



## VIOLENCE IN URBAN SCHOOLS IN ROMANIA EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Stan Nicolae Cristian

Babes-Bolyai University, Sindicatelor, Cluj-Napoca, Romania

---

### ABSTRACT

*School violence is one of the phenomena not only growing in terms of the frequency with which it manifests itself in urban schools but also one of the factors with a major impact on the educational environment and the physical and psychological sense of security for students. Insecurity, present in the long-term, results in a reduced school performance of students, which makes it necessary to develop and implement programs to eliminate violence in schools. The effectiveness of prevention and combating school violence depends heavily on detailed knowledge of the peculiarities that characterize this phenomenon. In this context, this article focuses on highlighting the defining elements of school violence: What are the most common manifestations, who are the aggressors, where most of these acts of aggression produce and last but not least, what are the reactions of victims of school bullying.*

© 2014 AESS Publications. All Rights Reserved.

---

**Keywords:** Educational climate, Bullying, Physical security, Psychological security, Victimization.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In its broadest sense, the notion of violence refers to unlawful use of force and can be defined as an acute aggressive behavior, characterized especially by using brute, physical force (Preda, 1998). More precisely said, violence is seen as the threat or intentional use of physical force or power against oneself, against others or against a group or a community, action that causes or is powerful enough to risk causing an injury, psychological damage, improper development or deprivations (Krug *et al.*, 2002). Whatever the accepted definition, violence is, by the aggressive behavior brought into play, one of the major challenges that modern society must face.

In turn, school violence is a phenomenon that, due to the increase of its frequency and complexity of cases, concrete forms and effects, requires an interdisciplinary approach. Overall school violence refers to all aggressive actions manifested in the school space between students or between them and the teachers of the institution. We want to emphasize in this context that school violence is not confined to physical aggression but it includes a number of various other aspects like victimization, physical aggression and verbal aggression (Miller and Kraus, 2008). School

violence can lead to serious consequences in both the short and long term, equally affecting the social and emotional wellbeing not only in the victims but also in the perpetrators. Moreover, violent behavior also has negative influences on school students who are not involved in the conflict. The fact that students attending the aggression a colleague can trigger prolonged emotional states of anxiety or trauma that might reduce the effectiveness of learning or lead to dropping out of school.

Sciences such as psychology, pedagogy or sociology have been studying violence in schools for a long time and one of the conclusions that researchers have reached is that the frequency of bullying among pupils is significantly higher in the urban rather than in rural ones (Harding, 2008). At the basis of this situation are several explanations such as: higher social polarization existing in urban areas, a higher density of population and segregation of housing areas that facilitate the emergence of gangs as well as less family involvement in the student's daily activities, which leads to increased emancipation and the degree of their independence, a situation that may facilitate the emergence of conflict situations.

Beyond the generally valid reality of higher number of violent acts in urban schools, Romania is facing a particular situation from this point of view. Thus, according to the study entitled "School violence: epidemiology, history and prevention", conducted in 2008 by the World Health Organization in collaboration with the World Psychiatric Association and the International Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry in 37 countries, Romania is designated in the first places regarding violence in schools. According to the aforementioned study, over 50% of Romanian teachers report acts of school violence while in countries like the Netherlands this percentage is only 7%. The same situation is also found in the views of Romanian students from Classes VII-VIII, where 37% of them state that they are afraid of violence in school. On the opposite side are countries like Denmark or Singapore, where only 6% and 8% of students are afraid of this.

## 2. MAJOR COORDINATES OF THE RESEARCH

Studies in this field indicate that the contextual approach to school violence is the basic condition of the efficiency of any program of preventing and combating this phenomenon (Spiel and Wagner, 2012). The analysis of school violence should focus not only on the phenomenon itself but also on the causes that determine the circumstances under which it occurs and the consequences induced on both the victim and the aggressor (Furlong, 2000).

The main purpose of our research, with the above statements is as a starting point, is the investigation of contextual urban school violence. Investigation objectives derived from the aforementioned purpose, aim to obtain empirical answers regarding the following questions: what is the percentage of students which go to school in fear because of violent acts or events, which are the main manifestations of bullying, where and when do most acts of violence in schools occur, who are, in the vast majority of cases, the perpetrators of violence and what are the reactions of victims of school violence?

The sample is made up of 150 students (7th -8th graders) with ages ranging from 12 to 14 years old, from three secondary schools in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The three schools were selected according to certain shared criteria (number of students – low, social-economic-cultural level of the

parents – average, school performance –average, location - neighborhood school, frequency of student behavior problems – average, compared to the middle schools in town). The research strategy used combined the method of a questionnaire based survey, the interview technique and the focus group method. The data is expressed as a percentage and summarized through tables.

### 3. RESULTS

The first item of the questionnaire administered to the 150 students aimed to capture the extent to which they come to school in fear of violence. The results indicate that 28% of them said that in many cases, going to school generates a feeling of anxiety, due to violence that could involve them directly as victims or indirectly as witnesses. Compared to the World Health Organization in 2008, cited above, there is a decrease from 37% to 28% of students who go to school in fear, a result, in our opinion, of improved security by installing video surveillance cameras and hiring specialized security firms. However, concern remains that more than a quarter of students going to school associate with feelings of insecurity and anxiety which makes it necessary to develop more complex programs to combat and prevent school violence, involving activities including counseling students and their parents.

The second item of the questionnaire was used in order to identify the main forms of school violence that students are most exposed to. The data obtained is shown in Table 1.

**Table-1.** Typology of the forms of school violence to which students were exposed

Item/Answer	Never	Once or twice	More than two times
Insults	32.3%	47.7%	20%
Threats from other students	56%	39.3%	4.7%
Blackmail under threat of violence	84.7%	12%	3.3%
Deliberate shoving	32%	51.3%	16.7%
Hitting with the intention of doing harm	63.3%	24.7%	12%
Hitting with sharp /blunt objects	83.9%	14.8%	1.3%
Sexual harassment from other students	94%	4%	2%

As we can see from the table above, the most frequent form of school violence takes the form of intentional shoving, reported by 68% of students. If 51.3% say they have been shoved occasionally, 16.7% say they are frequently targeted by colleagues' shoving. The second position is occupied by addressing insults as a form of verbal abuse, where 67.7% of students complained about this. We can notice in this context that 20% of respondents admit that they are addressed insults repeatedly. The third position in the ranking of forms of school violence is owned by threats from other colleagues. Thus, 44% of those questioned admitted that they were threatened by their peers at least once with hitting or other forms of punishment. The interviews revealed that the negative psychological impact of the threat is significantly higher than the insults addressed directly. Hitting with various parts of the body with the intention of doing harm ranks four and is brought up by 36.7% of students while using blunt or sharp objects is alarming, were claimed by 16.1% of students claimed this was a problem. Regarding the use of blackmail to obtain material benefits, 12% of students say they have been blackmailed and 3.3% occasionally admit to being blackmailed repeatedly. A less frequent occurrence is sexual harassment by colleagues, where only 6% of students stated that they had experienced this once or several times and the interviews

showed that this category also included less irrelevant elements such as prolonged staring or love notes.

The next item of the questionnaire aimed at identifying the places where most events belonging to school violence occur with the data being presented in Table 2.

**Table-2.** Places where school violence occurs most frequently

<b>Item</b>	<b>Answer</b>
In class	16.7%
School corridors	14.8%
The schoolyard	14%
The gym	6.7%
The locker room	0.7%
Outside the school	47.1%

Analysis of the responses of students for this item shows that apparently surprisingly, nearly half of them (47.1%) stated that acts of violence where they were directly involved or where they were witnesses occurred outside the school, usually in parks or on the street. If almost half of all violent acts occurred outside the school, in terms of aggressive behavior manifested in the school we can notice that most of them took place in the classroom (16.7%), corridors (14.8%) or in the school yard (14%). Less common were violent acts in the gym (6.7%) or in the locker room (0.7%), which are places where verbal or physical aggression only occur sporadically.

The fourth item of the questionnaire aimed at identifying the intervals of time that school violence occurs with the greatest frequency. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table-3.** The time interval when most violent acts occur in school

<b>Item</b>	<b>Answer</b>
Before classes	7.4%
During classes	3%
During breaks	39.6%
After classes	50%

The data in the table above indicates that more than half (57.4%) the acts of violence faced by students occur outside school time: 7.4% before classes and 50% of them after school hours.

This confirms the results obtained in the previous item, whereby 47.1% of students stated that violence in which they were directly or indirectly involved occurred outside school. Regarding violence that occurs while students are in school, 39.6% of these occur during breaks and only 3% of verbal or physical assault offenses are committed during school hours.

The next item of the questionnaire aimed to highlight the type of people who are the perpetrators of school violence. The data obtained is shown in Table 4.

According to the reports of interviewed subjects, for the many acts of violence in which they were involved (29.5%), perpetrators were students from other schools in the city. The second position in the ranking of people showing violent behaviors is held by classmates (27.5%), followed by students in higher classes (25.9%). Less common are assaults committed by students from parallel classes (16%) or by students from lower classes (1%).

**Table- 4.** Data regarding people who express violent behavior

<b>Item</b>	<b>Answer</b>
Students from higher classes	25.9%
Classmates	27.5%
Students from parallel classes	16.1%
Students from lower classes	1%
Students from other schools	29.5%

The last item of the questionnaire aimed to identify the typology of victims' of school violence reaction against this phenomenon. The results achieved in this regard are displayed summarily in Table 5.

**Table- 5.** Data regarding the response of victims towards violent acts at school

<b>Item/Answer</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Request the help of a classmate	26%	74%
Request the help of another student/friend	23%	77%
Request help from the school staff	22%	78%
Request help from family members	10%	90%
Do not react in any way	18%	82%

The data presented in the table above shows, even at a brief analysis, that there is a state of passivity and unresponsiveness of students towards aggressors and school violence in general. Thus, directly or indirectly confronted with violent situations, students say that they seek the help of a classmate (26%) or of another student / friend (23%) while 22% of subjects responded that they seek help from the school staff . Meanwhile, 10% of students seek help from their families in situations of school violence and 18% of victims of verbal or physical bullying recognize that they do not react in any way, accepting the situation.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Compared to 2008, when the report "School violence: epidemiology, history and prevention" developed by the World Health Organization showed that a percentage of 37% of the students of Classes VII-VIII from Romania were fearful of going to school, the percentage of this category is now 28%. Although not very significant, this decline is an indicator that measures taken at national level to equip schools with video cameras and concluding contracts with specialized security companies has shown results. However, we should note that, due to these measures, school violence has not decreased in intensity but it has moved outside of school. Thus, according to obtained data, from a spatial perspective, 47.1% of violence now occurs outside the boundaries of the school institution and from a temporal perspective, 50% of assaults occur after school hours. Regarding forms of school violence, the results show that the predominant acts recorded are shoving, intentional insults, threats and blackmail under threat of violence while attacks using blunt/sharp objects or sexual harassment are uncommon events. Regarding the perpetrators, it is found that 29.5% of them are students from other schools, classmates represent 27.5%, and with a share of 25.9%, older students from the same school. If assaulted, 26% of the students prefer to seek the help of a classmate, 23% seek another student/friend and 22% seek the help of the school staff. Only 10% of students seek help from their families in situations of school violence while

18% of them say they do not react in any way, when targeted by school violence. The development and implementation of an effective program to prevent and combat school violence thus involves a contextualized approach, able to take into account the overall of all parameters mentioned above in an operational manner.

## REFERENCES

- Furlong, M., 2000. The school in school violence definitions and facts. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders Summer*, 8(2): 71-82.
- Harding, J.D., 2008. Neighborhood violence and adolescent friendship. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 2(1): 28-55.
- Krug, E., I. Dahlberg, J. Mercy, A. Zwi and L. Rafael, 2002. World report on violence and health. Available from <http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2002/9241545615.pdf> [Accessed 12/10/2013].
- Miller, T.W. and R. Kraus, 2008. School-related violence - definition, scope, and prevention goals in school violence and primary prevention, Springer.
- Preda, V., 1998. Delicvența juvenilă o abordare multidisciplinară/ Juvenile delinquency. A multidisciplinary approach. Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană. pp: 38.
- Spiel, C. and P. Wagner, 2012. Violence prevention in Austrian schools: Implementation and evaluation of a national strategy. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, 6(2): 176-186.

*Views and opinions expressed in this article are the views and opinions of the authors, International Journal of Asian Social Science shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.*