Addressing Violence in School Through EDC/HRE

FOCUS GROUPS CONTENT ANALYSIS

1. INTRODUCTION

Two focus groups were organised in Montenegro for research purposes, both heldin urban areas.

The first groupconducted the interviewin Bar on 14.12.2015in the grammar school "Niko Rolović".

The group consisted of **11 participants**:

1A. high school principal

1B. special associate (pedagogue) from primary school

1C. subject teacher

1D. parent representative (a member of Council of parents from a primary school)

1E. psychologist from the Centre for Social Work

1F. high school teacher

1G. primary school principal,

1H. representative of the MUP - Regional Unit Bar (crime department head)

1I. representative of the MUP - Regional Unit Bar (an outreach officer in charge of security in high schools)

1 J. classroom teacher

1K. subject teacher

- The mediator was Ms SlavicaVujović, and the keeper of the minutes Ms Bojka Đukanović

The second group conducted the interview in Podgorica on 22.12.2015 in the Bureau for Education Services. The group consisted of **9 participants**:

2A. primary school subject teacher

2B. primary school classroom teacher

2C. professional associate(a high school pedagogue)

2D. high school principal

2E. professional associate (a high school psychologist,)

2F professional associate (a pedagogue from primary school)

2G. representative of the Bureau of Education Services

2H. representative of the Roma association – a social worker

2I. representative of the NGO "Juventas".

- The mediator wasMs Jelena Mašnić, and the keeper of the minutes Ms Vidosava Kašćelan.

In agreement with the participants, both interviews were audio recorded and besides this the keepers of the minutes took detailednotes. The participants were interested in the subject;they actively listened to interlocutors and were constructive during the discussion, so that both of the interviews were conducted in a friendly atmosphere.

2. CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS

2.1. Perceptions of violence in school

The participants in both focus groups agreed that there is **a lot of violence** in our schools, that it is almost a daily occurrence, and that this is a problem which should be a concern of the society as a whole. There are **different forms of violence** – this is more verbal (taunts, insults, rejection, threats ...) than physical violence. "*In the first grade of primary school the psychological and the verbal violence is already visible, often it is unconscious behaviourlearnt at home*" (2B. a primary school classroom teacher).

A common form of violence is when an individual is exposed to the violence from the group.

The focus group from Bar was in agreement that physical violence is declining, but that some new, less visible forms of violence are on the rise. Particularly alarming is an increase in violence through social networks, which are difficult to expose and difficult to prevent. There is more and more violence amongst girls, who form groups according to different "status symbols".
Both focus groups highlighted the problem of cooperation with the family when it comes to the perception of violence as well as when it comes to addressing specific problems related to violence. Parents are often overprotective towards children and justify certain behaviours by saying that it is "a joke".

"Children recognize the obvious violence ... and we receive most of the information on these forms of violence .... The topic of violence is very current, these are the everyday problems...
... of more recent date is violence amongst girls (within the group), but it is less visible; only when the problem escalates do things unravel and one can see how long the problem has persisted.
An aggressive and violent style of communication has become a trend in the behaviour amongst young people ... when they are asked to explain their behaviour, they say "I was kidding", which is not actually true.Discourse is full of inappropriate and insulting words ... Girls are grouped by external status symbols (clothing, appearance, money)- they set the standard for other girls in the class or grade - pressuring and rejecting the others - these children rarely complain". (1B. a pedagogue from primary school)

"Violence is recognised daily and is present. Verbal violence is present to a greater extent. From conversations with students, I realized that they do not recognize what violence is, some forms of violenceare accepted as an everyday model of behaviour, for example "I'll get even."The hidden violence is more dangerous than the open one, violence is on the rise. Many were reluctant to participate in this, I do not believe that teachers can solve these problems,their hands are tied." (2A. primary school subject teacher)

During the discussion the participants did not use any specific words in their native language to refer to violence. The focus group participants in Bar were more focused on bullying and they mentioned violence of children towards teachers: "*Nowadays, children "harass teachers severely*" (1D. parent representative), while the participants of the focus group in Podgorica, besides bullying, gave plenty of examples of violence by teachers towards children.

In both focus groups, participants mentioned various examples of violence they were familiar with. **Examples are different**: from a boy who imitates cartoon heroes, picks up tree branches and rushes after the other children, to sexual harassment of an ailing boy by a peer group:

- *A son of one of the focus group participants was attacked by a boy who was well known not only in school, but also in the police and the Centre for social work forvarious violations and violent behaviour. Allegedly, the boy's sister said something that angered him and as a sort of revenge he attacked her brother. According to the father, the boy who attacked his son wanted to push him under the car. The persons present prevented him from doing it. The boy bully is well-known in the city for his violent behaviour, but his parents refuse to deal with the problem and have always denied his guilt.* (1D. parent representative)
- *Another example is a boy who first began to suffer violence from a group of students through social networks. Other students opened a fake account on Facebook under his name and in such a way ridiculed and belittled him. The problem was revealed when the boy was no longer able to withstand the ridicule and when he complained to his mother about it. She informed the headmaster. The school reacted and convened a parents' meeting, at which the parents were informed of what was going on. It turned out that all of the students from the class had a Facebook account, although they were only 12 years old. After that, the situation calmed down, but the problem escalated at the end-of-primary school-excursion when a group of students attacked the boy while he slept, simulated sex with him and recorded it by usingmobile phones. The boy later told that the recording and laughing at him was more difficult than the fact that he was attacked. The group of thugs were joined by the children who never showed signs of inappropriate behaviour ("all the good students, from good families"). A daughter of one of the focus group participants was on that school trim and told her mother that the children are often under pressure to be actors in a group, " the principle applied is - if you're not with us, you are the next victim."* (1K. subject teacher)
- *A girl told her father, who then reported the incident to the police that a group of students forced her friend to steal stuff and that they also hit him. The group stated at the hearing that it was all a joke.* (1F. high school teacher)
- *An example of a fight in high school, in which a number of students took part. The occasion was an insult. The case was successfully resolved because the parents were unbiased and they accepted cooperation.* (1A. high school principal)

- *A physical confrontation of school girls on a school day-trip. The problem escalated, and its background was a long-lasting emotional pressure. (*1A. high school principal)
- *A girl (primary school) suffered the pressure over Facebook, which eventually lead to a fight. It turned out that she had suffered because she was "more beautiful" than the others. (*1C. subject teacher)
- *A girl (secondary school) did not play truant with the others, because of which they insulted her over Facebook (*1A. high school principal)
- *A girl was recorded by another girl while she responded to teacher's questions for her mark. A friend sent the clip to others through a social network. (*2E. high school psychologist)
- *An instance of a daughter who returned home crying because the teacher did not accept the report signed by her father because his signaturewas artistic. She did not accept such signatures. The child felt offended, she felt that her father would behurt by it. (*2D. high school principal)
- *An example of a teacher who tells her female student: "when you lose weight you will get a D." (*2I. representative of the NGO)
- *Personal memories of the school days: "Not a day would pass without me being called: "you fatty". Violence has always existed amongst children."(* 2G. representative of the Bureau of Education Services)
- *A parent: A small child came home from school and said he/she experienced the following "If I see you next to Natalia, I'll break you." (*2G. representative of the Bureau of Education Services)
- *Teacher: "Be good and quiet and if you are lazy, you will be cleaning streets like a gypsy." A Roma schoolgirl started crying. (*2G. representative of the Bureau of Education Services)

The violence inflicted through **social media**is a common form of violence in the examples, but also a cause of other open forms of violence. In all cases the importance of the family for the success or the failure to address the problem was pointed out. Many issues "smoulder" for a long time and no one in the school notices them or reacts until it takes on a wider scale which indicates ignorance or a lack of recognition of violent behaviours in an "early stage". The differences in the perception of violence, recognition of skills and proper response by those who could have prevented it stand out in all of the examples above as something that has failed and led to the escalation of the problem.

We learn about violence from children (victims) or their companions or parents, usually when the problem escalates. **Child victims rarely seek help**–*"in our culture if we say that we are hurt by something, we lose the attribute of a "strong person", we become weak."*(2I. representative of the NGO),

An example of a school that participated in the project School without violence is quoted, in which cases of violence are revealed through the "box of confidence."

School violence usually happens in the hall, school yard, bathroom, on the way from home to school ... In addition, violence often happens on school trips and excursions, where it is more noticeable than in the classroom. In secondary schools with more stringent corrective

measures for acts of violence, violence is lesser in the school buildings, but it moves to pupil's dorms, it happens on the way to school ... *"It happens that the high school students get together after midnight in night clubs and under the influence of alcohol…"* (1I. representative of the MUP - Regional Unit Bar (outreach officer in charge of security in high schools)

2.2. Major variables of school violence

In the focus group interview in Podgorica the view was presented that in schools, as well as in society in general, there is a lot of homophobia, xenophobia, nationalism and intolerance in general: "*We did research in 2014 in secondary schools with the aim of studying perception of high school students on a variety of topics. It can be said that secondary schools do not foster an atmosphere of tolerance; there is a lot of homophobia, intolerance, in the same way as is the case in the society. " (*2I. representative of the NGO)

However, the Bar focus group participants completely agree that phobias are not the dominant cause of violence in our schools. They agree that the earlier nationalism was a common cause of violence, but "*today no phobia is a problem.*" (1D. parent representative).

In schools with diverse ethnic structure there are no examples of violence stemming from it. *"It happens sometimes (e.g. the children teased a girl whose mother was Albanian, sometimes Roma children), but it is not the dominant cause of the violence."* More often it is diversity of any other kind (appearance, clothing, preference to some sort of music, thinking, uncommon name or nickname). *"Such little things decide whether someone will be the subject of ridicule (phone, glasses..)."(*1B. pedagogue from primary school)

Participants in both focus groups believe that a**disturbed system of values in the society**, a**negative impact of the media, reality programs, a weakened educational role of the school as well as incompetent teaching staff** (teachers are not always a good role model) are some of the factors that greatly contribute to the violence in schools:

- *30 years ago this kind of violence did not exist, today's race for wealth has destroyed the family, the negative examples come exactly from families who do not take care about their children (*1D. parent representative)
- *Reality programs, starlets and criminals produce inappropriate vocabulary that children embrace; today the role models are negative - kids watch everything and accept models without criteria; Many parents watch reality programs with their children; e.g. a boy brought from his home a copy of Story to school (with inappropriate pictures) (*1D. parent representative)
- *The problems are generated by the Internet - in order to have more time to relax, parents leave their children to all sorts of content (*1K. subject teacher)
- *Girls come home crying because they were told that they were not fashionable (social status, etc.) (*2I. representative of the NGO)
- *The whole social environment is such that it does not allow the best ones to excel (*1D. parent representative)

- *Insufficient work with the family and insufficient educational work with children (*1D. parent representative)
- *Parents do not know how to solve a problem even when they notice it; Many parents are too demanding and make too much pressure on their children (*1H. representative of the MUP - Regional Unit Bar (crime department head)
- *The law is too loose – "too broad for some persons" when it comes to juvenile delinquency; when they get to high school kids declare: "in elementary school we can do anything, the teachers cannot do anything to stop us" (*1F. high school teacher)
- *Comment: "The mother of a girl who was filming a scene of violence by using a mobile phone said: "well, why don't you simply delete the recording, what is the problem" – "what for me is violence for the girl's mother is obviously not" (*1 J. classroom teacher)
- *Parents often negate the inappropriate behaviour of their children (*2C. a high school pedagogue)
- *School and parents shift the blame onto each other when it comes to educating children(*1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *We have people who have authority in school and those who do not. (*2D. high school principal)

The victims are mostly quiet and withdrawn children, of the poor material status and children who are in some way different (clothing, music they listen to or other minor things ...). "*The victims are afraid to seek our help because they think that it would make them even more exposed to violence."(*2A. primary school subject teacher)

Bullies are usually from families where nobody cares about children, persons who want to stand outat all costs, but when it comes to the "group" violence, the thugs are often joined by children who are not individually prone to violent behaviour, but they accept the group behaviour (in order not to be different or become victimsthemselves). Bullies are also vulnerable, insecure, poorly directed persons - someone who has a problem, a real problem. "*It is not always easy to define the profile of a violent person; these may be seemingly brought up children. For example, it often happens that girls form groups according to some external status symbols (appearance, clothing, money ...) and they exert pressure and reject others who do "not fit" their standards".(*1B. a pedagogue from primary school)

2.3. Means for Combatting violence / Recommendations

Participants of the focus groups understood the responsibility <u>of the school as an institution that generates violence in the following way:</u>

- *The school as an institution generates violence and violence in schools exists in almost all countries. Schools are a mirror of society and social problems, especially if we bear in mind the context :economic crisis, wars ... (*1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *No violence stems from the staff of the school (*1D. parent representative)

- *Violence happens in school because children interact closely*(1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *We do not have parents as partners in the conversation (*1C. subject teacher)
- *The school brings together a large number of people in one place (from different contexts, with different needs and values)*(1B. a pedagogue from primary school)

- *School lacks long-termobjectives; all projects which were conducted in the past were short-lived and did not cover all schools. The problem cannot be solved overnight - we lack perseverance. City Schools are overcrowded* (1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *The educational role of the school is not given enough attention, the emphasis is on the realization of the curricula. Even when they noticea problem, teachers do not have time to deal with it - and the assessment of teachers' work is mainly down to the implementation of the prescribed material*(1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *Not all teachers are skilful enough for their job, if they know how to recognize the victim… the thugs ... do they know how to react properly?(* 1A. high school principal)
- *Teacher education programs are focused on the acquisition of expert knowledge, they provide little practical knowledge and skills to solve problems. If a teacher as a person possesses essential characteristics (tolerance, flexibility), then he/she is doing fine, but in college they do not acquire the necessary skills*(1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *Everyone knows who conscientious and responsible teachers are, but they do not getany other recognitionof their work (*1F. high school teacher)

Recommendations:

Recommendations for combating violence in schools can be classified into several categories: those relating to strengthening **the competences of teachers** to cope with the problem of violence, those relating to the creation of **a positive school climate** and strengthening the educational role of schools, recommendations relating to the importance of joint action **of all stakeholders in society** as well as the recommendations relating to **the restrictive measures** (Regulations on Punishment in Primary Schools and Juvenile Delinquency)

- *We shape the minds, everyone who works in school does that. Therefore, every teacher should pass the appropriate tests; Strict criteria should be defined on who can be a teacher (*2H. representative of the Roma association – a social worker)

- *Teamwork is necessary in school and continuing education of teachers on the subject of violence (how to recognize it, how to act preventively and how to deal with the problem when violence occurs) (*2F. a pedagogue from primary school)

- *Violentbehaviour in school is within the scope of professional services and they do not have enough time to deal with this issue. Penalties do not give the expected results. The priority of professional services is to deal with violence;their other liabilities should be kept aside. (*2I. representative of the NGO)
- *Teachers can do so much. They should make use of parent-teacher meetings, student association meetings, homeroom classes. It is important to prepare for parent-teacher meetings- parents do not like if the details of their child are brought up before others. (*2G. representative of the Bureau of Education Services)

- *Teachers should be trained for this in their initial education. People in education have great prejudice of LGBT, we should ourselves come to terms with it.*(2I. representative of the NGO)
- *One needs to address the roots of the violence :negative role models, teachers' reputation, weakened role of the family. (*1D. parent representative)

- *The solution is a systematic work, coordinated action of the whole society, there is no connectivity. ((*1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *We need to strengthen the school (improve the material position of teachers).(* 1D. parent representative)
- *Preventive action is important in school- talks about one's and others' experiences ... establishing clear rules of conduct. Children are very honest when you talk to them and it's important to be open. (*1C. subject teacher)
- *One needs to work on prevention, recognize the problem at an early stage (*1H. representative of the MUP - Regional Unit Bar (crime department head)
- *Schools need support of the system and theinstitutions outside the school need to deal with the family. Better collaboration with parents(*1H. representative of the MUP - Regional Unit Bar (crime department head)
- *Positive examples should be brought to attention–this should help children to follow someone who is a good role model (*1D. parent representative)
- *Children should be taught how to deal with violence (*1A. high school principal)
- *Video surveillance should be set up in every school. Social networks should be controlled . (*1D. parent representative)
- *Achievements in extracurricular activities should be valorised(*1D. parent representative)
- *Both the teachers and the students should be relieved of the overloaded curricula. Reduce the number of students in the classroom (*1F. high school teacher)
- *The family should have a greater control over children*1I. representative of the MUP - Regional Unit Bar (outreach officer in charge of security in high schools)
- *Children who behave inappropriately should be excluded from school – so that they would not adversely affect the other children. (*1F. high school teacher).
- *Teachers should devote at least 5 minutes a day talking with children (*1D. parent representative)
- *Introduce school uniforms(*1K. subject teacher)
- *Stricter school rules, community service, punishment of exclusion from a part of the classes or excursions(*1F. high school teacher)
- *More rewards for good students, provide talents with more space to do what they like in order to excel. (*1C. subject teacher)
- *Reduce the number of hours of regular classes, introduce more hours of homeroom classes, physical education and extracurricular activities. (*1B. a pedagogue from primary school)
- *Restore the dignity of teachers and school. (*1A. high school principal)
- *Strengthen the personality of students, developing life skills (*1C. subject teacher)
- *Increase the number of school projects as much as possible (*1 J. classroom teacher)

3. CONCLUDING POINTS

- **Violence is present in school in different forms**: more verbal and psychological than physical violence. Some new, less visible forms of violence are on the rise: in particular, the increase of violence through social networks is worrying as they are difficult to expose and prevent. More and more violence appears amongst girls who form groups according to different "status symbols". Schoolviolence usually happens in halls, school yards, bathroom, on the way from home to school ... **The victims** are usually quiet and withdrawn children, of a poorer material status and children who are somehow different (clothing, music they listen to, any minor thing ...). **Bullies** are usually from families where nobody takes care of children, persons who want to stand outat all costsor vulnerable and insecure persons. But, when it comes to "group" violence, the groups of thugs are often joined by children who are not individually prone to violent behaviour, but they accept the behaviour of the group (so they would not stand out or not become victims themselves). Violence is learned from students, parents ... but the victim often suffers violence, and does not report it until the problem escalates.

- Various phobias are a factor that leads to violence, but they are not the dominant cause of violence in our schools. **Social inequality and individual differences of any sort are the most common trigger for violence**. A disturbed system of values in the society, negative role models, weakened role of the family, the poor status of teachers are the problems of the wider environment that generate violence in general, even in school. The Internet, social networks and other media, used without controls and criteria have contributed to a creation ofsome new forms of violence, much harder to detect and prevent.
- The educational role of the school is ignored;realization of the curriculum is the primary objective. By the very fact that inschoolsthere are a lot of people who come from different contexts and with different needs, conflicts are inevitable, for the successful resolution of which it is necessary to have teachers with advanced skills to cope with problems, and they are often not so. Teachers often do not have enough time to deal with educational problems due to the overwhelming curricula. At teacher training programs they are not trained to solve problems (they mainly acquire expert knowledge in the subject area). Classes are overcrowded – it is easier to create a stimulating climate in a classrooms with fewer students. Schools are missing long-term objectives and planned activities designed to deal with the prevention of violence.
- In order to prevent violence, it is necessary, above all, **to prevent its causes**, the causes transferred from the society onto the school (disturbed system of values, negative role models, weakened role of the family...). **A systematic cooperation of all stakeholders is necessary.** When teachers are concerned, a careful selection of candidates should be made at the teacher-training programs and a great attention should be paid to the quality of the initial education of teachers - teachers in colleges do not acquire enough knowledge and skills to deal with the problem of violence. Therefore, they need continuous support and training. Various school projects can contribute to creating a positive school climate as one of the important factors for reducing school violence, as well as more extracurricular activities, more time devoted to educational influence on students - more homeroom classes, interviews with children, introduction of clear rules, introduction of school uniforms so thatsocial differences would be less visible.