



**EVALUATION OF SERVICES
THAT ARE PROVIDED IN SCHOOLS
FOR THE PREVENTION AND CONFRONTATION
OF INCIDENTS OF FAMILY VIOLENCE**

(Executive Summary)

**Advisory Committee
for the Prevention and Combating of Family Violence**

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following text is the summary of the Final Report, submitted by the Contractor in the frames of the study of the subject: "Evaluation of the services that are provided in Schools for the prevention and confrontation of Family Violence". The study was assigned to CMR Cypronetwork by the Advisory Committee for the Prevention and Confrontation of Family Violence. According to the Copy of Proclamation the study aims to: "Evaluate the objectives, the processes and the effectiveness of services that are provided in Schools for the Prevention and Confrontation of Family Violence".

The objectives of the study, the target groups in which the study is concentrated, the methodology, the frame and the existing services that are provided in the schools of England, Finland and Cyprus, are presented in the completed document of the Report.

2. RESULTS

2.1 Services that are provided in the schools of Cyprus and the existing practice

As far as it concerns the enacted Handbook of Interdepartmental Processes (2002) for the Handling of the Family Violence, which mentions the clarification of duties and the role of all the professionals that take part in the process of handling family violence, it was realized that the processes that it proposes are followed in a certain level and there are various problems to its application.

It was evident that the groups for Prevention and Confrontation of Family and School Violence, as they are indicated in the handbook, do not exist in every school and where they exist they do not have regular applications of the processes. As the officers and teachers of primary and secondary education reported, the teams, where they exist, are not functioning properly.

The directors and inspectors around free Cyprus, claim that the Groups of Prevention and Confrontation of Family and School Violence are typically formed, since the Ministry of Education is informed.

However, the results of the research specify that there is a great confusion between the role and the duties of the Groups, once a lot of them consider that they have been recommended for the dealing of fighting between students in the school or even they combine their duties with the safety and health environment of the school. Moreover it's important to mention that it has not been clarified if the Handbook is briefly distributed with the memorandum at the beginning of the school year and then it is properly archived.

Looking at the existing practice, there is a differentiation between the schools, as far as the localization and reporting of the incidents is

concerned, depending on whether the school is a primary school or a high school. In Primary and Pre-Primary Education usually the report comes from the teacher, who spends longer time with the students, thus he/she is in a position to recognize the incidents of violence. The teacher reports the incidents to the principal of the school, and the decision whether to report it to the Social Services is taken by both of them.

In Secondary Education there are more official mechanisms of locating the incidents of family violence, as the structured interviews that take place in the beginning of each year by the Teacher-Counselors. That is the reason why teachers and the principals of the schools are giving more gravity to the Consultancy Services and Career Counselor (ΥΣΕΑ) once is considered that they have the authority to locate and handle the incidents, in collaboration with the Social Services and the Services of Educational Psychology. Even if another teacher of the school notices an incident of violence, the Career Counselor is involved immediately in order to handle the situation. Also they inform the Principal of the School as well as the School Psychologist who is in charge of the specific school.

Although the Principal of the school in Secondary Education is obliged to inform the parents that they will call the Social Services, in practice they very often ask for the intervention of the Consultancy Services and Career Counselor (ΥΣΕΑ).

Also, it was often reported that in Secondary Education, most of the cases are already known and they are handled by the Social Services.

It is noteworthy that in none of the different levels of education had reported the attendance of Health Services and, specifically, the School Health Services in the team.

Even the contribution of the Educational Psychologists is an “exogenous” service. The Educational Psychologists have to be called to visit the school. They are not always available in the school as the Career Counselor, although they are considered to be the professional experts for these cases.

As far as the Group of Prevention and Confrontation of Family and School Violence (which is supposed to exist from the processes in place) is concerned, it has been noted that there are not any organized preventive programs, activities or actions on a systematic basis under the direction of the Ministry of Education.

Investigating the subject from the side of the **Office of the Prosecutor-General** it appears that schools report only few cases of family violence, even though 8 out of every 10 participants claim that they are aware that reporting of the incidents is mandatory.

From the semi-qualitative interviews, with teachers and principals of the secondary education, it is concluded that the collaboration with the Legal Services is limited or it does not exist and that is because the reports are delivered via other state services and not directly from the school.

2.2 Locating and recognizing difficulties in the relative services provided

The bigger difficulty in the services provided in the schools is the “fear” that the teachers feel when they are about to be involved in an incident of family violence, thus it is a suspending factor in the process of locating and reporting of incidents according to the enacted processes. Moreover, in the Primary Education it is estimated that the teachers and principles show bigger tolerance when there are suspicions for violence because they are more afraid and they tend to run away from their responsibilities.

In the secondary schools usually the person in charge of the team is the Teacher Counselor who encourages the students to report the problems, so there are more chances to locate the incidents and the report comes straight from the students. The school psychologists claim that the incidents are more “obvious” in those cases.

Difficulties in reporting the incidents are located in all the levels of education because of the fear of damaging the prestige of the school. Moreover due to the small society of Cyprus and while there are reservations as for the role of the teachers, they become a target for the parents. The fear and those reservations of the teachers lead to the delay of the reports to the Social Services, with the most serious consequence the loss of the findings.

On the other side, there is the concern for unfounded charges, and that leads to a more careful investigation of incidents before the Social services are informed. Because of that, the Interdepartmental Committee proposed, among other suggestions, to make a better investigation of each case before a professional like a family counselor is called.

The not effective services that are provided in the schools are also a discouraging element. The teachers were not satisfied because their intervention cannot substantially help the welfare of children and they consider that the most suitable services, that can play the most important role on this subject, are the Services of Educational Psychology, the Social Services and the Police. The school does not offer support to the children victims. There are restrictions on what the school can offer and that is only encouragement and understanding if the academic performance of the victims is not as expected.

Beyond the problems/ difficulties and the reservedness that are located at the point of reporting and handling of the incidents, there seem to be simultaneous problems of correct education and information on the subject of violence since all of the groups of interest were explicit that there is lack of a satisfactory level of knowledge and sensitivity about the subject. There is also lack of coordination and systematic information on the processes of handling the incidents.

Although there are many seminars about the subject - organized by the Interdepartmental Committee for the Prevention and Confrontation of Family and School Violence, the Advisory Committee, the Organization for the Prevention and Confrontation of Family Violence, the Pedagogic Institute of Cyprus and other governmental institutions and organizations – it is understood that there is a lack of diffusion of information that results from each seminar as well as lack, on behalf of the trainee, of briefing of their colleagues.

Under the frame of conducting optional educational seminars, organized by the Pedagogic Institute of Cyprus, there are some interdepartmental seminars for all levels of education organized and the speakers are individuals with great experience in the sector of Consulting and Professional Education Services, the Educational Psychology Services etc.

The disadvantage these seminars have is that they are optional and they are only organized on a local level, not country-wide. Thus any attendance of teachers is voluntary and fragmentary with restrictions regarding the further diffusion of knowledge acquired by the seminars or by the workshops included in the seminars.

The seminars of the Interdepartmental Committee include a) Lectures on violence and processes, preventive confrontation and sensitization and b) Workshops (case studies). One representative from each school participates and

the main objective is to participate in such educational programs every 2 years. The committee estimates that these seminars are essential and the participation in the past demonstrated great interest. Nevertheless there does not exist a mechanism to check the existence of feedback or any form of diffusion of the material from each seminar, in the schools.

In essence, the Interdepartmental Committee, which exists, roughly, for the last ten years, works in the frames of briefing and sensitization. There are not any “terms of command” or an action plan. Besides, no administrative support exists nor some other official mechanism that would allow the Committee to have a supervisory or coordinative role with regards to the processes in the level of prevention and confrontation.

According to the results of the research, the participants believe that there is ignorance of the processes, and that it is a matter of training. There is not an official process of reporting the incidents, because of the ignorance even in the higher levels of hierarchy.

Consequently the problem of the training of the teachers consists of three different levels that require particular attention: a) Gnoseologic Training regarding family violence, b) Education regarding the role of the teacher and sensitization on violence issues, c) Interdepartmental training especially in the legal obligations that derive from the enacted processes and subjects of collaboration/co-ordination of all involved institutions and services.

Another weakness, reported by the different groups of interest, is the annual school circular. It depends on the school principal how much attention will be given to the processes. Moreover, in the educational meetings mostly, educational matters are discussed and the educational psychologists are not

invited to participate even though there is encouragement on their behalf. Naturally, it is up to the principal to decide.

Some other practical problems that result from the application of the processes are certain legal obstacles that not only impede the teachers from handling properly the incidents but also function negatively for all the system.

Moreover there seems to be a need for clarification of the role and duties of all the services and related information for the subject, since it is co-related to the co-ordination problems that exist between the involved services.

Structural and infrastructural problems were diagnosed through this research as well as the need for innovation in the various sectors.

In the subject of collaboration between institutions and interdepartmental communication which has an effect on all the co-ordination and it is related with the deficient coordinated education/training, an important problem comes up, the personnel turnover. When some officers that are responsible in certain services are moved, then the communication malfunctions. Beyond the negative impact in effective communication and collaboration, the rotation of duties of the personnel has an effect to the dissimilarity in handling of the incidents.

Moreover, all the targeted groups of the research agree that there is a problem with the number of the educational psychologists in the schools and the pressure of work as well as bureaucracy that characterizes the Social Services.

As a result of the above it is derived that the services that are provided today in the schools for the prevention and confrontation of violence are not sufficiently effective. It is not clear for the teachers that each child and adolescent has the legal right of protection from family violence, as well as support from the responsible services and that the teachers are indebted to ensure that right for

every child. The difficulties and the problems that exist in the function of the relative services are listed briefly below:

- The enactment of the handbook has not been taken seriously
- The incidents are not located or they are not reported on time
- The teachers are afraid to be involved in cases of violence.
- The existence of unfounded charges complicate also the report of the well-founded information.
- The unsatisfactory results of the services provided in the schools as far as it concerns the essential protection of children.
- The deficient education, briefing and sensitization on the subject.
- The lack of coordinated and systematic briefing on the processes of handling the incidents.
- The seminars on briefing and training about the subject are having the below problems: a) absence of diffusion of information of the results of each seminar, b) the conduct of seminars take place mostly on a local level and they are optional, thus the attendance is voluntary, c) the number of representatives from each school that participate in the seminars of the Interdepartmental Committee is very limited.
- The lack of an action plan and administrative support on behalf of the Interdepartmental Committee.
- The directions of the circular in each school are applied in different ways according the beliefs of the principal of each school.
- The absence of the educational psychologists in teachers' meetings, although they are willing to participate.
- The legal obstacles that impede teachers from handling certain incidents.
- The lack of clarification of the roles and duties for each service and a general co-ordination between the services.

- The rotation of personnel between the services causes communication and co-ordination gaps.
- The structures and infrastructures in different departments need innovation.
- The small number of educational psychologists occupied in the schools and the pressure of work.
- The existence of bureaucratic processes in all the involved services.

3. Suggestions for effective services in the schools

Studying the results of the desk and field research as well with the analysis of all essential elements, the Research Team submits the following proposals, taking into consideration the improvement of services that are provided in the schools for the prevention and confrontation of family violence. The below proposals are analyzed extensively in the completed study of the research:

1. Secure the creation and effective operation of the Prevention and Confrontation Teams of Family Violence in the Family in all schools.
2. Creation of a mechanism of continuous briefing of the personnel of each school, in the beginning of each school year, with regard to the existence and the enacted processes of the Handbook of Interdepartmental Processes.
3. Follow-up of the educational seminars of family violence.
4. Creation and application of programs based on systematic training and sensitization of teachers in the subject of family violence.
5. Application of coordinated actions, for parents and children, aiming for the prevention of family violence with the collaboration of responsible Services.
3. Creation of mechanisms that will support teachers who are involved in incidents of violence.
 4. Better staffing of schools with Educational Psychologists, Family Consultants and Social Workers.
 5. Better co-ordination between the relevant services and creation of multitasking teams for handling the incidents of family violence.
6. Creation of Coordinative Service, more likely on a Minister level, with the “authority” to apply and “to oversee” the processes as far as it concerns prevention and confrontation.
7. The creation of therapeutic centers within school, supported with various specialties that will work afternoons and evenings with vulnerable students victims of family violence as well as with members of their family.

8. Collaboration of schools with Non-Governmental Organizations as well as with the Municipalities for the provision of services that will support and teach skills to vulnerable students victims of family violence that belong to minorities.