

VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: DEFINITION AND FACTORS

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The subject of violence amongst children and teenagers keeps being raised for discussion times and again, especially in a background of incidents of extreme violence such as fights, involvement of teenagers in acts of murder, robberies or sexual violence. Natan [15] claims that recently, there are many reports in the media, on teenager violence in general and on violence in schools in particular. However, the essence of the problem is not necessarily in those extreme cases, but in involvement and daily exposure of teenagers to violence in different levels of severity, such as teasing, cursing, threats, boycotts, vandalism, extortion, pushing and fights.

Keywords: *violence, aggressive, teenagers, school, achievement, security of students, behavior.*

VIOLENȚA ÎN ȘCOLI: DEFINIȚIE ȘI FACTORI

Subiectul violenței în rândul copiilor și adolescenților rămâne temă de discuție frecventă, în special pe fundalul unor incidente de o violență extremă, cum ar fi luptele, implicarea adolescenților în crime, furturi sau violență sexuală. Natan [15] susține că actualmente în mass-media există multe rapoarte cu privire la violența între adolescenți, în general, și cu privire la violența în școli, în special. Cu toate acestea, esența problemei nu este neapărat în aceste cazuri extreme, dar în implicarea și expunerea zilnică a adolescenților la violență de diferite niveluri de severitate, cum ar fi tachinare, înjurături, amenințări, boicoturi, vandalism, jaf, îmbrânceli și lupte.

Cuvinte-cheie: *violență, agresivitate, adolescent, școală, realizare, securitatea elevilor, purtare.*

Definition

Violence is perceived as the destructive, non-legitimate form of aggressiveness and is defined as "the use of force, whether physical or other, against another person for the purpose of harming his body, dignity, property, spirit, or culture" [17, p.387]. Often, especially with children, what begins as mild and presumably harmless aggressiveness can quickly deteriorate into actual violence. Verbal and physical bullying, cursing, aggressive play, and so on are the precursors of violence and foreshadow it.

Violence is a common phenomenon that resides in almost every aspect of our lives: in the family, among neighbors, in sports' stadiums, in schools, the streets, and lately even in the political arena. Violence among Israeli children and youths rises to public awareness when it descends to shocking lows, and then the media reports on extreme cases of violence, robbery, group rape, or drug dealing. However, the truly troubling phenomenon is that these lows are a manifestation of daily involvement and exposure to varying levels of violence, which has become a regular part of the life of children in Israel, in every place, in all walks of life. If in the past violence was attributed to the lower classes or to certain ethnicities, today it is an affliction reaching all sectors and classes, which points towards a psychological phenomenon rather than a sociological one. The research literature points to particularly high levels of violence in adolescence, compared to other ages, and to an increase in violence in many Western countries, concurrent with a growing exposure of youths to alcohol and drugs [17].

Violence in schools threatens the security of students and teachers and harms the educational enterprise. This is not a unique or new phenomenon, though the public outcry regarding it increases when extreme incidents occur. In Israel, as in many other countries, there is great concern about this issue, which is manifest in, among other things, varying attempts to learn about violence in educational institutions and identify ways to promote its prevention and treatment. Students behave in an aggressive and even violent manner towards other students as well as towards teachers [7], and there are numerous, daily examples of this: Students refuse to follow instructions, they yell, harass verbally and physically, threaten, frighten, and even engage in bodily violence [2]. The extent of violence in the Israeli education system is one of the highest in the Western world. The types of violence are many and range from fighting, to strangling, severe knife wounds, and more. Among the reasons for the rise in violence one can count: low achievement levels in school, a feeling of alienation from school, acknowledgement that violence exists in school, a difficult economic situation, violence in movies, ads, computers, the internet; a rise in the level of violence in broader society, and the impact of terrorism. Violent children tend to run away from school, get bored, fail, and get into trouble with

teachers and parents. The increase of violence in schools is also related to the weakening of the teachers' status in school, the erosion of their authority, increasing contempt for teachers and lack of backing for teachers. The incidents of brutal violence among youths, which are increasing and worsening, are also an expression of the social and economic distress of children from poor families, children of unemployed parents, and single-parent families. Taking measures to bolster the academic achievements of the violent students in school may strengthen their self-image and positively affect their integration in the school system and society [14].

Violence among children and youths is a reflection of adult society. Society is more violent and crude, and the boundaries between what is permissible and what is not are being shattered on a daily basis. The rise in violence in society parallels the rise in terror incidents in Israel. Manners are no longer fashionable, and neither is consideration for one's fellow man. The responsibility lies on the parents' shoulders as well, who do not set clear boundaries to their children regarding dress and behavior, which causes a crisis in values. Children imitate grownups as they look to address their problems with violence. Violent children grow up to be violent adults who are difficult to rehabilitate, perhaps even impossible. Children and youths are supposed to acquire values in the education system, but instead they beat each other up mercilessly for values such as honor, manliness, control, bullying for its own sake, and more [14].

Dealing with the issue of violence is a high priority for the Ministry of Education and may even be included in next years' school curriculum. Schools operate many programs and they are open to treating the issue. The police encourage the students who suffer harm from violence in school and their parents to submit official complaints to the police. The Ministry of Education is considering combating youth violence through means such as revoking driving licenses of violent youths for two years, forbidding the issuing of such a license, suspending violent students, segregating them in special classes for violent students, as well as exchanging violent students among schools. Students will be able to enter their school only with a personal magnetic card and their bags will be searched upon entering [14]. In recent years this issue has received more intensive, consistent attention than in previous periods. Among other things, detailed recommendations for the reduction of violence in the education system were submitted following the Vilnai Report [21], and a national study was conducted, the first of its kind, that concentrated on violence in the education system [5].

Factors of violence in school

Professional literature deals extensively in violence phenomenon as a complex phenomenon, with multiple causes and factors. School violence phenomenon stems from many different factors. Professional literature relates the reasons to teenagers' violence in environmental, familiar, cultural, social, biological, psychological factors and naturally to school elements as well. Natan, 2014 [15] claims that the weakness of an education system, rough social-economic situation, lack of leadership role models and the Israeli society violence are some of the factors of increase in teenagers' violence. Horovitz, 2000 [12] has divided the explanations for the violence phenomenon's into three: 1. violence as society's input into school; 2. violence as a product of school experience; 3. violence as product of situation factors. Reinforcement of the understanding that there is a link between society conditions and school components which lead to teenagers' violent behavior can be found in a study of Horovitz and Amir (1981) [11], who have sought to find what are the terms that lead to violence. The community conditions found in their study as leading to violence have been: distress areas in condition of anomie and school being located in a crime environment. The school components found as leading to violence have included inconsistent, arbitrary administrative decisions that lack a diagnostic foundation, and school-related elements such as transitions, high expectations as opposed to medium ability, division of courses and more.

Another angle for relations between youth culture, youth education and schools and between teenagers' violent behavior can be found in study of Sela-Shiyovitz, 2003 [18] that have investigated teenagers' violence in dance clubs and rock concerts. She has found that violent behavior is more common amongst pupils studying in vocational schools and amongst teenagers belonging to street groups, than amongst pupils studying in academic schools. From the findings of her study, it can be understood that the differences in involvement of teenagers in violence in rock concerts and dance clubs is related to their educational level. Meaning, as education level rises, the frequency of violence as a community-cultural phenomenon, reduces.

The existence of violent behavior as a cultural phenomenon amongst teenagers intensifies in recent years. It must be remembered, that the peer groups amongst teenagers are a natural basis for arguments and fights,

which can easily side over to violent acts. Some claim that in the Western world, peer groups of teenagers develop into antagonistic sub-cultures of the world of adults. It is expressed in the mass leisure culture [16], in computerized roaming in the computer world, in teenagers' television shows [13] and of course, in the educational frameworks as well, in which teachers and the principals are perceived as enemies [19]. Harel (1999) and Gumbel (2002) have equally addressed the fact that social alienation of pupils from teachers, from colleagues, from school and from studied material affects school violence level [9; 10].

Gilboa (2004) claims that the most obvious attitude to violence is determined in the cultural moral code that companies and states are managed by. In his opinion, the school as significant representative of society and dominant culture expresses powerful force. However, it is faced with not a weaker force of individuals and groups. Those succeeding to accept the normative value framework, survive within the system. Those who cannot accept the framework's values, do not survive and therefore, act violently towards it. He claims that a school framework reflects the Israeli society with its layers and represents social reality in which the conflicts existing between individuals and system representative lead to violence. Only a change in the perception that would stop considering violence and its causes as social deviation, but as a subject in itself, in social and cultural aspects, can bring about an improvement [8].

Abu-Asba (2010) adds that forgivingness towards violence in schools leads to an increase of social violence, and makes violent behavior a familiar pattern of behavior. It must be considered that school violence problem is complicated and complex, and is not to be attributed to one factor only but to an entirety of social and psychological factors [1].

The perception relating teenagers' violent behavior to political and social situations, is enforced by the vast variety of programs dealing with multiculturalism, conflict resolutions and education for peace [20]. Continuing on this broad view, Salomon offers three categories of education for peace: education for peace in relations to international conflicts in which familiarity with the other side's narrative is emphasized; education for peace in relation to tension between different culture groups where change of stereotypes and prejudice is emphasized; and education for peace in non-conflict or stress-free relations in which support of the importance of peaceful life is emphasized.

The perception relating the violent behavior of pupils in educational systems to the social cultural reality in Israel, is emphasized as well, in the recent studies on pupils' violence that have been conducted in Israel. Benbenishty (2003) reviews the variables outside of school that influence the behavior within a school, such as family, the peer group and culture. He also presents elements within a school which can intensify violence or aid its prevention, such as school climate and relationships between pupils and teachers. In his opinion, in the face of multitude of variables relating to school violence, it could be expected that intervention programs in this field would focus on multiple elements, both within and outside a school. However, most intervention programs focus only on one or two elements, or one or two ecology level (for example, the child, the family or the class), and tend to disregard the interaction between a multitude of variables. Therefore, it is no wonder that most programs dealing with one element tend to be ineffective in lowering the level of school violence [4].

In the Ministry of Education CEO Circular [23] the variance of school violence has been related directly with variables related to school climate, and it has been claimed (section 1.1) that "the climate in an education institute... is a central factor influencing the creation of an environment that does not invite and does not allow violence within the educational institution. Creating a climate meaning, creating the possibility for pupils to experience, continuously, social values and assimilate them and to experience social skills". Amongst the guiding lines for creation of safe climate in a school the Circular's subject of discussion is "applying social-community world-view (relevance, caring, involvement and guarantee)... creating early routines that promote security, safety and values of mutual respect... adopting a violence intolerance policy..." and more (section 1.2).

Harel and Laufer (2003) point additional school components which might increase the possibility of teenagers' acts of violence. They have found that school variables, and especially the sense of disconnection of a pupil from school, a sense of lack of achievement and a sense of high violence level in the vicinity of a school, are related to hooliganism, fights and carrying of weapon. In their opinion, bored pupils with a tendency to escape from school, whose achievement level is low and who claim that their school has a high violence level are more likely to be involved in hooliganism, fights and carrying of weapons. Although social difficulties have been found to be related to violence, however, in a lesser extent. This relation has been a little higher amongst girls [24].

Summary

Benbenishty (2006) claims that class teachers and principals are obligated to the primary responsibility of prevention and handling of instances of violence in school. In order to handle this task, they must be equipped with tools, meaning, knowledge and training. About 33% of school principals and about 20% of class teachers believe they do not possess the tools required for dealing with instances of violence. As a result, training is to be given to principals and school teachers for equipping them with the tools they need. Despite the basic training, in which principals and class teachers receive aids for dealing with violence, in order to handle violence, knowledge and specific skills and focused training are to be acquired during the professional work. The emergent picture from the words of principals and class teachers about the training they have received is not encouraging. Less than 33% of the principals and less than 25% of the class teachers believe they have received proper training for dealing with violence in their training. The rate is extremely low amongst high school teachers [3, p.146]. In a survey held in 2003, amongst 600 teachers, 400 from the responding teachers point out that they don't have the tools and knowledge to deal with violence in their school, and that violence and disciplinary problems are the most difficult problems in the education system today (Public Opinion Survey amongst Israel's teachers, Panim 24, 2003, p.77-88). Vilnaei Committee (1999) has referred in its first recommendation to tools that a principal is to be given in order to deal with violence. Amongst other things, it has been recommended to add to a school external factors for helping in dealing with the phenomenon. Later on, the committee has recommended an encouragement of designing of study units in training program and apprenticeships of preschool teachers, teachers and principals that would assist in prevention of violence [21]. A testimony to the effectiveness of this solution can be seen in data of study year of 2002 that have indicated a decrease in rate of instances of violence in schools, particularly in Primary schools. This decrease has been credited to the large investment in guidance, training apprenticeships and interventions in schools [3, p.146].

Despite the fact that Israeli studies on patterns of violence amongst pupils highlight school as a dominant violence arena, it is common knowledge that the violence reasons are caused by a variety of elements, most are not directly related to school. Nonetheless, the researchers believe a school must take responsibility for an effective dealing with teenagers' violence problem, while constructing cooperation with educational-therapy systems in the community, to relate to the living environment of teenagers in school and in the community [22,3].

The first group of factors (biological, psychological and familial factors) relates to primary elements, both those that imprinted in a person from birth and those depending upon the initial environment surrounding him during his first years. Those factors form a charge arrives to school with and turn him into aggressive behavior prone. Crawford and Bodin [3] in their study indicate that behavior is comprised of joined factors each one having a certain effect; accelerating factors (as failure) can worsen violence tendency, and flexibility and communication skills characteristics can restrain the tendency to its disappearance.

The second group of factors includes factors such as communication, community and society, surrounds a child and affects him before his arrival to educational frameworks, and continue affecting him in the course of his study years. Sometimes there is a problem that lack of congruence between school framework and an external framework would lead to rejection of school values in advance and to aggravation of aggressiveness [11].

A great deal of optimism lies in the fact that not all children exposed to risk factors from the first and second groups are characterized with aggressive and violent behavior. The cognitive approach claims that a behavior change can be made by concept and thinking change and by acquiring skills of conflict resolutions and development of self-control [6]. Indeed, it has been found that prone children have managed to develop social fitness and haven't become violent, characterized by capability for recovery and flexibility stemming from factors the likes of sense of belonging, effective communication skills, ability of caring for another, problems resolution skills and more [11].

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