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AGGRESSION AND VIOLENCE IN THE OPINION OF POLISH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

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1. Introduction

On January 18th, 2001, in the city of Poznań a research into the feeling of safety in all Poznań schools (primary schools – PS, secondary schools – SS, and grammar/vocational schools – GVS) was conducted. The main reason for initiating research at such a large scale was the increasing number of phone calls from parents to the *Wielkopolska Gazeta Wyborcza* (i.e. the local journal) concerning the endangered safety of their children. A small team was set up, consisting of the representatives of *Gazeta*, the Children Rights Defence Committee, the Police, the Education Department of the Poznań Municipal Board, the Education Board, the Church and the Institute of Psychology of the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań. The group came up with the idea of carrying out a research drawing on one conducted several years ago in Malmö, where children in all schools answered a questionnaire on safety, on one day at the same time. The results of the research, which in Poznań covered ca 47 000 students, have been worked over by a team of students of the Institute of Psychology, Poznań, under the supervision of the authors of the present text (cf. Brzezińska, Hornowska, 2001a, 2002b). The report was presented at a press conference

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for directors and workers of schools covered by the research on May the 10th, and published on May the 11th of the same year (cf. Brzezińska, Hornowska, Mamys, 2001). The directors of all schools under study received detailed reports with the results of their students.

2. Problems and empirical questions

Children's safety is a vast problem. More and more children spend their time away from their parents, in places where adults' control is limited or practically non-existent. Obviously, parents' and other adults' control does change and should change together with the age of their children, but some of its forms are as necessary at childhood as they are during the long and difficult age of growing up. Control over a growing-up child executed by significant persons from his environment is a major factor of socialisation. However, as stressed by H. R. Schaffer (2000, p.146) the intended effect of control on the part of the others, parents in particular, is self-control gained by the child. As the child grows up, the peers begin to win more and more importance as sources of behaviour patterns and as control "factors". E.H. Erikson (1997; cf Brzezińska, 2000b, p. 233–234; Debesse, 1996, p. 69) stresses the point writing that at the school age peers become a major social factor as friends and mates in play and other activities; so do teachers, and later at puberty so does the peer community. Children enter the school age equipped with various ways of satisfying their needs acquired earlier. They have also mastered manifold methods of coping with difficult situations, on the one hand connected with experiencing states of frustration when their important needs are not met, either at all or not satisfactorily, and with experiencing aggression and violence from others – both adults and increasingly the peers – on the other. With fields of activity growing and the children's competence increasing, they are potentially exposed to much more frequent and more intense experience of aggression that at the pre-school and early school (grades I –II) age.

The questions the research ought answers for touched the following issues:

- How do pupils most often get to school from home and return home from school – this problem touched the potentially bigger susceptibility to experiencing acts of aggression, both as a victim and a witness, among those pupils whose way from home to school is long and demands commuting by various means of transport.

- Whether pupils feel safe on the way to and from school, in school, in their own district (the street, the backyard), in places where they spend their free time (football field, the cinema, vicinity of shops) – the problem referred to the pupils' feeling of security in places where they spend most of their free time outside home, i.e. the places of learning and rest,

- Has the pupil been a victim or witness to acts of aggression such as beating, robbery, threats, extortion, and in what places this took place; the question whether pupils themselves were the perpetrators of such acts was not asked,

- Who, according to the pupils, was the perpetrator of acts of aggression they had experienced or witnessed (the peers, younger or older friends, adults; the known or the unknown),
- To whom they told or would tell that they had been victims or witnesses of acts of aggression at school and outside; indirectly we were interested in the problem of trust in adults – parents and teachers,
- Have pupils been offered to buy or take drugs, and in what places this most often took place.

3. Empirical study programme

3.1. Research method

The research was conducted among students of all primary schools, secondary schools and grammar and vocational schools in Poznań, except for pupils from grades I and II of primary schools. These were not tested due to the instrument used – which required a good mastery of reading and writing, and also because of the very nature of the problems discussed – children might have problems with reflecting upon their negative experiences. The research questionnaire was prepared in four versions: first – for III grade students and IV-VI grade students of primary schools, second – for secondary and third – for grammar/vocational schools. The same questions were asked, and in the same order; the differences referred to the formulation of some of the questions; furthermore, the questionnaire for the III grade students did not contain the question about drugs. Each questionnaire consisted of 14 questions (13 questions for the III grade students).

All questions were of closed nature. The interviewees could choose from among 4 to 7 answers. Next to each answer there was an empty block which the students ticked off according to the instruction. In question no. 3 they estimated their feeling of safety in five situations (on the way from home to school, the way back, at school, in the district, in places where they spend their free time) according to four categories: “yes”, “yes, rather”, “not quite”, “no”. In their answers to all questions except no.3, students could tick off one or two blocks, so their answers do not sum up to 100%. In the final part of the questionnaire students were asked to provide the information about their gender, year of birth, and the grade they attend (ex. grade VI). The research was anonymous and realised after the assent of the school head masters, teachers, and the students themselves.

3.2. Organisation of empirical study

The research took one day. With the help of school masters, teachers, pedagogues and school psychologists, the test was carried out in all schools in whole Poznań at the same time, in the fourth tuition hour. The technical preparation of the questionnaires and their distribution was done by the editing board of *Wiekopolska Gazeta Wyborcza*. Altogether 100000 questionnaires were prepared. Schools got them according to the orders they had placed. 46 960 filled-in questionnaires were returned (ca 47%) – they were filled in by students who

were present at school at the time and agreed to do the test. It must be remembered that most schools operate in two shifts and some students started classes on the day of the test in the afternoon and thus were unable to take part in the research.

3.2. Subjects

Out of the questionnaires returned 15 269 were filled in by primary school students (PS) (grades III, IV, V, VI), totalling 32.5% of the tested sample; 10 043 were questionnaires filled in by secondary school students (21.4% of the sample), and 21 648 were questionnaires from students of grammar and vocational schools (GVS) (grades I, II, III, IV, V) which totalled 46.1% of the sample. Questionnaires filled in incorrectly or with gaps were rejected. In primary schools there were only 13 such questionnaires, in secondary schools 60, and in grammar/vocational schools as many as 222. Table 1a. presents the number of tested persons according to school type and age, and Table 1b. – the number of girls and boys tested in all types of schools. Boys and girls constituted ca 50% of the tested groups in primary, secondary and grammar/vocational schools.

Tab. 1a. Number of students ($n_1 = 46\ 960$) – by age

| SCHOOL | PS | PS | PS | PS | SS | SS | SS | GVS | GVS | GVS | GVS |
|-------------|---------------|-------|-------|-------|---------------|-------|-------|-----------------|-------|-------|-----|
| AGE (YEARS) | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| f | 3 308 | 4 137 | 3 736 | 4 075 | 5 048 | 4 935 | 6 594 | 5 357 | 4 994 | 3 832 | 649 |
| % | 21,7 | 27,1 | 24,5 | 26,7 | 50,6 | 49,4 | 30,8 | 25,0 | 23,3 | 17,7 | 3,0 |
| no data | 13 | | | | 60 | | | 222 | | | |
| n | $n_1 = 15269$ | | | | $n_2 = 10043$ | | | $n_3 = 21\ 648$ | | | |

Tab. 1b. Number of students ($n = 46\ 690$) – by gender

| SCHOOL | PS | PS | SS | SS | GVS | GVS |
|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| GENDER | girls | boys | girls | boys | girls | boys |
| f | 7 510 | 7 678 | 5 040 | 4 916 | 11 165 | 10 374 |
| % | 49,4 | 50,6 | 50,6 | 49,4 | 51,8 | 48,2 |
| no data | 81 | | 87 | | 109 | |
| n | 15269 | | 10043 | | 21648 | |

4. Results

4.1. Problem I: way from home to school and back

Among III grade students only one third (32.3%) says they were walked or driven to school, and as many as 63.9% came to school on their own and on foot. In grades IV – VI 15.5% of students are brought to school by their parents (by car or otherwise), 72.2% come on foot alone, 10.0% of students commute. In

secondary schools the figures look the same, ie 7.8% students are brought to school by their parents, 66.8% come alone on foot, 21.7% commute. In grammar/vocational schools 5.6% are brought by their parents, 15.9% come on foot, and as many as 80.5% commute. Clearly the percentage of students brought or driven to school decreases with age and the number of students getting there on their own (on foot) grows. The data collected, however, show that primary schools are situated much closer to the children's residences, with means of transport immaterial, while secondary school students (21.7%) and grammar/vocational school students (80.5%) commute. Thus groups of younger students are clearly potentially less exposed to acts of aggression than older ones on the way from home to school since the way is shorter, but at the same time many of the former goes to school with a guardian (this totals **almost 64%**, i.e. 2100 students in grade III).

As far as the way from school to home is concerned, the number of students brought or driven by adults changes considerably. In grade III it is only 24.2% (against 32.3% brought or driven to school), in grades IV – VI it falls down to 8.2% (against 15.5%); in secondary schools it decreases by about a half at the figure of 3.1% (against 7.8%), in grammar/vocational schools the figure stands at 2.5% (against 5.9%). In III grade **as many as 42.3% students come home alone on foot** and 37% come back home with male or female friends; in grades IV – VI 39.3% come home alone, 51.2% return with friends. 29.3% secondary school students return home alone on foot, and 56.6% with friends. Grammar/vocational school students rarely come home alone on foot (11%), while ca 33% students go home with friends. Various means of transport are used on their way home by 7.4% of III grade students, 12% students of IV – VI grade students, 22% of secondary school students and 78.5% of grammar/vocational school students. Still, the number of children who declare returning home with friends is surprising: in grade III it is only 37%, in grades IV – VI 51.2%, in secondary schools 56.6%, in grammar/vocational schools only 33%. The last figure is connected with the fact that lots of young people commute to school and their friends do not necessarily live close in the neighbourhood. The very small number of III grade students returning home with friends is particularly remarkable. After three years of learning together (the research was carried out at the end of the first semester in grade III) the children would have surely established some relations. Perhaps some students stay at school in school day-centres waiting for their siblings or other people to fetch them, or for the parents to return home.

4.2. Feeling of safety among students

General indices have been calculated for five situations researched and for four comparable student groups, which indicate their feeling of safety. The index 0 points means lack of the feeling of safety, and the 3 point index means a very high level of the feeling of safety. The results are presented in Table 2. The feeling of safety is the highest among III grade students (2.48), lower, yet the same, among IV-VI grade students (2.43), and the lowest among grammar/vocational school students (2.30) (an overwhelming majority commute to

school). The results are more varied in the case of the return way home: the highest level of the feeling of safety is among students of higher grades of primary school (2.55), slightly lower among students of III grade (2.50), and much lower among secondary (2.38) and grammar/vocational (2.19) school students. Grammar school students feel the safest (2.64), together with the youngest ones (2.52), with IV-VI grade students following at 2.45. **The lowest feeling of safety at school** persists among secondary school students (2.31). The feeling of safety outside, in the play-field or the street clearly increases along with age – the lowest is among grade III students (2.25), and highest among grammar/vocational schools (2.40). The lowest feeling of safety in all age groups is connected with the place where **the students spend their free time**, with the lowest index for grammar/vocational schools students (2.05).

Altogether, the feeling of safety among students is fairly high (the highest index is 2.05, which means about 68% of the maximum result (3 points). Some tendencies relevant for parents and teachers have appeared, however: (1) primary school students feel less safe in the street, district and places where they spend their free time, (2) secondary school students feel relatively little safe at school and places where they spend their free time, (3) grammar school students feel least safe in places where they spend their free time and on the way back home, (4) “places where students spend their free time” remain a mystery – there all age groups feel the least safe.

Tab. 2. Feeling of safety among students

| situations | III rd grade | IV-VI th grades | secondary school | grammar school |
|---------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| way home – school | 2,48 | 2,42 | 2,42 | 2,30 |
| way school – home | 2,50 | 2,55 | 2,38 | 2,19 |
| at school | 2,52 | 2,45 | 2,31 | 2,64 |
| at street | 2,25 | 2,28 | 2,38 | 2,40 |
| at free time places | 2,27 | 2,23 | 2,24 | 2,05 |

4.3. Problem III: students as victims

In the fourth question “*Have you ever been (*) beaten, (*) robbed, (*) threatened, (*) forced to do something you didn't want to do, (*) nothing like that has ever happened*”, students could tick off any number of answers (unless they chose the last one). Compared to primary and grammar/vocational school students, the secondary school students experienced the biggest number of various forms of aggression. Table 3 presents the percentage of students that have experienced the above-mentioned forms of aggression and violence, so they can be considered victims of aggression – with a classification into comparable four age groups.

Tab 3. Students as a victims – by age

| KIND OF AGGRESSION | III rd grade | IV-VI th grades | secondary school | grammar school |
|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| beating | 13,8 | 11,1 | 11,2 | 11,4 |
| thefts | 7,1 | 9,5 | 16,4 | 25,2 |
| threats | 18,6 | 19,4 | 27,1 | 29,4 |
| extortions | 7,1 | 8,1 | 10,4 | 9,0 |

There are distinct differences in the experienced forms of aggression, linked with the age of the victim. And so, the youngest students (III grade) much more frequently than their older friends experienced beatings (13.8% against ca 11% in older age groups). Situations of theft or robbery grow considerably with age – from 7.1% for III grade students and 9.5% for IV – VI grades up to 16.4% for secondary school students and 25.2% for grammar school students. Thus over one fourth of grammar/vocational school students experienced theft, which puts the figure of young people robbed at nearly 5500. Students fairly often encountered threats. This is the most often occurring form of aggressive act all students experience in each age group. For primary school students the percentage is similar (18.6% and 19.4%), much lower than in the case of secondary school students (27.1%) and grammar/vocational school students (29.4%). The index of coercing certain behaviours, however, is not high. It grows with the age of the children during primary school (7.1% and 8.15%) and secondary school (10.4%), and then fall in the case of the oldest students (9%). Altogether, the biggest number of various types of aggressive behaviour was experienced/vocational school students (threats, thefts and beatings). Primary school students were mainly victims of threats and beatings.

4.4. Problem IV: authors of aggression the students' opinions

Answers to the eighth question about the identity of the aggressor differ widely. The interviewees could choose from among the following: *he/she was from my school, I knew him/her but they attend different schools, he/she was unknown*. Aggressors from the same school were most often mentioned by III grade students (30.4%), IV-VI grade students (27%) and secondary schools students (30.9%). This category was very rarely mentioned by grammar/vocational school students (only 10%). Persons attending different schools were much more often indicated by secondary school students (14.7%) and grammar/vocational school students (15%) than by primary school students. On the other hand, the number of people indicating unknown aggressors grows dramatically with the age group: from 11.9% for the youngest students, 17.2% for IV-VI grade students, 25.9% for secondary school students, up to 50.9% for grammar/vocational school students. The last result may be connected with commuting by most grammar/vocational school students to and from school, and their declared low feeling of safety in places where they spend their free time.

4.5. Problem V: informing about the experience of aggression or acts of violence

Question 9, which read: “*If you happened to be beaten, robbed or threatened, who did you tell about it?*”, had the following choice of answers: “*parents, brother or sister, teacher, friend, policeman, nobody*”. The responses given are presented in Table 4, with a classification into age groups.

Tab 4. Informing about experience of aggression or violence acts

| DO YOU INFORM: | III rd grade | IV-VI th grades | secondary school | grammar school |
|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|----------------|
| parents | 30,4 | 27,7 | 24,1 | 26,9 |
| brothers, sisters | 6,3 | 7,0 | 9,8 | 13,8 |
| teacher | 10,5 | 9,4 | 7,7 | 4,2 |
| friend | 8,1 | 11,7 | 22,2 | 33,0 |
| policeman | 3,3 | 3,3 | 3,2 | 4,8 |
| nobody | 7,4 | 8,0 | 10,8 | 8,8 |

Primary and secondary school students would first of all inform their parents. As for grammar/vocational school students, parents came second. Together with the increase in age there is a discernible growth of trust in friends and siblings, **while trust in teachers, rather low anyway, systematically goes down**. The teacher comes last among secondary and grammar school students. Also, few students informed policemen about their experiences (ca 3% of primary and secondary school students and 4.8 grammar/vocational school students).

Why students do not inform anybody about being victims or witnesses of aggression? To answer this question it is worthwhile to compare the number of persons in each age group who declared never telling anyone about being beaten, robbed or threatened with those who think they would never inform anyone if something of the sort happened to them. In each age group more children told nothing about the event than thought they would not tell. The largest number of the tell-nots (10.8%) and the would-not-tells (9.9%) was in the secondary school group (cf. Table 5).

Tab. 5. Number of students who don't inform anybody about experience of aggression

| STUDENTS WHO | III rd grade | IV-VI th grades | secondary school | grammar school |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| don't inform | 7,4 | 8,0 | 10,8 | 8,8 |
| wouldn't inform | 6,5 | 7,0 | 9,9 | 7,3 |

Thus, the question arises yet again: why students do not inform anybody about the wrong they experience? Table 6 presents the motives for avoiding informing anyone of being a victim or witness of aggression.

Tab. 6. Motivation of avoiding to inform anybody

| Kind of motivation | III rd grade | IV-VI th grades | secondary school | grammar school |
|--|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| I was afraid | 13,6 | 13,2 | 11,5 | 4,8 |
| I ashamed | 3,1 | 3,1 | 3,1 | 2,2 |
| I didn't know who was able to help me | 7,9 | 5,1 | 5,8 | 4,8 |
| I wanted to cope myself | 7,2 | 7,1 | 10,2 | 12,0 |
| I thought that it was without any sense | 7,7 | 12,0 | 23,1 | 30,1 |

The youngest students declared fear as the main motive (as many as 13.6% of III grade students chose the response "I was afraid"). The motive declines in meaning together with age (a decreasing tendency). Among IV-VI grade students and the older ones there appears the motive of "thought it would do no good anyway" and "wanted to cope myself". The conviction that **informing others about an experienced act of aggression would do no good** is prevalent among secondary school students (23.1%) and grammar/vocational school students (30.1%).

6. Problem VI: contact with drugs

The last question posed to older students of primary schools (IV-VI grades), secondary school students and grammar/vocational school students was as follows: "*Have you ever been offered to buy or take drugs: (*) at school, (*) near school, (*) in your district, street, backyard, (*) in places where you spend your free time (e.g. at the disco, the cinema, the football field, in a pub, near the shops, (*) never happened?*". Students could choose several responses. Table 7 presents the results for all age groups (according to the percentage of students that chose the given answer).

Tab. 7. How many students and where met the offer to buy or use drugs?

| Place | IV-VI th grades | grammar school | secondary school |
|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------|------------------|
| just at school | 3,0 | 6,8 | 15,1 |
| near school | 3,3 | 6,7 | 12,9 |
| at street | 3,5 | 9,0 | 23,5 |
| at free time places | 3,7 | 9,0 | 29,5 |
| no offer | 88,7 | 79,0 | 57,4 |

The number of students who were offered or not to buy (take) drugs is significantly different in comparable age groups. And so, 88.7% of primary school stu-

dents declared not ever getting such a proposition, 79% in secondary schools and only 57.4% in grammar/vocational schools. **In other words, the number of students who were offered to buy or take drugs grows considerably (11% – 21% – 43%).** IV-VI grade students met with offers to buy or take drugs in various places, though most often in places where they spend their free time (3.7%). Secondary school students – three times as often as their younger schoolmates – got offers to buy or take drugs in the district (the street) (9%) and in places where they spent their free time as well (9%). Grammar/vocational school students had many such offers and in diverse places. Most often this occurred in places of spending free time (29.5%), and in the district or the street (23.5%), also at school (15.1%) and close to school (12.9%). **Places where students spend their free time** were those most frequently mentioned.

5. Conclusions

5.1. Students of primary schools

Analysis of the results for primary school students reveals the following:

1. The feeling of safety is relatively high, higher in reference to school, lower for the district or the street and places of spending free time, with III grade students feeling safer at school than IV-VI grade students.
2. Children experience various acts of aggression, but in both groups these are most often beating and threats, with the former for younger students and the latter for the older ones. Girls fall victims to aggression less frequently than boys and are mostly threatened. Boys do not only experience aggression more often, but experience it in more diversified ways as well (most often beatings).
3. Students most often are victims or witnesses of aggression on the way back home and in the district or the street. However, younger students experience aggression at school more often than the older ones.
4. The aggressors are usually older students or peers from the same school.
5. When an event takes place, students most often inform their parents, next their teachers, and last – the policemen. When one compares responses to the questions about the declarations and the real behaviours, it appears that children do not that often inform others about any wrong they have experienced. The main motives are: fear (similar in grades III and IV-VI) and the conviction that it would not work anyway. This conviction gets stronger among older students.
6. As many as 33% boys and 28% girls declared having met offers of buying or taking drugs. This usually took place outside school – in the district, the street, places of spending the free time.

5.2. Students of secondary schools

Analysis of the secondary schools students shows that these students differ in the following categories:

1. They commute to school by various means of transport thrice as many times as primary school students,
2. secondary school students return home with their friends, as compared to 51% in grades IV – VI and only 33% of grammar/vocational school students.
3. Feeling of safety at school is the lowest as compared to other student groups (as many as 13% secondary school students do not feel safe at school, and 10% in primary schools and 4% in grammar/vocational schools).
4. Secondary school students are most often witnesses and victims of aggression – as many as 29% of students as compared to 12% students of grade III, 10% of IV – VI grade pupils and 10% grammar school students.
5. They have a bigger sense of safety in places where they spend their free time (the average estimate is 2.05 out of 3).
6. They are most often – out of all age groups – victims of extortion, and also as witnesses they most often see such situations.
7. They most often inform that the aggressor was a student from the same or other schools, and twice as more often as primary schools students (they give 12% and 26% respectively) as compared to an unknown person.
8. The smallest number of all groups inform parents about the wrong they have encountered, the policeman is the rarest person they would contact, and the largest group contains persons that never inform anyone.
9. Twice as many secondary school students as the grammar ones declare that the motive for non-information was fear.
10. They meet with offers of buying or taking drugs three times more often than primary school students, yet twice less often than grammar school students.

5.3. Students of grammar/vocational schools

The research covered a numerous group of students from many types of grammar schools in Poznań. In this paper we present the results acquired only from the point of view of the differences connected with the gender and age of the students. We do not show the differences linked with learning in a particular school of a given type, nor with location of the school in a particular district (cf. Brzezińska, Hornowska, Mamys, 2001):

1. Most of the youth under investigation commute to their schools, and so spend much of their time outside home, outside the control of adults. Thus this is a susceptible group – also because of the age, the essence of which is experimenting and exploring various possibilities of action (cf. Brzezińska, 2000a, p. 324 and 242-246) on various random contacts and offers.
2. The feeling of safety of the youth under investigation was relatively high, while both younger and older students experienced it at school, with the lowest in places of their leisure time. The feeling of safety on the way home was also estimated as a lower one.
3. As victims of aggression, students most often experience threats and theft, with boys much more often victims than girls. Also, boys are quite often subject to beatings.
4. As witnesses, they observe it most at the places where they spend their free

- time, in the district, the street, but at school as well (more frequently younger students and girls).
5. The perpetrators of the experienced and observed acts of aggression are most often the youth, very rarely adults. The young people indicated their friends from other schools and unknown people more than friends from their own schools.
 6. Students inform their friends about what has happened to them (male and female), with boys more eager to do it than girls. Parents come the second, then the siblings – boys inform them more often than girls. The last comes the teacher, even the policeman comes better. The teacher comes last, even if students were asked to whom they would disclose the experienced act of aggression, and to whom they would tell that the event took place. From the point of view of pedagogics, this is the most disturbing result of the research. It could mean that a teacher is an insignificant person in the bringing-up process, while being endowed with considerable power over the student and – formally – a significant person at this difficult stage of life.
 7. About 40% students declared that they have been offered buying or taking drugs, with boys and higher grade children becoming victims more often. This took place most often during the free time and in the district, the street or the backyard. School was quite often such a place. Yet, most often the contact with drugs took place in places of spending the free time. A similar tendency was observed among primary and secondary school children. Thus we have clear indications about the risk groups as the target groups of activities, and an indication of how the preventive activities should proceed.

ABSTRACT

The aim of the article is to present the results of an empirical study made in one day (the 18th January 2001) in Poznań (ca 800 000 inhabitants) among students of all types of schools: primary, secondary and grammar/vocational. The total number of investigated students was 46 960. We used a 14-item questionnaire (and 13 items questionnaire for the third grade students of primary schools – without the question about contact with drugs). The main empirical problems were as follows: the way from home to school and back, the feeling of safety at various places of the city, students as victims and observers of aggression or violence acts, authors of aggression or violence acts in the opinion of students (peers or adults), who was informed about aggression experienced by students (parents, siblings, friend, teacher, a policeman, nobody), contact with drugs (frequency and places with drug peddling). The results revealed the following: (a) relatively high level of personal safety among students of all age groups, (b) the lowest feeling of safety was connected with places where girls and boys of all types of schools spend their free time, (c) the risk group were the groups of secondary school students, both girls and boys (13-15 years old), (d) boys of all age groups experienced more often various aggression and violence acts than girls, (e) a lot of students had contact with drugs at school and in places where they spent their free time.

RÉSUMÉ

The research shows that students have a fairly high feeling of safety. In their opinion, a relatively safe place is the way to and from school, as well as the district and the street. Their feeling of safety is slightly lower at school and the places where they spend their free time. At the same time many students experienced many kinds of acts of aggression, both as victims and witnesses or observers, often at school. Students most often inform their parents and friends about what has happened, but siblings as well. They very rarely go to their teachers or the policemen. Some – not very small – percentage of children inform no one, with “it will do no good” as the main motive. This feeling is stronger among older students. Many of them try to cope on their own, but for some it is fear that keeps them from asking someone for help. A significant number of students have already encountered the offer to buy or take drugs. This happened most often in the places where students spend their free time or in the street or district.

Analysis of the data acquired makes one pose the following basic questions:

1 Where, in what places students of all types of schools spend their free time and why they do not feel safe there?

2 Why school has become a place of little safety for secondary students?

3 What conditions make students experience theft or various threats that often?

4 Why the trust in all teachers of all kinds of schools is so low?

5 Why are students convinced that informing about aggression “will do no good”?; be it from observing the feeling of helplessness on the part of the parents and teachers in diverse situations?

The way to behaviours not always consistent with social norms yet meeting important developmental needs to deviate or even criminal behaviours is not that distant (cf the remarks of Urban, 1999, 2000). A growing-up child, with no feeling of acceptance in the class or the backyard group, unable to communicate with the parents, and one that feels an acute sense of its own incompetence in contact with teachers is a good potential candidate to enter the path just described. James Gilligan (2000) sees the prevalent feeling of shame arisen when a man publicly experiences his little worth and incompetence as the main source of destructive and autodestructive behaviours. He says that the way from experiencing the shame to brutal violence against others and oneself is very short indeed, since “all violence is an attempt at executing justice” (*op. cit.*, p.26).

On the one hand, the results show that students (still!) do have a fairly high sense of safety but, on the other, that they experience a number of aggressive acts, both as victims and witnesses or observers. This controversy, paradoxically, creates a chance for adults, both for parents and teachers. Yet if nothing is done, in some time successive research will certainly show high compatibility between the experiencing acts of aggression and the low feeling of safety among our children. Thus we still have some time left to undertake steps to counter aggression among children and the young, or else activities that would alleviate the effects of the experience. The areas that demand our – the adults’ – reflection as well as urgent action are the following:

(1) organising the activity of students during their stay at school: a wise control of this activity by teachers and its orientating by means of the richness and abundance of didactic and bringing-up offers,

(2) organising the activity of children and teenagers at the time free from learning,

(3) control of the places of spending free time,

(4) relationships within the family – with parents and the siblings,

(5) relationships within the peer groups

(6) relationships between teachers – students.

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