

## VIOLENCE IN THE EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

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### **Abstract**

*School is not an isolated environment but rather an integral part of the broad community, and the problems it faces as an institution and youth training environment concern the entire society. Although there should be a positive climate in school, and any form of violence should be kept under control, there may be forms of violence both between students and between teachers or, unfortunately, between teachers and students. School violence is just one of the manifestations of daily violence. The media are increasingly focusing on youth violence, school violence, trying to raise awareness about society.*

**Keywords:** *violence; society; behavior; discipline; education;*

### **Introduction**

Raising awareness of the phenomenon of school violence should, of course, lead to increased efforts to improve the current situation, prevent and combat violence in general and school violence in particular. Addressing violence in schools as a particular form of violence must take into account three key concepts: violence, school and age. We are therefore talking about pre-school and primary school children, but also about teenagers. Exclusive children are excluded in any form of education, although they may be at school age.

Violence is a social phenomenon defined by Organizția World Health that "the threat or intentional use of physical force or power

oneself, against others or against a group or community that drives an injury, death or damage to psychological development improper or deprivation ". However, it includes acts based on a relationship of power expressed through intimidation, threats or, conversely, negligence and omission.

### **1. The notion of "violence"**

Defining violence has proven to be an extremely difficult attempt. This is explained by the complexity of the phenomenon, but also by the great diversity of its forms of manifestation. Last but not least, the difficulty also arose due to the association and sometimes even the confusion of violence with aggression. However, field specialists have made a

series of delimitations between the two concepts, which are said to be mentioned. [1]

The term aggressiveness comes from the Latin adventurer, which means "going to ...", and then evolved into agility, meaning "going to ... something bad with a tendency to attack." Etymologically, the notion of aggressiveness refers to individual potentiality, ability to face an obstacle, to confront one another and not to give back in case of difficulty. The notion of violence is discussed in relation to aggression. The Latin root of the term violence is a dream, which means "force," and which refers to the idea of power, domination, use of physical superiority, and of force, of another.

There are many definitions of violence. Eric Debarbieux (1996: 45-46), a specialist in violence in the school environment, offers a definition that captures the phenomenon of violence: "Violence is the brutal or continuous disorganization of a personal, collective or social system, a loss of integrity, which may be physical, mental or material. This disorganization can operate by aggression, by using force, consciously or unconsciously, but there can be violence only from the point of view of the victim, without the aggressor having the intention of doing harm." [2]

Most analytics privilege the idea that aggression is more of an instinct, while violence is more of a culture, of education, of context. Historically and culturally, violence is a relative notion, dependent on the social, legal and political codes of the society in which it manifests itself. In the absence of a precise definition of violence, some authors believe that an inventory of violent acts is more appropriate. But the

gross facts, private to their social significance, do not say anything. Clarifying a fact as violent depends on the social conventions in place. For a long time, such as the physical correction that parents applied to children, it was considered a natural thing that is part of the educational act. There are also populations, communities that almost do not know aggressiveness, while others are quite aggressive. [3]

## **2. The family environment**

Social psychologists insist that socially acquired aggression does not just mean the tendency to respond hostile to unpleasant interactions. The family environment, neighborhood or school similarity group, the media are psychosocial frameworks to acquire aggressive scenarios that are supported by knowledge and assessment structures (perceptions, attitudes, normative beliefs) that send aggressive behaviors. Human beings teach little how to perceive, interpret, judge, and respond to stimuli coming from the physical and social environment. Slowly, mental-behavioral scenarios crystallize, which, learned and used frequently, can take on automated character, like habitus, in time. Longitudinal studies show that such cognitive-behavioral structures of aggression begin to grow around the age of 8-9 years and are continuously consolidating to maturity.

I think, the most important source of student aggression. Many of the children with an aggressive profile come from disorganized families, experience parental divorce and live in single-parent families. The family's balance is also disturbed by the crisis of jobs, the unemployment that touches many parents. Parents are confronted with many material and psychological difficulties, because they have the feeling of devaluation, of failure. Under these

circumstances, they are no longer available to their children. Against this backdrop, there are very serious family problems that deeply affect children: intra-family violence, alcohol abuse, child abuse, neglect, plus important educational needs - lack of dialogue, disorder, inconsistency in the demands formulated (from one extreme to the other, from an exaggerated permissivity to very harsh restrictions), the use of violent means of punishing the child on the grounds that "beating it from heaven". There are also parents who exaggerate the affective relationship to the detriment of the educational role they should have in dealing with their children: I do not impose any kind of interdictions, by rules, they issue few exigencies and seek to avoid conflicts. This quantum absence of constraints (outside school) will cause the pupil to adopt school behaviors to refuse teachers' exigencies. [5]

According to UNICEF data, almost 60% of Romanian pupils aged between 11 and 15 admit to having participated in acts of verbal or physical violence against their schoolmates. In the ranking of violence in schools, Romania is followed by the Baltic countries and Ukraine. The least violent pupils are in Sweden and the Czech Republic. The causes of this extremely worrying situation come from domestic violence. UNICEF data show that when a child does something wrong, the first reaction of 54 percent of parents is to raise the voice, and 11 percent of parents immediately slap their baby or pull hair. Approximately 17% of children in 58 countries are subjected to severe physical punishment (head, ears or face or harsh and repeated blows). Globally, three out of ten adults believe that physical punishment is needed to raise children well. [9]

### **3. The social environment**

In turn, the social environment contains many sources to induce, stimulate and sustain school violence: the economic situation, the weakness of social control mechanisms, social inequalities, the moral values crisis, the media, the malfunctions at the level of the factors responsible for youth education, the lack of cooperation of institutions involved in education. For the former communist countries, the economic and social conjuncture causes some confusion among young people, who are beginning to doubt the effectiveness of the school, the usefulness of science. And this is all the more so since it finds that school does not provide professional insertion. Traditional values in school - work, merit, effort - know a visible erosion. A social environment in crisis (job crisis, family crisis, the crisis of values) deeply affects the development of the child's personality. [2]

Student personality traits are also in close correlation with violent behaviors, adding to age-specific issues.

### **4. School - an important role in preventing violence in schools**

Adolescence is a period of profound physical, mental and social transformation. Now the teenager is happy, he feels good in his skin and two hours later he is sad, depressed, discouraged. Often he oscillates between the feeling of power, strength and the feeling of doubt, of discouragement, of diminishing self-esteem. To defend themselves from these emotions, adolescents develop provocative, aggressive, oppositional reactions to parents and teachers.

In this difficult period, parent-child and student-teacher dialogue is absolutely

necessary. The teenager wants to be understood, needs love, affective security, but most of the time he does not recognize or express it. It is not accidental that school violence goes, first and foremost, from a lack of communication. Fighting school violence means improving the quality of relationships and communication among all people involved in the educational act.

School itself may be a source of some forms of school violence and this must be taken into account in the design of various programs to prevent and control violence. School is a place where students learn, learn, but it is also a place where relationships are established, models, values, conditions are created for cognitive, emotional and moral development of the child. The school class is a group whose members depend on each other, being subjected to a mutually influencing movement that determines the functional balance of the educational field. Each group asks its members different forms of behavior. The very act of teaching-learning is a relational process, and the management of these relationships is part of what some authors call the management of the school class, namely, the set of activities through which the teacher promotes the student's proper behavior and eliminates inappropriate behavior, develops personal relationships good and positive socio-emotional climate in the class, establishes and maintains an efficient and productive organization of the class "(Weber). [6]

Violent behaviors of the pupil may also originate in a faulty management of the school class, more precisely in a lack of adaptation of educational practices to a significantly changed school population. It is stated that the first desire of the trainer is to

exert a power. By following this unconscious desire, the teacher can negatively influence the relationship with the student as he will seek to keep him in a situation of dependence, unconditional subordination. In order to do this, the teacher can resort to different ways of coercion, thus discouraging the formation of autonomous, independent personalities; as a result, in authoritarian groups, tensions and frustrations accumulate, causing aggressive behaviors and hostilities among the members of the group. the leader has an attitude of obedience.

The relationship of authority also influences the type of communication. In most cases, communication is lateralised, that is, the teacher is the one who issues and monopolizes communication, and the student remains only a passive receptor. Communication between students within workgroups is rather limited, and student views on classroom life are too little to be considered. The need for expression and communication is a fundamental need of any individual, and the school group is a privileged place to meet these needs. Their frustration inevitably leads to a frustration that will translate into aggressive behaviors. [7]

And other components of the teacher's attitude towards students can generate conflicting situations or violent behaviors of students. Some teachers adopt an attitude of contemptuous ignorance of students, correlated with their tendency to evaluate them in constantly negative and depreciable terms. Teacher's indifference is the most important manifestation of contempt for students. There are many students who suffer as a result of these negative judgments of the teacher because they come

to strengthen their own feeling of doubt, discouragement, lack of confidence in their own forces. This contemplation, once internalized, can lead to a set of consequences in the behavioral context: lack of communication, passivity at the lesson, indifference or, on the contrary, disruption of lessons, development of hostile, provocative attitudes.

Often, unconsciously, the teacher introduces differentiation between students according to their performance. Such differentiations translate into teacher attitudes that disfavor pupils with modest achievements.

This attitude of the teacher may cause students to avoid work, indifference to what is happening in the classroom, absenteeism, refusal to do their homework, verbal violence against colleagues and even teachers, aggressive behavior. The student who is in a state of failure and who is often placed in the face of learning tasks he can not solve, is experiencing a deep anxiety.

The student suffers because he has deceived his parents and teachers, because he is despised by colleagues, he loses his self-esteem, his confidence in the ability to succeed even in areas where he is not in a state of failure. This is the moment when the violent conduct that translates into: depression, revenge and revaluation, provocative manifestations, reorientated contempt for others, lack of interest in life in general. In the current context, school failure quickly becomes synonymous with failure in life. This situation hurts the individual, affects the image he has about his own value, and therefore he tries to take revenge in some way. [5]

Last but not least, how the teacher distributes sanctions, abuse of disciplinary measures, punishments, influences the climate and the quality of school life. Every teacher knows that punishment, as a remedy, has positive effects only on a circumstantial and short-term basis. In most cases, it produces negative emotional reactions, creates tension, anxiety, frustrations, conflicts and damage to teacher-student relationships. In order for a sanction to be effective, it must have a meaning, be integrated into a coherent system linking the observance of rules, school rules to the nature of the act committed and the type of sanction. The sanction must be in a logical report with the sanctioned act.

The phenomenon of school violence must be analyzed in the context of its occurrence. School can play an important role in preventing school violence. Not only when the sources of violence are in the school environment, but also when the sources are outside the school.

In order for the school to assume this role of preventing and controlling the phenomenon of violence, the first investment should be made in the field of teacher training. We have to recognize that, both in initial and continuing training, attention is focused on working with student classes "smoothly". There is little talk about how to approach difficult classes. There is a need for specific training that can be used to meet the needs of students with problems. We can not expect liabilities to solve the problems by themselves. For example, in the context of an unstable, tense, conflictual family environment, school can represent a second chance for the student. [8]

In order to deal with difficult classes or pupils, the following objectives must be taken into account:

- carefully observing student behavior to better understand the causes of violence;
- developing the means of communication with students and establishing trust relationships;
- developing the school-family partnership;
- collaboration with school specialists (school psychologist, social worker).

Many of the violent behaviors of students manifest as a transgression of school rules. The class is a micro-society whose functioning requires the establishment of clear rules to be respected by all members of the school group. The set of dominant rules in a class characterizes the pupil's desirable behaviors and its correlative or negative, undesirable behavior. Compliance with rules is a condition of socialization, which means learning to live together in mutual respect, excluding violence. School rules are about dressing, doing themes, attending courses, but also rules of civilization that address the language used, the ways of addressing, respect for the other, preserving school supplies, tolerance, solidarity, in a way to go behave so that the life in the community is as pleasant as possible.

Rules can be imposed by the teacher or negotiated with students. They are more likely to accept rules whose meaning is transparent, and if school is a place to learn democracy, then it also requires students to participate in the development of the rules of school life: "In a democracy, the citizen is not only the one who obeys law, but also the one who elaborates it, along with others."

### **5. Risk factors for violence in school**

Studies and research that addressed the issue of violence in general or violence in school have proposed different classifications of causes or risk factors in the occurrence of the phenomenon, sometimes considering them to be identical, sometimes distinguishing between causes and risk factors. Here are some typologies of the causes / risk factors of violence.

One of the proposed classifications of specialists [10] groups the causes of violence in: biological causes (genetic factors, neurobiological problems, brain injuries, nutrition factors, alcohol and drug consumption, etc.), sociological (socio-factors related to the community and its structure, etc.) and psychological (psychological disorders associated with a lower level of psycho-intellectual development, but especially the psychological effects of the family environment in which the child develops).

Other approaches [11] consider that the main causes of violence are those generated by:

- domestic violence (children living in violent families take on these "patterns of relationship");
- economic conditions (extreme poverty in which some families live, including children, pushing some of them to commit violence);
- Unstable environment (certain family events such as parental divorce or death, as well as the unstable and insecure psychophysical climate in which children are developing - in or out of the family - may lead to violent manifestations);

- lack of self-esteem (individuals with an unfavorable self-image are involved in acts of violence to compensate negative feelings about their own person and because they thus obtain acceptance of the group with which they commit acts of violence);

- the image of media violence (the prolonged exposure to media-propagated violence desensitizes children, so they accept and practice it, all the more so since the image of media violence does not insist on the consequences on the aggressor - the criminal, social, etc. - and the effects on the victim);

- the legal system (the permissive legal framework in some countries for youth violence, a situation that does not discourage recidivism);

- alienation (lack of communication and connection points with the community, sense of belonging to it as well as lack of hope for success in life; violence and adherence to a violent group creates a sense of belonging to a certain community and confidence in the future);

- racism, sexism, homophobia, social stratification, ethnocentrism (discrimination centered on differences between individuals or groups is a source of tension that can generate violence, institutions can legitimize violence through institutional policies and practices, giving individuals the right to discriminate individually, with minimal consequences).

Another typology [12] of the risk factors of violence concerns the individual, with his / her personal characteristics, his / her relationship system, as well as cultural, environmental influences etc .; this classification includes:

- individual factors: characteristics of individuals that include biological factors and factors relating to personal history;

- relational factors: family factors, influences of the group of friends, etc .;

- Community factors: community characteristics (eg school and neighborhood) in which the individual's relationships develop;

- societal factors: social, cultural and environmental factors; include cultural norms that support children's parental rights, male dominance over women, and education and health policies that maintain or create inequality between groups.

Taking into consideration as a classification criterion certain entities or groups of influence, another grouping [13] of risk factors, relatively similar to the one presented above, envisages:

- the individual: difficulty in concentrating attention (hyperactivity), antisocial attitudes, personal history of aggressive behavior, tobacco consumption, alcohol and drugs, low intellectual development, limited possibilities of self-control, etc.

- family: authoritative behavior towards children, exposure of the child to conflicts and acts of domestic violence, harsh discipline, lax or inconsistent discipline, lack of involvement in children's lives, poor supervision, low affection towards children, reduced parental education, low family income, drug use and crime;

- colleagues / school: association with delinquent groups, involvement in

"gangs", rejection by colleagues, lack of involvement in various activities, low motivation for school, poor school results, school failure.

- neighborhood / community: low economic opportunities, high concentration of poor population, increased mobility of community population, high number of disorganized families, low community participation, social disorganized neighborhoods.

The analysis of the types of risk factors for violence in school presented above, depending on the criteria taken into account - points out that they are found especially at the following courts: individual, family, school, community, society. In our research, from the suicide of risk factors of violence, we focused in the present chapter on the individual factors (with emphasis on the psychosocial ones) and on the microsocial factors, especially those related to the family environment (given that the family has an important role in child education, including the prevention of violent behaviors), as well as on school factors.

The identification of risk factors in the phenomenon of violence was based on the analysis of data collected from the questionnaire survey addressed to more than 600 students (out of which more than 40% said they "were in a situation of being violent (aggressive towards colleagues or teachers), as well as from individual interviews with students with manifest violent behavior, with their parents and teacher-teachers.

### **5.1 Individual factors**

At the individual level, factors that affect students' violent behavioral potential include biological, psychological and social characteristics. Violent manifestations can arise from childhood, at younger ages, being influenced in varying degrees by the family environment, membership group, or other social and cultural factors.

Although the investigation of biological factors has not entered the objectives of the present study, they can not be omitted in an attempt to understand the complexity of the etiology of juvenile violence. According to recent studies in this field [14], children who have undergone various types of influence or trauma, either during the uterus or at the time of their birth, may have neurological features with a high potential for violence. Complications at birth, as well as parents' history, prove to be predictive factors for an individual's deviant behavior later, classifying him as a genetic victim, and somehow eluding him from individual responsibility. It is also considered that among the major personality factors and those with behavioral expression that characterize violent children, the most important and most relevant are: impulsiveness, hyperactivity, lack of or insufficient self control, deficit or attention problems.

In the category of psychological factors that define the personality of the violent pupil, the literature [15] mentions a series of attributes, such as: low self-esteem; the need for domination and control; physical strength; valorizing aggression in conflict resolution; specific coping mechanisms; low empathy; high social but unacceptable social impact; social empowerment.

Taking into consideration the theoretical premises presented above, the present research has started from the hypothesis that one of the categories of risk factors in inducing the phenomena of pupil violence is found in their personality. It is more about the student's personality structure and membership of one of the sex categories. In order to identify these personality factors, the present study considered the following defining variables of violent pupils:

- personality traits: aggression / impulsivity; lack or insufficient development of self-control mechanisms; motivation centered on preference for violence; particularities of the value system; self-esteem and self-expression; the tendency towards addictive behavior; empathy; - personal history (experience of victimization).

### **6. Personality traits and impact on violent behavior**

In analyzing personality traits and their influences on the behavior of children and young people, the most frequent variables considered are temperamental tendencies and personality structures. These are difficult to autonomy, on the one hand, because they are potentiated or not by the individual's history and, on the other hand, because they enter into complex and subtle interdependencies. It would be very simple to believe that a personality trait is solitary responsible for the violent behavior expressed by a symbolic or physical personality, perhaps by some authors, as simplistic as when attempting to explain violent behavior and aggression through genetic determinism .

Although no one is born criminal, Lawrence E. Cohen claims, genes predispose some individuals to crime, and criminality occurs when individual predispositions interact

with favorable social circumstances or an exciting climate. However, controversies exist, especially in the group of scholars inclined to favor explanations of a socio-cultural nature.

However, the psychological profile of the violent child, regardless of the inter-individual variables manifested in the overall category of deviance, can outline both general personality traits and specific features associated with a particular type of violence. We will continue to analyze these features, as outlined in the present investigation.

### **7. The main forms of manifestation of aggressive behavior**

**a) Active versus passive.** In this case, the attacker-victim perspective is targeted. The attacker actively carries out an aggressive gesture in order to get something. The victim suffers harm due to aggressive behavior.

**b) Initiative versus Reagent versus Association Involvement.** For these forms of aggression, the difference is also at the level of individual involvement. If aggressive behavior establishes contact, interaction to achieve selfish purposes, then we have significant individual involvement. Aggressive reactive behavior is in fact a response to a real or possible threat, a response to an attack. The association by association refers to the fact that a person moves from the observer position of the aggressive act to engagement on the part of the aggressor.

**c) Direct versus indirect.** Direct aggressive behavior is easily perceived by both the observer and the victim. He is clearly directed towards a particular person.

Indirect aggressive behavior is hard to observe and demonstrate because it is hidden outwardly; the goal is to hit the victim when it is in a vulnerable situation. Examples of this are: "gossip spread" or "attacks" as lies, theft or destruction by arson, vandalism or graffiti.

**d) Physical versus verbal.**

Aggressive physical behavior manifests itself in a direct confrontation, open to the victim. Such attacks are in the form of boxing, beatings or blows. Aggressive verbal behaviors are manifested through insults or by making a very high voice through screams. [5]

**8. The main causes of violence**

- domestic violence (children belonging to families in which violence is manifested take on these "patterns of relationship");

- economic conditions (extreme poverty in which some families live, including children, pushing some of them to commit acts of violence);

- The unstable environment (certain family events such as the divorce or death of a parent, as well as the unstable and insecure psychophysical climate in which children are developing in or out of the family - may lead to violent manifestations);

- low self-esteem (individuals with an unfavorable self-image are involved in acts of violence to compensate for negative feelings about their own person and thus gain acceptance of the group with which they commit acts of violence);

- the image of violence in the media (the prolonged exposure to media-propagated violence desensitizes the children, thus accepting, practicing, seeming normal;

- the legal system (the permissive legal framework in some countries regarding youth violence, a situation that does not discourage recidivism);

- lack of communication and sense of belonging to the community of young people, as well as lack of communication;

- the hope of success in life; violence and adherence to a violent group create a sense of belonging to a certain community and trust in the future);

- racism, sexism, homophobia, social stratification, ethnocentrism (discrimination centered on differences between individuals or groups is a source of tension that can generate violence, institutions can legitimize violence through policies and institutional practices, giving individuals the right to practice discrimination on an individual, with minimal consequences). [7]

**Conclusions**

Traditionally, school is the place of production and transmission of knowledge, of cognitive skills, of understanding the meaning of life and the world that surrounds us, of understanding relationships with others and ourselves. The mission of the school is not just to prepare the workforce. The school has to shape characters, teach the young man the pleasure of learning, the

desire to succeed and to face the changes in the labor market.

In this context, talking about violence where we expect to find the best conditions for the harmonious formation and development of personality may seem at least unlikely. In recent years, violence among minors has been the subject of many media debates. However, our knowledge in this area is quite incomplete. The only clear data comes from the Ministry of the Interior's statistics, and they cover various types of juvenile offenses: murders, attempted murder, serious bodily harm, rape, theft and robbery.

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