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ASPECTS OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN ROMANIAN SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Human violence is one of actual problems of contemporary world. Almost every day, we are presented a series of forms of violence, from the easiest to the most difficult ones. The violence in school organizations is a common form, so we can not speak about it as a separate reality of life. This fact knows a spectacular growth in the last period, it contains a multiple determination (familiar, social, personal and school) and its forms of manifestation are mutually conditioned and they have a specified dynamics. Most of the time, the violence in schools is not fatal but it may be the cause of serious physical and pshycal prejudices of the abused person.

JEL-classification: I20, I21

Keywords: violence, school organization, school violence prevention

1. INTRODUCTION

Human violence, a phenomenon which is socially, psychologically, culturally and economically determined, is a topic that raises more and more interest in contemporary society. Seen from a social and psychological perspective, violence is apparent in all societies. All countries, all communities face violence; it is everywhere: in the street, in people's homes, at their workplaces, in mass-media, in schools, on sports stadiums etc. The World Health Organization proposes the following definition of violence: the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (Krug et al., 2002).

Recent research into violence in society has also included approaches to violence in educational settings, as they are constitutive parts of human communities. The specialized literature on school violence is diverse and covers numerous related fields. There is a significant impact on the educational system and on the origin of the violence phenomenon. In capitalist societies, people tend to be egotistic, competitive, and this perpetuates class

differences and thus disadvantaged groups emerge. Potentially, these cultural, social, economic differences tend to considerably influence the level of violence in different countries. There are significant structural and organizational differences between educational organizations in Europe and worldwide. According to Furlog & Morrison (2000), school violence is a multifaceted structure which includes both criminal acts and in-school aggressions, inhibits students' development and learning, and also affects school climate.

2. SCHOOL AS AN ORGANIZATION

Organizations are social units or groups, established intentionally, with explicitly formulated objectives, which engage a large number of individuals in assuming well-determined roles and statuses within the framework of a differentiated structure, with leading and co-ordinating positions (Păun, 1999, p. 8). The school organization, a component of a societal group, is under the influence of political, economic, cultural systems, social trends, etc. The existence of schools is strictly dependent on their relationship with the economic, political, cultural and ideological spheres, which compose their environment. School organizations depend upon their surrounding environment from which they draw their human and material resources (figure no. 40).

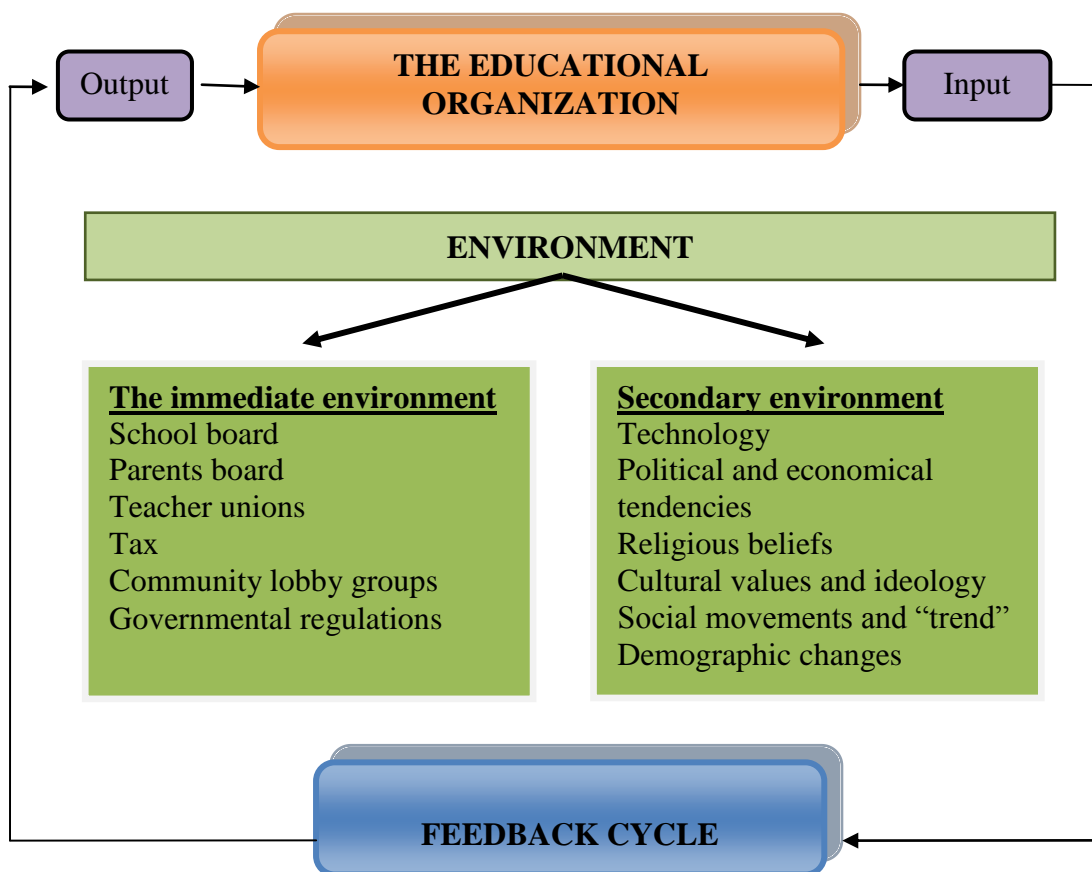


Figure no. 40 The relationship between the school organization and its environment adapted after Diaconu (2004)

The immediate and secondary organization environment is composed of all elements which surround the organization and are able to exert influence on them. The school organization is an open system because there are both positive and negative interactions between it and the outer environment.

The organization receives input flows (*input*) from the environment, i.e. school-children, university students, demographic variables, school-children's families, subcultures, teachers, support teaching staff, affiliates, training level, equipment, teaching-staff's proficiency, school-children's motivation to study, etc. A certain control is exerted upon the input to school organizations because some of its elements are required for these organizations to work, while others are less efficient. *The output* consists of the materials and ideas leaving the organization, such as for instance: the instructional material developed within the school, new ideas, the alumni, school-children's motivation to continue their education etc. *The feedback*, positive or negative, enables the organization to adapt to the changes and requirements of the environment, depending on the information it receives.

3. VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN ROMANIAN SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONS

Romanian society has recently experienced an alarming increase in school violence; this became a matter of concern for the public opinion, nongovernmental organizations, local authorities, and last but not least, for experts in the educational system, who are directly involved in this phenomenon. In Romania, there are currently few statistics of school violence, although research into this phenomenon has increased. School violence studies, research, conferences and prevention programs developed in the last 10 years revealed cases in which violence was an alarm signal drawing attention to school safety issues, both at a local and national level.

One of the first national programs focused on violence in school organizations - The National Program: Education for Health in Romanian Schools -, started in 2001 by the Ministry of Education and Research in partnership with the Ministry of Health, had a distinct chapter dealing with the prevention of school violence, containing special topics included in school curricula for grades I through XII.

A complex study was developed for the first time in Romania, between 2004 and 2005, by the Institute of Educational Sciences in collaboration with the Institute of Criminology on violence in Romanian schools. According to this study, more than 32% of the students participating in the survey declared that they had previously witnessed violent acts in their schools, involving students and teachers or students only. On January 30, 2006 the International Day of Non-Violence in Schools was celebrated in Bucharest, for the first time

in Romania. School and high-school students in Bucharest were asked to applaud for one minute, at 12 pm, in support of the fight against violence in Romanian school organizations. Although the event was first scheduled only in Bucharest, it took place in other cities as well. Another study, dealing with violence in schools was presented during the first meeting of the National Student Board (Călimănești, 2006), organized by the Ministry of Education and Research in partnership with the Institute of Educational Sciences, UNICEF Romania and Vâlcea County School Inspectorate. The campaign "Be Intelligent, Not Violent!", was launched on March 20, 2006 addressing primary and secondary school students, teaching staff, but also parents; its main objective was to cut down on violence in school organizations.

University of Bucharest hosted the first national forum titled "The Media, Violence and Education" between May 26 and 27, 2006. This event was organized by the Ministry of Education and Research, the National Audiovisual Council of Romania, the Center for Media Studies and New Communication Technologies of the Faculty of Sociology and Social Services, in partnership with UNICEF (Romania). In 2006, the Bucharest Police Directorate General, through the "Service for Criminality Analysis and Prevention," the organization "Save the Children" Romania, the Bucharest School Inspectorate, the Bucharest Municipal Center for Psychopedagogical Assistance and the Faculty of Arts, of the "Hyperion" University launched the pilot program "NU DA!" for the prevention of violence in the school environment.

Research into school violence conducted between December 2005 and January 2006 by the Bucharest School Inspectorate concluded that approximately 60% of students were verbally and physically aggressed both in school and at home. Physical aggressions in schools vary from less significant forms to extremely violent fights. The campaign "Be Intelligent, Not Violent!", focused on the reduction in violence in school organizations, was launched in the Municipality of Bucharest on March 9, 2006. The program, organized by the Bucharest School Inspectorate, the Bucharest Police Department, the "Noi" Foundation and funded by SIVECO Romania had several stages until June 15, 2006.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administrative Reform and the Ministry of Education and Research signed a joint protocol on August 30, 2007 on combating violence in school organizations. The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth and the Council of Europe Information Office organized on November 20, 2007 the national symposium "A Europe with and for Children - Reducing Violence in Schools," which was part of the Council of Europe program "A Europe with and for Children." The Foundation for the Development of Civil Society with the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth and International Child Development Initiatives (Holland) organized in Bucharest on May 22, 2008 the symposium

titled "Violence School - School Violence Prevention Methods." In 2008 The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth launched the project "Together against violence. Parents Go Back to School" aimed at triggering parent involvement in children's education and stopping violence in schools. During the third conference titled "Modern Management in Education" for preuniversity education, held between November 21 and 23, 2008 in Sinaia, the "Youth Against Violence" Project of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth was launched. The general objective of the project is to develop informing, training, monitoring and communication structures and mechanisms at local, regional and national level in the field of school violence prevention. The target group is composed of students, staff, holding management, monitoring, evaluation and control positions in school inspectorates, principals, and members of boards of trustees of schools. The project is to be implemented between 2009 and 2011.

Analyzing Romanian legislation on children's rights and protection against violence, Jigău, Liiceanu & Preoteasa (eds., 2005) concluded that: a) Romania had signed the main European and international agreements and documents on children's rights and their protection from violence; b) national legislation covers thematically the entire range of violent acts, school children being protected from physical, verbal, sexual violence and exploitation; c) there is an increase in the adaptation or harmonization of national legislation with the most recent trends. This fact was materialized in measures and actions of prevention and intervention in the case of violent acts; d) there is a tendency to unify the efforts of several bodies for finding or applying more effective solutions; e) the joint document released by the Ministry of Education and Research and the Ministry of Internal Affairs is the specific and eloquent example of the constant efforts for developing institutional partnerships, because it instituted the unification of all efforts of improving education, prevention and intervention in violence related issues.

4. CONCLUSION

One must take into account also the fact that conferences, seminars, symposiums, projects on the prevention of violence in school organizations require substantial financial efforts, involve coordination difficulties and high costs. Violence in the school organizational environment, irrespective of the fact that students were victims or/and aggressors is a predictor of the future violent behaviors, including couple violence, involvement in fights and adopting an auto-destructive behavior (smoking, excessive consumption of alcohol, etc.). In the case when victims survive aggression and preserve their functional abilities, psychological consequences sometimes affect their entire lives: the feeling of shame, blame, devaluation,

diminish self-trust and trust in others, weakens self-control, etc. Violence in school organizations does not only have immediate effects, but in most cases they are preserved through adulthood perpetuating it.

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