

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AS A PROBLEM OF AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of violence and aggression, as well as the emergence of new forms of destructive influence on the functioning of Polish public life is understandable fear among the population. A particular problem for Pedagogical Sciences, Humanities and Law, the phenomenon of aggression and violence among young people, which affects the most important learning environment that is family, school and in general the environment surrounding the young man.

Keywords: *aggression; physical aggression; psychology of aggression; school environment; violence.*

INTRODUCTION

School is a place where pupils' personalities are shaped in the process of socialization and upbringing. Such values as tolerance, dialogue, freedom, human treatment are not always observed at school. We see the school in pessimistic tones. B. Shliverski believes that a modern teacher works in school where tensions and imperfections take place, adding to inter-human relations the acts of violence and humiliation.

Teachers cannot cope with the problem of aggression and with their role, they themselves become the objects of violence, experiencing anxiety, insecurity, helplessness; they are burned out professionally. In such a climate it is difficult to establish a positive Teacher – Pupil dialogue.

K. Kmiecik-Baran has another approach to this problem: school is a complex community consisting of pupils and teachers. Each pupil is an individual; he is active and has a system of values. At school one faces the manifestations of violence that are influenced by:

1. Socio-economic factors: the political struggle which has been taking place in Poland since 1980, where a submission of mass media, cultural institutions and educational system took place, unemployment rose, crime and ineffective law increased.

2. Factors specific for the school itself, for example, social disorientation of school with the lack of positive relationships between pupils, teachers and parents, angry climate dominating at school, the criteria of pupils' assessment and behaviour are defined vaguely, teacher's reluctant attitude to a pupil which often takes place, aggression and violence directed at a pupil by a teacher (Kmiecik-Baran K., 2000: p. 65).

I. Pufal-Struzik in his book "Aggression and violence in schools" defines the issue in the following way: "Aggression at school determines the behaviour and predisposition of pupils at school, aiming to do harm to specific individuals, social groups or their properties." In addition to the notion of aggression, there are such related definitions as violence, bullying, encirclement.

THE PROBLEM OF AGGRESSION AT VIOLENCE IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

At schools the acts of violence, both physical and mental, are becoming more frequent. Physical aggression occurs when one person hurts or injures another one, using physical force. Here should be referred such forms of violence as cruelty to animals and destruction of the natural environment by a human.

Mental aggression it is a psychological behaviour ubiquitous in everyday life, such as bickering, nicknaming, obscenities directed at an individual, as well as complaining, ridicule, criticism and mockery, manipulation of friendly relationships. Girls are going ahead in it, and this aggression is a form that is very painful and difficult to detect, being thus particularly dangerous. On the surface, it is less dangerous for the victim, because it does not damage physical health, but on the other hand, it can leave permanent traces in a pupil's psychics (Chvikla A., 2007: p. 29).

In psychological violence verbal aggression from teachers to pupils prevails: moralizing, blackmailing, humiliating comments against the pupil, emotional coldness, lack of support, conforming pressures, lack of respect to privacy and dignity of a pupil. Pupils manifest the following behaviours towards their mates: abuse, restriction of freedom, pushing, bruises; in turn, teachers beat the pupils by a book on the head, hit their heads against the wall, and pull by the ears and hair.

Aggression at schools arises due to the faulty functioning of these institutions. In schools there are a lot of pupils, it is very noisy, and there is lack of cooperation between school and parents. Also there is lack of control on the part of teachers, as well as unfair evaluation, creating stressful situations connected with checking knowledge, and even ridicule becomes the cause of aggressive behaviour. Pedagogical training should be aimed not only at transmitting knowledge, but at the development of positive personal characteristics and interpersonal skills.

Educational programs are often little varied and overloaded; the lack of extra-curricular activities and widespread "boredom" at school promote aggression in pupils. As a proof to this phenomenon, in the Annex I am attaching the article from "Gazeta Wyborcza" published on the website www.gazeta.pl on October 17, 2008, named "Boring lessons trigger aggression".

Research shows that aggressive behaviour is often a cry for help and attention, for example, on the part of parents. When a young person cannot cope with his own problems, he feels threatened and has very low self-esteem; aggression is an explosion of emotion, and emotions cannot be suppressed, it is only necessary to find a safe exit for them.

Aggression is a form of individual behaviour implemented in a specific social context. A person or group of people manifesting aggression are the subject or the aggressor. The aggressors are people who are usually strong physically; they manifest an inborn tendency to aggression to their colleagues first, and later to parents and teachers.

Aggressors are people with a low self-esteem; they are impulsive and usually characterized by antisocial attitudes and lack of discipline.

A child spends a great part of the day at school in a large group, and teachers often treat him or her from a distance not observing the child on the background of a large group. A teacher is a person who has authority over a pupil and the teacher can decide about the pupil's position in the class. Often, the teacher turns reluctant

to a pupil who has troubles in school, mocks at his answers, using abusive terms, even nicknames. Such pupil feels hurt and humiliated.

An aggressive and rebellious attitude arises in the child. Rebellion manifests itself in the form of arrogant behaviour towards adults, neglecting of school duties, antisocial pranks. Such pupils often do not have colleagues in class, and they meet their needs of recognition in informal peer groups of a destructive character. Behavioural problems can also be caused by capable students despite their intellectual superiority over their colleagues, and thus they are isolated in the class.

The form of physical violence is punching in one's face, hitting with an object, for example, a diary, notebook, key or a ball. They are an expression of powerlessness of teachers who cannot discipline pupils. Children are often afraid to tell their parents what happened at school in order not to worsen the situation (Kmiechik-Baran K., 2000, p. 22). Psychological violence is verbal aggression that includes shouting, taunts addressed to the pupil. If a teacher speaks raising voice, it testifies his or her nervousness that has a negative impact on the working atmosphere which evokes fear, and often divers pupils (Chvikla A., 2007: p. 28).

The teachers who were asked about the causes of violence against the pupils show:

- professional stress;
- aggression on the part of children;
- overwork;
- non-fulfilment of assignments;
- underestimation of the profession;
- material difficulties;
- job insecurity;
- manipulation by pupils, objectifying attitude to a pupil.

It is worth noting that not only the teacher's personality and his authoritarian attitude are the cause of the aggressive behaviour that we see in today's schools, but it is also possible to mention other reasons, such as bad examples (adults, peers, media), lack of attention, constant contact (between a teacher and a pupil, a parent and a child), external conditions (noise, the crowd, the congestion, fatigue), complexes (a child is too thick, too thin, has too long or too short hair; children want to be similar to each other, because then they feel safe and accepted), criticism from peers, problems in learning, envy, inability to function in a group, lack of support from parents, lack of acceptance by the people important to the child, lack of clear, predictable rules of functioning, punishment disproportionate to the offense (too harsh or too lenient, inability to express negative emotions, resulting from the failure of education, inadequate self-esteem, lack of communication skills (children, adults), overprotective upbringing raises a syndrome of a victim, pupils may react aggressively, they fear of losing the acceptance of the group, too high demands to a child's mind.

Among many other reasons of pupils' aggressive behaviour may be also mentioned escapement, sadness, depression, lowering in learning, loneliness, change in sentiment, psychosomatic symptoms (headache, abdominal pain), being late for school or its avoidance, truancy, keeping close to the teacher, being taunted by peers, scattered traces of violence (bruises, scratches, destroyed clothes and school kit) (Chvikla A., 2007: p. 37-39).

In every school there is psychological violence, if a pupil is nicknamed by somebody, if somebody tells others untrue stories about him, mocks at him in

others' presence, destroys or takes things, steals money, publishes offensive information in the Internet, if a pupil gets text messages or telephone calls insulting him – he does not want to go to school because he is afraid to meet his pursuers. This means that he is a victim of psychological violence.

The perpetrators know how to provoke the victim: they often scoff at his or her appearance (weight, hair colour, dress style), or there are other reasons, for example:

- a pupil does well in studies;
- he or she does worse in studies;
- a pupil does not have money;
- a pupil is popular at school;
- he or she professes another religion;
- a pupil is of a different nationality;
- he or she wears glasses;
- a pupil has a speech impediment.

Victims of school violence often suffer in silence. They are powerless knowing that nobody will help them; they have a reduced sense of security. In many cases teachers are unaware that a pupil or pupils are victims of violence. Children are afraid to tell parents and educators about this because it can cause their fellow pupils' revenge. Perpetrators are usually inclined to attack because of the absence of reaction to provocations, demanding money or alcohol from their victims. If the victim has no money aggressors imply how to get it: for example, to steal from parents, vandalize, commit assaults upon people.

According to M. Dabrowska-Bak the following factors influence the phenomenon of "lawlessness climate" at school:

- widespread cigarette smoking;
- alcohol at discos and excursions;
- lack of discipline;
- acts of vandalism;
- rude and disrespectful attitude to the teachers and the brutal treatment of younger colleagues (Kmiechik-Baran K., 2000: p. 40).

In educational institutions, there are two types of violence. The first one is the school wave linked to the customs of the school; the second type of aggression occurs both at school and beyond it. The school wave consists in harassment of an individual by a group – repeated or continuing for a certain period of time. In Polish schools it takes the form of physical and verbal violence (Kmiechik-Baran K., 2000: p. 41).

Another term dealing with this problem is bullying that means mobbing, teasing, exciting. Studies show that every year 5% of children undergo this menacing phenomenon. The forms of bullying are slander, ignoring, rejection, horriification, committed most often in the locker room, in the toilet, in front of the school building. Tormentors are both boys and girls, who take pleasure in tormenting others.

CONCLUSIONS

The phenomenon of school aggression is growing before our eyes. Media report about drastic events that are the evidence of helplessness of adults concerning the problem of wave aggression. Recognition and examination of this problem is very difficult because both the perpetrators and the victims remain anonymous.

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