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DEALING WITH PEER VIOLENCE IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, A CASE STUDY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL HINKO SMREKAR

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Abstract

Peer violence has developed in a large extent in today's society. It starts at an early age and continues in primary and secondary school. Professional workers in education meet with different forms of violence. We perceive the most peer violence in elementary school, because pupils start to explore society in a different way. We can say that we start talking about it in the second triad. Some professional workers deal with violence almost every day. In this text, we present qualitative research with a case study at the Primary School Hinko Smrekar.

In the theoretical part, we show what peer violence means and the forms and types of peer violence. In the case study we present a protocol for dealing with the perception of peer violence at the Primary School Hinko Smrekar.

Given that society has changed a lot and us, educators detect inappropriate behaviour in individuals every day, which then turns into various forms of peer violence, we must be prepared to act in the event in which we perceive this type of behaviour. For this reason, it is necessary to be prepared and also to know how to act correctly.

Key words: peer violence, protocol, safe school, types of peer violence

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the paper is to show theoretically what peer violence actually is, to list some types of violence that we face today, to present what a safe school is and finally to present the protocol according to which the pedagogical professionals at our school act.

The goal of the text is to show a good way of dealing with peer violence in primary schools, where managers, advising services, professionals and parents are involved.

In the following, we present the theoretical part and a case study at Primary School Hinko Smrekar Ljubljana.

2. THEORETICAL RESEARCH

Olweusa (1993) says that we talk about peer violence when a student is repeatedly exposed to aggressive behaviour over a long period of time, or negative actions caused by his peers or peer group. Smith et al. (2003) and Sullivan (2013) define peer violence with the following elements:

- conscious, deliberate and repetitive behaviour,
- aggressive behaviours and/or manipulative behaviours and/or exclusionary behaviours,
- one person or more against one person person is/are weaker (physically, psychologically or socially) than the perpetrator of violence.

Peer violence is aggressive behaviour that is intentional (not accidental or the result of play) and involves an imbalance of power. Violence happens very often.

The elements of peer violence are:

- violence that is repeated and can happen for a long time,
- has the intention of harming another,
- has different forms,
- involves an imbalance of power between the one who experiences and the one who carries out the violence,
- is often hidden from the authorities at school (teachers),
- perpetrators of violence do not expect to be exposed and to suffer the consequences for their actions,
- physical and psychological consequences,
- violence acts as a threat not only to the student who experiences it, but also to those peers who witness this violence i.e., to observers.

3. TYPES OF INTERCLASS VIOLENCE

Berger (2007) named four categories of peer violence:

- physical violence (pushing, kicking, damaging another's property),
- relative/relational violence (manipulation of interpersonal relationships),
- verbal violence (teasing),
- cyberbullying (spreading rumours online or sending offensive phone messages).

These authors classify them as traditional forms of peer-to-peer violence, which is why we also use a dichotomous division into traditional and online peer-to-peer violence.

Olweus (1993) differs between:

- direct peer-to-peer violence, which involves an open and obvious attack on another person, and indirect violence, such as social isolation or exclusion from the group.

In his peer violence questionnaire, we find seven categories, namely:

- verbal violence,
- exclusion from the group,
- physical violence,
- spreading false rumours,
- taking money or damaging other people's things,
- being forced to do certain actions,
- racial violence.

Sullivan (2011) distributes violence hierarchically. It lists two broad categories of peer violence – physical and psychological violence, and first divides it into narrower subcategories.

Physical violence (direct violence/aggression), includes these behaviours:

- fights with injuries,
- intentional kicking,
- hair pulling,
- restriction of movement,
- biting,
- pushing,
- intentional damage to an individual's property or destruction of his personal items.

Psychological violence (indirect violence/aggression) means an attack on an individual's inner self. The goal is to harm the individual who is the target of the attack, but often without physical signs. Therefore, some consider it less harmful, but Goldstein et al. (2007) point out that such violence is just as harmful as physical violence.

Sullivan (2011) divides psychological violence into:

- Verbal violence, which includes insults and insults with sexual and social content, spreading false, untrue rumours, inciting friends, threats related to extortion for money, other forms of verbal humiliation, such as remarks, packing, etc.

- Non-verbal violence, which is divided into direct non-verbal violence (various rude gestures), indirect non-verbal violence, which is more insidious and subtle and includes the manipulation of relationships, such as purposeful social exclusion.
- Isolation, ignoring - such violence is also called relative or relational violence. Carpenter and Ferguson (2009) list three basic types of relational aggression most often used by girls against each other:
 - Social bullying, when a girl is humble in front of her peers, manifests itself in the form of disdain and various insults (cow, whore...).
 - Relational bullying, when one girl deliberately and consciously destroys the social status of another girl, e.g., instructs others to ignore and isolate the victim as much as possible, spreads false rumours about her to let her know that she is not worth talking to etc.
 - Emotional bullying, when a girl uses emotional blackmail to control another girl e.g., tells another girl that she can't be her friend unless she sits next to her at the movies or breaks up with some other girl.

In the 1990s, Olweus, Smith and Sullivan highlighted two more specific forms of violence – sexual violence and online violence, which is just beginning to appear.

- Sexual violence to which they belong e.g., groping and sexual harassment. This violence could be classified into all three categories: both physical violence (when it comes to pushing and groping) and psychological violence - verbal (using sexually suggestive or inappropriate expressions) or non-verbal (using inappropriate gestures).
- Online or cyber violence, which belongs to psychological violence and can take a verbal or non-verbal form (e.g., spreading threats, false information on the Internet, the purpose of which is to make someone laugh or humiliate another).

Cyberbullying takes many different forms. Kowalski et al. (2012) divided this violence into several types:

- offensive messages,
- harassment/defamation/dissparagement,
- impersonation/impersonation,
- disclosure and fraud,
- exclusion,
- stalking,
- videos of attacks,
- sexual messages.

4. WHAT IS CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR OR VIOLATIONS?

These are aggressive behaviours that also have the characteristics of peer violence (they are repetitive, involve violence and abuse of power), but due to their intensity and severity, they swear by the framework of peer violence. Such behaviours are:

- serious attacks by another with a weapon or a dangerous object e.g., a broken bottle, a knife, a razor,
- major thefts and more serious cases of property damage,
- threats to cause serious bodily injury or death,
- various forms of sexual violence.

The handling of such behaviour is therefore no longer the responsibility of the school, but of relevant external institutions - police, courts, CSD, etc.

Some other behaviours do not belong to peer violence. Students often play rough games that involve fighting (physical contact). This is especially true for boys' games. Children also tease each other e.g., with names.

In case of:

- they are equal children and adolescents (in the sense that there is no power imbalance between them - neither physical nor psychological),
- this behaviour is not repetitive,

- they do not want to intentionally cause harm to another.

Such behaviours cannot be considered peer violence. Still, it makes sense to stop and investigate such behaviour.

There are often excesses and disciplinary offenses in the school environment, where it is an aggressive attack that occurs once - i.e., a one-off attack, bullying, harassment, which can be painful and traumatic, but does not necessarily belong to peer violence.

In the case of peer violence, it is important for the teacher to be aware that the students, the perpetrators of the violence, find this violence amusing and that it is a fight between unequal individuals. Therefore, they discredit the victim and assert their power.

5. FACTORS OF STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN INTERCLASS VIOLENCE

They are very diverse and very intertwined. Most modern authors agree that for a comprehensive understanding of the factors of peer violence, it is necessary to know the factors on three levels (Saarento et al., 2013, Salmivalli and Peets, 2011):

5.1 AT SCHOOL LEVEL

Protective factors at school level show a positive school climate and good cooperation between the school and parents (Ma, 2002) and students' perception that teachers do not approve of peer violence (Saarento et al., 2013).

According to the type of school culture in peer violence (Sullivan, 2011) identifies three types of schools:

5.2 NON-FUNCTIONAL SCHOOLS

It is typical for them to do little or nothing about peer violence. The reasons for this are different: schools can be located in a less stimulating environment with a prevailing lower socio-economic status, in an environment with a lot of alcohol and drug abuse.

5.3 CONFUSING SCHOOLS

These are schools with conflicting rules or activities. Pedagogical workers at the school often have different attitudes towards peer violence. If, for example, a headmaster is convinced that there is no real violence at their school, that there are only a few rough games between students, that peer violence is part of growing up etc., it will more likely be concluded that there is no need to deal with such violence, and will wait for the violence to be simple disappeared.

5.4 SAFE SCHOOLS – A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

It is characteristic of them that they approach the issue of peer violence holistically and want to create a school as a safe place where every individual has the opportunity to develop their own potential. With an integrated approach, everyone deals with the problem - teachers, students, other school staff, parents and representatives of the wider community. They all know the rules and wonder who is responsible for their implementation.

Also an important element of school culture is the school's view of responding to violent student behaviour. There are three dominant views on how to respond to peer violence: the punishment approach, the consequence approach, and the emotional response approach.

The punishment approach means that in schools, when violence occurs, punishments are applied to the perpetrators of it. Most often, these are detention, additional homework, various tasks in the school and its surroundings, and in the case of repeated occurrences of this type of behaviour, expulsion or retraining of the student.

In Anglo-Saxon countries, there is a well-known so-called bully court (Laslett, 1982., Elliott, 2022), in which classmates of the perpetrator of violence play the role of judges.

If the contractor is found guilty, he receives a punishment, such as one week he stays after school for an hour and picks up litter on the school playground.

The philosophy of school participants who advocate such an approach is:

- the perpetrator of violence must be punished for violence with school detention, expulsion or other punishment,
- the punishment is carried out by someone with power,
- the person experiencing peer violence has no role in it,

- the purpose of this approach is to stop the violence, if this violence is repeated, the punishment for the perpetrator of the violence will escalate.

The consequences approach means that if a student chooses to be violent, they must know that such behaviour has consequences. The essential difference is that these consequences should be educational rather than punitive. It is not just about punishing the perpetrator of violence, but also about talking to the student who is experiencing this violence, offering support to the victimized student and clearly demonstrating that any violent behaviour has consequences that the perpetrator of violence must be aware of.

The approach - response to feelings - means that in this approach we try to act on the positive side of the perpetrator of violence and change his behaviour. One of the characteristics of peer violence is that the perpetrator sees the victim as unworthy, as a non-person. The goal is not only to stop violence, but to change the behaviour of the perpetrator of violence, so that he tries to empathize with the emotions of the victim, so that feelings of guilt and awareness that violent behaviour is inappropriate occur.

This approach includes:

- encouraging a student who experiences violence to say how he feels about peer violence,
- helping other peers, including the perpetrator of violence, to try to dispel the victim's feelings,
- encouraging all participants to find solutions and not to find fault, the culprit,
- the purpose of this approach is to stop the violence because peers understand what happened to the victim and how he feels.

5.4.1 AT THE CLASS LEVEL

The class or department is a key reference group for students, within which they compare themselves, establish relationships, form smaller groups, build their social position and also carry out and experience peer violence.

5.4.2 AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Olweus (1997) divided students who experience peer violence into two groups:

- Passive victims (submissive victims);
- Provocative, provoking victims (a much smaller common victim, they often have problems with concentration - they are hyperactive and with their behaviour often cause excitement and tension in other people - usually in the whole class).

The authors highlight four typical ways of responding to peer violence.

- A passive response is present in most students who experience peer violence and includes ignoring the bully or leaving the situation. They are less likely to use other, more active coping strategies.
- Active response in the sense of seeking help: elementary school students respond in this way more often than high school students, and girls more often than boys. Girls even perceive seeking help as the best strategy to stop violence.
- Aggressive response is more characteristic of students who are occasionally also in the role of perpetrators of violence. There is a difference in this strategy according to gender: in boys, the aggressive response includes both forms of physical and verbal aggression, and in girls mainly verbal aggression.
- Undifferentiated response: the student does not have a dominant or a consistent way of responding - one time he may withdraw (passive response), the other time he erupts again and verbally or physically attacks the perpetrator of violence (aggressive response).

6. SCHOOL AS A SPACE OF SOCIALIZATION

Not responding to peer violence in school means tacit agreement with it and a clear (and very dangerous) message to all participants that violence is an acceptable and potentially successful way of responding in interpersonal relationships and that violence is a matter of the perpetrator and the student who experiences the violence.

Authorized teacher or even better, the community of teachers at the school, who understand and are aware of the importance of systematic social and emotional learning for establishing and maintaining an inclusive school and departmental climate, can significantly contribute to the reduction of this phenomenon by both preventing and responding appropriately to peer violence.

A good theoretical framework for dealing with peer violence (both preventive and curative) is offered by the bystander intervention model (Latane and Darley, 1970). This model is useful for both students and school teachers and has five levels.

1. Perception of the event - the first condition for any intervention is attention directed to the problem of peer violence.
2. Interpretation of the event as serious - if an individual (another student, teacher) is to intervene, he must assess the event as serious, threatening. In this decision, whether it is an event that requires intervention or not, the rest of the people present play an important role.
3. Taking responsibility for help - when observers perceive and recognize an event as serious, they must quickly take responsibility for intervention. If several are present, the individual may assume that someone else will intervene.
4. Knowledge and skills to help - the individual must know strategies to effectively respond to peer violence. Ignorance of strategies or a lack of mediation skills is often the reason the case ends. The teacher knows he should intervene, but doesn't know how.

7. PROGRAMS/PROCEDURES FOR THE PREVENTION OF INTERCLASS VIOLENCE - THE OLWES PROGRAM (1995)

His example of a comprehensive program involves work at three levels – school, department and individual.

Measures at the school level include all school participants and envisage the following activities:

- A school day dedicated to the issue of peer violence;
- Supervision of students in the school and in the immediate vicinity of the school;
- Meetings between parents, teachers and students (education, awareness raising, workshops...);
- Groups of teachers (teams) for developing a favourable social environment in the school;
- Educational groups for teachers, students and parents.

Actions at department level (work with a group of students):

- Creation of clear departmental rules (1. We must not mistreat other students. 2. We must help students who mistreat others. 3. We must help students who are quickly excluded to integrate into the society of their peers.);
- Praise for desirable and sanctions for undesirable behaviour;
- Class hours for raising awareness, informing about peer violence;
- Developing collaborative forms of work e.g., collaborative learning;
- Departmental meeting between teachers, students, parents and external experts.

Measures at the individual level are:

- Conversation/work with perpetrators of violence;
- Talking/working with students who experience violence;
- Conversation with the parents (of the performer and the victimized student);
- Group discussions for parents of students who experience violence and for those who carry it out.

8. COMPREHENSIVE KIVA PROGRAM (SALMIVALL et al., 2005)

Finland's KiVa prevention program (KiVa is an acronym for words that mean "against violence" in Finnish).

It is based on the assumption that peers, who are witnesses or observers of this violence, as they have the power to encourage violence or try to prevent it.

The KiVa program includes school-wide activities aimed at preventing violence, as well as activities when violence occurs and intervention is needed.

Preventive activities at the school level are aimed at promoting greater awareness of peer violence and the important role that the peer group plays, as well as familiarizing students with safe strategies that can be used to support or defend students who experience violence. Learning units include discussions, role play, videos of people reporting experiencing peer violence, group work, written products and whole class activities. The curriculum initially encourages the development of social skills, kindness and team spirit, then focuses on learning vocabulary that enables the expression of emotions and finally moves on to concrete examples of peer violence.

In addition, posters with various contents of the KiVa program are placed around the school. The teachers who supervise the students during the breaks wear special, highly visible KiVa vests and thus warn and remind the students at every step that they belong to the so-called KiVa school. The program also encourages the involvement and support of parents, for whom a special website is dedicated.

KiVa also includes a trained team of experts at the school (teachers, counsellors...) who deal with cases of peer violence when it occurs.

9. THE SULLIVAN PROGRAM (2011)

It has a six-step plan to approach peer violence:

- Creation of an initiative against peer violence;
- Designing a school policy against peer violence;
- Development of programs against peer violence by the school team;
- Presentation of these programs to others at school;
- Use of programs;
- Evaluating and maintaining programs against peer violence.

10. PREVENTIVE PROGRAMS IN SLOVENIA

A very common classification of programs to combat peer violence is the division into preventive, interventional and mixed programs - in which preventive activities are intertwined with interventional ones. With us, D. Lešnik Mugnaioni et al. (2009) made a comprehensive systematic review of prevention and intervention programs in the field of peer violence within the framework of a broader research on violence in schools.

1. NEON PROGRAM – SAFE WITHOUT VIOLENCE – ISA INSTITUTE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELING AND EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF M. ŠTIRN.
2. PREVENTIVE WORKSHOPS ON VIOLENCE - SOCIETY FOR NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION IN LJUBLJANA AND MARIBOR
3. POLICE FOR CHILDREN - MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS (One one three and Police Officer Leon advises)
4. YOUTH WORKSHOPS FOR PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS - CENTERS FOR SOCIAL WORK IN THE REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA
5. PREVENTION OF ONLINE VIOLENCE - SAFE.SI, COUNSELING LINE FOR ONLINE PROBLEMS TOM TELEPHONE, ONLINE OKO, SAFE INTERNET INSTITUTE, HAND IN HAND PROGRAM, WE ARE ONLY WITH OTHERS, A SAFE AND ENCOURAGING LEARNING ENVIRONMENT
6. STRATEGIES FOR PREVENTING VIOLENCE - PRINCIPAL SCHOOL

11. PROTOCOL FOR DETECTING AND DEALING WITH INTERCLASS VIOLENCE IN EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS (Lešnik Mugnaioni et al., 2016; pp. 7–9)/ ACTION IN THE CASE OF INTERCLASS VIOLENCE

11.1 IMMEDIATE INTERVENTION

a) Tasks of a professional who has detected violence

A professional worker or other VIZ worker who has detected violence or has been informed about it:

- immediately ensure the safety and health of the children by taking all necessary measures to protect the child victim, if necessary, call emergency medical help and notify the child's parents of the injury;
- talks to a child who has been a victim of violence and offers him emotional support the same or no later than the next working day after the detection of violence;
- informs the class teacher of all children involved, the school counselling service, the principal and the parents about the event;
- make a record of the event and hand it over to the school counselling service.

b) Tasks of the school counselling service

School counselling service of the same or no later than the next working day after the detection of violence:

- if necessary, formulate a plan to prevent the continuation of violence,
- talks separately with the child victim and the perpetrator of violence and, if necessary, with observers of the event, and makes a record of the conversation to explain the situation.

c) Tasks of the VIZ management

In the absence of the school counselling service or if the school counselling service deems it necessary, the principal or assistant principal conducts the separate conversations from the previous paragraph.

11.2 PROCESS INTERVENTION

a) Tasks of the school counselling service

Based on the information obtained, the school counselling service begins counselling work with the child victim and perpetrator of violence. He also invites parents to the conversation. The school counselling service convenes a team no later than three working days after the detection of violence. Team members are: consultant, class teacher or the educator of the victim's child and the perpetrator of the violence, the principal and, if necessary, other professionals from VIZ.

The team is led by a consultant who also properly documents the team's activities.

b) Tasks of the team

The tasks of the team from the previous paragraph are:

- prepares an assistance plan for a victim of violence;
- plans educational measures for the perpetrator in accordance with the regulations;
- plans to work with parents;
- plans work with the department, which includes the victim, perpetrator and observers;
- cooperates with external institutions;
- determines the task executors;
- inform other professional workers about the case of violence, viz.

12 COOPERATION WITH OTHER AUTHORITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

12.1 Notification

If a criminal offense has been committed, which is prosecuted ex officio, and the perpetrator of the violence has already reached the age of 14, the principal informs the police and the centre for social work. The social work centre also informs the principal if the team assesses that the child victim and/or the child perpetrator of violence needs the help of the social work centre. In the mentioned cases, the school counselling service invites a representative of the

police, the centre for social work and representatives of other authorities and non-governmental organizations to participate in the team.

The tasks of the extended team are:

- exchange of information between members of the extended team,
- planning and coordinating activities to help the child victim and to deal with the perpetrator of violence,
- monitoring the progress of the treatment,
- agreement on cooperation in the implementation of preventive activities" (Pečjak, 2021).

13 Case study: INTERCLASS VIOLENCE ACTION PROTOCOL

13.1 Taken according to the Protocol on the detection and treatment of peer violence in educational institutions

Duties of a teacher who has detected violence:

Take care of the safety and health of children immediately.

He/she immediately informs the school counselling service or the school management about the event.

If necessary, call for emergency medical assistance.

On the same day, he informs the parents of all the children involved about the incident.

The same or no later than the next working day after the detection of violence:

- informs the class teacher of all children involved about the event,
- makes a record of the event and hand it over to the principal (report on an extraordinary event).

13.2 PROTOCOL FOR DETECTING VIOLENCE AGAINST A CHILD IN THE FAMILY - Summary according to the Rules on handling domestic violence for educational institutions

1. A teacher who has noticed the consequences of violence in a child, whether the child has confided in him that he is a victim of violence, or has received information about violence from a third party, immediately informs the counsellor (Article 3).
2. The teacher and the counsellor make a record of the event on an official form (see attachment). They also write a detailed report in which they describe the event, provide information about the child's family and his functioning at school (Article 3).
3. On the next working day at the latest, when he has already submitted a telephone report of violence, the counselling worker convenes an internal team consisting of:
 - consultant (team leader),
 - class teacher,
 - the teacher who recorded the event,
 - principal (at least at the first meeting).

Time is written at the meetings, in which the decisions on the agreed tasks, their holders and deadlines for the implementation of the tasks are recorded (Article 6).

4. If the school determines that the child is still exposed to the consequences of violence or that there has been a recurrence of violence, the school's experts will carry out the procedure referred to in points 3 and 4 (Article 7).

14 CONCLUSION

In the article, we discussed different forms of peer violence. We conclude that peer-to-peer violence occurs both in society, outside the school premises as well as in an elementary school. It is very important that the professional teaching staff is educated in the field of peer violence and that appropriate action is taken in the event of the perception of peer violence. In addition, the management must create an action plan based on relevant literature, which combines with the educational team of the school, they complete and prepare for appropriate action. Parents should also be informed about the protocol drawn up at school. At our school, we follow the protocol stated in the text above.

We conclude that cooperation with parents and relevant institutions is very effective. Therefore, we suggest that the protocol be coordinated with the Centre for Social Work, the Police and the Ministry of Education and the Inspectorate of Education.

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- Zakon o osnovni šoli (Uradni list RS, št. 81/06 – uradno prečiščeno besedilo, 102/07,
107/10, 87/11, 40/12 – ZUJF, 63/13, 46/16 – ZOFVI-K in 76/23)
<http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO448> ;
- Zakon o preprečevanju nasilja v družini (Uradni list RS, št. [16/08](#), [68/16](#), [54/17](#) – ZSV-H
in [196/21](#) – ZDOsk) <http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=ZAKO5084> ;