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Violence in German schools. The current situation

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1 Introduction¹

1.1 The federalised structure of education in Germany

The Federal Republic of Germany is a democratic welfare state (see Article 20 of the German Constitution) with a federal structure. Article 7 of the Constitution places the entire education system under government supervision, while Articles 70-75 confer “cultural and educational sovereignty”² - and thus overall responsibility for education policy - on the individual Länder [States]. Since the incorporation of the former German Democratic Republic on 3 October 1990, Germany has consisted of 16 Länder, each with its own separate education policy. This federalised structure is reflected not only in different views (largely determined by party policy) concerning the organisation of schools and the content and goals of education, but also in correspondingly different approaches to the issue of violence in schools (see Schrewe in this volume).

1.2 Violence in schools as a social problem

In recent years there have been increasing reports in the German media about increasing brutality and violence among school pupils. Rather than discussing the issue in a nuanced manner, such reports have tended to focus on a graphic, sensational presentation of extreme problem cases. However, this media exposure has rapidly revealed shortcomings in educational and sociological approaches to the issue of violence in schools, and has prompted calls for up-to-date empirical studies. It has justly been remarked “that this is not an entirely new issue, but one that has been discussed at various times with varying degrees of intensity and varying emphasis” (Schubarth 1993: 41). Until a few years ago, however, there were no up-to-date scientific data on the current scale of the problem, and in particular there were no data to support the repeated claims in the media that violence in schools is on the increase. The last major empirical findings - by Bach et al. (1986), Klockhaus and Habermann-Morbey (1986) and Holtappels (1987) - did not lead to comparable follow-up studies which might have allowed scientifically substantiated conclusions to be drawn as to whether violence in schools is increasing or decreasing.

¹ Revised version of a paper originally presented at the European conference on “Safe(r) at school” in Utrecht, The Netherlands in February 1997.

² This means that the individual Länder are assigned primary legislative and administrative responsibility in the fields of education, culture, science and research (see Secretariat of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany 1997: 33).

Feltes (1990) and Hurrelmann (1990) returned to this issue in their special report to the Independent Government Commission on the Prevention and Control of Violence, or "Violence Commission" (see Schwind et al. 1990). The Commission came to the conclusion "that there is no evidence of a continuous increase in aggressive behaviour among pupils in German schools" (Schwind et al. 1990: 71). The renewed focus on the issue of violence in the school setting has led to the widespread initiation of new research projects on the subject (see Schubarth 1993: 32ff)

2 Description and analysis

To date there have been no quantitative studies representative of Germany as a whole on the issue of violence in schools. The topicality of this issue has admittedly led to a series of local and regional surveys on the subject among head teachers, teachers, pupils, parents, etc.³ However, partly because classroom research of this kind is necessarily subject to ministerial approval at Land level, such surveys have always been limited to the Länder concerned and can therefore only provide evidence about individual Länder, or in some cases only about certain local authorities. The result nationwide is an immense patchwork of findings which, despite their diversity, could nevertheless serve as a basis for a realistic assessment of the problem of violence in schools.

2.1 Definition

While the key concepts in the literature in languages other than German are "bullying" and "anti-social behaviour", the debate in Germany has centred on the concept of "violence".⁴ Only recently has there been a representative nationwide inquiry into "dissocial behaviour" among children and adolescents (Döpfner et al. 1996).

Innumerable diverse definitions of "aggression" and "violence" can be found in the literature. Schubarth (1993: 31) has noted a broadening, differentiation and pluralisation of the concept of violence in recent years. Current German studies of violence in schools tend to use the

³ For a list of these surveys, with an appraisal of the methodology, see Krumm (1999). The theoretical underpinning of the surveys is examined in Holtappels (1999).

⁴ In fact, in the current German version of Olweus the verb "to bully" is actually translated as "mobben" ("to victimise") and the noun "bully" as "Gewalttäter" ("perpetrator of violence") (see Olweus 1996: 11).

definition provided by Hurrelmann in his special report to the Violence Commission: "Violence in schools comprises the entire spectrum of activities and acts which result in physical and mental pain or injury to individuals operating in the school setting, or the aim of which is to damage objects on school premises" (Hurrelmann 1990: 365). This definition covers acts of physical violence and verbal/psychological - including threatening or sexist - forms of violence committed by or directed at pupils, teachers or other individuals, as well as violence directed at property (vandalism). This relatively abstract definition has been made more specific operationally in empirical studies, i.e. by inquiring about specific acts occurring in the school setting. Schwind et al. (1999: 84f) have made it clear that the concept of violence is not applied at all consistently, even by those operating in the school setting. Existing studies largely ignore aggressive acts by teachers towards pupils, as well as the "structural violence" of schools.

2.2 The spread of violence in the school setting

Aggressive and dissocial behaviour among German children and adolescents

According to Döpfner et al. (1996: 13), some 3% of girls and 6% of boys aged between 4 and 18 are considered by their parents to be "markedly aggressive".⁵ Approximately 1% of children aged between 4 and 10, as well as 1.5% of girls and some 3% of boys aged between 11 and 18, are considered by their parents to be "markedly dissocial".⁶ Although such percentages may at first sight appear low, they represent a total of approximately 600,000 children and adolescents nationwide. In self-assessments by adolescents aged between 11 and 18, using the same criteria, some 6% of girls and 7% of boys are considered to be "markedly aggressive" and some 3% of girls and 5% of boys to be "markedly dissocial" (see Döpfner et al. 1996: 14).

Acts of violence in schools

In the Nuremberg Pupil Survey 1994: Violence in Schools⁷ pupils were asked how often they themselves had committed 20 specific acts of aggression or violence during the previous half of the school year. Calling other pupils names or subjecting them to verbal abuse was quite

⁵ This refers to "serious forms of aggressive behaviour", such as destroying one's own or other people's property, frequently getting involved in fights, attacking or threatening others, and having fits of rage (see Döpfner et al. 1996: 13).

⁶ This refers to "serious forms of dissocial behaviour", such as running away from home, playing with fire, stealing at home or elsewhere, playing truant, or using alcohol or drugs (see Döpfner et al. 1996: 13).

⁷ For the theoretical introduction to this study and its methodology, see Funk (1995a).

clearly the commonest act of violence or transgression (boys 82.9%, girls 74.1%). This finding, which confirms the predicted high frequency of verbally aggressive behaviour patterns, has also emerged in other studies (see Schubarth 1997: 4; Fuchs et al. 1996: 94ff; Holtappels and Schubarth 1996: 17; Schwind et al. 1999: 87; Greszik et al. 1995: 270; Meier et al. 1995: 171). Fighting with another pupil (boys 48.4%, girls 15.8%), spreading lies about pupils (boys 40.9%, girls 23.0%), verbally abusing teachers, whether or not to their face (boys 35.6%, girls 32.4%), and damaging (boys 40.1%, girls 27.7%) or dirtying (boys 32.0%, girls 31.6%) school property were also common transgressions. The following transgressions, in contrast, were mentioned relatively rarely: sexually harassing other pupils (boys 6.2%, girls 1.6%), threatening them with weapons (boys 3.9%, girls 0.9%) and in particular sexually harassing teachers (boys 3.1%, girls 0.9%) or threatening them (boys 3.0%, girls 1.2%). Fuchs et al. (1996: 81ff, 96ff) present similar findings based on assessments by teachers and pupils.

Using factor analysis, the reported transgressions and acts of violence can be summarized under the following four headings (see Funk 1995b): (1) telling lies and name-calling; (2) fighting; (3) vandalism; and (4) threats involving weapons or sexual harassment. Over three-quarters of the girls in the Nuremberg study (77.3%) and nine out of ten of the boys (86.9%) admitted having lied to other pupils or called them names. More than half of the boys (53.1%), but only one girl in six (17.7%), admitted having been involved in fights. Over half of the boys (57.7%) and nearly half of the girls (45.4%) admitted to having committed acts of vandalism, and as many as one boy in ten (10.8%) - but fewer than one girl in twenty (3.6%) - reported having threatened others with weapons or having sexually harassed other pupils (see Funk 1995b: 52). Fuchs et al. (1996: 99) report that verbal aggression was admitted by 84.4%, acts of physical violence by 36.3%, and personal acts of vandalism by 29.4% of pupils in Bavaria.

In her survey of Bavarian schools, Von Spaun (1996: 31) reports that during the school year 1992-93 violent offences were committed in four-fifths (81.5%) of schools for children with learning difficulties, almost two-thirds of junior secondary schools [Hauptschulen] (63.2%) and primary/junior secondary schools [Grund- und Hauptschulen] (62.2%) and more than half of vocational schools [Berufsschulen] (56.9%), grammar schools [Gymnasien] (56.4%) and general secondary schools [Realschulen] (53.6%). Her survey also essentially confirms the difference in levels of violence between urban and rural areas (Von Spaun 1996: 35f; see also Meier et al. 1995: 179). Name-calling and causing physical injury were the most frequently reported acts of violence towards individuals in all types of schools in Bavaria, while damage to property and graffiti were the main acts of vandalism (Von Spaun 1996: 38ff). On

the other hand, head teachers in the Länder of Hesse and Saxony saw vandalism as the most frequent form of violence overall (see Meier et al. 1995: 174).

According to the various studies, violence towards teachers is fairly rare (see Schwind et al. 1999: 91; Fuchs et al. 1996: 112ff; Funk 1995b: 43; Greszik et al. 1995: 279; BaySUKWK 1994: 13). However, Von Spaun reports an extensive "lack of respect among pupils towards teachers" and points out that in "grammar schools, junior secondary schools, general secondary schools and primary/junior secondary schools ... some 40% of recorded name-calling [was directed] towards teachers, this figure rising to over 60% in vocational schools and schools for children with learning difficulties. (Von Spaun 1996: 41 and 54ff). In this connection, women teachers appeared to be more frequently exposed to verbal/psychological violence than their male counterparts (Schubart 1997: 8).

Perceptions of increasing violence in schools

Among researchers the increase in violence among children and adolescents in general, and violence in schools in particular, is disputed, but there is a broad consensus that violence in schools is not increasing overall (see e.g. Hurrelmann 1990: 367, 1991: 103; Schwind et al. 1990: 70ff; Greszik et al. 1995: 280). While the general view even here is that "minor" transgressions have increased, and in particular that verbal violence is now a part of everyday school life (see Schubarth 1997: 6; Schwind et al. 1999: 99), there is no scientific evidence that the same can be said of "serious" violence (see e.g. Dann 1999; Schwind et al. 1999: 99f; Fuchs 1996: 69). This suggests that the issue of violence in schools should not be overdramatised. The true situation seems to be that in a minority of schools, a small number of violent, unscrupulous pupils with a combination of different problems have drawn considerable attention to themselves through brutal forms of physical violence (for example, see Meier et al. 1995: 181).

In a current comparison of the years 1994 and 1999 Lamnek (1999: 9) comes to the result that there have been no decisive changes in the self-reported violence in schools by Bavarian pupils. Violence against persons and vandalism seem to remain on the same level, psychic violence seems to have even decreased. Only verbal violence slightly increased.

"Victim experiences" in schools

On the basis of statements by pupils, the Nuremberg Pupil Study distinguished between "victim experiences" of a verbal kind (being verbally abused, lied about, called names or insulted) and those of a non-verbal kind (being beaten up, bullied, threatened with weapons or sexually harassed). While girls (81.4%) claimed notably more often than boys (75.2%) that

they had suffered verbal abuse and also sexual harassment (girls 5.8%, boys 3.7%), in the case of all other offences it was boys who reported "victim experiences" more often than girls (Funk 1995b: 54).⁸ In Bavaria, 59.7% of pupils indicated that they had been verbally abused by a fellow pupil at least once during the current school year. 41.5% claimed they had been victims of "indecent remarks" by male fellow pupils (see Fuchs et al. 1996: 152ff).

Fuchs detects "a relatively high degree of overlap between perpetrators and victims" (1996: 62): in other words, perpetrators of violence often reported corresponding victim experiences of their own, and vice versa. This finding is backed up by the correlations between (a) lying about other pupils or calling them names and (b) being lied about or called names by other pupils ($r = .3902$), and between (a) beating up other pupils and (b) being beaten up oneself ($r = .3089$) in the Nuremberg Pupil Survey (Funk 1995b: 59; see also Fuchs et al. 1996: 160ff or Dettenborn and Lautsch 1993).⁹

Gender differences

In every subpopulation identified in the Nuremberg Pupil Survey (7th, 8th and 9th grade junior secondary, general secondary and grammar school pupils), and for each of the violence indices, the average values were higher for boys than for girls. In other words, boys reported more often than girls that they had told lies, called people names, got into fights, committed acts of vandalism, threatened others with weapons, or sexually harassed them (see Funk 1995b: 61). Greater, or more clearly perceived, levels of violence among boys were also reported by Schubarth (1997: 7), Fuchs et al. (1996: 104), Holtappels and Schubarth (1996: 17), Schwind et al. (1999: 93), Von Spaun (1996: 43ff), Meier et al. (1995: 180) and Greszik et al. (1995: 270).

Differences based on Grade or age

Döpfner et al. (1996: 28) refer to "the influence of developmental psychology" on the exhibiting of aggressive and dissocial behaviour by children and adolescents. In the literature the problem of violence in schools is thought to be particularly prevalent in the highest classes of primary school and lowest secondary school classes (for example, see Feltes 1990: 327). Fuchs et al. (1996: 102) detect a decrease in verbal violence in schools as pupils grow older,

⁸ Boys vs. girls: "Called names/verbally abused", 69.5% vs. 57.1%; "Lies spread about me", 58.7% vs. 51.6%; "Beaten up", 19.2% vs. 5.5%; "Blackmailed", 8.9% vs. 6.6%; "Beaten up by a gang", 7.0% vs. 1.6%; "Threatened (with a weapon)", 4.8% vs. 1.4% (see Funk 1995b: 54).

⁹ Since almost all empirical studies are designed as cross-sectional studies, i.e. the questions are only asked at a single moment in time, no conclusions can be drawn about the direction of causality - in other words, it is not possible to conclude that pupils only become violent after having had victim experiences of their own.

and in this connection they refer to a “transient problem”. On the other hand, there are no interpretable age differences in the case of other forms of violence (see also Funk 1995b: 63). Fuchs et al. (1996: 103) see 13 to 15-year-olds as being the most violent in junior secondary schools, and 13 to 18-year-olds in general secondary schools. There are no age-related differences in grammar schools or vocational schools. Holtappels and Schubarth (1996: 17) report the highest levels of violence as occurring in the 12-14 age group in Hesse, and in the 12-13 age group in Saxony.

Differences between types of schools

In Nuremberg, lying and name-calling were admitted more or less equally often by pupils of general secondary schools (82.5%), junior secondary schools (82.3%) and grammar schools (81.4%). Personal involvement in fights with other pupils was reported least often by grammar school pupils (22.8%) and most often by pupils of junior secondary schools (49.1%) (for general secondary schools the figure was 31.5%). On the other hand, personal acts of vandalism were admitted least often by general secondary school pupils (44.6%) and most often by pupils of grammar schools (59.5%) (the figure for junior secondary schools was 49.6%) (Funk 1995b: 63). Fuchs et al. (1996: 102) report (solely with reference to general types of schooling) that pupils of junior secondary schools displayed the highest levels of verbal, psychological (at the same level as general secondary school pupils) and physical forms of violence. Only acts of vandalism were admitted more often by general secondary school pupils in Fuchs' study. Holtappels and Schubarth (1996: 17), Von Spaun (1996: 31), Greszik et al. (1995: 273ff .) and Dettenborn and Lautsch (1993) likewise show violence to be a particular problem in junior secondary schools and - to the extent that these were investigated - special schools.¹⁰

Differences between the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the former German Democratic Republic (GDR)

As regards aggressive and dissocial behaviour, Döpfner et al. (1996: 21) detect no difference between children and adolescents in the former FRG and GDR. In a comparative survey of head teachers in the western Land of Hesse and the eastern Land of Saxony, Meier et al. conclude: “In general, violence and abnormal behaviour are (clearly) more in evidence in Hesse than in Saxony, in every dimension investigated and also when the various types of schools are compared” (1995: 172). In a corresponding survey of pupils, Holtappels and Schubarth (1996: 17) report largely similar frequencies and types of violence in the former FRG and GDR. However, they did detect a tendency towards somewhat lower levels of vio-

¹⁰ Because the type of organisation in vocational schools and the type of pupils attending special schools were atypical, these types of schools were not regularly included in surveys.

lence in Saxony, especially “more extreme” types of violence. On the other hand, pupils in Saxony displayed more markedly authoritarian and nationalistic attitudes than their counterparts in Hesse (for a further comparison between East and West, see Dettenborn and Lautsch 1993).

Differences between German pupils and pupils from ethnic minorities

As regards lying, verbal abuse and name-calling, involvement in fights, vandalism, threats involving weapons and sexual harassment, no statistically significant differences were found between German pupils and pupils from ethnic minorities in Nuremberg (Funk 1995b: 62). While German pupils (83.1%) in the Nuremberg Pupil Survey mentioned verbal aggression more frequently than their counterparts from ethnic minorities (78.7%) and also committed acts of vandalism more often (German 52.4%, ethnic minorities 49.3%), pupils from ethnic minorities were involved in fights more often than German children (German 34.1%, ethnic minorities 43.0%) and also threatened others with weapons or sexually harassed them more often (German 6.3%, ethnic minorities 11.0%). Fuchs et al. (1996: 107) report more vandalism and more physical and mental violence among pupils from ethnic minorities; only in the case of verbal violence no differences were detected on the basis of nationality (see also Fuchs 1996: 65).

“Defensive objects” / weapons in schools

15% of Nuremberg pupils admitted bringing “defensive objects” to school. Boys answered “yes” to this question more than twice as often (19.7%) as girls (9.7%), a statistically significant difference (see Funk 1995b: 65). No statistical differences were detected between types of schools, grades or nationalities (see Funk 1995b: 65ff). In Berlin, 26% of pupils reported carrying defensive objects on their person (see Dettenborn and Lautsch 1993: 760). Schwind et al. (1999: 90) reported that 24.5% of pupils in the city of Bochum had brought a weapon to school at least once. In a Land-wide survey of Bavarian pupils, a similar admission was elicited from some 30% of respondents (see Fuchs et al. 1996: 123). Von Spaun, on the other hand, reports only very few instances of weapons being used in schools (Von Spaun 1996: 42f), and the Bavarian Ministry of Education describes the possession of weapons as “not a real problem in Bavarian schools to date” (BaySUKWK 1994: 14). Finally, in a survey held in Kassel, Greszik et al. (1995: 273) report “peak levels” of weapon-carrying as high as 47% of boys and 44% of girls in junior secondary schools and 41% of boys in general secondary schools.

There is some evidence to suggest that pupils who carry “defensive objects” also lie about other pupils, call them names or beat them up more often, commit more acts of vandalism,

and admit more frequently to threatening or sexually harassing others than pupils who do not carry such objects. Pupils who carry arms are also significantly more often victims of verbal and non-verbal violence (Funk 1995b: 68). Once again, a single survey of pupils cannot be used to draw conclusions about causal links. However, the link between weapon-carrying and pupil violence is identified as a problem by Fuchs et al. (1996: 121), Funk (1995b: 6), Greszik et al. (1995: 8) and Dettenborn and Lautsch (1993: 763).

3 Supposed causes of violence in schools

Hurrelmann seeks the causes of violence among pupils wherever a “clear reduction in self-esteem and in opportunities for later personal development [is] perceived” (1990: 368). Funk (1995a: 13ff) and Lösel and Bliesener (1995: 8) identify the following specific factors as influencing young people’s readiness to use violence: individual personality traits, family background, peer group, school, and exposure to the media (see also Schwind et al. 1990: 91 ff; 1999: 94ff).¹¹

Problem factors in the young person’s family background include: poor family relationships (“lack of warmth”); parental separation and divorce; absence of siblings; poverty and deprivation; a changeable, aggressive, over-strict or over-permissive parental approach to upbringing; lack of supervision; the parents (or single parent) being away at work; etc. (see Döpfner et al. 1996: 29; Funk 1995c, 1996a; Meier et al. 1995: 180; BaySUKWK 1994: 17; Hurrelmann 1990: 367). Cramped living conditions are also mentioned in connection with the family situation (see BaySUKWK 1994: 17).

However, environmental or organisational factors in the school, a poor working atmosphere among the teaching staff, the quality of the teacher-pupil relationship, alienation from, or lack of commitment to, school norms and values, and poor school performance are also identified as predictors of violence (see Hurrelmann 1990: 367ff, 1991: 106ff; Lösel 1993: 117ff; BaySUKWK 1994: 17, 18ff; Funk 1995a: 13ff; Meier et al. 1995: 180).¹²

¹¹ Lösel and Bliesener (1995: 14ff) also identify as significant factors the specific situation in which the act of violence takes place and the general social and political environment (in this connection, see Section 1.5).

¹² Among pupils from ethnic minorities, “living in two different worlds” - living by the prevailing German norms outside the family, and inhabiting a world of “traditional structures, frequently with an authoritarian pattern, in the family home, the extended family and the religious community” (BaySUKWK 1994: 18) - is seen as an additional problem.

Similar clusters of probable causes are also identified by teachers' associations (for example, see Kraus 1995) and by teachers themselves (see Schul- und Kulturreferat der Stadt Nürnberg 1992: 8ff). According to Fuchs et al. (1996:184), Bavarian teachers see membership in deviant groups (see also Döpfner et al. 1996: 30) and exposure to "action" and horror films as factors which particularly influence violence among pupils. Teachers see young people's leisure activities as being more relevant determinants than aspects of their family or social backgrounds.

The views of the pupils themselves are also interesting. The reason for violence in schools which is cited most frequently - by two-thirds of girls (66.5%) and almost as many boys (63.5%) - is "showing-off, seeking acceptance". Pupils thus clearly emphasise the expressive nature of violence, as an attempt to gain attention and esteem. In identifying causes, girls display a marked ability to make social judgements: four out of ten girls (41.8%), as against only three out of ten boys (30.5%), refer to the "family situation" as the cause of violence among pupils, while one girl in three (33.51/o), as against only one boy in five (20.4%), sees "peer pressure" as the cause. In contrast, boys are more likely to cite individual Attributes such as "enjoying violence" (boys 48.7%, girls 41.4%) or "boredom" (boys 38.0%, girls 35.0%). Boys also mention "school" much more frequently (10.2%) than girls (6.1%) as a cause of violence (Funk 1995b: 70ff; see also Schwind et al. 1999: 95; Dettenborn and Lautsch 1993: 754ff).

4 Statistical links to violence in schools

Personality traits

On the basis of the Nuremberg Pupil Survey, the following observations can be made: The more isolated pupils feel, the more they are involved in fights. The greater pupils' need for stimulation, the more they lie, call other pupils names, get into fights, commit acts of vandalism, threaten others with weapons or sexually harass them. Conversely, the more conscientious pupils are, the less they are involved in verbal or physical violence, vandalism, or threatening or sexist behaviour (see Rojek 1995).

Family

Upbringing which is perceived to be domineering and strict goes hand in hand with higher levels of violence (telling lies, name-calling, fighting, vandalism, threats, harassment). The more supportive the parents' approach to upbringing or the better young people's social contact with their parents is perceived to be, the less they lie, call others names, commit acts of vandalism, or threaten or harass others (see Funk 1995c, 1996a; Rojek 1995). Funk (1996a: 16) did not detect any differences between pupils from single-parent and two-parent families when it came to lying, name-calling, fighting, vandalism, threats or harassment. Döpfner et al. (1996: 23) likewise found that boys from two-parent and single-parent families were no different in terms of aggressive and dissocial behaviour. On the other hand, girls from single-parent families were considered by others, and considered themselves, more aggressive, and their parents considered them more dissocial, than girls from two-parent families. Pupils with both parents, or the lone parent, working full-time were more frequently involved in fights and committed more acts of vandalism than those from households with a different parental employment pattern. In contrast, no relationship could be demonstrated between parental unemployment and pupils' affinity to violence (Funk 1996a: 18ff).

Neighbourhood / local community

In the Nuremberg data, the only significant link between violence among pupils and their perception of their neighbourhood was in relation to vandalism: the more positive pupils' assessment of their neighbourhood or community, the fewer acts of vandalism they committed in the school setting (Funk 1995c: 143ff; see also Fuchs et al. 1996: 293ff).

Peer group

Acts of vandalism were significantly more common among pupils whose leisure time was primarily spent in informal groups than among those who were mainly involved in formal club activities (Nasa and Weigl 1995; see also Fuchs et al. 1996: 326ff). Funk (1996b) has found a clear positive correlation between the perception of a pupil's own peer group as violent and the acts of violence committed by that pupil in the school setting.

School

According to Döpfner et al. (1996: 21 and Figure 26a), some 20% of conspicuously aggressive children and adolescents - four times as many as those who were inconspicuous in this regard (5.3%) - had previously had to repeat a school year. The rate for conspicuously dissocial pupils (1.2%), though lower, was still over twice as high as for pupils who were not conspicuously dissocial (5.1%).

The Nuremberg Pupil Study revealed clear links between self-assessment of school performance and reports of lying, name-calling, fighting and vandalism: pupils who considered themselves to be doing well were less violent than those who did not. Higher rates of violence among pupils who had to repeat a year in school were particularly evident in the case of vandalism, threats involving weapons and sexual harassment. No links were found between assessments of pupil-pupil relationships or subjectively perceived problems at school and the four categories of violence. On the other hand, the better the teacher-pupil relationship was felt to be, or the greater pupils considered their scope for influencing the way things were done at school, the fewer acts of violence they reported (see Keiling and Funk 1995).

Media

There is clear evidence of positive links between the exposure to “action” or horror films and violence in schools. The more pupils are exposed to such films, the more they indulge in lying, name-calling, fighting, vandalism, threats or sexual harassment (Kreuzinger and Maschke 1995; see also Fuchs et al. 1996: 231ff).

5 Causal determinants of the violence in schools

In the Nuremberg Pupil Survey, causal analysis (multiple linear regression) was used to identify the reasons for lying, name-calling, fighting and vandalism among pupils, with the help of determinants from every suspected determinative context. This revealed the following influences: being male, having a greater need for stimulation and belonging to a violent peer group increased the levels of all three types of violence, whereas a good teacher-pupil relationship tended to reduce these levels. Having parents with full-time jobs increased the levels of both verbal violence and vandalism, whereas good social contact with one’s parents reduced them. Greater conscientiousness among pupils, and perceived greater scope for influencing the way things were done at school, also reduced levels of vandalism. Older pupils got into fewer fights, and pupils from ethnic minorities indulged in less verbal violence. Pupils who were exposed to horror films and those who attended a grammar school committed more vandalism, whereas those who attended a junior secondary school were more often involved in fights (see Funk 1996a: 29ff; 1996b: 29ff).

There was only very patchy evidence of class-related or school-related factors influencing violence among pupils. For example, the proportion of boys in the class increased the prevalence of individual lying, name-calling and fighting. On the other hand, an increasing proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities in the class reduced individual involvement in

fighths. Increasing school size tended to foster vandalism among pupils, whereas a favourable teacher-pupil ratio (i.e. fewer pupils per teacher) reduced levels of vandalism (see Funk and Passenberger 1999).

6 Overall social processes affecting violence among pupils

An overall social factor which encourages violence among young people, and thus violence in schools, is the observable increase among young people (as a result of social change) in the subjective importance of peer groups and the media, at the expense of traditional social relationships such as family, neighbourhood, clubs and churches. This individualisation and pluralisation of lifestyles is accompanied by a loss of homogeneous value systems and sense of meaning; in some young people this leads to disintegration processes¹³ which, if “disintegration is experienced and perceived as the loss of a sense of belonging, loss of scope for involvement or agreement” (Heitmeyer 1992: 109; see also BMFSFJ 1995: 18), may manifest themselves in acts of violence. Against this background, the call for schools to fulfil a renewed role in children’s upbringing is understandable - a role which at least complements, but in practice may often replace, the crumbling influence of the parental home. Similar calls for facilities ranging from extracurricular supervision to all-day schools, though they may vary in content according to their political slant, have been heard not only from politicians (see BaySUKWK 1994: 34f; Schnoor 1993: 36), but also from groups representing teachers’ interests (see Kraus 1995: 43) and teachers themselves (for example, see Schul- und Kulturreferat der Stadt Nürnberg 1992: 1 5ff).

Literature

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¹³ Heitmeyer, for example, defines these as “(a) diminishing relationships with other people or institutions; (b) diminishing actual involvement in social institutions; and (c) diminishing consensus on shared perceptions of norms and values” (1992: 109).

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