



International Network for School Social Work

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Interpretations of school violence among Estonian teenagers, by Judit Strömpl, Marju Selg, Kadri Soo, Beata Shakhverdov-Zharkovski, University of Tartu, Estonia

Summary

Violence among children and violence against children has recently been a subject of lively discussion in Estonian society. A number of studies have been conducted in search of a scientific explanation for the phenomenon. However, until now none of the research was based on understanding the children's own system of meanings. This is the gap this study is trying to fill.

The first stage of the study used focus groups with 13 through 16 year olds to determine questions about violence to add to a standard questionnaire. The questionnaire with the additional questions about perceptions of violence was administered to 1,815 teens from various parts of Estonia.

The children's responses focussed mainly on violence in schools, while violence experienced at home, on the streets or in other public places or via the media was mentioned only in passing. The children defined violence as both physical and mental violence. A greater number of children experienced mental violence, including being ignored. Older teens experienced less physical violence and more mental violence. Unfortunately, some of the teachers also use mental violence, in the children's opinion.

Boys and girls use violence differently. Boys tend to assert themselves through physical force and girls tend to assert themselves through mental violence. The children mentioned the abusers and the victims but not the bystanders: what did not personally concern a child was not seen by that child as any of his or her business.

The most important finding was the children's confirmation of the great prevalence of mental violence in Estonian schools and of the fact that teachers do not adequately respond to occurrences of mental violence. The hypothesis that there are cases of fellow students being ignored in today's Estonian schools, which the children regard as severe mental violence and which is not dealt with in Estonian schools, was confirmed.

In our opinion, the solution to this is to apply student-centred teaching methods. The friendlier and more understanding the relationships are between the teachers and the students, the fewer the occurrences of violence among students. It is also clear that the better the children feel at school, the easier it is for the teachers to do their work.

Currently there are obvious contradictions between the rhetoric of overall availability of education and the actual practice. It is claimed that the educational system in Estonia ensures a possibility for development for every child, but in practice ‘unsuitable’ children are being excluded from the general educational system. School social work and social pedagogy, new professions that are still being developed in Estonia, can help the educational system to live up to the rhetoric by developing approaches to include all children and apply student-centred teaching.

Free Curriculum on Preventing Depression and Suicide in Grades 7 to 12

How can schools use their existing resources to prevent depression and suicide? That is the key question answered by McLean Hospital and Children's Hospital Boston clinicians who created “An Adolescent Mental Health & Wellness Curriculum: A Starter Kit for Schools”. The PDF file is a full copy of the manual containing three curriculum topics - stress management, substance use and abuse, and preventing depression. The manual is a guide to implementing depression prevention for students in grades 7 to 12, with existing school resources.

http://sharedwork.org/documents/D10_Adoles_Curriculum_2nd_Edition_2006_a.pdf

Vietnam: Ministry of Education and Training workshop on social work in schools

The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) held a national workshop on school social work in Vietnam on February 6, 2007 in Hanoi. Participants came from various agencies including the Committee for Population, Family and Children, MOET and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, as well as from high schools in the northern provinces. The purpose of workshop was to promote school social work in Vietnam especially in secondary and high schools.

At present, social work education and practice is strong in the southern provinces, especially in HoChiMinh City. However, the general public does not as yet understand social work. So at this time, over 20 schools in HoChiMinh have introduced *school counseling* to help pupils with many problems like dropout, stress, heavy program, suicide and depression.

The 10th Annual School Social Work Conference School Social Work: Our Future is Bright

Almost six hundred school social workers attended the School Social Work Association of America's conference in Orlando, Florida. Five Canadians, two Australians and one Swede joined with school social workers from many parts of the US who had their choice of about 70 topics, including group-work, peer helpers, bullying, identifying and helping suicidal students, attachment theory applied to middle schools, inclusion of autistic children, truancy prevention, integrating research into practice and many more. Social work students, faculty, school social work leaders and other special interest groups also met to share new ideas.

Randy Fisher, a school social worker for over thirty years and the SSWAA's first President and first Executive Director, was honored at the conference with establishment of a social work student scholarship fund in his name. Randy is still involved in school social work as a faculty member at Aurora University teaching school social work specialty courses.

Next year's SSWAA conference will be in Denver from April 3-5. In 2009, the conference will be held in Philadelphia from March 26-28.