

Sociological Research on the Occurrence of Violence and the State of Security Among Young Men of the Youth Educational Centre (MOW-46) in Trzcinec (Poland): Research Report as a Presentation of the First Stage of Situation Analysis and Recommendations for Practical Solutions

Badania występowania zjawiska przemocy i stanu bezpieczeństwa wśród wychowanków MOW-46 w Trzcińcu (Polska). Sprawozdanie z badań jako pierwszego etapu analizy sytuacji i rekomendacji rozwiązań praktycznych

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Abstract: The presented text describes sociological research on the occurrence of acts of violence and the state of security among pupils of the Salesian Educational Centre of St. John Bosco in Trzcinec (Poland). The research was commissioned by the centre's management in a letter dated 8 February 2025 addressed to Head of the Department of Health Sociology and Social Work at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw. After developing a research tool in the form of a mixed non-standardised questionnaire containing 20 questions tailored to the content of the commissioned research topic, qualitative research was conducted at the centre in Trzcinec. The study involved 56 pupils in the following age groups: a) up to 15 years old – 1, b) 16-18 years old – 55, c) 19-21 years old – 0, in groups according to school classes Youth Educational Centre. The research was conducted by a researcher from the Institute of Sociology at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw, preceded by pilot interviews with pupils indicated by the management.

Keywords: Youth, education, resocialization, sense of security, violence, Trzcinec

Abstrakt: Prezentowany tekst opisuje socjologiczne badania występowania aktów przemocy oraz stanu bezpieczeństwa wśród wychowanków Salezjańskiego Ośrodka Wychowawczego im. św. Jana Bosko w Trzcińcu (Polska). Zostały one zlecone przez dyrekcję ośrodka pismem z 8 lutego 2025 r. skierowanym do kierownictwa Katedry Socjologii Zdrowia i Pracy Socjalnej INS UKSW w Warszawie. Po opracowaniu narzędzia badawczego w postaci arkusza ankiety mieszanej niestandardyzowanej, w której postawiono 20 pytań dostosowanych do treści zleconego zadania badawczego, przeprowadzono w ośrodku w Trzcińcu badania jakościowe. W badaniu uczestniczyło 56 wychowanków w następujących przedziałach wiekowych: a) do 15 lat – 1, b) 16-18 lat – 55, c) 19-21 lat – 0, w grupach wg klas szkolnych MOW-46. Badania przeprowadził pracownik naukowy Instytutu Socjologii UKSW, poprzedzając je wiadomymi pilotażowymi ze wskazanymi przez dyrekcję wychowankami.

Słowa kluczowe: młodzież, wychowanie, resocjalizacja, poczucie bezpieczeństwa, przemoc, Trzcinec



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INTRODUCTION

Violence occurs when a young man or a group of young men mistreats another person (ridicules, insults, uses vulgar language, spreads rumours, behaves aggressively, beats, isolates, or deprives the person of money or belongings). Furthermore, violence is a deliberate act aimed at controlling and subordinating the victim. In such relationships, one party has an advantage over the other, and this advantage is exercised in a harmful manner. The perpetrator exploits this power and violates the victim's fundamental rights (e.g., the right to physical integrity, dignity, and respect). The sociological research presented here, examines the sense of security and the lack thereof arising from various factors in a facility designed to help the residents of the Trzciniec residential care centre in their reintegration into society. Participating in the study gave the young men the opportunity to express their opinions and experiences, which is crucial for engaging them in the process of creating a safer environment within the facility. The study findings provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of existing anti-violence programs and strategies and enabled a more in-depth understanding and identification of problems related to violence, bullying, and other violations of fundamental rights within the youth community. These findings will be used to develop a report and to implement preventive measures.

1. OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH AREA

The first area of research concerns the phenomenon of violence, which in this study is understood as intentional and repeated actions aimed at violating the rights, dignity or physical and mental integrity of another person. Violence may take various forms, however, it invariably involves the physical or psychological superiority of one party over another and results in humiliation, stress, physical or psychological suffering, fear, anxiety, or other types of existential harm. The relevant literature distinguishes several types of violence, including: physical violence (e.g., beating, pushing, choking, restraining movement); psychological violence (e.g., humiliation, ridicule, threats, isolation, manipulation, hovering – subtle forms of psychological abuse involving emotional manipulation and control); sexual violence (e.g., forced sexual contact, groping, sexual blackmail); economic violence (e.g., financial control, confiscation of money, preventing or hindering employment); cyberbullying (e.g., online harassment, publication of compromising content); abandonment and neglect (e.g., lack of care, disregard for physical and emotional needs); and collective violence (e.g., acts of group aggression directed at an individual or another social group).

Violence in juvenile rehabilitation centres is a well-documented phenomenon and is often encountered in the context of an isolated environment imposed by institutional circumstances. In setting such as youth educational centres or reformatories, violence may take multiple forms and arise from different sources.

Among pupils, it may manifest as fights, intimidation, exclusion, or verbal abuse. Directed towards staff, it may include verbal and physical aggression or refusal to cooperate. On the part of the staff, violence may involve abuse of power, psychological or physical coercion, ignoring pupils' needs. Self-directed violence includes self-harm and suicide attempts, while indirect violence includes gossip, informing, manipulation of interpersonal relationships. Research indicates that many minors admitted to the centres come from dysfunctional families, where they have experienced violence, neglect, addiction and lack of support. These experiences often contribute to emotional disorders, impulsivity, difficulties in interpersonal relationships, as well as and deficits in so-called social skills.

The second area of analysis concerns the sense of security among the pupils at the Youth Educational Centre in Trzciniec. In this context, security is understood as a situation free from threats, in which an individual or a group can function without fear of physical, psychological, social or material harm. It encompasses a sense of certainty, stability and protection from risk factors. From a social and institutional perspective, safety is a process involving continuous efforts to eliminate threats and strengthen protective mechanisms. In institutions such as youth educational centres or correctional facilities, safety is multidimensional and includes physical safety (protection against physical violence from other pupils or staff, provision of adequate living conditions through monitoring, secure access, and rapid response to crisis situations such as fights or self-harm); psychological safety (prevention of verbal abuse, intimidation and isolation, access to psychological and therapeutic support and the development of relationships based on trust and respect); social safety (prevention of exclusion and stigmatisation, creation of conditions for integration and cooperation, and counteracting the development of criminal subculture among pupils); and educational and upbringing safety (implementation of individual educational and therapeutic programmes, rehabilitation activities based on creative development and the strengthening of personal potential, and preparation for independent life outside the institution).

Difficulties in ensuring safety in Youth Educational Centres may result from shortages of specialist staff (psychologists, therapists – sometimes pupils have access to a psychologist only a few minutes per week), reliance on outdated rehabilitation models focused primarily on punishment rather than therapy, excessive use of isolation and a lack of individualised activities. These factors may contribute to increased social anxiety and feelings of resentment among pupils. Consequently, contemporary educators working in Youth Educational Centres increasingly emphasize that ensuring an adequate level of safety requires an individualised approach to pupils, multifaceted interdisciplinary cooperation (involving educators, psychologists, therapists, and chaplains), and the development of appropriate forms of openness to the external environment. Such measures aim to prepare pupils for life outside the educational institution, which should function as a supportive structure facilitating socialisation and new socio-cultural adaptation.

2. AIM AND SUBJECT OF THE STUDY

The main aim of the study was to diagnose the scale, nature and determinants of violence in a specific rehabilitation and educational facility run by the Salesian Society. The study was intended to provide information on the effectiveness of programmes and strategies implemented to counteract violence and to identify problem areas related to the phenomenon of violence and non-compliance with pupils' fundamental rights. The research focused on the following aspects: the frequency and forms of violence experienced or observed, the location and timing of violent incidents, the characteristics of perpetrators, procedures for reporting violence and the effectiveness of imposed sanctions, the respondents' sense of security, and their perception of changes in the institutional environment during the last school year. The collected data will be used to prepare a report and to implement specific preventive measures.

3. RESEARCH METHOD, TECHNIQUE AND TOOL

The study employed a quantitative diagnostic survey method. The research technique used was a self-administered questionnaire. The research tool used was a non-standardised questionnaire consisting of 20 substantive questions and a personal data section. The survey was anonymous, as emphasised in the introductory instructions, in order to encourage respondents to provide honest and accurate answers on the sensitive topic of violence. The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed-ended questions, including single-choice items (e.g. questions 1, 9, 10, 15-20), using a Likert-type scale (e.g. "definitely yes", "rather no"), multiple-choice questions (e.g. questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13), allowing respondents to select more than one answer; a numerical rating scale (question 14), in which respondents assessed their sense of safety on a scale from 1 to 10, and one open-ended question (question 11), which allowed respondents to express their views freely on the consequences imposed on perpetrators. The questionnaire introduction included an operational definition of the key concept, precisely defining "violence" as an intentional act based on the superiority of one party over another involving violation of, violating of the victim's rights (e.g. ridicule, physical assaults, isolation, theft).

4. FINAL CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate that violence occurs in the centre, however, it is not linked to specific times of day or particular situations. Rather, it is primarily associated with uncontrolled emotions and situational opportunities. Violent incidents most often occur during recreational activities and free time in enclosed spaces. The main perpetrators of violence are the pupils themselves, acting both individually and in groups. Centre staff are rarely identified as perpetrators, and the management is

not mentioned in this context. A significant proportion of pupils do not report acts of violence, and many experience pressure or coercion to remain silent, which makes it difficult to respond effectively. Although a significant percentage of pupils declare that they experience violence rarely or never, this may reflect repression or reluctance to admit victimisation. At the same time, there appears to be a distinct group of “scapegoats” who experience violence more frequently. More than half of the pupils believe that the centre consistently punishes perpetrators of violence, most commonly in the form of penalty points and referrals to the court. The sense of security is ambivalent: on the one hand, pupils report a decrease in aggression and theft, but on the other, there has been an increase in the number of runaways, which indicates the presence of organisational and emotional problems within the institution. Although pupils generally demonstrate awareness of the obligation to report violence, a significant group either lacks this awareness or avoids fulfilling it. Support in situations of violence is not always provided, as nearly half of the pupils report having been left to cope on their own in difficult moments. Most pupils report being able to rely on family support, which constitutes an important stabilising factor and facilitates the process of rehabilitation. Despite the institution’s Christian foundations, only about 25% of pupils report using prayer as a form of spiritual support in difficult situations. This finding suggests the need to review existing forms of religious and spiritual engagement and to develop more effective methods of reaching pupils with Christian values as well as alternative forms of emotional help appropriate at this stage of development. Finally, while the centre offers most pupils opportunities to develop their passions and interests, which has a positive impact on their self-development, a significant group reports either a lack of such opportunities or dissatisfaction with their scope.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthen the system of support and monitoring of violence by encouraging pupils to report problems openly and by more effectively counteracting pressure to remain silent.
2. Increase the scope and quality of preventive and educational activities addressing violence, including sessions focused on emotional awareness, assertiveness and conflict resolution skills.
3. Intensify educational activities aimed at perpetrators of violence, especially those acting in groups, while ensuring an individualised approach and therapy.
4. Improve the accessibility and quality of support offered to pupils in difficult situations, including through specialised training for staff to enable more effective and timely responses.
5. Sustain and further develop positive changes identified by pupils, such as a greater number of interest groups and organised trips, which contribute to better social integration and a reduction in negative behaviours.

6. Address the problem of pupils running away from the centre by systematically analysing its underlying causes and implementing preventive measures and psychological support.
7. Emphasise the role of the family as an important source of support and develop mechanisms that facilitate regular contact between pupils to their relatives, thereby strengthening pupils' sense of security and emotional stability.
8. Consider introducing a diverse range of spiritual and emotional support, not limited to prayer, in order to respond to the varied needs of pupils.
9. Expand and adapt opportunities for the development of interests and passions so that the widest possible group of pupils as can engage in activities suited to their individual needs and preferences.
10. Introduce a system of rewards and positive behavioural reinforcement to complement the existing disciplinary measures, thereby motivating pupils to engage in positive change and cooperation.