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Citizenship in combating students' violence against teachers

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Abstract

With growing intolerance and violence in Slovene post-modern society, violence in school is, unfortunately, growing, too. Teachers can be exposed to various forms of violence from students. Therefore the authors in their paper deal in theoretical part with the role of citizenship in presenting different concepts and realizations connected with following aspects and roles of citizenship in: violence and aggression, violence and aggressive behaviour in school at workplace, violence in school against teachers. Their intention was to discover how the violence appears today, in what kind of patterns, how it influences the relationship between the teacher and the student how the teacher is suppose to be responding on violence, are there any differences in performing violence and, finally, can citizenship combat these unwished social processes. In the empirical part they represent their research on 240 teachers, as they involve aspects of the research problem: main or relevant teacher's dimensions, diffusion and forms of violence against teachers, responses of the teachers to aggressive behaviour, prevention, reduction and dealing with violence in schools and the necessity of citizenship education in Slovenian curricula.

Keywords: *citizenship, violence, educational system, Slovene post-modern society.*

Introduction

Slovenia has only been an independent state since 1991. In spite of outstanding developments in the global informational society, it is still a basic lever for successful development, enforcement of political and economic nation's identity and integrity. As Slovenia would like to be closer to the developed world in its processes of democratisation it has seen rapid change in last decade. Education as a special social subsystem is in the middle of enormous changes at all levels: we conclude that elementary education reform began to transform the secondary educational level and almost completed the Bologna programmes. In such situation the educational system must use its unique position in changing the global social, economic and political system.

Every day we are more aware that educational field in our country is coping with growing problems about violence against teachers and therefore about the needs for new and better educational goals and programmes. Schools at all levels are the working environment for the teachers and students and therefore schools must be safe and secure places for all included and must ensure the best possible work situations for all, be to able work and to learn. It is therefore incumbent upon each school to take actions designed to prevent violence in their environment and to facilitate a positive and constructive work atmosphere between all involved in the educational process: teachers

and student in the first place. However, when violent situations occur, they obstruct the teaching and learning processes and have a malign influence on all included: on teachers and on students, on other school staff members and students' families, as well. And, last but not least, on quality of the education.

Violence at School

Violence is among all social undesirable processes, the most contradictory and unclear phenomena, but sometimes seems an insurmountable problem. As violence usually appears as a very complex social situation, there are profound accessible approaches of different science disciplines (sociology, psychology, law etc.) needed. They, in common, define the phenomena as be individual or group behaviour, which results in personal, being physically or/and psychologically injured or damage. When aggression is focused on a momentary reaction we understand it as aggression. In cases of permanent and lasting actions of the individuals or groups, we understand it as violent behaviour against someone or something. But Bučar-Ručman (2004, p.25-27) calls attention that people can behave aggressive even if they do not want to be and do not (also) behave physically aggressively.

According to the basic legal Slovene document "Direction about violence in school space" (2004,p.6), violence, whether on or by students or teachers, is the exertion of physical and/or psychical power and force, with actual or virtual threat against the self, other persons or groups, with the possible or real and actual result of damage, death or psychological deprivation. Different forms of violence can affect teacher's work in school. They can be: physical, psychological, sexual; one off incidents or more systematic patterns of behaviour; among colleagues, between teacher and pupils, teachers and parents, or/and range from minor cases of disrespect to more serious acts, including criminal offences, which require the intervention of school and (even) judicial authorities. Violence against teacher(s) is a growing risk to his/their health that is closely interlinked with teacher's roles in school and society. It includes all intentional behaviours causing harm to the teacher: from working time, excessive physical, nervous and mental strain caused by work at school, to direct attack on teacher's physical and intellectual personality. It also includes incidents between teacher and student(s) where teacher is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances related to the work in school, involving an explicit or implicit challenge to his/her safety, well-being and health. According to Chapell and Di Martino (2000) abuse covers all forms of workplace harassment to mortal acts of personal violence (which can be verbal, physical and visual or written and can range from disparaging remark to personal attack, including racial harassment, bullying and mobbing).

The continuum of violence against teachers ranges from threats (announcement of an intention to harm the teacher or to damage his property), and abuse (students' behaviours that depart from reasonable conduct and involve the misuse of physical or psychological strength), to assault (attempt at physical injury or attack on teacher's person including physical harm).

Unfortunately, violence from pupils against teachers and other school staff members are reported as an increasing problem in schools throughout Europe and Slovenia is no exception. According to data, violence against teachers in Slovene society can potentially affect any school and any teacher, irrespective of the school largeness, study activities, form of study or form of the teacher's employment. However, kindergarten and primary schools are not as high at risk as secondary or vocational schools or faculties. Not yet?

Table 1: Source: Police, General Directory, September, 2010.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Elementary school	50	46	42	47	44	29
Secondary school	51	46	30	51	35	23
Light assault injures	8	17	18	19	21	15
Great assault injures	2	1	4	1	0	2
Blackmail	14	17	11	21	11	3
Threats aggression	5	10	6	10	12	7

Because violence against teachers is a hidden, often without sufficient evidence event, it is becoming a matter of concern to the general Slovene public. We noticed that public opinion has and further could help to heighten awareness of the prevalence and problems of violent behaviour against teachers, with general agreement that which is related to issues of power and control. In general practice, not all schools and not all teachers are affected. As school is a working environment for the teachers and students, it must represent a safe and secure working environment for all: teachers, students and other school staff members, and for visitors, as well.

Success in education has become in the post-modern Slovene society extreme important. Very often students and even their parents put the guilt on teachers not realising their insufficient study work and unacquainted behaviour against them. There is no doubt that such a situation often godfathers a situation full of negative emotions, conflicts and violence.

School's Identity and Appearance of Violence

Every school has its identity, as a situation in which a school as organisation really lives and is characterized by the quality of language, teacher's roles, deeds and physical presence.

The schools image shows how the school is seen from the environment; the difference between the reality and undoubtedly perception from the outside. It is an impression in which the school wishes to co-create the environment and its evaluation from the

environment. This includes the desired condition of characteristics amongst very different processes: teachers' academic titles; a particular educational orientation; characteristics and the acquirement of the student's knowledge (actually as the product); its external image; the cleanliness of the school; alumni references; and also, the presence of violent behaviour.

Creating a global school image is very demanding and it is not dependent solely on the factors within the school, but also on the real picture of teachers and students cooperating in learning and educating. The less negative emotions they produce for each other the more they grow and contribute to non-violent situations. Very often elements which contribute to an optimal non-violent relation between teachers and students are: specific school goals, school regime, teaching style, contemporary didactic methods, environment participation in managing, specific presentations of school organisation in the social environment, contents of the educational processes to stimulate healthy competitiveness in the intervention of specific academic values against violent and aggressive behaviour, continuing studies or even finding a job), school's name, academic title obtained at the end of schooling.

The school location, which includes the environ in which school is situated is also an important factor. Students and their parents when deciding about registration at a particular school from the viewpoint of the schools location take into consideration the social criteria of violent behaviour appearance. The distance from school to the residence is an important factor in deciding on registration, regarding the risk of violent behaviour. This element indirectly influences the quality of study and the conditions of students' population. With the increase of violent behaviour, social differences and exclusion of injured also became very important element in parents' deciding where to register their child(ren). Avoiding violent and aggressive behaviour and to prevent teachers and to create a positive public opinion about the school each school should perform different activities, as they should include: attractive information days, presentation of successful school events, organising talking situations, competitions, announcements about the work and success.

The headteacher, elected by the School board and named by the Minister of education, is the most responsible person for combating violence against teachers and aggression. His or her decisions would have consequences in affecting teacher as victim and student as aggressor. If responsibility is sensible and controllable all involved, especially the student(s), know beforehand the sanctions for deviating from the rules. Responsibility does not just lie with the headteacher but with all involved: teacher's colleagues, parents, other students, social environment. The more aware all about the dangers are, without becoming overwhelmed by the emotional issues inherent in violence, the more all could equip teachers to "protect" themselves.

Empirical Research

Investigating the phenomenon of violent behavior of students against teachers on Slovenian schools, we were interested in main dimensions of the teachers, dissemination and forms of student violent behavior upon teachers and the teachers' responses, and

prevention, reduction and managing of the phenomena. We were tracing the differences among teachers according to the type of school they work at and according to the subject they teach. Analyzing the distribution and forms of students' violence upon teachers, we set our starting-point hypothesis, in which we assumed that most of the activities, that deal with prevention and reduction of violent behavior and informing about violence issues (teaching plans, erecting a positive social school climate, projects on the topic, incorporations with interested associations, offering professional advanced study), are already taking place in Slovenian schools, regardless of the school type, with no significant differences between them; and five hypothesis, presuming that:

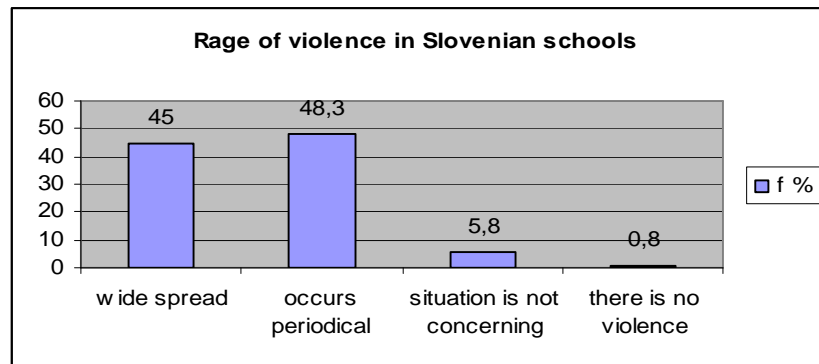
- violence has a very wide circulation in Slovenian schools, whereat the teachers claim that the range of violence is much higher in secondary trade-, technical- and vocational schools than in primary schools and gymnasiums;
- although the majority of teachers did not experience any form of violence from the students, students' violent behavior mostly is experienced among teachers in secondary-, trade-, technical- and vocational schools, and teachers teaching language- and social subjects;
- the majority of teachers would report on an violent behavior and according to significant differences to the type of school and the subject;
- most common experienced form of students' violence is disquietude during lectures, cursing, assigning insulting nicknames, detraction, humiliation, extortion, threatening and demolition of school property;
- less experienced are physical attacks with injuries, sexual harassment and demolition of personal property.

Methodology

We employed a quota-type sample (n-240) reflecting the primary and secondary schools population structure in Slovenia. Regional school distribution was also taken into account, as well as secondary school teachers' population regarding the type of school. The current study included 240 teachers, 16 enrolled in 3-years vocational school, 54 4-year occupational school, 62 Gymnasium and 108 in primary school. Most of the representatives have a working experience period of 6-15 Years, the least of them above 30 and less than 1 year of working experience. The proportion of female was 73 %. The majority of teachers were aged between 26 and 45 years. The smallest part of the sample represented teachers aged under 25 and above 55 years. The majority had a university degree. Most of the representatives are teaching language subjects, natural-mathematic and social subject, following by representatives teaching primary school subjects. The smallest part of the sample represents teachers teaching vocational subjects and physical education. We used the descriptive and causal, non-experimental method of empirical sociological research and collected the data in autumn 2010 with survey questionnaire.

Results

Graph 1: The range of violence according to the teachers' estimations.



Most teachers estimate that violence in Slovenian schools is occurring only periodically, followed by teachers who estimate that the violence is very extended, what is in accordance with other similar investigations done by now. A very small percentage estimate that violence situation is not concerning or that violence behavior on schools does not exist. This ascertainment confirms the starting-point hypothesis about the range of violence on examined schools, although the representatives estimate that the problem of violence in their school is not as burning an issue as it may be in other schools.

Table 2: Range of violence, according to the type of school and the subject they teach.

	Occupation place/type of school				Teaching subject					
	Prim.	SVT	TEPRf	Gym	NMath	SOC S.	LANG	all	PRO F.	SPORT
Very extended	62 57,4%	8 7,4%	26 24,1%	12 11,1%	26 24,1%	22 20,4%	26 24,1%	26 24,1%	4 3,7%	4 3,7%
Periodically	44 37,9%	8 6,9%	22 19,0%	42 36,2%	28 24,1%	28 24,1%	37 29,3%	6 5,2%	12 10,3%	8 6,9%
No apprehension/for concern	2 12,5%	0 0,0%	6 37,5%	8 50,0%	6 37,5%	2 12,5%	6 37,5%	0 0,0%	2 12,5%	0 0,0%
All	108 45,0%	16 6,7%	54 22,5%	62 25,8%	60 25,0%	52 21,7%	66 27,5%	32 13,3%	18 7,5%	12 5,0%
χ^2 -test	$\chi^2=16,531$, g=6, P=0,011 → P < 0,05				$\chi^2=14,717$, g=10, P=0,143 → P > 0,05					

According to the results of the χ^2 -Test, we reject the zero hypothesis ($P < 0,05$), because there are statistically significant differences between teachers in estimating the range of violence. The biggest part of primary schools teachers, estimate that the violence is either wide spread or that violence is occurring periodically. On the contrary,

the biggest part of Gymnasium teachers estimate that the violence situation is not concerning.

This ascertainment can perhaps be explained, that the primary schools teachers are more susceptible and sensitive towards any problems with violence issues, because they feel a bigger responsibility towards students which are not as independent and mature as Gymnasium or secondary students. We were predicting that the part of teachers estimating the violence in schools as wide spread would be bigger in secondary trade schools and smaller in primary schools. On the other hand, our predictions on teachers' estimations in technical secondary and vocational schools and gymnasium were confirmed.

At ascertaining the differences according the teaching subject we can keep the zero hypothesis ($P > 0,05$), because no statistically significant differences between teachers' estimations, respectively of the teaching subject, are observed.

Table 3: Absolute frequencies (f) and percentage frequencies (f%) for teachers experiencing students' violent behavior.

<i>Students' violence upon teachers</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f %</i>
yes	92	38,3
no	148	61,7
<i>Together</i>	240	100,0

The majority of teachers didn't experience any violent behavior from the side of students, which confirms our assumption. But, it is a concerning fact that more than one third of the teachers have already experienced students' violent behavior, which warns that it is still present in examined Slovenian schools. Similar results were being confirmed by other investigations done on that topic as well (Hoffman 1996, Balkovec Debevec 2003, Chalvin 2004).

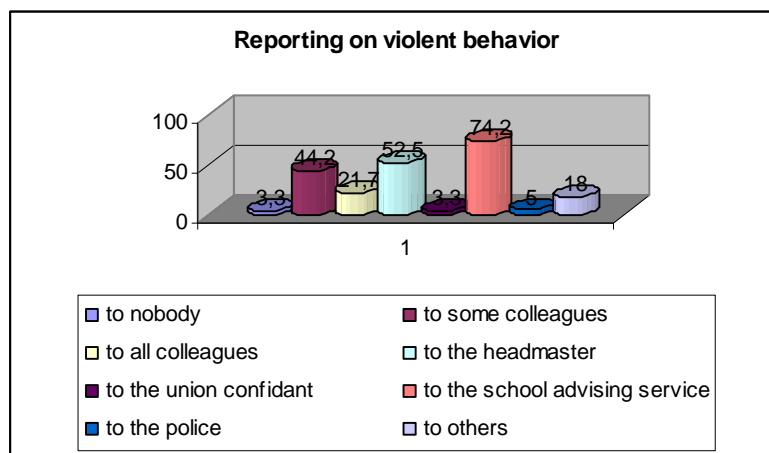
Table 4: Teachers experiencing violent the students' behavior regarding the school type and teaching subject.

	type of school				teaching subject					
	Prim.	Voc.	Tech.- prof.	gym	N.mat	Soc.S	Lang.	all	Prof.	sports
yes	50 54,3%	18 13,0%	20 21,7%	10 10,9%	24 26,1%	24 26,1%	30 32,6%	6 6,5%	4 4,3%	4 4,3%
no	58 39,2%	4 2,7%	34 23,0%	52 35,1%	36 24,3%	28 18,9%	36 24,3%	26 17,6 %	14 9,5%	8 5,4%
<i>Sum</i>	108 45,0%	16 6,7%	54 22,5%	62 25,8%	60 25,0%	52 21,7%	66 27,5%	34 13,3 %	18 7,5%	12 5,0%
χ^2 - test	$\chi^2=13,215$, g=3, P=0,004 → P < 0,05				$\chi^2=5,401$, g=5, P=0,369 → P > 0,05					

According to χ^2 -Test, we reject the zero hypotheses ($P < 0,05$), because we recognize statistically significant differences between teachers in experiencing students' violence behavior regarding to the type of school. The highest rate of violence was experienced

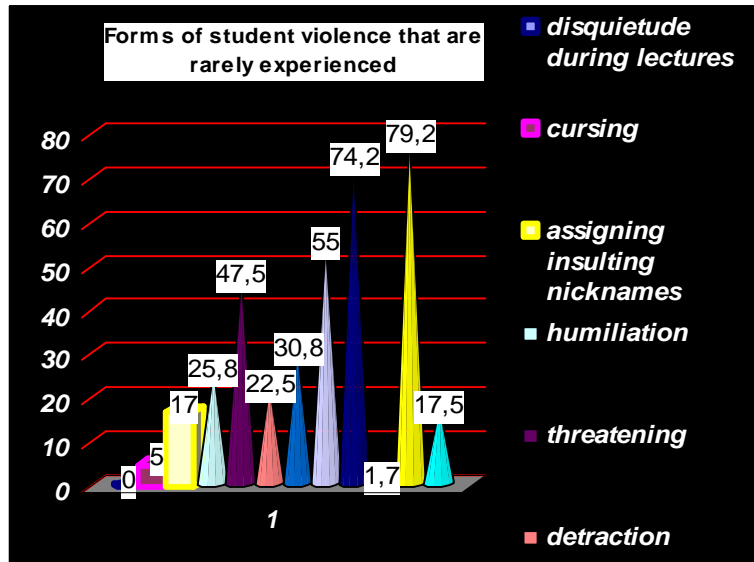
among primary school teachers, followed by secondary technical and vocational school teachers, and much less by gymnasium teachers. At ascertaining the differences regarding the teaching subject we can keep the zero hypothesis ($P > 0,05$), because there are no statistically significant differences between teachers' experiencing violent behavior, regarding the teaching subject. It is noticeable, that language teachers are being more exposed to violent behavior than teachers of naturalistic-mathematical subjects, which we were assuming as well.

Graph 2: To whom do teachers usually report on students' violent behavior.

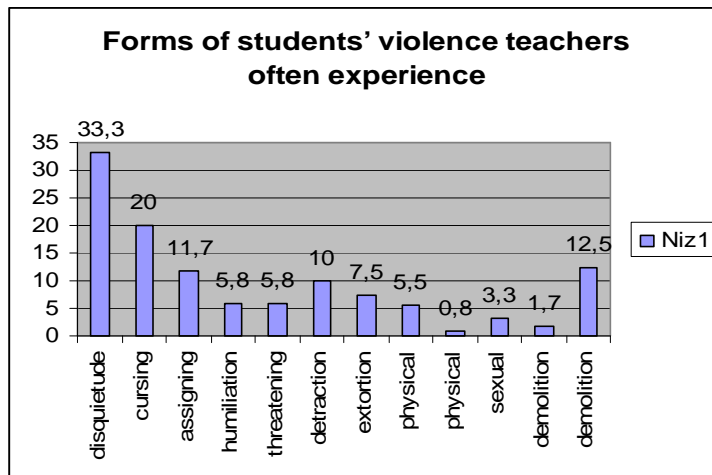


The majority of teachers' report students' violent behavior to the school's advising service, which is in accordance with the findings of other similar investigations. Furthermore, they are followed by teachers who report students' violent behavior to the headmaster, and only to some colleagues. Similar researches show that only one third of participants inform the headteacher about violent behavior, which is introducing a separate problem, worth further investigations. The smallest part of participants report on violent behavior to their union confidant and to the police. The answer "others" contained answers such as form master, parents. A small percentage of 3,3 % does not report on violent behavior. They think it would not help in anyway and that reporting about it would mean the fall of their authority. It is necessary to break silence on a topic such as violence because only with a open dialog and concrete examples we clearly give notice that violence is not acceptable. However, the majority of teachers do communicate students' violence, whereas there are no significant differences between teachers regarding the type of the school they work at and the teaching subject and these were also my assumptions.

Graph 3: Forms of student violence teachers never or very rarely experience



Graph 4: Forms of students' violence teachers often experience



According to graphs 3 and 4, we can see that the most common experienced forms of student violent behavior are disquietude during lectures, cursing, demolition of school property, assigning insulting nickname and detraction. A lot less experienced are violent behaviors such as physical attacks with or without injuries, sexual harassment and demolition of personal property, which is in accordance with my assumptions and the results of previous investigations. In most of the cases it was proved that the teachers are

noticing different forms of student violence more at their colleagues than reporting on their own experiences.

In continuation we are representing the results of the χ^2 -test for the violence form "assigning insulting nickname". Similar results occur for the majority of other violence forms.

Table 5: Experiencing "assigning insulting nicknames" regarding school type and teaching subject.

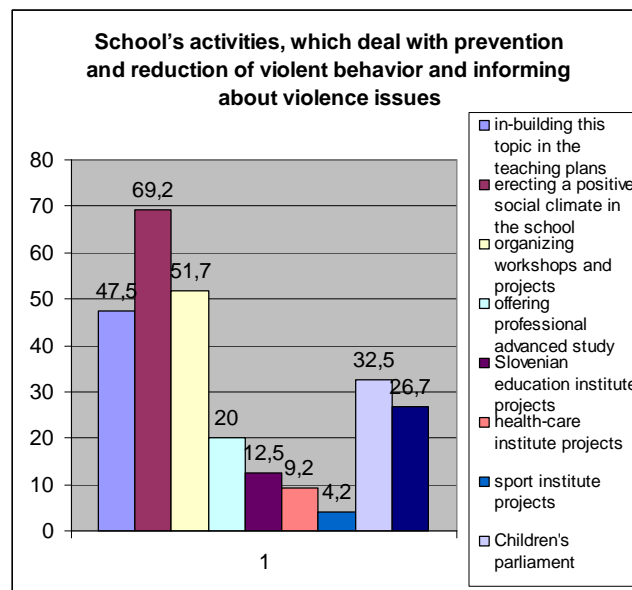
	type of school				teaching subject					
	Prim.	SVT	TSV	GYM	N.math	SocS.	Lang.	All	Prof.	Sports
yes	25 54,3 %	6 13,0 %	10 21,7 %	5 10,9 %	12 26,1%	12 26,1 %	15 32,6 %	3 6,5%	2 4,3%	2 4,3%
no	29 39,2 %	2 2,7%	17 23,0 %	26 35,1 %	18 24,3%	14 18,9 %	18 24,3 %	13 17,6 %	7 9,5%	4 5,4%
together	54 45,0 %	8 6,7%	27 22,5 %	31 25,8 %	30 25,0%	26 21,7 %	33 27,5 %	16 13,3 %	9 7,5%	6 5,0%
χ^2 -test	$\chi^2=13,215$, g=3, P=0,004 → P < 0,05				$\chi^2=5,401$, g=5, P=0,369 → P > 0,05					

"Assigning insulting nicknames" is more often experienced by primary teachers, teachers in secondary trade and vocational schools, teaching languages, social subjects and all primary school subjects. The different forms of violence, experienced in such a high rate among primary school teachers teaching primary school subjects, were not expected, but could be explained with the age and students' personal characteristics. Some of them attend certain schools with a more commitment, effort, learning abilities and self-discipline than others.

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to assess the relationship between violence, teachers' experiences and students' behavior. The results indicated that both constructs had statistically significant predictive power. In order to prevent and reduce violence and to inform about violence issues, teachers most frequently work on building up positive social climate, open and qualitative communication, different workshops and projects, parents and school employees. In a smaller percentage these activities are followed by Children's parliament activities (primary school only), incorporations with different associations and professional advanced studies. The smallest percentage carry the Slovenian education institute- health-care institute- and sport institute projects. Under "Others", the participants wrote activities such as youth organization, CAP (Project for preventing child abuse), incorporation with the state police department in forms of lectures and video sessions about violence and drogues among youth, student organization and the project "Collect your courage and speak", which is a cooperation project with the police department.

Graph 5: School's activities, which deal with prevention and reduction of violent behavior and informing about violence issues



According to the activities, that take place in schools and deal with prevention and reduction of violent behavior and informing about violence issues, we are representing the results of the χ^2 -test for erecting a positive social climate in the school. Similar results occur for the majority of other activities.

Table 6: Building up a positive social climate

	Type of School			
	Prim.school	Sec.Voc-TradeSch.	Sec.tech.-Prof.Sch.	Gym
yes	72 43,4%	8 4,8%	32 19,3%	54 32,5%
no	36 48,6%	8 10,8%	22 29,7%	8 10,8%
Sum	108 45,0%	16 6,7%	54 22,5%	62 25,4%
χ^2 -test	$\chi^2=8,088$, g=3, P=0,044 → P < 0,05			

The mentioned activity is more common to be applied in primary schools and gymnasiums and less in technical secondary and secondary trade schools. The same occurred for other activities as well. We can connect this ascertainment with the higher rate of violence appearing on schools with lower rate of prevention activities. My assumption was that there will be no major differences between schools.

We would also like to mention some other ascertainment. The majority of the participants estimate that they have only partially enough expertise for handling violent behavior of students, and the same for abilities concerning professional advanced studies. It occurred that mostly this lack is experienced by secondary school teachers, teaching languages. The stated reasons for lack of abilities concerning professional advanced studies are mainly financial nature from the side of government and school, to offer suitable seminars, lectures, workshops; ignorance from the side of other teachers, even parents and the whole society who are not aware enough of the seriousness of the violence issue. Cooperation with local bodies, such as Center for social work, police, nongovernmental organizations, works only when it is needed, when a school cannot deal with the problems anymore.

Conclusions

Violence, in different-kind of forms, is present in most Slovenian schools. The only difference between schools is that some schools recognize and deal with the problem, whereat others ignore it. From our point of view, it is crucial to speak up about the violence issues, because only with open dialog and concrete cases we can clearly communicate that violence is unexpected and untranslatable.

In contemporarily society it is often claimed that violence is present mainly in secondary trade schools. Our research did not notice a higher range of violence in these schools, but this can also be related to the lower number of the specific participants in the sample. We all need somebody, who is prepared to listen to us and provides help when we need it. Especially children and youngsters that are facing violence in any form need such support. Therefore we would like to quote a thought those children

“...who are disturbing, violent and aggressive to teachers, are to often pushed away and isolated, are most likely the victims of others, have to receive a lot of affection and love, even if it might seem that they do not deserve it. Do not remove them from our hearts”.

To insure the safety of teachers it is essential to move from reaction to prevention. This can only happen with a public education campaign, supported by Ministry of Education, justice system and legislation. Local campaigns can demonstrate the vale of public education, but net to be taken up across the whole country. How society deals with violence against teachers and teachers as victims is also of crucial importance. Issues of treatment need to be properly addressed and adequately resourced to ensure the safety of all involved in the school everyday's life. Protecting teachers is the responsibility of all involved and, as such, also of the community in which the school lives. It is not until the whole community becomes involved in the protection of violence in the school that a clear and unified message is transmitted:

“Our society will no longer tolerate the violence in the field of education: in no case, in no time and space, in no environment and regardless who the agent of such behaviour is.”

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