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THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL AMBIENCE ON STUDENTS' SENSE OF SECURITY – CASE STUDY OF LODZ SCHOOLCHILDREN

Abstract: This paper discusses research conducted five years ago into the sense of security of students from all types of Lodz schools. Attention is focused on seeking the impact of social ambience on the increase or decrease of violence-based behaviour. The research principally indicated that the teachers' attitude toward students, the manner in which classes are run, and how teachers react to violent outbursts all have a fundamental impact on the scale of aggression and the forms of its manifestation. The research findings and suggested interpretations can spawn a discussion on the situation of Lodz students as broadly understood, the opportunities for change, and ways to react which would lead to increasing the sense of security, and, as a natural consequence, the quality of life in general.
Keywords: Security, social ambience students.

Introduction

The issue of quality of life in a broad sense has attracted the interest of not only the scientific environment, but also social politicians and public opinion. According to Kolman, the "quality of life is tantamount to the degree of spiritual and material needs satiation and that of meeting the expectations of conventional normality in the day-to-day life activities and situations for individuals and the society" [Kolman 2000]. Amongst the subjective determinants of the evaluation of the quality of life, "we can include the level of satiation of needs such as feeling of safety, personal goals and aspirations, mental well-being, social acceptance or recognition, as indicated by Trzebiatowski [2011, p. 28].

A vital element in the quality of life is the sense of security, which is based upon one of the most fundamental human needs. The sense of security is multifaceted. It includes the significant factor on inhabitants' physical security (crime rate, road

safety *etc*.) as well as healthcare and inner prosperity. This paper discusses one of the vital aspects impacting on the increased sense of a lack of security – violence.

Society seeks to explain the problem of violence in a myriad of ways. Aspects such as family, peers, neighbours, school or mass media are subject to a detailed analysis. This is done by pinpointing gaps in value systems or educational care actions, which can result in a pronounced increase in patterns of behaviour marked with violence, in all its forms.

It is considered that the dominant educational model, *i.e.* that of the parent-child and teacher-student relationship, is ingrained with an element of mental violence, as it implies an authorization to invade another person's territory, dictating or barring their right as a result of performing a particular function or occupying a certain position. Violence is omnipresent: it occurs in less-well-off, middle-class and prosperous families, both in the city and in rural areas. It may affect children and adults, men and the elderly, and any weaker ones who are unable to withstand it. Such violence always causes humiliation and suffering, spawns hatred and the urge for revenge, and offers nothing that would justify recourse to it. It always ensues from human actions and is typically intentional, its essence being the violation/infringement of the rights of an individual, with the infringement rendering self-defence impossible and causeing harm [Forward 2011]. In the light of this, it can be indisputably listed as a pattern of deviant behaviour. In the undertaken research, an attempt is made to identify the essential components of group influence which may lead to a possible rise in distortion of the sense of security among Lodz schoolchildren. In this research it was essential to establish the quality of functioning of environments that impact the shaping the young personality.

1. Methods of analysis and characteristics
of the analysed specimen

The field study consisted of two stages. Stage one was quantitative research conducted using a survey questionnaire. It constituted the primary source of information for analysis of the analysed issue. Stage two consisted of a focus approach, aiming at enrichment of the earlier quantitative approach by qualitative aspects deemed indispensable in this study. The research included all schools in the City of Lodz administrative region. Selection was based upon stratified sampling, and the strata consisted of three school types: primary, lower- and upper-secondary (both general and technical). The number of subjects from each school type ("strata") were proportional to the overall student count in each stratum. Taking into consideration the number of classes as well as the average student count in classes in each school, the number of classes to be researched was determined. All children among the sampled classes were subjects of research. It is worth noting that the research excluded third-

grade primary school students, due to the fact that intellectual capabilities of children in this age would have caused considerable communicative impediments, which in turn would have led to obtaining inconclusive information.

Within the researched population, primary school students constituted 40.5% (7364 respondents), lower-secondary school students – 26.9% (4896 respondents), general upper-secondary school students – 19.6% (3565 respondents), and upper-secondary school complex students (technical schools) – 13.0% (2376 respondents). The socio-demographic characteristics of the sampled population were as follows: girls made 51.7% of respondents, and boys the remaining 48.3%. The largest proportion of girls was sampled in general upper-secondary schools (60.3%), while the largest proportion of boys were in the in upper-secondary school complexes (56.8%). The most balanced gender proportions were in the primary schools. For 91% of respondents both parents were alive, whereas 5.3% had a living mother, and 1.2% a living father, while for 0.6% of the respondents both parents were deceased. Currently, 72.7% of respondents live with both parents, 18.6% live with the mother only, 1.7% – with the father only, and 2.5% with more distant family members. It can thus be concluded that nearly 1/5 of children are brought up by a single parent, mostly the mother. In view of text editing requirements, matters relating to the issue of violence and its determinants have been singled-out.

1.1. Social ambience of children and youth

This part of the research is dedicated to relationships between students and their immediate ambience, which in turn affects the extent of their sense of security. The research set out to demonstrate how respondents view and assess their in-school and out-of-school environments. A fundamental research task was to diagnose the violence-creating determinants in school, since school violence is on the increase. Numerous studies indicate that almost 75% of respondents personally experience acts of violence in school – being the perpetrator, victim, or a bystander. Nearly all students have encountered or were aware of the existence of this issue in their school [Górniewicz 1995]. Other studies conclude that for more than half of the community, school is a source of negative experience [Dąbrowska-Bąk 2014]. Violation of students' dignity linked with physical and verbal aggression, didactic pressures, and demonstrations of power by the teacher are dominant in treating children-in-care. The aggressive demeanour of some teachers is palpable in elevated expectations, strict grading requirements, and compelling children to absolute submission to their will [Jundziłł 1993]. Other research asserts that some 20% of students are involved in pathological violence, whereas about 80% fall victim to aggression, ranging from verbal abuse, racketeering and appropriation of possessions, to physical intimidation [Kmiecik-Baran 1999]. Also worth noting is the relatively novel form of violence called *mobbing*. This issue first appeared in Sweden in the 1960s and was related to the violence in school [Kmiecik-Baran 2000].

School-going is typically either an ordeal or a pleasure for students. This results most of all from ambience in its broad sense, and the emotions that ensue there from. Ambience encompasses three areas. The first is linked with coequals (school peers); the second concerns teachers; and the third applies to the home environment. Whether school-going is a pleasant experience or an ordeal is by and large a result of these three dimensions. It is vital to realize that a child's indication of his or her stance on school is, in the case of the respondents, more connected with a manifest of emotions rather than common sense, bearing in mind the analysis of all these principles. Aside from merely asking respondents whether they enjoy school-going, an attempt was made to include the justifications behind their opinions.

As indicated above, school and the peer groups are crucial aspects when it comes to developing aggressive patterns of behaviour. "The school environment is, aside from home, the main personality-forming factor of a young individual. It is the "duty" of the school to prepare a child to lead an adult life and make them capable of fully partaking in the life of a social group to which they belong and in which they develop" [Lewowicki 1997, p. 94].

1.2. Students on teachers as educators and class masters

Various aspects of teachers' work were put to the students for their appraisal. The first was the manner in which classes are run. In this regard, the student-repondents replied as follows:
- All teachers run the class in an interesting way (9.0%),
- Most teachers run the class in an interesting way (24.1%),
- Only some teachers run the class in an interesting way (40.2%),
- Few teachers run the class in an interesting way (22.8%),
- None of the teachers run the class in an interesting way (3.8%).

Apparently, most students are bored with the way teachers run their classes (76.8%). Primary school teachers are at the top-of-the-range when it comes to the quality or way of running their classes, with more than half of the respondents stating that most or all teachers can engage their students. This verdict is considerably less common with regards to teachers in other school types. Being able to engage the student is a feature that is the rarest among upper secondary school complexes, according to respondents.

The way teachers are perceived by students was also researched through the prism of other dimensions, such as: evaluation methods, attitude towards students, and manner of running the classes. Student opinions on evaluation methods were as follows:

Among the respondents, 54.7% concluded that most teachers provide a fair evaluation, by which they mean "uniform". However, this fairness has a two-pronged distribution:

- 37.4% of respondents consider that they are evaluated fairly, but in a strict manner,
- 17.3% deemed their grades as fair, albeit lenient.

The remainder (44.3%) of opinions point to favouring certain student groups in a biased way. Hence:

- 30.6% of school youths consider teachers are characterized by strict grading, yet are more lax towards those whom they fancy,
- 14.7% think the reverse, *i.e.* that teachers provide lenient evaluations, but are harsher towards students they do not like.

The manner in which teachers evaluate their students can be characterized using merely two categories:

1. Students consider themselves evaluated fairly (regardless of whether the grading is strict or lenient);
2. Students consider themselves evaluated unfairly (*i.e.,* teachers favour certain students).

The distribution of responses reveals that, in the opinion of the preponderance of primary school students, teachers provide fair evaluations of their children-in-care (66.8%). With regards to students in other school types, opinions in this regard are different; 46% of lower-secondary students indicated their evaluations were fair, compared to 47% of upper-secondary general students and 45% of students in school complexes.

Subsequently, the way students are treated was the main aspect of interest. The question "*Do teachers address students in a favourable and amiable way?*" yielded the following responses:

- Yes, all of them (16.9%),
- Yes, most of them (46.6%),
- Yes, but only some of them (25.4%),
- Yes, but only few of them (9.1%)
- No, none of them (2.0%).

Based on these indications, it can be concluded that 63.5% of students assess their teachers' attitude as positive – kind and friendly. What's more, this verdict is rendered for all school types. More than half of all students declared that all or most teachers conduct themselves in a friendly and amiable manner. Once again this approach is most pronounced in the youngest respondents (primary school pupils) and less so in students of upper-secondary school complexes.

The 'style in which a class is run' pertains to the students' opinions on which children are preferred by their teachers [Schulz 1985]. Do teachers prefer those who "keep quiet", or rather those who spontaneously ask questions in class? It was assumed that lessons are run in either a traditional way, involving the division of class time into two parts – passing on and applying knowledge; or else in an interactive manner, engaging students directly. The latter allows questions to be asked at any moment of a class session. Respondents' opinions that teachers prefer those students

who "keep quiet" will be treated as a determinant of running a class traditionally, whilst those who encourage and promote students who ask questions points to the interactive approach. As regards which type of student is preferred, the following distribution of answers was given:

- All or most teachers would rather have students who "keep quiet", rather than those who ask questions (28.2%).
- Half of the teachers would rather have students who ask questions, and the remainder prefer those who "keep quiet" (37.4%).
- All or most teachers would rather have students who ask questions (34.4%).

Hence nearly one in three teachers runs his or her class in a traditional way, while over a third opt for the interactive manner. The remaining group of teachers fall into two groups: one prefers students to "keep quiet", whereas the other would rather hear questions in class. An interesting component of the study was to establish the manner in which classes are run across school types.

In primary schools, the traditional manner prevails (42.6%), while the interactive way prevails in the higher levels. By way of analogy, the traditional-to-interactive ratio equals: 23.8% to 34.8% in lower-secondary schools, 12.0% to 48.9% in general upper-secondary schools; and 16.7% to 36.5% in upper-secondary school complexes.

1.3. Students' sense of security and the phenomenon of violence in school

The focal point of this study is the issue of aggression and the jeopardy thereof faced by youth, so most questions that were asked pertained to these aspects. At the onset it is worth drawing attention to terminology, which can be subsumed under three approaches.

The first has been tagged as "individual". This approach seeks patterns of aggressive behaviour within the individual, and the trend comprises Lorentz's Ethological Attachment Theory, Freud's Theory of Aggression, and Dollard's Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis.

The second approach states that the source of aggressive behaviour can be found in the situations that people face. This has been dubbed the "situational" approach.

Last but not least, there is the third, "sociological" approach. The social ambience and environment of an individual can be sources of aggression. This hypothesis will be crucial to the subject matter for this study. However, it should not be assumed that this aspect is the sole or the most pronounced precondition for aggressive behaviour. Aggression *per se* is understood as any pattern of behaviour that causes physical or mental harm. Certain definitions emphasize the consciousness behind such behaviour, thus rendering it intentional and advertent, or unintentional and inadvertent. Given the nature of this distinction, it was assumed that researching patterns of

behaviour from the standpoint of the active entity would necessitate a methodology other than one hinging on the search for environmental motives behind this behaviour. For this reason, an attempt was made to obtain information on students' subjective feelings, as well as to replicate a true-to-life objective visualization of threats by registering behaviours that fall within the category of this phenomenon. Questions were asked to determine the respondents' sense of security, opinions on violence, its causes and preventive measures, and the frequency of occurrence of phenomena falling into this category, such as: beating, theft, coercion *etc*. Discussion of the subjective feelings of students with regard to their sense of security will come first. The bar chart illustrates where and to what extent respondents feel secure.

The results confirm the assumption that home is where children feel the most secure (96% of respondents). On the contrary, however, certain opinions shared dur-
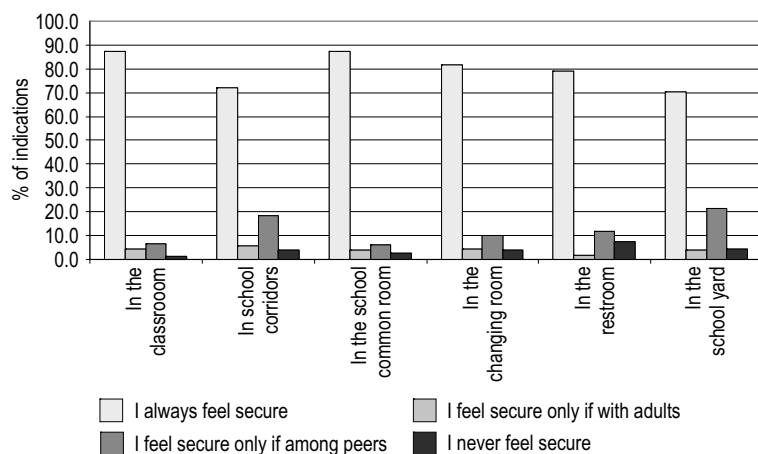

Figure 1. Student sense of security in various places

Source: Own research (Figs. 1-3).

ing the questionnaire may be striking. In the street, *i.e.* the place considered by the youths as the most dangerous, (only one in two respondents feels secure there), they feel more secure if surrounded by friends or peers (28.6% of indications), rather than adults (10.0%). One may thus conclude that the sense of security resulting from the company of peers is an erroneous assumption concerning the strength of the group, and, as a result, the security of its members.

When it comes to the sense of security in school, respondents pinpointed the classroom (87.6%), the school common room (87.5%) and the changing room (81.6%) as the most secure places, while restrooms (7.2%), the school yard (4.2%) and school corridors (4.0%) were ranked the least secure. Hence an assumption can be made that places without supervision are deemed less secure.

Another aspect was to verify whether secure school areas, *i.e.* the classroom, common room *et al.,* are deemed equally secure (*vis-à-vis* insecure) in different types of schools. The analysis revealed that students, regardless of the type of school they attend, consider the classroom and common room to be the school's most secure places. The palpable level of security in the remaining school areas varies however.

From the prepared summaries, only two contrasting expressions were chosen for comparative analysis – "I always feel secure" and "I never feel secure" – so as to more vividly present the concept of (in)security. In nearly all school areas, the percentage of respondents who always feel secure is lowest in primary school students. Upper-secondary general school and school complex students felt equally secure within all school areas. A somewhat smaller proportion of those who always feel secure is made up of lower-secondary school students, and the lowest – of primary school-goers. This might corroborate the fact that age matters – younger students feel somewhat more secure in certain school areas than their older counterparts.

What is violence for students? In order to portray the essence of this term, respondents were advised to choose a description of patterns of behaviour that they deemed to fit the definition of the term. Most defined violence as behaviour which causes physical harm, such as: beating, scuffling, pushing and shoving (95.8%), using physical prowess to provoke submission (92.3%). Less frequently, respondents pointed to behaviour causing mental harm, such as humiliating or ridiculing (47.3%) or shouting at someone or calling names (46.4%). Browbeating occupied top position in the hierarchy of violence (78.4%). It is evident that the physical "face" of aggression stands for violence per se. As regards mental harassment, less than half the respondents were inclined to subsume it under violence whatsoever. Behaviour types concentrating on browbeating others are an exception. Three quarters of all students regard this type of aggression as a form of violence.

In analysing this matter from the viewpoint of various school types, it can be concluded that the definition of violence differs depending on the type of school. While physical aggression, encompassing patterns of behaviour such as beating or the abuse of strength were unanimously considered as violence, mental-harm-oriented violence, including humiliation or browbeating, were not as evident. The younger respondents (*i.e.* primary and, in part, lower-secondary school students) are considerably less inclined to tag these types of behaviour as violent than their older peers. This could indicate that the latter types are considered to be "normal", or ordinary. The "normality" or ordinariness might not necessarily stem from a lesser sensitivity on the part of the younger students, but rather from the fact that such instances of behaviour are an everyday occurrence for them – they grow accustomed to them and treat them as natural.

The next element to be ascertained is a vital aspect: What people or institutions do students expect to counteract violence?

According to the respondents, violence should be acted against by the family (79.2%), followed by the police (68.9%) and the school (62.7%). These are the three

core "institutions" that the students feel should address the issue of violence in the first place. Considerably less popular indications were the courts and prosecutor's office (25.6%), social welfare (11.5%), community and grassroots organizations (10.4%) and the church (10.1%). Hence youths seek the sources of aggressive behaviour, their motives and countermeasures in the family, notably in the parent-child relationship.

Respondents also drew attention to particular actions that, in their opinion, should be taken to counteract violence. These can be broken down into:

1. Creating free-time activities that enable giving vent to energy excess (indicated by 51.3% of respondents).
2. Didactic-oriented activities, which can fall into:
   - Presenting youths with the evils resulting from aggressive behaviour (36.7%).
   - Conveying exemplar types of behaviour and praising them, with lesser penalties (42.3%).
   - Talking more about violence and teaching how to defend against it (42.5%).
   - Avoiding the issue of violence (talking less about it – 11.9%).
3. Applying constraints towards aggressive individuals, most of all by: using stiffer penalties towards aggressors (42.5%), and the need for greater supervision of youngsters in public areas and having more police officers on the beat (33.5%). The least popular response was that calling for the harshest constraints – restrictions of liberty of young individuals, by *e.g.* curfew, age limits in the case of concerts, or clubbing (10.1%).

Students of school types above the primary level agree with their younger counterparts as regards counteracting violence. There exists, however, a marked difference in the countermeasures against violence suggested by this group in comparison to the former respondents. The most telling epitome of the variations is the frequency of indicating actions that advocate avoidance of the topic of violence ("no discussion – no problem"). Nearly one in four primary school-goers chose this code of conduct, whereas students of other school types indicated this in a very small percentage of responses. A similar situation applies to the use of stiffer penalties. The above-primary-level students indicated this a truly violence-preventive measure nearly twice as often as did their younger peers, which appears striking.

To present an objective image of dangers and threats, a list of aggressive types of behaviour witnessed or experienced by Lodz school students was used. This list included twelve different behaviour patterns, among which six examples were given of both physical and mental aggression. Students were required to indicate how frequently each pattern was present in their school. The scale of behaviour frequency included four degrees, beginning from "very often" to "quite often", "sporadically" and ending with "never", in which case one is unable to treat the responses and indications as measurable threats. The results obtained will be discussed on two levels. The first will characterize the frequency of occurrence of these types of behaviour for the society *in toto*. The other will indicate which position is occupied by each of the four

researched school types in terms of the scale of the described threats. The frequency of occurrence of each type of behaviour is represented on Figure 2 and Figure 3.
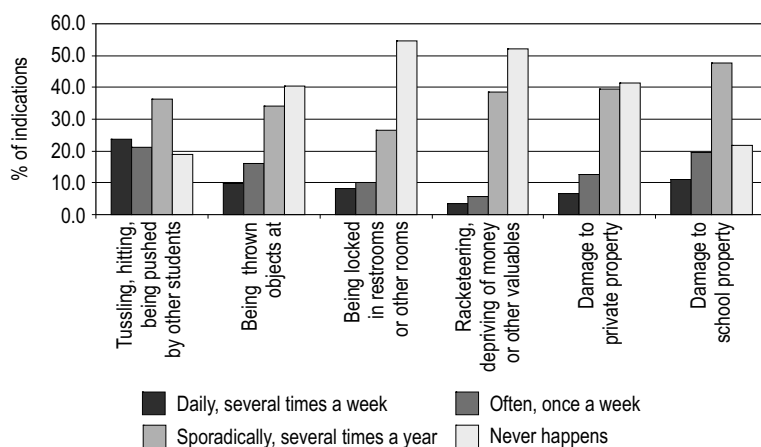

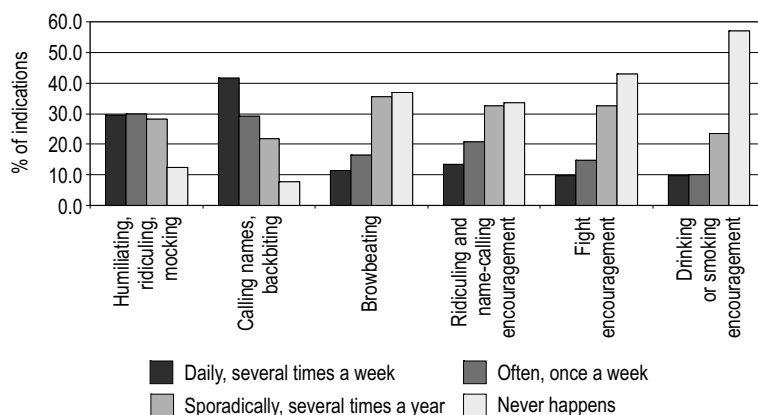Figure 2. The frequency of occurrence of physical aggressive behavior in students

Figure 3. The frequency of occurrence of mental aggressive behavior in students

Nearly three quarters of all respondents (70.7%) indicated calling names and back-biting as patterns of behaviour that occur frequently of very frequently. It can be assumed that such behaviour is treated as a school-life ritual. The runners-up were types of behaviour aiming at humiliating and ridiculing (59.3%). Both behaviour types are instances of mental aggression and, interestingly, are treated as types of violence in merely half of the instances (47.3%) indicated directly by the students. Juxtaposing these findings corroborates the theory that, in spite of the high frequency

of occurrence of these patterns, such behaviour is deemed as a regular fixture rather than as violence.

Among physical-type aggressive behaviours, students usually pointed to: "tussling", "hitting", and "shoving", with 44.8% of respondents declaring them as frequent or very frequent occurrences, thus pronouncing the verdict of these being a direct form of violence.

Second in the rank, intensity-wise, is damage to school property (24.5%). These appear tantamount to demonstrations of violence and can be interpreted as the urge to show-off within the group in order to be seen as a formidable person who will eagerly resort to using strength in conflict situations. Aggressive patterns of behaviour that respondents failed to interpret as aggressive *per se* included: encouragement to drink or smoke (57.0%), racketeering/depriving of money and valuables (52.2%), encouragement of fights (42.9%), damaging the property of others (41.3%).

It is worth noting that in nearly 50% of cases, these types of behaviour also take place with varied intensity. The broader picture, even after a tentative analysis, is nevertheless somewhat sombre, as a result two facts. Firstly, the set of proposed activities does not include those that never occur in schools. Secondly, most aggressive patterns of behaviour occur with high regularity.

Aggressive behaviour usually impacts the weaker students, as indicated by 45% of all respondents, followed by new students (34.6%) and the younger ones (28.6%). Teachers' "pets" (17.8%), less-well-off family members (14.5%) and less gifted students (13.0%) fall victim to these types of behaviour far less frequently.

Most rarely targeted are disabled (4.5%) and well-off students (3.3%). Only 8.6% of respondents have declared that no such behaviour exists in their school.Victims are similar or identical regardless of the type of school. In other words, there is no "exemplary" victim of violence for a particular type of school. Put differently, regardless of what type of school students attend, the aggressive behaviour toward representatives of the victim groups occurs with similar frequency. The youngest children constitute a certain exception in this regard, as they often fall victims to older aggressors themselves. The same applies to less-well-off students if they become victims.

1.4. Students on teachers' behaviour towards violence

An important research goal was to determine teachers' reactions if they witness student violence. In the students' opinion, they most often reprimand aggressors verbally (43.4%), followed by contacting their parents (36%), referring the matter to the headmaster (32.7%), entering a note in the register (30.5%), applying other penalties (14.8%), or not reacting at all (9.4%). Taking into consideration that no reaction is perceived by as many as 9.4%, and a staggering 43.4% indicate merely a verbal reprimand, it may be concluded that the distribution of teachers' reactions to aggressive behaviour points to rather lenient treatment.

An attempt was made to establish whether teachers put in their utmost effort to make school a safer place. The evaluation of teachers' reactions on aggressive student behaviour is as follows: teachers do their utmost to make the school secure (24.2%); teachers put in a great deal of effort to make the school secure, yet they sometimes fail (46.8%); teachers do little to make the school secure (16.0%); teachers do hardly anything to make the school secure (5.1%).

The student respondents were rather critical of their tutors' attitude towards aggression. As many as 21.8% of respondents stipulate that teachers do nothing or very little to undergird and increase security, although such opinions occurred 2.4% less frequently than those claiming teachers to be doing their utmost in regards to the issue. Nearly half of all students (46.8%) observe some teacher efforts.

It is worth noting that primary-level students give teachers a considerably higher score than do other students when it comes to their efforts to increase security. Teachers score lowest among lower-secondary and upper-secondary school complex students.

The most popular teacher reaction to student behaviour is shouting. Much less frequently is the aggressive student expelled from the classroom. A similar frequency is represented by teacher behaviour based on ridiculing and embarrassing students. Direct aggression, manifested by shoving students, is the least frequent option used by teachers.

In a further search for the relationship between aggression and students' ambience in the broad sense of the word, attention was focussed on the link between teachers' actions and students' perception of aggression. Two dimensions were used in describing the teacher-student interaction: teacher-as-educator, and teacher-as-classmaster, as these two relationship types are easily distinguishable. The teacher-as-educator dimension was further split into two tiers. Both the form and the subject matter of the class were treated separately. The subject- matter tier relates to the teachers' ability to engage students with the topic of the lesson. Information on the extent of this skill was obtained by inquiring how many teachers run their classes in an interesting manner. Since the form and the rules dictating how students should participate in the class is set out by the teacher, observations were made as to how many teachers prefer those who do not interact spontaneously during the class (*i.e.* who do not ask questions when not expected to) and how many would rather have a class of students who react spontaneously (*i.e.* make enquiries and interact/discuss with the teacher).

What then is the correlation between the way in which the class is run and aggression? It appears to be statistically significant and straightforward. It can be concluded that the more teachers in the student's ambience run the class in an interesting manner, the fewer instances there are of students experiencing and perceiving aggressive behaviour. Another conclusion follows: the interactive method of running a class (one in which students engage in an active dialogue with the teacher) entails considerably less aggression than does the traditional method (one in which the students' and teachers' roles are strictly observed). These findings regarding this aspect

of the teacher-centred analysis seem to be spot-on: both the manner of running the class manner and the rules governing student obedience indicate different levels in the students' perception of aggression. How can this be explained? While a myriad of possible interpretations exist, two are the most plausible. The first relates to the venting of energy and associated emotions by the students. One can assume that the emotional and intellectual involvement of students is considerably stronger when the class is interesting and requires focus. If the student is intensively active and involved, it causes him or her to use up a lot of energy and dedicate breaks to "re-charging batteries". If a student is bored in class, usually linked with the onerous stress related to anticipating the teacher's questions, the energy reserves are vented during the breaks or after school. The interactive method also teaches students tolerance towards alternative viewpoints and the importance of persuading others of one's own views, leading students to the ineluctable discovery that the best effect is obtained by strength of arguments, not arguments of strength.

Conclusions

The undertaken research was a compound organizational enterprise on the one hand, yet on the other it offered vast possibilities to discover the magnitude and character of violence in Lodz schools and to run a broad and multi-tiered analysis in search of its nature. The study allowed for evaluating the level of security perceived by the students, whilst the outcome was also informative with respect to the family situation of the subjects, the parent-child relationship, the division of roles and responsibilities for diverse family matters. Another aspect was the possibility to inquire into how students function in the school environment and discover and assess the teacher-student and student-student relationships – *i.e.* those of the "actors" of this "spectacle".

Although the scope went somewhat beyond the general picture of the study, the findings constitute a unique diagnosis of the Lodz school system. First and foremost, all the Lodz school-goers (children and youths) are entangled in different environments which they penetrate or touch upon on a day-to-day basis. Particularly striking are the findings concerning the status of Lodz families, as they were also indirectly involved in this study. Their condition is disturbing, mostly due to the most widespread absence of the father. This fact has been called the 'maternalization of the Lodz family'. Moreover, browbeating is regarded as a relatively common form of violence, and it falls into the mental category. One out of every two respondents is of the opinion that children and youths use violence because they experience it at home and are unable to go about their business and achieve their goals otherwise. The students also simultaneously concluded that the family is the institution that should counter violence in the first instance, followed by the school itself and the police. Respondents feel there would be less violence if there were opportunities to spend time in an active

way, shaping behaviour so as to show young people the nature of wrongdoing and its ramifications. At the same time, both families and schools ought to teach ways to deal with aggression from others. It was also postulated that violence-based behaviour should be countered with stiffer penalties.

Teachers usually react to violence by telling the aggressors off, notifying their parents, referring the matter to the headmaster or entering a formal note in the register. The respondents were critical of teachers' reactions towards violence. They know the nature of efforts taken, but find them to be below par and insufficient to tackle the issue.

The fact that multiple families are dysfunctional, that schools' actions are characterized by indecisiveness or frequently "clumsiness", that peer groups dominate in behaviour pattern determination on the school premises (and beyond), and that such patterns are not always in line with the existing normative system, altogether presents a rather gloomy picture.

The research results and suggested interpretations open the door for further discussion on the widely-recognized situation of Lodz school-goers, and the possibility of change in the direction of drives and interactions which might lead to increasing the sense of security, and, as a natural consequence, the quality of life in general.

It is worthwhile to conclude with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's thought-provoking claim that if the most innocent and vulnerable child cannot feel safe in a society, no other human can feel safe there either.

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