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**“Let’s beat the Hell out of Them!” – School Violence and its
Prevention in Israel**

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This article opens with a comparative bird’s eye view of school violence as a serious world-wide problem, thereafter focusing on school violence in Israel. It draws attention to the fact that school violence in Israel has been recognised as a grave problem for years. It draws attention to the fact that schools are more violence-prone than clubs, cinema-theatres, community centres, even disoteques. What is more, the article cites data that clearly indicate that the situation is going from bad to worse. The article briefly reviews numerous surveys that reflect this situation, and expands on violence as the liability of the school system. It then moves on to analyze a certain violence-prevention programme devised by and implemented in a certain junior high school in a medium-size town in greater Tel-Aviv. The articles tries to explain why the intervention programme should be judged a failure, and points out that this is typical of many other programmes initiated in the Israeli school system.

Juvenile delinquency, school violence, bullying, aggression, harassment, anxiety and fear, intervention and prevention programmes in schools

**INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CRIMINAL OFFENCES AND JUVENILE
CRIMINAL OFFENCES IN ISRAEL IN RECENT TIME**

School violence is an increasing concern in Israel. Israeli figures show that both criminal offences as well as violence have increased since 1990 at an alarming rate. Israeli police data reveal that while the number of caught delinquents stood at 62,916 in 1990, it reached 119,484 in 2000 – almost a 100% growth (MIS, 2000). At the same time Israeli population growth stood at a mere 34.8% (CBS, 2001).

There again, at the very same period the number of juvenile delinquents caught by the police grew by 38.5%, from 6,910 to 9,570 (MIS, 2000). In other words, the growth in juvenile delinquency lags far behind the general growth in criminal offences, and yet its rate is higher than the population-growth rate.

To sharpen the picture one ought to mention that the increase in the number of criminal files opened for minors aged 12-18 reached 16.8% between 1997 and 1998. Moreover, the number of criminal files opened for minors in 1998 was ten-fold bigger than in 1988 – 11,060 as against 1,030. The population growth along the same period was a mere 30% (Gumple, 2001, 9).

Violence merits a special attention in any discussion of both adult and adolescent delinquency; all the more so when it is interpreted as a behaviour pattern, causing physical or psychological harm to a third party, entailing degradation or use of force .

Special attention should be called to juvenile and childhood violence, since in the past twenty years empirical literature has accumulated many serious studies showing a strong association between high aggression exhibited in childhood and high aggression later exhibited in adolescence and adulthood. In other words, it is now recognised that childhood aggression is a good predictor of aggression in later life (Astor, 1995, 102).

It should be noted that high aggression detected at a young age is most unfortunately bound to be stable throughout development (Eron, 1987; Farrington, 1991; Huesmann et al., 1984; Olweus, 1991; Patterson, 1982).

What is more, it has been suggested that high levels of aggression are as stable as IQ measures across development (Farrington, 1991; Olweus, 1984). Namely, without early intervention aggressive young children exhibiting chronic aggressive behaviours are likely to remain aggressive as adolescents and adults (Astor, 1995, 102).

If that is not bad enough one should bear in mind that serious violence is frequently part of a lifestyle that includes drugs, guns, precocious sex and other risky behaviours. Youths involved in serious violence typically commit many other types of crimes and exhibit other problem behaviours, presenting a serious challenge to intervention efforts (The Surgeon General, 2000).

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AS A SERIOUS WORLDWIDE PROBLEM

School violence, according to a new study by the International Bureau of Education is increasing at an alarming rate worldwide (Ohsako, 2001). Contrary to what is commonly thought, school violence is as much an issue in developing countries as industrialized ones; in rural areas as much as in urban neighbourhoods (ibid).

Bullying in schools, once shrugged off with a kids-will-be-kids attitude, has come to be regarded as a serious problem around the world. Ten to fifteen percent of children are bullied regularly, and bullying most often take place in school. Facts also show – as just mentioned – that the size of the school, its setting (rural, urban or suburban) and racial composition seem to have no bearing on its occurrence (Newquist, 1997). Bullying takes a heavy toll on the victims. As many as seven percent of 8th grade pupils in the USA stay home at least once a month because of bullies. Chronic fear can be the source of all-too-real stomachaches, headaches and other stress-related illnesses (ibid).

As school violence turns out to be a good predictor of aggression in later life a lot of effort has been invested in concentrated attempts aimed at evaluating the scope of this phenomenon. In 1988 some thirty experts from fifteen countries met in the Netherlands for a NATO Advanced Research Workshop organized with the objective of discussing problems in measuring self-reported crime and delinquency among young people. As a result the International Self-Report Delinquency Study was started in 1990 (Junger-Tas et al., 1994).

The 1992/3 survey found out that among the 16-17 age-group in England, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy the violence figure reached 16%-26% (ibid). The prevalence of serious violence by age 17 in the United States is even higher than that. About 30-40% of male and 15-30% of female youths report they committed a serious violent offence at some point in their lives. This cumulative prevalence is similar among African Americans and white males (The Surgeon General, 2000, ch. 3). On the whole, then, youth violence rates in the US reach about 30%.

A comprehensive survey of school violence has been carried out in recent years by the World Health Organization, and the results have been published under the title *WHO-HBSC: World Health Organization: Health Behavior in School-Age Children*. Twenty nine countries participated in the last survey, all of which – with the exception of Israel – in Europe or North America. The HBSC survey is conducted every four years according to the same protocol and using the same international standard questionnaire. The study was initiated in 1982 by researchers from England, Finland and Norway. Data collection within this study took place in 1983/4, 1985/6, 1993/4 and 1997/8.

Three main conclusions could be drawn on the basis of the 1997/8 survey. First, the variance in cross-cultural school violence is very large. On the one hand there is a whole list of countries in which the percentage of pupils who admitted participation in bullying or harassment of fellow pupils reached the figure of 60 or more. On the other hand there is a group of countries where the percentage is under the figure of 20 ! Second, violence among boys turns out to be a much graver problem than among girls in all the countries participating in the study. Third, the percentage of recidivist violent pupils, who admitted they committed at least three acts of violence in their school within the academic year is dramatically lower than that of the pupils who committed less than three violent acts during the year (Harel, 1999).

The violence-prone countries (according to rank order) turned out to be Austria, Denmark, Greenland, Lithuania and Germany. In all of them the violence figure transcends 60% inasmuch as pupils aged 11, 13 and 15 are concerned. In Austria the percentage stood at 68.1; in Germany it stood at 61.2. In Israel it stood at 43.0 (Harel, 1999, 19). The five least violent countries turned out to be Northern Ireland, Greece, Wales, Sweden and England. In Northern Ireland the violence figure reached 21.4%. In England it stood at a mere 13.5% (Harel, 1999, 17) !

To top it all one should be aware of the fact that surveys carried out in different countries indicate that anxiety and fear of school violence also constitute a grave problem. Where violence is rampant parents fear for their children's physical safety in school.

The extent of this problem is reflected in Table 1, based on Gallup polls carried out in the United States between 1977 and 2001.

Table 1: Fear of parents for their children's safety according to Gallup polls

<u>Poll's date</u>	<u>Fear for children's safety</u>	<u>Don't fear</u>	<u>Have no opinion</u>
August, 2001	32.0	68.0	0.0

March, 2001	45.0	54.0	1.0
August, 2000	26.0	74.0	0.0
April, 2000	43.0	57.0	0.0
August, 1999	47.0	53.0	*
May, 1999	52.0	47.0	1.0
26 April, 1999	49.0	51.0	*
21 April, 1999	55.0	45.0	0.0
June, 1998	37.0	62.0	1.0
1977^	24.0	70.0	6.0

Source: The Gallup Organization, 2001; Gallup Poll Topics, 2001.

This awareness of school violence is also typical of Israel. A survey carried out among 1,750 Israeli respondents in 2002 indicated that 67.2% of those sampled held the opinion that school violence is a much graver problem than it used to be. 51.9% of those sampled stated that either they themselves or else somebody close to them encountered violence in school. 69.2% of the parents included in the sample stated that they feared for their children's safety in school. 20.9% of the children in the sample stated that they feared for their safety while in school (IOL, 2002) .

SCHOOL VIOLENCE IN ISRAEL

The preceding review of school violence indicates a large variance in school violence in so far Western countries are concerned. The findings emerging from available statistical data as well as from field studies carried out in Israel indicate that school violence constitutes a grave problem both in absolute and relative terms. In fact, the problem is graver in Israel than in most Western countries.

One may say that the problem is going from bad to worse. Statistical data indicate that the growth in school violence between the years 1995 and 1999 was very sharp. In fact, the growth in school assaults handled by police amounted to 93.5%; the growth in aggravated assault cases handled by police amounted to 262%; and the growth in cases of grave injuries caused by assaults handled by police reached 435.7% (sic !) (National Council for Child's Welfare, 2000).

Table 2: Violence offences committed by minors in the Israeli school system, 1995-1999

Offence	No. of cases investigated by police		
	1995	1998	1999
Total	928	1,383	3,034
Assault	803	1,235	2,390
Assault on school staff members	15	21	87
Aggravated assault	60	71	257
Grave injuries caused by assaults	50	56	300

Source: National Council for Child's Welfare, 2000.

According to a police report to the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) 2,760 criminal files were opened for juveniles in the year 2000 for school violence as against 2,633 in 1999 (Ha'aretz, 2000). Police officers in charge of juvenile delinquency in Israel maintain that school violence constitutes a very grave problem.

In 1990 a 3,415 sample survey was carried out, encompassing pupils in fifteen high schools in greater Tel-Aviv, Netanya (a medium size town, 30 km. North of Tel-Aviv) and Beer Sheba (the capital of the Negev in the Southern part of Israel). It tried to trace down the patterns of juvenile delinquency in various youth activity foci such as clubs (including Youth Movements), community centres, cinema theatres, sport clubs, cafes, pubs, discotheques as well as schools (Horowitz and Frenkel, 1990). The findings were very illuminative.

As it turned out *schools* constituted the main violence focus. Schools turned out to be more violent than clubs, community centres, cinema theatres, sport clubs and sport grounds, pubs, cafes and even discotheques. In so far as verbal abuse, bullying, threatening, beating, purposely pushing, stabbing, “score settling”, blackmailing, inflicting injury and property-damaging were concerned school premises turned out to be far worse than all the other activity foci (Horowitz and Frenkel, 1990, 75-86). 60% of the surveyed boys and 40% of the surveyed girls admitted involvement in verbal abuse. A third of the boys and more than 10% of the girls admitted involvement in physical violence (op. cit., 265).

At the very same year another comprehensive survey was carried out in Tel-Aviv, encompassing a 8,931 sample of 5th and 6th graders in secular, religious and Arab schools (Dgani & Dgani, 1990). Its aim was to gauge school violence in Tel-Aviv, and study its characteristics, types and frequency. The survey also included 460 teachers who were in direct contact with the surveyed pupils. The main findings were as follows:

- About 19% of the surveyed pupils (32% in the Arab schools) reported high or very high incidence of violence in their schools. Another 40% defined the incidence of violence in their schools as intermediate. In other words, about 60% of all pupils indicated that school violence was a real problem where they learned !
- At least 2-3 pupils in every class (6% of all the pupils) knew at least five pupils in their own class who lived in constant fear of threats and beatings – the most common manifestation of violence on school ground.
- 45% of the reported incidents were not perpetrated by children constantly prone to be violent. However, 30% of the incidents could be definitely ascribed to *persistent offenders*.
- Only about 27% of all violent incidents were reported to teachers and headmasters. The great majority of the cases never reached their attention !
- The response of the school administration to the reported incidents turned out to be as follows: In about 10% of the cases no action whatsoever was taken against the offenders; in 42% a warning was issued to the guilty parties; in 32% of the cases the culprits were punished.
- Boys suffered from violence to a much higher extent than girls (ibid).

The main lesson to be learned from this survey is – as mentioned above – that 15% of the pupils are under constant threat while in school; moreover, teachers and headmasters are unaware of the great majority of the incidents that happen, so to say, “under their noses”. Therefore no action whatsoever is taken against the offenders in most cases.

Another comprehensive survey carried out on a national representative sample of 6th-11th graders illustrated once again a rather unhappy picture at the end of the 1990's (Harel et al., 1998). It turned out that more than 50% of the surveyed pupils were bullied at least once one way or another during the school year. The lower age-groups were more liable to fall victim to violence. 68.7% of the boys and 53.2% of the girls in the 6th-7th grades were victimized at least once during the year. In grades 10-11 48.3% of the boys and 28.6% of the girls reported they fell victim at least once to an act of violence in the school (ibid.) .

At the same time it turned out that 21.6% of the pupils were victimized three times and more during the school year. Here again, the younger children suffered more than their seniors. 35.7% of the boys and 21.2% of the girls in the 6th-7th grades reported they were victimized. In the 10th-11th grades only 17.8% of the boys and 11.8% of the girls made similar allegations (ibid).

As to active participation of the children in violent acts against their peers, the survey indicates that about 45% of the 6th-11th graders molested other pupils in their school at least once during the survey's year. 17% of those surveyed admitted they were involved in violent acts against their peers three times or more during the same period (ibid).

Things are not very much different in so far as *physical violence* or beating is concerned. Almost half of the 6th-11th graders (48%) reported that they had been involved in physical fights in their school at least once. Among the 6th-7th graders the percentage was much higher than among their seniors. 79.7% of the boys and 32.2% of the girls in the lower age-group reported involvements in physical fights, as against 56.9% of the boys and 16.8% of the girls in the higher age-group (ibid).

It is interesting to note that the involvement of veteran Israelis or Israeli-born children in physical violence is higher than that of the new-comers or immigrants (Immigrants who entered the country in the last ten years constitute about 20% of the Jewish population in Israel). 48.8% of the old-timers or "Sabras" (Israeli-born) were involved in physical fights as against a mere 37.0% of the new-comers (ibid).

The violence picture depicted by the survey has not been exhausted thereby. On top of all that has been mentioned so far, one should also note that 14.4% of the boys and 8.1% of the girls in the 6th-7th grades stated that they fell victim to what would be termed in plain language as *robbery* by other kids. 7.3% of the boys and 4.7% of the girls in the higher age-brackets were similarly robbed in school. To top it all, 14.6% of the boys and 6.6% of the girls in the 6th-7th grades, and 6.2% of the boys and 4.5% of the girls in the 10th-11th grades reported that they were physically attacked by peers using clubs, knives or other harmful objects. These cases fall under the definition of *serious violence*.

Furthermore, the available data suggest that about 9% of the 6th-11th graders were injured and had to be medically treated at least once during the school year as a result of involvement in scuffles. The grim situation is reflected in another finding of the survey: About 15% of the 6th-11th graders reported carrying weapons into school for self defence at least once during the month preceding the survey (22.6% of the boys;

6.6% of the girls). Mostly, though, it was not firearms but rather knives, pen-knives, clubs, knuckle-dusters etc.

It should be reiterated in this respect, that the international survey mentioned above (Harel, 1999) indicates that Israel is counted among the most violent countries of those surveyed. The school-violence coefficient found in Israel turned out to be higher than these found in Russia or the USA, two countries whose stereotype is most violent.

As far as taking part in bullying, harrasment or pestering on school ground is concerned, Israel is in the 11th place, right after Belgium and just above Russia. The percentage of children involved in this kind of violence in Israel is 43.0 as against 49.3 in Belgium and 41.6 in Russia (Harel, 1999). As far as recurrent participation in bullying, harrasment or pestering on school grounds is concerned (three time or more during the school year) Israel is again in the 11th place, right after Estonia and just above France. The percentage of pupils counted in this category in Israel is 18.8, as against 19.2 in Estonia and 18.2 in France.

The grim Israeli situation is fully reflected in the most comprehensive and recent survey to date, carried out in two stages in 1998 and 1999 and encompassing 32,246 6th-11th graders in 1229 classromms, as well as 1509 teachers and 197 school headmasters (Benbenishti et al., 2000). It is interesting to note that the picture drawn by the pupils was much grimmer than that drawn by either the teachers or the headmasters. Which only serves to show how insensitive the latter are to the problems facing the school system. About 80% of the elementary school and junior highschool children and 65% of the highschool children reported having been verbally abused by their peers during the last month prior to the survey. Two thirds of the elementary school and junior highschool children and half of the highschool children reported that they have been mocked, insulted or humiliated by their peers during the same period (Benbenishti et al., 2000, IV). About a quarter of the junior highschool and highschool children surveyed reported involvement in scuffles that were the result of either ethnic tension or else the eruption of tension between new-immigrants and old-timers, or a collision between members of different hamulas (in the Arab schools).

Inasmuch as physical violence is concerned, about 85% of the elementary school children, 50% of the junior highschool children and a third of the highschool children reported they were pushed around by their peers at least once during the last month prior to the survey. About 16% of the highschool children, 32% of the junior highschool children and 48% of the elementary school children reported having been kicked or beaten at least once during the same period (ibid).

On top of that, about a half of the elementary school children, a third of the junior highschool children and a quarter of the highschool children reported they were threatened by their peers at least once during the same period. 6.8% of the elementary school kids, 7.2% of the junior highschool kids and 5% of the highschool kids reported that they were threatened by peers holding a knife ro a pen-knife. 8% of the junior highschool and highschool kids reported they were threatened by gangs in the school. And finally, 3% reported they were threatened by a peer flashing a gun (ibid). Without going into details one should bear in mind that this picture is much grimmer than the findings of the parallel comprehensive survey carried out in the USA

(Furlong et al., 1997). On all accounts mentioned in both surveys – involvement in beatings, scuffles involving injuries, use of stones to inflict harm, kicking or boxing, threatening with knives, etc. – the situation in Israel turns out to be much worse than in the USA.

Small wonder, then, that public opinion in Israel is very skeptical about the steps taken by various state agencies in order to curb violence in the schooling system. In the 2002 survey 65.9% of the respondents held the opinion that the steps taken in the schools were “too late and too little”. Only 2.3% deemed those activities good and beneficent (IOL, 2002).

VIOLENCE AS THE LIABILITY OF THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

A very grim picture of violence both in absolute as well as in relative terms emerges from the data cited so far. The ensuing question is a twofold one, namely, what is the school’s contribution towards this violence, and how can one fight against this phenomenon.

Without going into a detailed discussion in order to gain new insights into violent behaviour in the school and increase one’s understanding of the complex reasons leading to it, it might be stated briefly that school violence is usually attributed to three main causes (Horowitz, 1989):

- The influence of the aggressive streaks prevalent in the Israeli society at large. Schools do not exist in a vacuum; they are a reflection of their society. A Violent society gives rise to violent schools (see also Admati Institute, 1998). Violence in the Israeli schools is to be seen as an integral part of the negative changes occurring in the Israeli value and normative system. It is - as said – the outcome of prevalence of violent behaviour in the Israeli society of the 1990’s.
- The unique school climate and experience: estrangement and alienation typical of large schools; stressful organizational climate; weary, worn-out teachers; prevalence of behavioural norms regarded by the pupils as unfair, etc. etc. (see also Smith and Sharp, 1994). School climate offers a significant potential for enhancing both understanding and prevention of school violence (see also Welsh, 2000).
- Situational factors resulting from the context in which the school is functioning: change in the school administration accompanied by installation of new educational concepts; intensive turnover of the school staff; intensive absorption immigrant pupils and minority groups, etc.

There is no doubt that the school exerts a great deal of influence on children due to the mere fact that they spend a lot of their time on school grounds. Schools can be a risk factor when violent behaviour is prevalent there. On the other hand, schools can also be protective and safe, enhancing efficient adjustment and counteracting negative social influences (Baker, 1998; Garbarino et al., 1992).

In this respect one should be aware of the fact that school violence might be attributed to a large extent to the failure of community spirit there. It is the result of a crisis in the sense of identity and belonging of the pupils (ibid). In schools where the sense of

belonging and commitment is strong, violence constitutes no problem. When schools do not impart their pupils with meaningful social contexts; when the school atmosphere is perceived as hostile or threatening one may expect violent behaviour (ibid).

This assumption that violence is environmentally caused; that it is *not* a born trait but rather an *acquired* one is also stressed by criminologists (Adad, 1993). According to this theory violence is the result of absorbed and adapted environmental influences. The environment exerts a great deal of influence on violence. Since the environment is a primary factor contributing to violence, socialization – and the school as an important socialization agent – has a very important role to play in promoting tolerance, acceptance and non-violence among children (ibid). Hence the conviction that communal and humanistic school climate, encouraging the pupils to take part in the decision-making process in the school may contribute greatly to reducing school violence (Friedman, 1993; Admati Institute, 1998; Baker, 1998; Hyman & Perone, 1998).

A FEW WORDS ON INTERVENTION AND VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMMES IN SCHOOLS

In view of all that has been said so far, there is no wonder that many countries - including Israel – developed intervention programmes intended to prevent or at least reduce school violence. The two leading countries in this respect are Norway and England.

The first and best known intervention to reduce bullying among schoolchildren had been launched by Prof. Dan Olweus in Norway. Inspired by the suicides of several severely victimized children, the government supported the development and implementation of a comprehensive programme to address bullying among children in school. The four goals of the programme included (1) to increase awareness of the violence problem and knowledge about it; (2) to achieve active involvement on the part of parents and teachers; (3) to develop clear school rules and procedures against bullying behaviour, and (4) to provide support and protection for the victims (Olweus, 1991).

The programme involved interventions at multiple levels (Olweus, 1993):

- Schoolwide interventions. A survey of bullying problems at each school, increased supervision, schoolwide assemblies, and teacher inservice training to raise the awareness of children and school staff regarding bullying.
- Classroom-level interventions. The establishment of classroom rules against bullying, regular class meetings to discuss bullying at school, and meetings with all parents.
- Individual-level interventions. Discussions with pupils identified as bullies and victims.

The Norwegian project encompassed 130,000 children aged 8-16 in a representative sample of 715 schools. Just before the project had been launched it was found that 15% of the children in these schools were involved in bullying incidents; 5% were involved in *serious* incidents. Within two years of implementation both boys' and girls' self-reports indicated that bullying had decreased by half. *These changes in*

behaviour were more pronounced the longer the programme was in effect. Moreover, pupils reported significant decreases in rates of truancy, vandalism and theft as well, and indicated that their school's climate was significantly more positive as a result of the programme (ibid). The project also indicated that the decrease of violence on the school's grounds has not caused what the criminologists term "crime transfer" into other arenas.

In short, the project has been regarded as a great success.

The British project is headed by Smith and Sharp (Smith & Sharp, 1994; Sharp & Smith, 1994). It encompassed 24 schools as well as control groups in Sheffield. Like the Norwegian programme it was meant to address bullying among children in school and decrease the level of violence there. The balance of the project two years after it had been launched indicates that indeed it exerted a major influence on the decrease of bullying. There were far less perpetrators and far less victims. Also, the self-image of the pupils was strongly influenced in a positive way.

This project too is therefore considered to have been a great success.

Needless to say that Israel has also launched numerous programmes aimed at decreasing school violence. Some of them were developed by different departments at the Ministry of Education. Others were developed in the schools themselves by the school staff and administration. Yet others were developed by academic institutions and public and private professional bodies. Although all the programmes were aimed at decreasing school-violence they differed in their scope, target-population, focus, the number of partners responsible for their implementation, etc. (Noy & Rokach, 2001).

As early as 1989 the psychological consultative service of the Ministry of Education published a booklet containing a host of intervention programmes aimed at decreasing violence levels in school (Rokach, 1989). They were developed by different schools and contained detailed instructions for school mobilization in the fight against violence, as well as detailed work-models and the like. On the whole, the booklet recommends a complex attitude, containing pinpointing the unique difficulties faced by the school; study of their causes; debating possible solutions and working-out a specific intervention programme in line with the concrete needs of each particular school. The emphasis is on the exclusiveness of the unique programmes. There are no standardised programmes embracing *all* the schools. As formulated by the authors (SHEFI, 2001), "*The intervention programme has to be specifically matched to each school. Each school has first to undergo a diagnosis; its strong and weak points have to be analyzed and evaluated. Only then a programme should be devised and launched.*"

A FEW INITIAL NOTES ON A CERTAIN INTERVENTION PROGRAMME IN A MEDIUM SIZE TOWN IN GREATER TEL-AVIV

As already mentioned there is no shortage in Israeli intervention programmes aimed at decreasing school violence. In fact, the problem is not the *availability* of programmes but rather their *suitability* and *effectiveness*. The question is to what extent have they managed to achieve their goals.

The Paper tries to analyze one particular such programme as a case in point. It was developed in a junior highschool in a medium size town in the metropolitan area of Tel-Aviv. Its target population was the 7th graders in the school. The analysis has been carried out under my guidance and supervision in 1996 (Tiqva, 1996).

This particular intervention programme has been chosen as a case study since it was regarded by the school professional staff as the right answer to the school's pressing need. It was not imposed on the school by an outside agent; rather, it was conceived and developed *in the school itself*. Moreover, this programme has also been chosen as a case study since it focuses on the *pupils*. It targeted their cognitive variables. It did not target school variables: it did *not* have in mind training of all the people in the school setting – teachers, support staff, parents etc. Also, it did *not* include multiple-level school-wide interventions. It attempted to change the children's attitude regarding violence through tackling cognitive or skill variables.

Hence, what characterizes this case study is on one hand, simultaneous implementation of several programmes (most of them devised by the Ministry of Education) trying to cope with school violence. On the other hand it is also characterized by a lack of systemic targeting of the school's variables. Finally it is characterized by a "*blitz*" attitude. While the Norwegian and British programmes spread out over an 8-20 months period, this case-study programme was built around ten meetings of two-hours each. The underlying assumption of the programme was that learning through group experience encourages personal involvement and commitment. It also facilitates self-consciousness and development of new behavioural patterns (Tiqva, 1996, 41).

The main question is whether under these circumstances the intervention programme actually succeeded in reducing violence in the school.

Among the goals usually recommended by experts and mentioned in intervention programmes one finds the increase of awareness of the violence problem and knowledge about it; development of clear school rules and regulations relating to students' discipline and intended against bullying behaviour; discussions aimed at promoting "alternative behaviour patterns", namely substitution of angry and violent behaviour by appropriate alternative behaviour; and last but not least, improvement of the school's climate, both on the institutional level as well as on the class level and the interpersonal level (Katz & Pazi, 1997, 14-15).

One of the questions posed while attempting to evaluate this particular intervention programme was whether these universal targets were included in it, and to what extent (Tiqva, 1996, 46-75). Contents analysis of the ten 2-hours meetings as crystallized in the programme indicates that it covered three out of the four universal goals recommended by the Ministry of Education. The subject treated most extensively was the increase of awareness of the violence problem. Six out of ten meetings were devoted to it (although one of the meetings also tackled the second subject). The prevailing attitude was that it is definitely possible to reduce bully/victim problems in the school. Yet, a pre-condition necessary in order to achieve desirable changes is a better awareness of the problem. The subject was treated through film-watching

(followed by discussions and analyses), lectures given to the pupils by experts, as well as case analyses.

Three meetings have been allocated to the second subject – school rules and regulations relating to discipline and norms of behaviour. It too was treated with the help of case analyses, filling of questionnaires followed by their analyses through group discussions; and last but not least – formulation of rules and norms of behaviour in the class forum, following suggestions of the pupils themselves.

Two meetings have been allocated to treating the third subject, namely promotion of alternative patterns of behaviour. The first meeting concentrated on constructing the personal profile of each one of the pupils. Later on ways and means of treating violent streaks existent in these profiles were discussed and recommended. The second meeting was built around analyses of case studies (carried out in small groups), followed by a general discussion of the case studies in the class forum.

Table 3: The subjects treated in the intervention programme and the tools applied

<u>The Subject</u>	<u>No. Of Meetings</u>	<u>Meetings Sequence</u>	<u>Tools Applied</u>
- Deepening awareness of violence	6	2,3,4,5,6,8	Questionnaires & analyses; films & discussions; lectures; case-studies.
- Discussions of school rules and regulations; formulation of behavioural norms	3	6, 9, 10	Task and case studies analyses; questionnaires & their analyses; discussion & formulation of recommendations
- Discussion of alternative patterns of behaviour	2	1, 7	Profile construction; case studies Analyses & class discussion

THE GROUPS SURVEYED AND THE QUESTIONS POSED IN THE 7TH GRADE

It is noteworthy that out of the four recommended targets of the intervention programmes one was omitted advertently or inadvertently: *changing the school-culture regarding violence*.

As already mentioned, it appears that the particular intervention programme studied here suffers from two major flaws: First, it does not apply a systemic approach. Rather than conceptualize components of the programme at the school level, the classroom level and the individual level, it is limited to the class and the individual levels. Moreover, not all the existing school environments were included in the programme. Parents were not actively involved; neither were social workers and psychologists. Second, not all the recommended targets were tackled to begin with.

As part of the evaluation an attempt has been made to survey a sample of the 7th graders in the school – the object of the intervention programme. In actual fact two separate groups were analyzed in the survey:

- An experiment group (27 pupils), which took active part in the sessions of the intervention programme;
- A control group (32 pupils), which did not participate in the project.

All in all 59 pupils (all of them 7th graders) responded to the written questionnaire at the end of the ten sessions devoted to the intervention programme. The questionnaire contained twelve questions dealing directly with the problem of school violence. It also contained additional questions concerned with violence generally or with inappropriate behaviour. The latter were meant to help illustrate the general social climate constituting the framework in which the children function.

The twelve questions dealing with school violence were subdivided into two subgroups:

- The first subgroup (4 questions) was meant to supply information regarding the scope of bullying and violence on the school grounds;
- The second subgroup (8 questions) was meant to supply information about the pupils' attitude toward school violence.

The first subgroup contained the following questions :

- *Are you aware of any vandalism case in your school ?*
- *Has such a case of vandalism happened in our school this year ?*
- *Have you been present in any case when school property was wilfully damaged this year ?*
- *Are you aware of any pupils in your class or grade who use to threaten other pupils and extort money or any other objects or articles from them ?*

The second subgroup contained the following questions:

- *Recently a complaint-box has been nailed in the school corridor. Pupils are encouraged to lodge complaints against abusing, threatening and beating peers. What is your opinion about that ?*
- *If you happened to witness a case of vandalism in the school have you tried to prevent it at all ?*
- *Suppose you happened to know of a classmate or somebody in your grade who threatens another classmate or tries to extort him – how would you react ?*
- *Some pupils think that bearing in mind the prevailing insecurity in Israel it is advisable to carry a knife or a penknife for self-defence. What is your opinion of this ?*
- *Suppose you happen to find out that a classmate or a grade fellow of yours has been abused, humiliated or beaten. How would you react ?*
- *In which of the following episodes will you address a teacher or some other authority at the school management level :*
 - *when you happen upon a beaten or abused pupil;*
 - *when you happen to witness pupils vandalizing your school property;*
 - *when you happen to know that a fellow-student of yours consorts with delinquents.*

The information collected from the survey justifies in principle the introduction of an intervention programme into the school, since it reflects the violent reality prevailing

there. 55.9% of the surveyed pupils reported that they witnessed vandalism in the school at least once during the last year; 87.7% reported that they were aware of the fact that cases of vandalism happened in the school occasionally; 50% reported that they were aware of cases of threats and extortion in their school; 5.8% stated that it happened to a friend of theirs; 5.8% reported that it actually happened to *them*.

Harassment happens to be a most common occurrence in the school. 84.9% of the surveyed pupils reported that they knew a pupil in their own class or grade who was regularly harassed, humiliated or beaten. 9.4% said it happened to a friend of theirs. 5.7% declared it actually happened to them. The pupils' answers imply that aggressive behaviour really constitutes a problem in the school.

The key question in this respect is *what do the pupils think about the intervention programme devised by the school*. Do the students in the experiment group differ in their opinion and attitude from the students in the control group? And if yes, in what way or ways ?

INDICATORS OF FAILURE

Since the questionnaire was administered to the pupils at the end of the ten “blitz sessions” comprising the programme, the answers could be taken as a good indicator of the effect of the intervention programme as a whole. A statistically significant difference between the two groups could at the very least mean that another check is justifiable.

Yet, the analysis of the answers points at a different reality. It turned out that in four out of eight relevant questions the answers indicated that the *control group* demonstrated a much stronger attitude against violence than the experiment group ! Indeed in four out of the eight questions the experiment group demonstrated a stronger attitude than the control group. However, it should be noted that in two out of these four questions the difference between the two groups was *statistically insignificant*.

Table 4: The pupils' attitude towards school violence according to categories and groups (%)

Category	Experiment group		Control group	
	Active stand against violence	Indifference	Active stand against violence	Indifference
- Attempt to prevent equipment destruction	52.9	47.1	61.5	38.5
- Taking a firm stand against threatening and extorting pupils	85.2	14.8	75.9	21.1
- Coming across a beaten and humiliated pupil	84.6	15.4	81.3	18.7
- Coming across vandalism in the school	25.9	74.1	36.7	63.3
- Catching a pupil in a stealing act	33.3	66.6	45.2	54.8
- Coming across a pupil consorting with delinquents	26.9	73.1	25.0	75.0
- Coming across a pupil carrying arms in school	64.0	36.0	51.6	48.4
- Taking a firm stand against beating and abusing pupils	62.9	37.1	75.1	24.9

An attempt to translate these data into a common denominator sharpens the picture. By constructing a binary scale allotting 10 points to each answer taking a stand against violence, and 0 points to each answer indicating indifference one arrives at an interesting result. The average score of the experiment group turned up to be 544.6 points, whereas the average score of the control group was 565.4.

In other words, contrary to what could be expected, it turned out that *the control group scored higher than the experiment group*. In plain words it means that the control group took a firmer stand against violence, although the difference of 20.8 points (or 3.8%) between the two groups is statistically insignificant.

Nevertheless, the inevitable conclusion is that the intervention programme failed to change the pupils' attitude towards violence.

PUPILS' SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

On top of all that has been said so far, it should be borne in mind that the indifferent students were numerically very prominent in both the experiment and the control groups. As far as the experiment group is concerned, in 6 out of the 8 questions mentioned above the indifferent constituted more than 35% of the respondents. In 3 out of the 8 questions their weight amounted to 65%. As far as the control group is concerned the picture is not very much different.

And yet, when the question was posed what should be done in order to further curb school violence, 45% of the surveyed pupils – in both groups – stated that the intervention programme was an efficient means... Of all the alternative answers this was the one adhered to by the largest number of pupils. The second most popular suggestion turned out to be stricter enforcement of discipline, order and the punitive system in the school.

It is interesting to note here that the systemic approach based on cooperation between teachers, parents and students was the third popular answer. It seems that the pupils see eye to eye with the experts in this respect. In fact, what the pupils say in simple language is that proactive programmes contribute to the improvement of the school climate as well as to changing the circumstances contributing to violence. They also embrace the notion that these programmes have to be implemented simultaneously on the individual's level and the systemic level (Noy & Rokach, 2001, 44).

A review of the pupils' answers serves to show that some of the suggestions were common to both groups, and some were typical of one but not of the other. Table 5 presents the breakdown of the suggestions put forward by the experiment group. It also shows the amount of support some of these suggestions gained in the control group.

Table 5: Different ways and means suggested by the pupils in order to reduce school violence (%)

The suggestion	Experiment group	Control group
Implementation of the intervention Programme in the school	44.4	43.8
Stricter discipline, order and punitive system	40.7	25.0

Cooperation between teachers, parents and Pupils	11.1	9.4
Starting implementation of the intervention Programme at a lower age	11.1	
More advertising placards and relevant TV programmes	7.4	9.4
Deeper inputs of teachers in pupils		
Excommunicated by their peer-group	3.7	
Talking nicely to the pupils	3.7	
Specific treatment of each problem as it arises	3.7	
Treating all violent acts equally	2.7	
Be sympathetic to violence victims	3.7	
Mutual encouragement and strong will-power	3.7	
Banish the violent students from school	3.7	
Handing over of the violent pupils to the police	3.7	3.1
Not to quarrel, not to meddle, address The teacher	33.3	21.9

Even a cursory study of the suggestions put forward by the experiment group points at another noteworthy conclusion: the students' awareness of the fact that a great weight should be assigned to the school climate in so far as prevention of violence is concerned. In this respect they concur with the experts who have for a long time maintained that schools – like people – have their own characteristic personalities or climates. Hence, school climate offers a significant potential for enhancing both understanding and prevention of school violence (Welsh, 2000).

Again, it is also noteworthy that seeming to recognize the advantages of combining macro and micro intervention strategies the pupils in fact embrace what some professionals termed “whole school policies”, that encompass the involvement of all central characters (Tattum & Tattum, 1992).

Nine out of the 14 suggestions put forward by the pupils in the experiment group deal directly with what could be aggregately be termed as *school climate* (2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14). Finally, it should be marked that 74% of all the pupils in the experiment group reported that the atmosphere in their class was pleasant. 18.5% defined it as “exciting”.

The anti-violence intervention programme was, therefore, introduced into a school whose predominant atmosphere was positive rather than mean and negative. The answers to the questionnaire reflect in this sense a rather rosy picture. *This fact makes the programme's inefficiency even less tolerable !*

All the data analyzed above help in evaluating the intervention programme *subjectively*, based on the subjective gut feelings of the pupils, who are the object of the school violence and the natural consumers of the intervention programme. An *objective* evaluation of the programme's effectiveness should be based on an analysis of sequential data relating to the school violence over a period of at least 5-10 years. Thus, contrary to the impression of the general public, careful study of objective data in the USA reveals that the overall risk of violence and injury at school there has *not* changed substantially over the past 20 years. This, despite the fact that both students and their parents report being increasingly apprehensive about their schools (Public Health Service, 2000).

Most unfortunately such data do not exist in our school. As already mentioned a comprehensive survey of the Tel-Aviv education system revealed that only 27% of the violent incidents are reported to the teachers and the school management (Dgani & Dgani, 1990). Yet, the survey did not try to find out how many of the reported violent incidents were *recorded*, so that they could eventually be followed-up. There is no doubt that most Israeli schools document in one way or another only severe cases of violence occurring on their grounds. Comprehensive, all-embracing documentation is very rare indeed.

In the school surveyed in our case-study only physical violence that necessitated medical attention was recorded. Even these cases were not documented according to consistent formal criteria. There is no way, therefore, to state unequivocally that the recorded incidents were really the only ones that *should* have been recorded. Since the validity of the data is very dubious, no attempt has been made to analyze it.

SUMMARY

The article tried to evaluate a specific anti-violence intervention programme implemented in an Israeli junior highschool not far from Tel-Aviv. It treated it as a case-study. The article started by drawing attention to the strong association between high aggression exhibited in childhood and severe forms of aggression and delinquency later in life. It also stated that overall it is now accepted that school violence is increasing at an alarming rate worldwide. School violence, it was maintained, constitutes a problem in many countries, although the variance is rather big – there are countries where 60% or more of the students admitted participation in bullying or harassment. On the other hand there are countries where the percentage is less than 20.

Following that an attempt has been made to depict school violence in Israel. attention has been drawn to the fact that schools turn out to be more violent than clubs, community centres, cinema theatres, sport clubs, sport grounds, pubs, cafes and even discotheques. It was pointed out that 60% of the students regard school violence to be a major problem. A warning has also been issued that about 15% of the Israeli students are constantly verbally abused, bullied, threatened, harassed or beaten. Citing several international surveys the paper stated that Israel turns out to be one of the more violent countries insofar schools are concerned.

Thereafter the article turned to focus on the case-study. It explained that the intervention programme implemented in the junior highschool was a cognitive one, focusing on the students and lacking a systemic targeting of the school's variables. The programme's rationale was discussed, and its underlying assumption and goals were duly analyzed. A description of the evaluation process – which was based on a questionnaire administered to a sample of 7th graders in the school – followed.

Based on the analysis of the pupils' answers to the questions posed the article arrived at the conclusion that the intervention programme *failed* in meeting its goals. All in all, the article drew attention to the fact that insofar school violence is concerned there is an urgent need to start building a systematic data bank in the Israeli schools. It is imperative in order to facilitate an efficient follow-up of both the violence and the

intervention programmes. Systematic data collection and recording is greatly needed at all levels, starting with the school, moving through the locality and ending at the national level. It is impossible to properly evaluate the intervention programmes currently administered when there is no data bank. Lack of proper evaluation is likely to impinge on the effectiveness of the programmes.

The case-study analyzed in the article is typical of a host of similar programmes implemented in other schools all over the country. School violence is too big and serious a problem to be treated the way it is now treated. It is both a sheer waste of resources as well as a misguided illusion : the initiators and the other parties involved with the programmes are under the impression that they are effective. In fact, a great many of them are not !

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