CRISIS INTERVENTION AS ONE OF THE FACTORS OF CREATING SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract: School, as an important educational and socializing factor, should be a safe environment. The safety of the school environment is crucial to ensuring quality education and the protection of both pupils and all school staff. The study deals with crisis intervention in schools, which is one of the factors creating safe school environment. Crisis intervention at schools takes place in the area of solving pupils' as well as teachers' problems, helping in overcoming specific obstacles. It seeks to help pupils or teachers, to create a safe space, to activate sources of support and to focus on restoring one's own strength.

Keywords: safety of a school environment, crisis, crisis situation, crisis intervention at schools.

1 Introduction

The safety of the school environment is an essential condition for an optimal educational process. School safety should be a matter of course for all pupils (regardless of age, gender or social background) and for all school employees.

Current dynamic changes in society encompass many positive, but also negative realities, which are manifested in various areas of life. This is evidenced by various security risks and threats.

According to Miovský et al. (2012), different groups of risk behaviour phenomena are associated with different **safety risks** for pupils and school employees. It is necessary to supplement the school rules for a particular school beyond the obligations given by the legislation in force to minimise the impact of risky behaviour on pupils and staff. These rules can be developed both at the level of school regulations and at the level of recommendations and voluntary rules incorporated into documents relating to various school activities and events (including e.g. excursions, school trips, etc.). We can agree with Kropíková (2016), according to whom parents want the school mainly to ensure safety for their children and peace for schoolwork, they want their children to experience success at school.

The issue of meaningfully addressing the safety of the school environment is now a matter of great urgency. A safe school environment influences pupil satisfaction, which translates positively into learning outcomes. Aggressive pupil behaviour and bullying seriously undermine the safety of the school environment and the wellbeing of pupils as well as the teaching and professional employees of schools.

Comparing the safety of school environments around the world can be quite difficult, as safety conditions vary widely between countries and regions. Each country has its own challenges and contexts that affect the way it deals with security in its schools. Jablonský (2024) presents a set of factors that are relevant when comparing school safety around the world:

- Security measures, school policies and legislation**:** in several countries there are specific laws and regulations that set out requirements for the security of school facilities. These laws often include standards for the physical security of buildings, rules for crisis management, and protocols for reporting incidents. World organisations such as UNESCO and UNICEF provide frameworks and recommendations for the security of school environments at a global level, which can be adapted to local conditions. Among the above, we can include specific regulations such as school security audits that assess the state of security measures and identify

areas for improvement, as well as security protocols for immediate reporting of any threats or incidents, regular crisis drills and stricter access controls to school buildings, etc.
- Incidence of violence and crime*:* this is a serious problem that affects the physical and psychological well-being of pupils and employees. This problem encompasses various forms of violence, including physical attacks, bullying, cyberbullying, vandalism, etc.
- Social and economic conditions**:** safety of the school environment can also be influenced by the social and economic conditions in a given country. Countries with higher rates of poverty, unemployment or social conflicts may face greater challenges in ensuring safety in their schools.
- Cultural and educational factors**:** each culture has its own norms and values that can influence safety standards in schools. Countries with an emphasis on discipline and respect for authority may have different approaches to ensuring safety in their schools than countries with an emphasis on individualism and democratic principles.

Depending on these factors, the safety of school environments around the world can vary. Some countries have very high security standards and very low levels of school violence, while other countries may face greater security challenges. Overall, however, the goal of all countries is to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for pupils.

The safety of the school environment is threatened by various factors, including risky and problematic behaviour of pupils. In particular, aggressive behaviour and bullying have a dominant negative impact. Similarly, the use of alcohol and other drugs can also be counted among the risk factors, as many of them lower inhibitions. Under the influence of alcohol or other addictive substances, people are more likely to engage in risky behaviour that endangers their health, but they may also commit acts against their surroundings, even criminal offences.

The range of problematic or risky behaviour of pupils is wide (from minor offences to violations of school rules to serious social pathologies) and is constantly changing. The reality of school practice is illustrated by the results of research, particularly with teachers and pupils, prevention practitioners and parents of pupils (Bielčiková, Hollá, 2022; Čerešník, 2019; Emmerová, 2022, 2023; Espelage et al., 2013; Garrett, 2014; Kauppi, Pörhölä, 2012; Kopecký, Szotkowski, 2017; Lipnická, 2022; Saracho, 2017; Tomšik et al., 2018; Verešová, Mujkošová, 2020; Wachs et al., 2018 and others).

2 Crisis intervention at school

Crisis is a popular and often used term that describes a dramatic change with negative emotions. According to Špatenková (2017), the definition of a crisis usually affects three basic components of a crisis: a certain triggering event occurs, the individual perceives it as threatening and dangerous, and the usual ways of coping fail. In an effective crisis intervention, these three components should be identified and understood.

Crisis intervention is a broader term; we will focus on crisis intervention at schools.

Intervention is defined by Bělík, Hoferková, Kraus et al. (2017) as an acute professional intervention. In the teaching about upbringing and education of socially disturbed youth, it represents pedagogical measures that intervene in the natural social life situations of individuals with disorders (problems) of emotions and behaviour.

Crisis intervention means intervention or interference in a crisis. Špatenková (2011) defines it as specialised help for people who

find themselves in crisis, i.e. in a situation that causes changes in their usual way of life and induces a state of imbalance, threat and stress.

Anyalaiová et al. (2023), in relation to crisis situations in schools, list the types of crises among pupils: developmental crises (transition from one developmental level to another) and situational crises (unexpected and accidental). Situational crises take the school community by surprise and often the school needs outside help. It affects pupils, teachers and other school employees. Specific crisis situations are considered to be events:

- with a particularly serious impact on the school community and society,
- with a potential to polarize society,
- with a higher number of dead and injured,
- with a history of dealing with trauma and loss in the school community in the last year,
- with a larger number of people affected (class, whole school),
- with a particularly vulnerable or traumatised population in the school community,
- a high-profile media event.

Experts in the field of crisis intervention (Gajdošová, 2020; Špatenková, 2017) emphasize the following basic principles and specific features of crisis intervention:

A crisis always has an individual character.
The state of crisis is limited in time.
Help should be as quick as possible.
Help should always be available.
Structured, active or even direct approach.
Professional work in crisis intervention is eclectic.
Care should be continuous.
Care should consider the context of the client's relationships.
Care should have defined at least minimum achievable goals.
Strengthen the client's competences for crisis management and prevention from the outset.
The focus of the work with the client is problem solving.
The starting point is the assessment of the situation and communication with the client.
The first step is to diagnose the crisis, its time and place of occurrence.
With the client, we should only aim for the near future.
The solution of the crisis comes from the bio-psycho-social-spiritual area.
Care must also consider the possibility of deterioration of the condition.
Care should be provided in the least threatening and restrictive space.

Crisis intervention, according to Anyalaiová, Lednická, Krnáčová and Križo (2023), is consequently perceived school's response to a serious acute crisis experienced by people in the school environment that they have no control over. Schools - not only in times of social emergency - experience smaller or larger upheavals. The basis for good adaptation and coping with difficult situations is a safe atmosphere inside the school (prevention), which protects it from falling apart at the first impact. When nothing serious is happening and the school is not in a crisis, a crisis plan (preparation) should be developed in case of a crisis

In times of crisis, there is no longer enough time to prepare materials and allocate responsibilities, who is responsible for what. Good preparation significantly helps the school system to respond adequately to reduced safety, fear and loss of control (intervention) and to create opportunities for new values in safe community life (postvention) that will help the school system to recover from a crisis event and even to strengthen itself (resilience).

The starting points for the implementation of crisis intervention are elaborated in the Standards for Professional Activities - Crisis Intervention (2021). Crisis intervention provider:

- psychologist, social pedagogue, special pedagogue, therapeutic pedagogue with training in crisis intervention,
- the crisis intervention provider is continuously educated and updated in this area to provide services in accordance with the latest scientific knowledge,
- a member of the school support team with crisis intervention training provides a specific agenda in the following areas:
- prevention (promotion of safe schools),
- preparation of crisis plans,
- educating pedagogical and other professional school employees,
- implementation of crisis intervention in cooperation with the relevant counselling facility,
- providing "post-intervention",
- planning, assessment of the impact of the event, counselling, consultation, screening aimed at mapping who else within the school needs crisis intervention,
- provides education and outreach to school headmasters on the need for and importance of crisis intervention as an effective tool for the prevention of post-traumatic stress disorder.

The actual implementation of the crisis intervention is adapted to the current situation, possibilities and needs of the group. The professional team considers the pace of the group and chooses adequate professional procedures for crisis intervention.

As Madro (2020) states, a well-directed crisis intervention helps to kick-start adaptive coping mechanisms, it accelerates psychological recovery and minimizes the impact on the individual's and society's mental health for the future.

Overcoming, coping with a crisis, according to Špatenková (2017), means regaining the energy needed to function "normally", rebuilding relationships and connections to people, regaining the ability to feel satisfaction or even joy; difficulties are not permanent and endless, but can be reactivated from time to time. Most crises bring with them some threat, danger, destruction or loss; on the other hand, it is always possible to see a crisis as an opportunity or a chance. Similarly, according to Vodáčková (2020), a crisis carries the possibility of fundamental change, which implies that it is both a danger and an opportunity.

Růžička et al. (2013) point out that a teacher is considered a layperson or trained layperson in the context of crisis intervention. Effective teacher intervention can be a useful support, namely: calming the individual in crisis, stabilizing his or her condition and reducing the danger.

In 2023, the Slovak Republic introduced a system of support measures in education and training into the regional education system, which were incorporated into the School Act (Amendment No. 182/2023 Coll.) with effect from 1 September 2023. The introduction of new support measures in education and training contributes to making the school system more responsive to the diverse individual educational and special educational needs of pupils, thus increasing their chances of success in education, as well as in life and in society.

Act No. 138/2019 on pedagogical employees and professional employees and on the change and supplement to some acts defines a school support team in Section 84a. For the purposes of inclusive education, the headmaster of a kindergarten, primary or secondary school may establish a school support team, whose task is, in particular, to coordinate the development of inclusive education, to ensure the application in education and training of approaches and strategies that arise from the various fields of science and technology, to cooperate with guidance and prevention services and other bodies in supporting children, pupils and their legal representatives in education and training, to provide advice to children, pupils and legal representatives and methodological support to teaching employees, to participate in the development of the school curriculum.

The school's special pedagogue and all professional employees of the school are members of the school's support team. Other teaching employees may also be members of the school support team. The composition of the school support team shall be regulated by the headmaster in the internal regulations after discussion in the pedagogical council, if established.

The headmaster will assess the realities of the school in terms of pupil composition. If the school has a high proportion of pupils from a marginalised community, it is advisable to have a social pedagogue as a member of the school support team to support the inclusion of pupils in the class or group, to strengthen communication with the pupils' family and legal representatives, to map the family environment, and to assist in building a positive classroom and school climate. The school psychologist supports pupils' adaptation to the school environment, provides counselling on pupils' developmental needs, etc. The school special pedagogue works with pupils with special educational needs.

3 Conclusion

Veteška, Svobodová and Tureckiová (2022) aptly point out that any visions and strategies are not realisable unless we feel safe, and therefore, for the quality implementation of the pedagogical process, it is first necessary to provide a safe environment. In this regard, they emphasize school rules and communication rules. The basis of safety is formed by rules that provide a framework for mutual relationships and desirable modes of communication behaviour in school. Existing rules need to be communicated; if someone is unaware of a rule, they cannot be expected to respect it.

Jablonský (2023) points out that current education should explicitly aim for pupils to think critically, to be able to cooperate and to be able to solve problem situations.

Nešpor (2019) emphasizes the skills necessary for life - the so-called life skills: self-management skills (to motivate for a healthy lifestyle, to lead a balanced lifestyle) and social skills (the ability to face social pressure, healthy self-assertion, finding a compromise, the ability to foresee the consequences of one's actions, etc.). Blinka (2015) states that currently implemented prevention programmes provide information on negative consequences but need to be complemented by targeted attitude change and the development of skills for life.

The content standards for the area of life skills development - social skills and skills of self-management/self-regulation (Tichý, Vojtová, Božík, Kříž, 2023) define the skills of self-management as personal and systematic application of strategies aimed at changing behaviour in order to achieve the desired changes in one's own behaviour (this includes critical thinking skills, creative thinking, constructive problem solving, decision-making about one's own life goals and priorities, anticipating the consequences of certain behaviours and actions, goal-setting, self-motivation, self-reflection and self-awareness, self-assessment and self-evaluation, emotion management, stress management, planning and control, time management, flexibility) and social skills - as the skills of adaptive, learned and socially acceptable behaviour that enable one to cope effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life. This includes the ability to cope with social pressure, assertive skills (in particular the ability to assert oneself in a healthy way), empathy skills, communication skills, constructive conflict resolution skills, ability to build healthy social relationships, ability to self-reflect and get to know others (social perception), coping with stressful and conflict situations (coping strategies), media literacy.

In regard of creating a safe school environment for practice, we recommend:

▪ To monitor the occurrence of risky or problem behaviour. Preventive activities must be targeted according to the composition of pupils and problems, which are specific and based on the diversity of school classes, the long-term effects of social influences, etc.
▪ Even minor behavioural problems need to be consistently addressed in the school environment, as overlooking or underestimating them can lead to more serious forms of deviant behaviour.
▪ To implement both specific and non-specific prevention.
▪ Since pupils have problems in the area of interpersonal relationships and social competence, it is necessary to teach them how to resolve conflicts, process failure, etc.
▪ At schools, it is not enough to eliminate risky behaviour of pupils, it is also necessary to implement activities to promote social relations between pupils in the classroom, as well as between pupils and teachers.
▪ To create an inclusive environment, employ social pedagogues and school psychologists.
▪ To implement prevention of victimisation.
▪ Discuss with school employees the procedure in the event of an armed attack. Awareness in this area is part of creating security awareness. Explain to pupils how to react in the event of an armed attack, i.e.: flight - shelter - attack.
▪ Implement effective rules and procedures. Develop a crisis intervention plan.
▪ Consider the advantages and disadvantages of installing CCTV systems.

The issue of meaningful addressing the safety of the school environment is now a matter of great urgency. A safe school environment influences pupil satisfaction, which translates positively into learning outcomes. Providing crisis intervention in the event of a crisis situation contributes to a sense of safety and overall security of the school environment.

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