural Difficulties (N = 92)

Category	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
Mean	5.89	7.26	5.53	7.10	4.36	7.13	6.99

We were interested in the possible correlation of behavioural difficulties assessment with **the teacher's age, sex and of teaching experience duration**. A factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showed no statistically significant relationship between problematic behaviour and either the teacher's age (F = 0.34; df = 3, p = 0.80), teaching experience duration (F = 0.77; df = 6; p = 0.60) or their sex (F = 0.5; df = 1; p = 0.82). Therefore, the above variables were not considered in further analyses.

***Assessed behavioural difficulties in male vs. female children***

Boys comprised 90 % (N = 83), girls children 10 % (N = 9). The large gender disproportion in the research sample made it impossible to compare males and females with respect to behavioural difficulties; nor was it possible to compare results concerning subcategories or individual items. The low proportion of girls in the research sample may indicate the lower levels of behavioural difficulties in female schoolchildren in comparison to their male counterparts, possibly also reflecting lower levels of occurring behavioural difficulties in female schoolchildren. However, the reason may lie in that behavioural difficulties manifest themselves differently in girls than in boys where behavioural problems are more salient and disruptive. Nevertheless, the above explanations are mere conjectures; a true test of **Hypothesis 1**, which predicted higher behavioural difficulty levels in male schoolchildren in comparison with female schoolchildren, could not be performed.

***Assessed behavioural difficulties in children attending village vs. city schools***

A comparison between the degree of problematic behaviour in children attending city schools and in those attending village schools was carried out using a t-test for independent samples. The mean value for behavioural difficulties in city-school children was 4.21 (N = 43; sd = 2.75), while for village-school children it was 4.24 (N = 49; sd = 2.49). The difference between the mean values was not found to be statistically significant ( $t = 0.07$ ;  $df = 90$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). No statistically significant differences between children from city schools and those attending village schools have been established, either with respect to subcategories of behavioural difficulties or with respect to individual items.

***Assessed behavioural difficulties in the younger vs. the older schoolchildren***

A comparison between the degree of problematic behaviour in the younger schoolchildren (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grade) and in the older schoolchildren (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade) was again carried out using a t-test for independent samples. The mean value for overall behavioural difficulties in the younger schoolchildren was 4.34 (N = 41; sd = 2.42), whereas for the older children it was 4.14 (N = 51; sd = 2.76). A t-test for independent samples revealed the differences to be statistically insignificant ( $t = 0.34$ ;  $df = 90$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

Other t-tests were performed to test the differences between the younger and the older schoolchildren with respect to the subcategories of behavioural difficulties. Mean values for all the subcategories are listed in Table 2. The difference between the younger and older schoolchildren has been found to be statistically significant only with respect to the category entitled *Tendency to Aggression*, with the younger children achieving a mean of 5.24 (N = 41; sd = 3.37) and the older children 3.65 (N = 51; sd = 3.30). It follows from the results that the younger children exhibited significantly stronger ( $t = 2.29$ ;  $df = 90$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) tendencies to aggressive behaviour than older schoolchildren.



**Table 2.** Mean Values for the Categories of Behavioural Difficulties – Younger (N = 41) and Older (N = 51) Schoolchildren

Category	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
Younger Schoolchildren	5.71	7.59	5.61	7.61	5.24	7.17	7.17
Older Schoolchildren	6.04	7.00	5.47	6.69	3.65	7.10	6.84

Within the subscale entitled *Tendency to Aggression*, a statistically significant difference has been found between the younger and older schoolchildren with respect to the following items: № 26 *He/she exhibits destructive behaviour; repeatedly breaks things*; № 27 *He/she uses violence to solve conflicts with classmates*; and № 29 *He/she acts cruelly and inconsiderately towards classmates* (see Table 3). The occurrence of the above traits, including violence, inconsiderateness and cruelty, was found to be higher in the younger schoolchildren than in the older ones. Destructive tendencies were present in 70.7 % of the younger schoolchildren with behavioural difficulties (N = 29) 47.1 % in the older (N = 24). Using violence as a means for solving conflicts was observed in 68.3 % of the younger (N = 28) and 45.1 % in the older schoolchildren (N = 23). Cruelty and inconsiderateness towards classmates was exhibited by 61 % in the younger (N = 25) and 31.4 % in the older schoolchildren.

**Table 3.** *Tendency to Aggression – Comparison of Younger and Older Schoolchildren (N = 92)*

Item	Chi-quadrat	Df	p
№ 26 He/she exhibits destructive behaviour; repeatedly breaks things.	5.22	1	p < 0.05
№ 27 He/she uses violence to solve conflicts with classmates.	4.95	1	p < 0.05
№ 29 He/she acts cruelly and inconsiderately towards classmates	8.06	1	p < 0.01

Further statistically significant differences were found with respect to three individual items falling under the following subscales: *Behaviour in Class*, *Relationships with Classmates* and *Emotional Reactivity*. When assessing their pupils' conduct in relation to item № 6 (*He/she skips classes*), the teachers marked "Sometimes" for only two younger children (4.9 %), while avoiding classes "Sometimes" or "Often" was true for

16 older children (31.4 %). The results appear to indicate that the older schoolchildren have more “experience” in skipping classes than their younger counterparts (chi-quadrade = 10.14;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). With respect to item № 8 (*He/she is confrontational*), the younger children were found to act more confrontationally towards their classmates ( $N = 34$ ; 82.9 %) than the older children ( $N = 33$ ; 64.7 %), (chi-quadrade = 3.81;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). The results for item № 19 (*He/she is calm and composed*) revealed irritability and lack of composure for most younger children (95 %,  $N = 39$ ), whereas the same traits were observed only in 74.5 % of the older children ( $N = 38$ ), (chi-quadrade = 7.08;  $df = 1$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 4.** Significance Levels of the Differences between Older and Younger Schoolchildren with Respect to Items 6, 8 and 19 of the Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale ( $N = 92$ )

Item	Chi-quadrade	Df	p
№ 6 He/she skips classes.	10.14	1	$p < 0.01$
№ 8 He/she is confrontational.	3.81	1	$p < 0.05$
№ 19 He/she is calm and composed.	7.08	1	$p < 0.01$

**Hypothesis 2**, which predicted a statistically significant difference in the overall behavioural difficulties between younger and older schoolchildren, was not confirmed. A statistically significant difference was established only in relation to *Tendency to Aggression* ( $t = 2.29$ ;  $df = 90$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The younger schoolchildren exhibited higher aggression levels than the older schoolchildren, showing more violence, cruelty and inconsiderateness towards their classmates, and stronger destructive tendencies.

### ***Relationship between the Overall Degree of Behavioural Difficulties and the Subcategories***

A correlation analysis was employed to test the relationship between overall behavioural difficulties and individual personality traits. Scatter variables plots showed a strong linear relationship, hence a positive correlation, between the above phenomena. The data was processed using Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient, which revealed the statistical significance for all the correlations to be at the level of  $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 5.** Correlation Between the Overall Degree of Behavioural Difficulties and the Subcategories (Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient  $r$ )

Cate- gory	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
R	0.69**	0.84**	0.81**	0.83**	0.81**	0.66**	0.83**

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

The above confirmed **Hypothesis 3** predicting a statistically significant relationship between the overall degree of behavioural difficulties and the relationship quality with classmates (category *Relationship with Classmates*). Correlation between the variables has been found to be very strong ( $r = 0.84$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ) and positive, showing that troubled children experience negative relationships with classmates.

### ***Relationships among the Behavioural Difficulties Subcategories***

The relationships among the individual behavioural difficulties subcategories were tested using scatter plots and Pearson's Correlation Coefficient. Scatter plots revealed positive linear correlations for most combinations (see Table 6). Using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, positive correlations between all the subcategories were tested for statistical significance and were found to be statistically significant at  $p < 0.01$ . Thus, **Hypothesis 4** has been confirmed, which predicted a statistically significant relationship between the tendency to lie and attitude to one's own behaviour. The relationship between *Mendacity and Psychological Stylization* and *Attitude to Own Behaviour* was found to be statistically significant ( $r = 0.70$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Hypothesis 5**, which states that there is a correlation between negative relationships with classmates and behavioural aggression degrees, has been confirmed. The correlation between the categories *Relationships with Classmates* and *Tendency to Aggression* has been found to be statistically significant ( $r = 0.74$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ).

**Table 6.** Relationship between the Subcategories of Behavioural Difficulties (Pearson's Correlation Coefficient  $r$ )

	Behaviour in Class	Relationships with Classmates	Attitude to Teacher	Emotional Reactivity	Tendency to Aggression	Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	Attitude to Own Behaviour
Behaviour in Class	–						
Relationships with Classmates	0.55**	–					
Attitude to Teacher	0.72**	0.71**	–				
Emotional Reactivity	0.53**	0.76**	0.70**	–			
Tendency to Aggression	0.38**	0.74**	0.54**	0.70**	–		
Mendacity and Psychological Stylization	0.57**	0.53**	0.50**	0.46**	0.49**	–	
Attitude to Own Behaviour	0.60**	0.75**	0.72**	0.70**	0.60**	0.70**	–

\*\*  $p < 0.01$

### ***Difficulty in Working with Troubled Children***

We were interested in teachers' perception of difficulty involved in working with troubled children. Item № 18 *Working with the child places extraordinary demands on the teacher* (Category *Attitude to Teacher*) included the following options: 2 – Yes, 1 – Sometimes and 0 – No. The results showed that nearly all teachers (88 %; N = 81) perceive working with troubled children as demanding, while only 11 teachers (12 %) did not view it as such.

### **Discussion**

During their teaching career, most teachers will encounter the necessity to work with “troubled” children, whose behaviour in class is disruptive and complicates the teacher's work as well as peer relationships. In our research it was this latter category, namely relationships with classmates, that proved to be the most problematic category reflecting behavioural difficulties. The category *Relationships with Classmates* received the highest average sten scores (7.26). The relationship between overall behavioural difficulty degrees and negative relationships with classmates (category *Relationships with Classmates*) showed strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.84$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ), meaning that children with higher behavioural difficulty levels experience more negativity in their relationships with classmates. The above is in line with a research by Fryntová and Hubinková (2011) on school-aged children with ADHD. According to the authors, children diagnosed with ADHD find it difficult to establish relationships with peers; they are unpopular in class and tend to be sidelined. We consider these findings particularly valuable for psychological and educational practice as well as for special education practice. According to Kauffman (2001), difficulties in social relations constitute a main characteristic of behavioural difficulties. Therefore, we view it as essential to pay special attention to developing and cultivating quality interpersonal relationships and social skills training. Based on the findings by Vágnerová and Klégrová (2008), we expected an increased tendency to aggression in school-aged children who have negative relationships with classmates. The expectation was confirmed; our research revealed a statistically significant relationship between the categories *Relationships with Classmates* and *Tendency to Aggression* ( $r = 0.74$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In addition, we established a strong correlation between the tendency to lie (mendacity) and inadequate attitude to one's own behaviour (breaking rules, inability to judge one's own behavioural adequacy in a particular situation, lack of guilt, remorse or shame, expressing grievances). The above is in line with the findings that Vrbová (2014) describes in her research.

The large gender disproportion in our research sample prevented us from comparing male and female schoolchildren concerning their overall behavioural difficulties. The low

proportion of girls in our research sample might have been caused by several factors, one being the heavily subjective selection criteria. Another reason may lie in the differences between how boys and girls manifest behavioural difficulties in. In this way, our research is in agreement with the information provided by Bowen, Jenson and Clark (2004), who claim that behavioural difficulties in girls are less conspicuous than in boys; according to them, girls tend to internalize their problems (e.g. depression, anxiety and depression). Vojtová (2010) states that internalized disorders have a negative impact on the child's school performance and social relationships as well as on his/her perception of school events and educational situations. Internalized disorders are covert in nature and as such are often underestimated by the teacher. Another possible reason may concern gender differences in ADHD. According to Barkley (2006, as quoted in Kelly, 2009), boys are diagnosed with ADHD three times more often than girls and display behaviour typical of ADHD five to nine times more often. A further reason may lie in teachers' differing attitudes toward each gender. Vágnerová and Klégrová (2008) state that the troubled girls tend to be viewed less strictly than boys. This may lead to the incorrect conclusion that there are more boys with behavioural difficulties than girls. Further differences in gender assessment can be related to pro-social versus asocial behavioural occurrences possibly corresponding to internalized and externalized behavioural disorders. Pro-social behaviour is less "visible" and can be overlooked easily by the teacher. Disruptive behaviour tends to receive more attention (Vágnerová, Klégrová, 2008).

In addition, we set out to investigate the differences between the degree of problematic behaviour in younger schoolchildren (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grades in compulsory education) and older schoolchildren (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades). The hypothesis that older schoolchildren exhibit more subjectively problematic behaviour than younger children was not confirmed. Vágnerová (2007, quoted in Vágnerová and Klégrová, 2008) points out the emotional difference between younger and older schoolchildren, with younger children being in general more restless, impulsive and quick-tempered, while older children tend to be calmer and more composed. Within the *Emotional Reactivity* category, the difference between the younger and the older schoolchildren was only confirmed with respect to the item inquiring about calm and composed behaviour. Our findings show that older schoolchildren tend to be calmer and more composed than the younger. Another significant difference between younger and older schoolchildren was found in relation to aggression levels (category entitled *Tendency to Aggression*). While Vágnerová (2005) states that aggression's frequency and intensity tend to increase in adolescence, our findings show the opposite, namely that it is the younger children who exhibit higher aggression levels, typically manifested in violence, cruelty and inconsiderateness towards classmates and in destructive tendencies (breaking things). No statistically significant

differences between younger and older schoolchildren were established with respect to impulsiveness, irritability, and the ability to comply with the teacher's instructions and fulfil his/her duties. Therefore, the findings by Vágnerová (2007, quoted in Vágnerová and Klégrová, 2008) were not confirmed. A statistically significant difference between younger and older children was found in relation to truancy. Our results indicate that the older schoolchildren exhibit a higher tendency to play truant from school than their younger counterparts, although two younger children with behavioural difficulties were known by their teachers to have a tendency to skip classes as well.

Our research limitations included especially the decidedly uneven gender distribution in our sample, which made it impossible to compare boys and girls with respect to their overall degree for manifesting behavioural difficulties; in order to enable comparison, the distribution would have to be improved. Our other problematic research aspects can be seen in the small number of teachers assessing the children and in their subjective selection of troubled children, who were assessed by a single teacher only.

Quite obviously, assessment quality is influenced by the contact frequency between the troubled children and their teachers. The great number of subjects taught in the second stage of compulsory education (6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grades) and the limited time allocated to these subjects prevents the teachers from gaining deep knowledge concerning their pupils. Teachers of younger children, on the other hand, may be biased by their previous experience with the child and by their more general view about problematic behaviour. As a result, they may tend to be more strict (or lenient) when assessing the troubled child's behaviour, or they can employ stereotypical notions. At the same time, the troubled child will likely be influenced by the teacher's personality, along with the child's liking (or its absence) for the subject. The validity of our findings could be increased by multiple assessments (by several teachers) concerning each child with behavioural difficulties. Some accidental multiple assessments of a single pupil cannot be excluded; however, our completely anonymous assessment (with respect to both the teacher and the assessed pupil) prevented us from identifying such cases.

We recommend "the Behaviour Assessment System for Children – Teacher Rating Scale" for use by school psychologists, counsellors and class teachers to assess problematic behaviour of school-aged children in various educational situations.

## **Conclusion**

Our questionnaire survey consisting in teacher-performed assessments of behavioural difficulties in school-aged children revealed that behavioural difficulties are most prominently manifested in negative relationships with classmates, higher mendacity and

tendency to psychological stylization, higher emotional reactivity, and displaying an absent negative attitude to one's own behaviour.

Due to uneven gender distribution, no comparison could be made between girls and boys. The differences in behavioural difficulty levels between children attending village vs. city schools were not found to be statistically significant. However, a statistically significant difference was revealed between the younger and the older schoolchildren with respect to aggressive tendency levels, which were higher in the younger children (1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> grades in Czech compulsory education). The younger children were found to show more violence, cruelty and inconsiderateness towards their classmates, and stronger destructive tendencies (breaking things). Strong correlations were established between the overall degree of behavioural difficulties and individual personality traits.

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