This second newsletter from the International Observatory on Violence in School is being published just before the 4th World Conference on School Violence and Public Policies, which will take place in Lisbon in June on 23-25 June.

More than 300 delegates from over 50 countries will meet to discuss progress in the area. This is clearly an important moment and testimony to the mobilization undertaken in the international community against a phenomenon of concern in most countries.

Next newsletter issues will be published in September and December and will cover extensively this Congress. One of the following issues will be produced by the Canadian Observatory for the Prevention of School Violence and, very soon, we will be giving results of research undertaken in Africa and Latin America.

In fact, violence in schools takes on several forms, not only according to the national and cultural context but also with regard to types of schools and the pedagogies they implement. For example, many countries have taken on the fight against school bullying, which is one of the main research themes in universities. Phillip Slee’s text demonstrates this. We also report a meeting held at UNESCO in Paris concerning efficient strategies to fight this problem. It is essential that our whole community be aware of the latest researches and thinking underway so that we can all grasp these issues to the full.

Step by step, the newsletter will strengthen and become diversified. Moreover, it welcomes contributions from NGOs that would like to publicize their actions. Please feel free to contact us.

EDITORIAL
Eric Debarbieux, President of the International Observatory on Violence and School
Violence in schools is multifaceted and its causes are culturally contextual. While there are common features of all manifestations of violence, it takes different forms and is defined differently depending on the cultural and social environment. This presents a great challenge for those seeking to counter the effects and causes of violence in schools. From 27-29 June 2007, the Expert Meeting: Stopping Violence in Schools: What Works? was held at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris. As part of UNESCO’s follow up to the UN Secretary General’s Study on Violence against Children, the meeting brought together experts, policymakers and practitioners from around the world to discuss the myriad issues that lead to violence in schools, and the innovative and preventative measures for reducing it.

The participants underscored the difficulty of agreeing on a universal definition of violence. Despite the commonalities found in all forms of violence, a holistic definition may obscure its specific dimensions. This became evident through the diverse interpretations of the word, and the variety of case-studies from different regions of the world that were presented. For example, one expert from West Africa observed that school violence does not only mean bullying, fighting in the schoolyard or drug abuse. Rather, it is a reflection of the wider culture of violence as expressed in armed conflict, family violence and street violence.

Extreme acts of school violence, such as school or campus shootings, have at times been singled out by the media. However, these sensational events occurring in schools are extremely rare. What presents a greater threat to students around the world is when violence becomes institutionalized, habitual and banal, as this makes it increasingly difficult to change the patterns of violence. For example, a student from a school in a northern Paris suburb expressed that violence is not something that one thinks about, it’s something that “just happens.”

In many contexts, students need to be protected from the very figures that are supposed to protect them, which constitutes a form of institutionalized violence. For example, a 1998 report by the South African Medical Research Council found that when rape victims in South Africa named their attacker, 37.7 percent named a school teacher or principal. Some of the experts expressed their concern that schools are dangerous environments for many children, despite schools’ intention of being safe havens for students. This reinforced the challenge of not only encouraging youth to go to school, but making the school environment safe enough to attend. As many experts underlined, quality education and safe schooling should go hand in hand.

However, other panellists thought of schools as being secure environments for young people, as often they are safer than students’ homes. This drew attention to the relationship between school and home life, and the importance of recognizing the link between the two when attempting to understand the causes of violence in schools, and when devising violence prevention programmes.

The causes of violence in schools differ greatly from country to country. This makes prevention programmes challenging as they are bound by cultural and contextual circumstances. For example, one expert maintained that in West Africa boys are trained harshly to
be “tough bosses” and girls are taught to comply with practices such as female genital mutilation. While cultural and contextual barriers such as this may exist, there are ways of working within their limits. For example, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) carries out educational programmes for 500,000 students living in refugee camps in the Middle East. Given the high rate of corporal punishment in these camps, many teachers believed that UNRWA’s opposition to corporal punishment was undermining their authority. To address this conflict of interest, UNRWA introduced awards for excellence in teaching, to serve as an incentive for constructive and non-violent discipline.

There was a general consensus at the expert meeting that there is no panacea to violence in school, as it manifests itself differently according to the specific country/cultural context. For this reason, the development of indicators on violence in schools that adapt to national contexts should be developed to measure the impact of schools’ internal factors contributing to violence, as well as their responses to violent phenomena.

Emanating from these questions and the meeting in general were various proposals and recommendations. In order to create or strengthen policy and practice designed to stop violence in schools, emphasis was placed on:

- Coordinated data collection;
- Pooling research and resources;
- Improving monitoring and evaluation procedures.

Various mechanisms were proposed to raise awareness and increase advocacy, such as:

- The appointment of a Special Representative to the UN Secretary General to further the follow up to the World Report with a focus on violence against children in schools;
- The creation of a web portal for sharing information on violence prevention with teachers and students; and
- The launch of a media advocacy campaign

In addition, the importance of strengthening and implementing legal and related policy mechanisms was stressed, such as the prohibition of corporal punishment, and the involvement of children and young people in decision-making through child-friendly mechanisms. The participation of families, teachers, students, administrators and the community at large was highlighted as important for a holistic and inclusive approach to stopping violence in schools, and for the wide spread dissemination of good practice. The expert meeting in Paris served as an example of such dissemination and as a central platform for addressing the complex issues related to violence in schools.

(2) Ibid. pp. 13
(3) Ibid. pp. 17
(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid. pp. 21
(7) Ibid. pp. 29
(8) Ibid. pp. 26
(10) Ibid. pp. 47-49
SCHOOL BULLYING IN PACIFIC-RIM COUNTRIES

PHILLIP SLEE
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There is no doubt that the issue of school violence is now well and truly on the agenda for educationalists on a global scale (eg. International Observatory on School Violence www.ijvs.com). A broad understanding of school violence is that it represents any situation where a member of the school community is abused, threatened assaulted or otherwise intimidated by another member of that community. A comprehensive definition of violence has been provided by Furlong, Morrison, Chung, Bates & Morison (1997, p.246):

“A public health and safety condition that often results from individual, social, economic, political, and institutional disregard for basic human needs. It includes physical and non-physical harm which causes damage, pain, injury, or fear, and it disrupts the school environment and results in the debilitation of personal development which may lead to hopelessness and helplessness”. One way to view school violence is to conceptualise it as a range of antisocial behaviours ranging from those that threaten the good order of the school to bullying and assaults. One recognisable aspect of violence is ‘bullying’. In terms of the issue of school bullying there is a view that there needs to be a distinction made between bullying and violence. The accepted definition of bullying is that it is widely regarded as a particularly destructive form of aggression. It is defined as physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress or harm to the victim, where the intimidation involves an imbalance of power in favour of the perpetrator. Typically there are repeated incidents over a period of time. Distinguishing features of this broadly accepted definition relate to the power imbalance and the repetition over time. In research examining 17 European countries, a little over half of the country reports distinguished between bullying and violence. Interestingly over half of the countries cited a definition of bullying. Perhaps there needs to be some greater debate regarding the issue of definition with a view to reaching some consensus.

The basis for the present comparative research has developed from shared interests by researchers in the commonalities and differences between school students in terms of their health and well-being in the Asia Pacific-rim countries of New Zealand, Australia, Korea, China, Japan, Canada and the United States. A particular focus of the research has been school violence and in particular the nature and effects of bullying on student’s well-being.

In the Asia-Pacific rim countries significant cross-cultural research has been conducted. A number of common elements have emerged from this opportunity for cross-cultural discussion of the emerging issue of school bullying. The issue of how best to define or describe bullying was a key element readily identified as a point warranting further discussion. Cultural and historical influences appear to significantly shape how bullying is viewed and the Chinese, Japanese and Korean authors draw attention to the language used to define the concept. It also appeared that bullying manifests itself differently in terms of age and gender as the statistics from all countries highlighted. The country reports also highlighted that different causes were linked to school bullying eg. The Japanese report has strongly linked bullying to stress. A significant need identified by most countries was for the development of a more comprehensive data base to better understand the issue. A strong call was made for longitudinal and cross-

References


BRIEF NEWS

BURUNDI

Since 1993 Burundi has been going through a crisis caused by a war that has taken many lives, causing also massive displacement of populations inside and outside of the country. Survivors, being mostly women and children, live in great misery.

One of the results of this crisis is the increase of violence cases against children in schools.

Jean Paul Ndayisaba, researcher working within the YSDR - Youth Strategy for Disaster Reduction in Burundi, affirms that “many statistics revealed that a lot of cases are committed between teachers and students who promise them undeserved marks, while others are committed by armed groups (military and rebel groups) which attack school environments and commit these acts”. His colleague Pélé Kabanda will present the communication “Violence in Burundi schools” at the 4th World Conference “Violence at School & Public Policies” in Lisbon on 23-25 June.

KENYA

School violence has developed from simple walkouts to planned and premeditated incidences of vandalism targeted not only to the school property but also the school members.

Nyambura Owino, PhD, lecturer at Uganda Martyrs University (Uganda), will present at the 4th World Conference “Violence at School & Public Policies” in Lisbon on 23-25 June, the findings of a case study research undertaken in a Kenyan school which had had a history of vandalism. The main objective of the study was to seek a deeper understanding into the occurrence of school vandalism and explore why the various undertaken initiatives have not been effective in controlling or preventing the menace. The school under study was Kusasi boys’ school which at the time of the study had experienced six incidences of vandalism.
Luxembourg

Ongoing project: Meta-analysis on school climate and violence

Research project by Sophie Recchia, under Professor Georges Steffgen's direction of the University of Luxembourg, direction line “Anger and Aggression in Institutional and Social Contexts (AASC)” of the research unit “Integrative Research Unit on Social and Individual Development (INSIDE)”

This project concerns the development of a meta-analysis studying school climate as a predictor of violence at school. Many previous researches have shown that violence at school can be influenced by the aggressors’ personality but also by the environment in which they evolve. In that sense the appearance of violence can be due to facts tied to the individual (sex, age, personality features) but also to environmental aspects (class cohesion, student-teacher relationship, school culture). In spite of considerable progress in this domain, it is convenient to clarify the role played by the school as an institution creating an organisational climate likely to influence violence at school.

The present meta-analysis has a goal of reproducing a global view of the theoretical advances on school climate and violence and makes a call to all published scientific studies (article, report, study memoir, thesis), even non published that analysed the causes of violence linked to school climate.

Luxembourg

Prevention of violence through promotion of helping behaviour

Jan Pfetsch, researcher at the University of Luxembourg, research line “Anger and Aggression in Institutional and Social Contexts (AASC; Head: Professor Georges Steffgen)” of “Integrative Research Unit on Social and Individual Development (INSIDE)”

Prevention of repeated violence against weaker students (bullying) may focus on different involved parties — victims, bullies, bystanders or teachers. Research in the last decade has shown that a high percentage of bullying behaviour takes place in the presence of bystanders. Therefore, it seems reasonable to use these bystanders in order to prevent bullying. The aim would be then, to promote socially brave interventions in situations where such fundamental norms like nonviolent interaction are being violated. Such socially brave behaviour may be called moral courage or civil courage. Following the perspective of the participant role approach regarding bullying, the defenders of the victim may be seen as showing civil courage, whereas reinforcing assistants of the bully, and outsiders may be targets of interventions to enhance civil courage among students.

The training of bystander behaviour seems especially important because the majority of students disapprove of aggressive behavior in school, although only a part of them intervenes.

A newly developed intervention for civil courage is at the moment being tested in different primary and secondary schools in Luxembourg. A total of 32 classes participate at the civil courage training and are compared to 20 classes in control group (n = 1000 students).

The project is implemented through teacher trainings which are offered by the University of Luxembourg. Evaluation includes questionnaires for students and teachers, assessing incidence and participant roles of aggressive and prosocial behaviours and possible moderators (e.g. class climate, empathy, norm of social responsibility). Training and control groups are assessed at three time points (pre, post, 3 month follow up).

First results of the project will be presented at the 4th World Conference “Violence at School & Public Policies” in Lisbon on 23-25 June.