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 discotheques. 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 program devised by and implemented in a certain junior high school in a medium-size town in greater Tel-Aviv. The article tries to explain why the intervention program should be judged a failure, and points out that this is typical of many other programs initiated in the Israeli school system.

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

INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF CRIMINAL OFFENCES AND JUVENILE CRIMINAL OFFENCES IN ISRAEL IN RECENT TIMES

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 delinquents caught stood at 62,916 in 1990, it reached 119,484 in 2000 – almost a 100 per cent growth (MIS, 2000). At the same time Israeli population growth stood at a mere 34.8 per cent (CBS, 2001).

There again, in the very same period the number of juvenile delinquents caught by the police grew by 38.5 per cent, 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 marginally higher than the population-growth rate.

To sharpen the picture it is only necessary to mention that the increase in the number of criminal files opened for minors aged 12-18 years reached 16.8 per cent 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 over the same period was a mere 30 per cent (Gumple, 2001, p.9).

Violence merits 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 20 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, p.102). It should also 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, p.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 industrialised 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 15 per cent of children are bullied regularly, and bullying most often takes 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 per cent of Grade 8 pupils in the United States 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 30 experts from 15 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 that among the 16-17 year age-group in England, the Netherlands, Spain and Italy the violence figure reached 16-26 per cent (ibid). The prevalence of serious violence by age 17 years in the United States is even higher than that. About 30-40 per cent of male and 15-30 per cent 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 United States reach about 30 per cent.

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 are, 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 per cent or more. On the other hand there is a group of countries where the percentage is under the figure of 20 per cent. 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 per cent inasmuch as pupils aged 11, 13 and 15 years 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, p.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 per cent. In England it stood at a mere 13.5 per cent (Harel, 1999, p.17).

To top it all, it is necessary to 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poll’s date</th>
<th>Fear for children’s safety</th>
<th>Don’t fear</th>
<th>Have no opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August, 2001</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>68.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2001</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 2000</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April, 2000</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>57.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 1999</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May, 1999</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>47.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26April, 1999</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21April, 1999</td>
<td>55.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June, 1998</td>
<td>37.0</td>
<td>62.0</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977^</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The data summarized in the table reflect a basic fact: fear for children’s safety varies from time to time. Yet, in so far the last few years are concerned it is quite considerable. Usually, between 40 and 50 per cent of the parents fear for their children’s safety. This fear is the understandable outcome of the dramatic change in school climate. School life once resembled gentle scenes from “Goodbye, Mr. Chips”. In recent years, however, bloody episodes have been acted in schools throughout many Western countries. Thus, for example, between 1994 and 2001 at least 37 lethal shootings have occurred in American schools, as well as many more near misses that were never reported. The deadliest school shooting in United States history left 14 students and a teacher dead in 1999 at Columbine high school in Colorado (Bowman, 2001). The days of “Goodbye, Mr. Chips” have long disappeared. In recent years schools have become an arena for violent conflict, even in the tranquil rural areas and well-to-do suburbia (Schneider et.al., 1998).

A few words on the link between violence and bullying are in order in this respect. To begin with, the data and reality of bullying and peer oriented school violence are so similar that many researchers use data from physical bullying, childhood violence and school violence
interchangeably (Moyer, 1987; Bandura, 1973). On the other hand, other researchers distinguish between the terms ‘violence’ and ‘bullying’, defining the latter as comprising of direct behaviours such as teasing, hitting and stealing, initiated by one or more students against a peer-victim. As is well recognised, in addition to direct attacks, bullying may also be more indirect, by causing the victim to be socially isolated through intentional exclusion (Smith & Sharp, 1994).

Amid growing concern over the connection between bullying and school violence there are some experts – like Prof. Howard Spivak from Tufts University – who are of the opinion that bullying and violent behaviour are indeed two different things, yet there is a strong relationship between them. Bullying breeds violence. Both bullies and their victims are more likely than other children to be involved in acts of violence (Bowman, 2001). Thus, in the case of the 15-year-old youth accused of killing two students in a shooting rampage in a certain high school in California in March, 2001 classmates described him as, “a constant target of physical and verbal abuse at school”. Similarly, the parents of a 14-year-old Pennsylvania girl, who shot a classmate in the shoulder at the same week, said she had been regularly brutalized by bullies (ibid). Last but not least, in the school survey mentioned above, the adolescents responding to the poll overwhelmingly ranked revenge as the strongest motivation for school shootings, with 87 per cent saying shooters want “to get back at those who have hurt them” (Bowman, 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 per cent of those sampled held the opinion that school violence is a much graver problem than it used to be. Of those sampled, 51.9 per cent stated that either they themselves or else some body close to them encountered violence in school. Of the parents included in the sample, 69.2 per cent stated that they feared for their children’s safety in school. Of the children in the sample, 20.9 per cent 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 as 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. Moreover, 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 per cent; the growth in aggravated assault cases handled by police amounted to 26.2 per cent; and the growth in cases of grave injuries caused by assaults handled by police increased four-fold (436%) (National Council for Child’s Welfare, 2000).

The huge surge in violence offences committed in the school system in recent years and depicted in Table 2 reflects inter alia the Israeli morbid reality. Although studies on aggressive and violent behaviour among Israeli children and youth are not numerous, there is a consensus among researchers that aggressive and violent behaviour has become a part of daily routine (Hochman, 2000). Israeli children most unfortunately grow up in a political and socio-cultural climate in which conflict is handled by hostility and aggression (Elbedour, 1998). Given the utilization of aggression in the national context of escalating conflict one can expect to observe the effects on aggression and violent behaviour among Israeli children and youth (Klingman et al., 1993). Violence breeds violence.

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.

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offence</th>
<th>No. of cases investigated by police</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
<td>803</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assault on school staff members</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggravated assault</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grave injuries caused by assaults</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1990, a 3,415 person sample survey was carried out, encompassing pupils in 15 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 track 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, blackmailling, 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, pp.75-86). Sixty per cent of the surveyed boys and 40 per cent of the surveyed girls admitted involvement in verbal abuse. A third of the boys and more than 10 per cent of the girls admitted involvement in physical violence (op. cit., p.265).

In the very same year another comprehensive survey was carried out in Tel-Aviv, encompassing a 8,931 person sample of Grades 5 and 6 students 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 per cent of the surveyed pupils (32 per cent in the Arab schools) reported high or very high incidence of violence in their schools. Another 40 per cent defined the incidence of violence in their schools as intermediate. In other words, about 60 per cent 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.

- Of the reported incidents, 45 per cent were not perpetrated by children constantly prone to be violent. However, 30 per cent of the incidents could be definitely ascribed to persistent offenders.

- Only about 27 per cent 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 per cent of the cases no action whatsoever was taken against the offenders; in 42 per cent a warning was issued to the guilty parties; in 32 per cent 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 per cent 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 sixth to eleventh graders illustrated once again a rather unhappy picture at the end of the 1990s (Harel et al., 1998). It turned out that more than 50 per cent 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. Of the students in Grades 6 and 7, 68.7 per cent of the boys and 53.2 per cent of the girls were victimised at least once during the year. In Grades 10 and 11, 48.3 per cent of the boys and 28.6 per cent of the girls reported that 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 per cent of the pupils were victimised three times and more during the school year. Here again, the younger children suffered more than their seniors. Of the sixth and seventh graders, 35.7 per cent of the boys and 21.2 per cent of the girls reported they were victimised, while in the tenth and eleventh grades, only 17.8 per cent of the boys and 11.8 per cent 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 per cent of the sixth to eleventh graders molested other pupils in their school at least once during the survey’s year. Of those surveyed, 17 per cent 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 sixth to eleventh graders (48 per cent) reported that they had been involved in physical fights in their school at least once. Among the sixth to eleventh graders the percentage was much higher than among their seniors. Of the lower age-groups, 79.7 per cent boys and 32.2 per cent of the girls reported involvements in physical fights, as against 56.9 per cent of the boys and 16.8 per cent 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 per cent of the Jewish population in Israel). Of the old-timers or Sabras (Israeli-born), 48.8 per cent were involved in physical fights as against a mere 37.0 per cent of the new-comers (ibid).

The violence depicted by the survey has not been exhausted. On top of all that has been mentioned so far, it should also be noted that 14.4 per cent of the boys and 8.1 per cent of the girls in the sixth and seventh grades stated that they fell victim to what would be termed in plain language as robbery by other kids. Of those in the higher age-brackets, 7.3 per cent boys and 4.7 per cent of the girls were similarly robbed in school. Furthermore, 14.6 per cent of the boys and 6.6 per cent of the girls in the sixth and seventh grades, and 6.2 per cent of the boys and 4.5 per cent of the girls in the tenth and eleventh 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 per cent of the sixth to eleventh 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 per cent of the sixth to eleventh graders reported carrying weapons into school for self defence at
least once during the month preceding the survey (22.6 per cent of the boys; 6.6 per cent of the girls). Mostly, though, it was not firearms but rather knives, pen-knives, clubs, knuckle-dusters.

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 United States, two countries whose stereotype is most violent.

As far as taking part in bullying, harassment or pestering in school grounds is concerned, Israel is in the eleventh 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, harassment or pestering on school grounds is concerned (three time or more during the school year) Israel is again in eleventh 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 sixth to eleventh graders in 1229 classrooms, 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 per cent of the elementary school and junior high school children and 65 per cent of the high school 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 high school children and half of the high school 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 high school and high school 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 hamulus (in the Arab schools).

Inasmuch as physical violence is concerned, about 85 per cent of the elementary school children, 50 per cent of the junior high school children and a third of the high school children reported they were pushed around by their peers at least once during the last month prior to the survey. About 16 per cent of the high school children, 32 per cent of the junior high school children and 48 per cent 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 high school children and a quarter of the high school children reported they were threatened by their peers at least once during the same period. 6.8 per cent of the elementary school kids, 7.2 per cent of the junior high school kids and 5 per cent of the high school kids reported that they were threatened by peers holding a knife or a pen-knife. Of the junior high school and high school kids, 8 per cent reported they were threatened by gangs in the school. And finally, 3 per cent reported they were threatened by a peer flashing a gun (ibid). Without going into details it is necessary to bear in mind that this picture is much grimmer than the findings of the parallel comprehensive survey carried out in the United States (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 – the situation in Israel turns out to be much worse than in the United States.

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 per cent
of the respondents held the opinion that the steps taken in the schools were too late and too little. Only 2.3 per cent deemed those activities good and beneficent (IOL, 2002).

VIOLANCE 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 twofold, 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 understanding of the complex reasons leading to it, it might best 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 1990s.

• The unique school climate and experience: estrangement and alienation typical of large schools; stressful organisational climate; weary, worn-out teachers; prevalence of behavioural norms regarded by the pupils as unfair (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 of immigrant pupils and minority groups.

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. Conversely, 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, socialisation – and the school as an important socialisation 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 PROGRAMS IN SCHOOLS

In view of all that has been said so far, there is no wonder that many countries, including Israel, developed intervention programs 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 victimised children, the government supported the development and implementation of a comprehensive program to address bullying among children in school. The four goals of the program included (a) to increase awareness of the violence problem and knowledge about it; (b) to achieve active involvement on the part of parents and teachers; (c) to develop clear school rules and procedures against bullying behaviour, and (d) to provide support and protection for the victims (Olweus, 1991).

The program involved interventions at multiple levels (Olweus, 1993);

- **School-wide interventions.** A survey of bullying problems at each school, increased supervision, school-wide assemblies, and teacher in-service 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 years in a representative sample of 715 schools. Just before the project had been launched it was found that 15 per cent of the children in these schools were involved in bullying incidents; 5 per cent 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 program 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 program (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 program 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 programs 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 programs were aimed at decreasing school-violence they differed in their scope,
target-population, focus, and the number of partners responsible for their implementation (Noy & Rokach, 2001).

As early as 1989 the psychological consultative service of the Ministry of Education published a booklet containing a host of intervention programs aimed at decreasing violence levels in school (Rokach, 1989). They were developed by different schools and contained detailed instructions for school mobilisation 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 program in line with the concrete needs of each particular school. The emphasis is on the exclusiveness of the unique programs. There are no standardised programs embracing all the schools. As formulated by the authors (SHEFI, 2001), “The intervention program has to be specifically matched to each school. Each school has first to undergo a diagnosis; its strong and weak points have to be analysed and evaluated. Only then a program should be devised and launched.”

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

As already mentioned there is no shortage in Israeli intervention programs aimed at decreasing school violence. In fact, the problem is not the availability of programs but rather their suitability and effectiveness. The question is to what extent have they managed to achieve their goals. The Paper tries to analyse one particular such program as a case in point. It was developed in a junior high school in a medium size town in the metropolitan area of Tel-Aviv. Its target population was the seventh graders in the school. The analysis has been carried out under my guidance and supervision in 1996 (Tiqva, 1996).

This particular intervention program 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 program 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, the training of all the people in the school setting, teachers, support staff, parents. 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 characterises this case study is on one hand, simultaneous implementation of several programs (most of them devised by the Ministry of Education) trying to cope with school violence. On the other hand it is also characterised by a lack of systemic targeting of the school’s variables. Finally it is characterised by a blitz attitude. While the Norwegian and British programs spread out over an 8 to 20 months period, this case-study program was built around ten meetings of two-hours each. The underlying assumption of the program was that learning through group experience encourages personal involvement and commitment. It also facilitates self-consciousness and development of new behavioural patterns (Tiqva, 1996, p.41).

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

Among the goals usually recommended by experts and mentioned in intervention programs 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, pp.14-15).

One of the questions posed while attempting to evaluate this particular intervention program was whether these universal targets were included in it, and to what extent (Tiqva, 1996, pp.46-75). Contents analysis of the ten 2-hours meetings as crystallised in the program 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 and 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 provides a summary of the subjects treated in the intervention program and the tools used in the program.

Table 3. The subjects treated in the intervention program and the tools applied

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

THE GROUPS SURVEYED AND THE QUESTIONS POSED IN THE SEVENTH GRADE

It is noteworthy that out of the four recommended targets of the intervention programs one was omitted advertently or inadvertently: changing the school-culture regarding violence. As already mentioned, it appears that the particular intervention program studied here suffers from two major flaws. First, it does not apply a systemic approach. Rather than conceptualise components of the program 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 program. 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 seventh graders in the school – the focus of the intervention program. In actual fact two separate groups were analysed in the survey:

- an experiment group (27 pupils), which took active part in the sessions of the intervention program; and
- a control group (32 pupils), which did not participate in the project.

All in all, 59 pupils (all of them seventh graders) responded to the written questionnaire at the end of the ten sessions devoted to the intervention program. The questionnaire contained 12 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 12 questions dealing with school violence were subdivided into two subgroups:

- The first subgroup (four questions) was meant to supply information regarding the scope of bullying and violence on the school grounds;
- The second subgroup (eight 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 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 vandalising your school property;
  - when you happen to know that a fellow-student of yours consorts with delinquents.

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The information collected from the survey justifies in principle the introduction of an intervention program into the school, since it reflects the violent reality prevailing there. Of the surveyed pupils, 55.9 per cent reported that they witnessed vandalism in the school at least once during the last year; 87.7 per cent reported that they were aware of the fact that cases of vandalism happened in the school occasionally; 50 per cent reported that they were aware of cases of threats and extortion in their school; 5.8 per cent stated that it happened to a friend of theirs; 5.8 per cent reported that it actually happened to them.

Harassment happens to be a most common occurrence in the school. Of the surveyed pupils, 84.9 per cent reported that they knew a pupil in their own class or grade who was regularly harassed, humiliated or beaten, 9.4 per cent said it happened to a friend of theirs, and 5.7 per cent 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 program 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 program, the answers could be taken as a good indicator of the effect of the intervention program as a whole. A statistically significant difference between the two groups could at the very least mean that another check is justifiable. The results of the analysis of these data are presented in Table 4, which gives data on pupils’ attitudes towards school violence according to specific categories and groups.

**Table 4. The pupils’ attitude towards school violence according to categories and groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active stand against violence</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempt to prevent equipment destruction</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>47.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a firm stand against threatening &amp; extorting pupils</td>
<td>85.2</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming across a beaten and humiliated pupil</td>
<td>84.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming across vandalism in the school</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catching a pupil in a stealing act</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>66.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming across a pupil consorting with delinquents</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>73.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coming across a pupil carrying arms in school</td>
<td>64.0</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking a firm stand against beating &amp; abusing pupils</td>
<td>62.9</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 experimental group demonstrated a stronger attitude than the control group. However, it should be

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1 The question relating to an attempt to prevent equipment destruction; the question dealing with the stand taken upon coming across vandalism in the school; the question dealing with the stand taken upon catching a fellow-student in a stealing act; and finally, the question relating to the stand taken against beating and abusing fellow-students.

2 The question dealing with the stand taken against threatening and extorting students; the question dealing with the stand taken upon coming across a beaten and humiliated student; the question dealing with the stand taken upon coming across a fellow-student consorting with delinquents; and finally, the question dealing with the stand taken upon coming across a student carrying arms on the school premises.
noted that in two out of these four questions the difference between the two groups was statistically insignificant.

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 experimental 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 not statistically significant. Nevertheless, the inevitable conclusion is that the intervention program 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 experimental and the control groups. As far as the experiment group is concerned, in six out of the eight questions mentioned above the indifferent constituted more than 35 per cent of the respondents. In three out of the eight questions their weight amounted to 65 per cent. 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 per cent of the surveyed pupils, in both groups, stated that the intervention program was an efficient means. Of the entire 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 pro-active programs 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 programs have to be implemented simultaneously at the individual’s level and the systemic level (Noy & Rokach, 2001, p.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 experimental group. It also shows the amount of support some of these suggestions gained in the control group.

Even a cursory study of the suggestions put forward by the experimental 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).

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3 The one dealing with the stand taken upon coming across a beaten and humiliated student; and the one dealing with the stand taken upon coming across a student consorting with delinquents.
Table 5. Different ways and means suggested by the pupils in order to reduce school violence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The suggestion</th>
<th>Experimental group</th>
<th>Control group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementation of the intervention Program in the school</td>
<td>44.4</td>
<td>43.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stricter discipline, order and punitive system</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperation between teachers, parents and Pupils</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Starting implementation of the intervention Program at a lower age</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More advertising placards and relevant TV programs</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeper inputs of teachers in pupils Excommunicated by their peer-group</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking nicely to the pupils</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific treatment of each problem as it arises</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treating all violent acts equally</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be sympathetic to violence victims</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutual encouragement and strong will-power</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banish the violent students from school</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handing over of the violent pupils to the police</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not to quarrel, not to meddle, address The teacher</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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 noted that 74 per cent of all the pupils in the experimental group reported that the atmosphere in their class was pleasant. 18.5 per cent defined it as exciting.

The anti-violence intervention program 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 program’s inefficiency even less tolerable.

All the data analysed above help in evaluating the intervention program 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 program. An objective evaluation of the program’s effectiveness should be based on an analysis of sequential data relating to the school violence over a period of at least 5 to 10 years. Thus, contrary to the impression of the general public, careful study of objective data in the United States 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 per cent 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 analyse it.

All in all there are three important lessons to be learnt from this discussion. First, the students as a whole were very much in favour of an intervention program intended to help curbing school violence. Second, both students’ groups favoured a systemic approach involving teachers, parents and students (an approach recommended by the experts in the first place…). Third, it is apparent that despite the school management’s willingness to do something serious about violence and bullying it did not take all the necessary steps to do it properly.

**SUMMARY**

The article tried to evaluate a specific anti-violence intervention program implemented in an Israeli junior high school 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 per cent 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 per cent of the students regard school violence as a major problem. A warning has also been issued that about 15 per cent 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 where schools are concerned.

Thereafter the article turned to focus on the case study. It explained that the intervention program implemented in the junior high school was a cognitive one, focusing on the students and lacking a systemic targeting of the school’s variables. The program’s rationale was discussed, and its underlying assumption and goals were duly analysed. A description of the evaluation process, which was based on a questionnaire administered to a sample of seventh 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 program failed in meeting its goals. All in all, the article drew attention to the fact that where 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 programs. 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 evaluate properly the intervention programs currently administered when there is no data bank. Lack of proper evaluation is likely to impinge on the effectiveness of the programs.

The case-study analysed in the article is typical of a host of similar programs 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 programs are under the impression that they are effective. In fact, a great many of them are not.
To sum up, the article reiterated a well-established fact, namely, that aggression occurs in school all the time. Teachers (and sometimes, parents too) are unaware of the problem’s extent, and many students are either reluctant to get involved or are at a loss as to how to help (Charach, Pepler & Ziegler, 1995). Given this situation the need is emphasised (Smith & Sharp, 1994) to develop whole-school policies and embrace the systemic approach (Olweus, 1993). One of the foremost conclusions of the case-study analysed above is that a lot of work has to be done with the school-master as well as the school stuff as a whole. They should have a ready access to professional consulting stuff made available to them by the Ministry of Education (Admati Inst., 1998). This is a pre-condition to implementing effective intervention programs.

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