

STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS SCHOOL VIOLENCE (experiences from Israel, Republic of Moldova)

Ali ABU RIA, PhD student

Valentina BODRUG-LUNGU, PhD, Associate Professor
Moldova State University

Summary. Legal framework in Israel and Republic of Moldova includes important provisions on child and youth protection from different forms of violence, including domestic violence and school violence. The article is dedicating to comparative analysis of Israel and Moldova's practices on combating the school violence. Based on schools' research the similarities and differences in students' attitudes on school violence and bullying were identified. Despite of different international and national context, Israel and Republic of Moldova have accumulated valuable experiences of preventing and combating violence in school, including bullying. Exchange of good practice would be very useful.

Key words: school violence, bullying, harassment, children's rights, best practices.

STRATEGII DE ABORDARE A VIOLENȚEI ÎN ȘCOALĂ (experiențe din Israel, Republica Moldova)

Rezumat. Cadrul legal în Israel și Republica Moldova include prevederi importante privind protecția copiilor și a tinerilor împotriva diferitor forme de violență, inclusiv violența domestică și violența școlară. Articolul este dedicat analizei comparative a practicilor Israelului și Republicii Moldova în combaterea violenței în școală. Pe baza cercetării în școli în ambele țări, au fost identificate asemănările și diferențele dintre atitudinea elevilor față de violența școlară și bullying. În pofida contextului internațional și național diferit, Israelul și Republica Moldova au acumulat experiențe valoroase de prevenire și combatere a violenței în școală, inclusiv a bullyingului. Schimbul de bune practici ar fi foarte util.

Cuvinte - cheie: violența în școală, bullying, hărțuire, drepturile copilului, practici pozitive.

Theoretical approach of violence and bulling

The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocols thereto provide a robust legal framework to ensure children's protection from bullying and to address the challenges associated with online abuse. Guided by article 19 of the Convention, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence [2], addressed psychological bullying and hazing by adults or other children, including through the use of ICTs.

Despite of the adoption of many international instruments on child protection against violence, statistical data elucidate different problems in the field. 246 Millions of girls and boys suffer school-related violence every year, according to a new report by UNESCO and the Institute of School Violence Prevention at Ewha Womans University (Seoul, Republic of Korea). Thirty-four per cent of students aged 11–13 reported being bullied in the previous month, with eight per cent reporting daily bullying, according to data from 19 low and middle-income countries [6].

The International Symposium on School Violence and Bullying: From Evidence to Action, Seoul, Republic of Korea, 17 – 19 January 2017, and the newly UNESCO Report presented at the event, reminders that school violence is a global phenomenon. It was recognized that all forms of violence and bullying in schools infringe the fundamental right to education and unsafe learning environments reduce the quality of education for all learners. No country can achieve inclusive and equitable quality education if learners experience violence in school. School violence and bullying can also seriously harm the health and well-being of children and adolescents with the adverse effects persisting into adulthood [6].

The first step in preventing school violence and bullying is to understand the extent and nature of the problem. We note the existence of many documents that propose the definitions of violence and bullying.

According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its General Comment No.13 (2011) on The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence, “violence” is understood to mean “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” as listed in article 19, paragraph 1, of the Convention. The term violence has been chosen here to represent all forms of harm to children as listed in article 19, paragraph 1, in conformity with the terminology used in the 2006 United Nations study on violence against children, although the other terms used to describe types of harm (injury, abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment and exploitation) carry equal weight. In common parlance the term violence is often understood to mean only physical harm and/or intentional harm. However, the Committee emphasizes most strongly that the choice of the term violence in the present general comment must not be interpreted in any way to minimize the impact of, and need to address, non-physical and/or non-intentional forms of harm (such as, inter alia, neglect and psychological maltreatment) [2].

At the same time school violence has specific content, root causes and impact. International studies of school violence face basic issues of definitions and connotations. There are multiple definitions of school violence that may have diverse connotations in different countries. For instance, Benbenishty and Astor (2003, 2005) have shown the difficulties associated with the term ‘Bullying’ that is understood differently in various countries. For instance, both ‘*Biryonoot*’ in Israel and ‘*Ijime*’ in Japan are considered bullying. However, in these countries the local terms have very different interpretations, connotations and associations [1].

We would like to mention that the results of our pedagogical experiment (focus group sessions) in Jerusalem school (Israel) confirmed the differences in the terms’ interpretations. Thus, among the terms proposed for discussion (violence /bullying) most students used the terms more often: violence, aggression, manifested by concrete actions such as blows / beatings, threats, pushing, ugly words, etc. Many of the higher grade

students were familiar with bullying, especially girls, such as bullying online with ugly words, nicknames, teasing, and deeds that hardly affected them.

The situation was similar in Chisinau (Moldova). The most students from Chisinau school (in the frame of focus group sessions) also used more often the terms: violence, aggression, manifested by beatings, threats, pushing, ugly words, etc. Many of the higher grade students were familiar with bullying, especially girls, such as bullying online with ugly words, nicknames, teasing, and deeds that hardly affected them.

The scientific researches and literature indicate that school violence has many forms and types, each with different frequencies and different patterns of association with student characteristics, such as gender and age, and with school context variables, such as poverty in the school neighborhood, also school environment.

Recognizing the diversity of definitions, we consider that as basic should be official used terms. Thus, the UNESCO Report (2017) specify clear differences between school violence and bullying. School violence encompasses physical violence, including corporal punishment; psychological violence, including verbal abuse; sexual violence, including rape and harassment; and bullying, including cyberbullying. Bullying, which is a type of violence, is a pattern of behaviour rather than an isolated event, and it has an adverse impact on the victim, the bully and bystanders. Bullying has been defined as ‘unwanted, aggressive behaviour among school-aged children that involves a real or perceived imbalance of power. The behaviour is repeated, or has the potential to be repeated, over time. Bullying and cyberbullying are a key concern for children and adolescents [6].

School is a living organism, organization in development, that brings together several interacting groups- students, teachers, other staff, parents and other relevant constituents in the community. Each of these groups may have a specific point of view on what is happening in the school, including how violent it is. Also each of these groups can be differently involved in solving school violence.

We would to mention the heuristic model that presents school violence within nested contexts developed by Benbenishty and Astor (2005). Their model is highly influenced by Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological developmental theory that conceives of violence as interplay among several relevant subsystems. Goldstein (1994) describes this type of nested ecological theory as an interactionist theory. This genre of theories considers human behavior as a "duet" between the person's personal traits and contextual and environmental variables (social and physical). This environment might include other human beings that are involved in the situation in which the behavior occurs (such as other students, teachers), and also includes the physical environment (such as school and class size, school structure). We agree their heuristic theoretical model that places the school context in the center of the model (Figure 1) [1].

This ecological approach examines how external contexts in which a school is embedded interact with internal school and student characteristics to influence levels of victimization in schools. These layered and nested contexts include the school (e.g., structural characteristics, social climate and policies against violence), the neighborhood (e.g., poverty, social organization, crime), the students' families (e.g., education, family structure), cultural aspects of student and teacher population (e.g., religion, ethnic affiliation), and the economic, social and political makeup of the country as a whole (see for example: Astor, Benbenishty, Vinokur, and Zeira, 2006; Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, and Vinokur, 2002; Khoury-Kassabri, Benbenishty, Astor, and Zeira, 2004) (apud [1]). The issue of social and physical context is relevant for several important reasons.

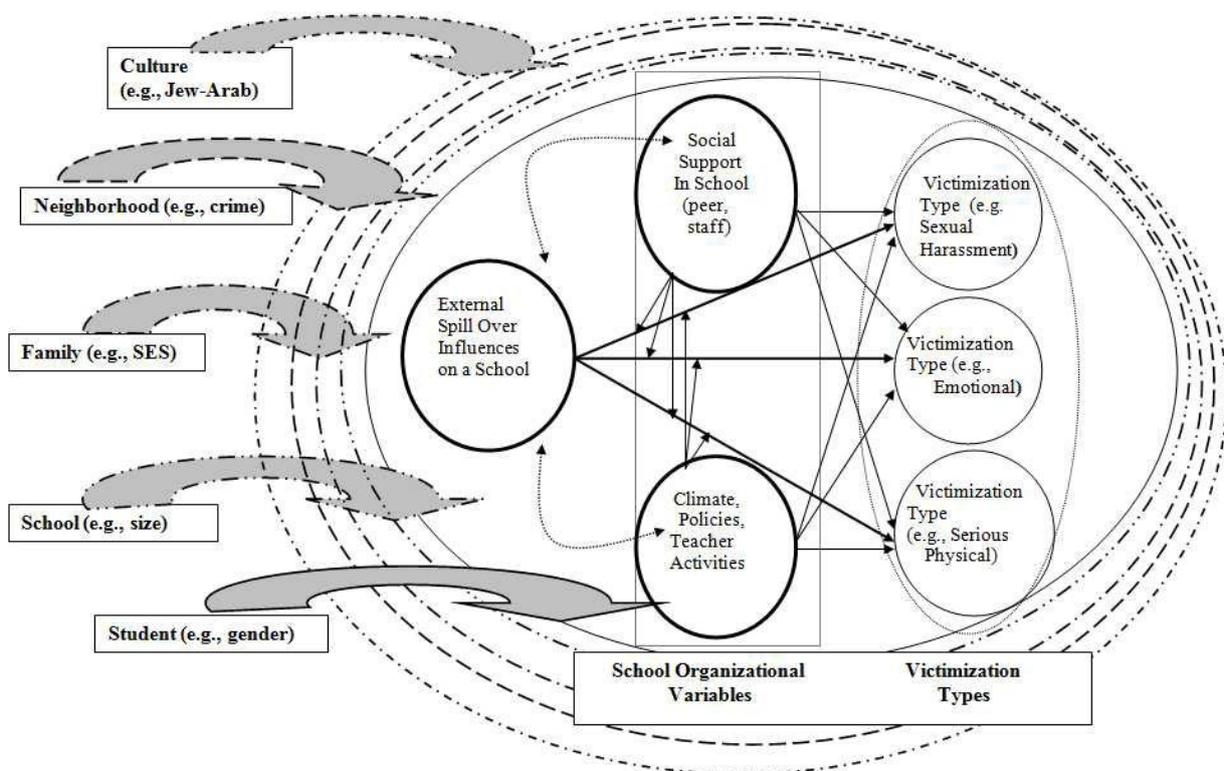


Figure 1: A Model of Social-Ecological Influences on Student Victimization

All the above-mentioned aspects confirm the importance of joint cross-sectoral efforts with the involvement of all stakeholders. At the same time, all actions related to the fight against school violence should be addressed through the protection of children's rights.

Children's rights in Israel

Mentioning strong international legal framework on the protection of the Rights of the Child, we would like to specify the Israel experience in the field. According to the Report on implementation of children's rights in Israel [3], Israel maintains an extensive system of laws designed to protect children's rights. It is a signatory to numerous international conventions and provides many health and welfare services to children.

Special protections apply in the areas of child labor and sexual exploitation. Children enjoy different treatment in the juvenile justice system than adults do in the regular justice system.

Humane School Discipline Students' Rights Law, 5761-2000, as amended, declares its objective: To prescribe principles for students rights in the spirit of human dignity and the principles of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, while guaranteeing the dignity of the student, the education worker and the education institution team, as well as guarding the specialty of the different education institutions... and in order to encourage the creation of an atmosphere of mutual respect in the educational institution's community.

The law prohibits discrimination against a student based on ethnic, socio-economic, and political grounds in registration, admission, or removal of a student, determining educational programs and class composition, as well as student's rights and obligations, including implementation of disciplinary rules. The law recognized a right of a hearing for a student and his parents prior to a permanent removal from an educational institution.

The law provides that discipline in an educational institute must be implemented in a way that befits human dignity, including the right not to be subjected to physical or degrading disciplinary measures. Additionally, an educational institution must not employ a punitive measure against a student for an act or an omission by his parents.

The Penal Law, 5737-1977, §§3 68D, prohibits physical, mental and sexual violation of a minor, and prescribes a maximum sentence of seven years' imprisonment for such offenses, or nine years' imprisonment if the perpetrator is responsible for the child. Harsher penalties are imposed on perpetrators of harm to minors and helpless persons especially when committed by a person who is responsible for a minor, by relatives and care givers. Any person knowing of an offense against a minor committed by a person who is responsible for that minor is obligated to report the offense.

In many countries, Israel included, children and teens are often exposed to internet bullying, whether as victims, bystanders or supporters; such exposure can lead to distressing results. Victims of internet bullying can often become despondent, depressed, have nightmares, and in extreme cases, even commit suicide.

In Israel, multiple strategies are utilized by government agencies, the internet industry, NGOs and public organizations to raise awareness about internet safety and to prevent bullying. The Ministry of Education coordinates a National Safe Internet Day, in which the Israel Police and the Ministry of Public Security and its civilian crime prevention programs participate, including Metzila, City Without Violence and the Israel Anti-Drug Authority. These organizations take an active role in educating the public, students and the community about the dangers of the internet, proper and responsible use of social media, what behavior may be considered unlawful and what to do if you are a victim of violence or abuse on the internet.

The Ministry's Metzila division, together with the Ministry of Education, developed a "Safe Internet Pact" in Hebrew and Arabic and called on children and parents to sign it and pledge to follow a number of safe internet guidelines. The pact reached thousands of parents, who discussed the guidelines with their children and signed the pact, and was featured in the news and media. Additionally, the Minister of Public Security, Knesset Members, Mayors and additional Ministry officials signed the pact as well to show their support for the initiative and raise awareness.

Source:

https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/reports/ie_17_internet_bullying/en/Internet%20Bullying.pdf

One of the good practice is "City Without Violence", one of the Ministry of Public Security's community crime prevention programs, provides safety counselors in schools, who attempt to identify and treat bullying, both in school and over the internet, and also serve as responsible adults to which the students can turn to in times of need. Students have reported many incidents to the counselors, including bullying on social media sites, the spreading of embarrassing or compromising pictures of teenagers, and fellow students posting suicidal thoughts. In addition to City Without Violence, the Ministry's Society and Crime Prevention Division – Metzila, also works to combat cyber-bullying throughout the country by conducting programs aimed at educating parents and youth about the dangers of the internet and safe internet practices. Metzila developed a crime prevention model for combatting crime on the internet over 10 years ago, and continues to develop methods and practices to reduce crime and bullying and to educate about safe internet use [7].

The Ministry of Public Security uses its digital platforms to raise public awareness regarding internet safety and has developed a safe internet guide and a variety of tips and advice for parents and children. The Ministry's Information and Knowledge Unit, together with additional government agencies, developed a website dedicated to internet safety. Throughout the year, and in particular before school vacations, the Ministry and its crime prevention programs, together with the Israel Internet Association's Internet Safety Center and the Ministry of Education, send out information packets. These are also published on the Ministry's website and social media in an effort to raise awareness and create healthy discussions between authority figures and children. Metzila and City Without Violence also have staff members who work in cities throughout the country and run educational programs on a regular basis.

Metzila, which together with City Without Violence and the Israel Anti-Drug Authority, operates Parent Patrols across the country, is currently working on a project to create online Parent Patrols in which an adult presence will be felt on children's websites and internet hang-out spots.

According to data collected in 2017 on cyber-bullying and internet abuse by the Ministry of Public Security's research department [8]:

- The subject is one of the three most troublesome problems for the Israeli public
- One in three children is exposed to threats or verbal violence on the web
- One in four children is exposed to shaming or bullying
- One in five children is exposed to messages of a sexual nature
- One in 10 children is exposed to sexual harassment
- One in 10 children is exposed to blackmail or identity theft.

In May 2017 the MA'OR program was established by the Ministry of Public Security and the Israel Police, in collaboration with other government ministries, in order to prevent violence against youth on the Internet. The heart of the program will be its 24-hour hotline, able to be reached by phone – by dialing 105 – or via the internet. The hotline will respond to all types of threats against children and youth on the web, including pedophilia and sexual harassment, as well as non-criminal offenses such as bullying and shaming, which can also be harmful. Police officers with specialized training together with and civilian experts in the field of child welfare and safety will man the hotline.

One of the challenges remain data collection. It is difficult to compare rates of violence from Israel to other countries because of the various definitions of what constitutes violence and the number of measuring methods [4].

Children's rights in Moldova

Republic of Moldova created an extensive legal system designed to protect children's rights. It is a signatory to numerous international conventions on children's rights protection.

According to Article 6 of the Law on the Rights of the Child, "The State guarantees the child's inviolability, by protecting him/her against all forms of exploitation, discrimination, physical or mental violence" Article 30 of this law stipulates that the state takes all the necessary measures to prevent any form of child kidnapping, sale and trafficking.

The Family Code ensures the child's right to protection against abuse, including corporal punishment, committed by his/her parents or by the persons in loco parentis. In the case of a violation of a child's legitimate rights and interests, a child can directly address the guardianship authority and, starting at the age of 14, they can go to court for the defense of their legitimate rights and interests.

The Republic of Moldova has a law nr.45 (2007) which aims to prevent and combat domestic violence, that covered also the protection of children against violence. At the same time, a set of criteria for the identification of cases of violence against children has been developed; these include the standard procedures of actions for professionals identifying such cases and Inter-institutional Instructions on prevention and intervention in cases of violence, neglect and exploitation of children. The government has approved

minimum quality standards on social services provided to victims of domestic violence and the Standard Regulation on the organization and functioning of rehabilitation centres for victims of domestic violence. Both documents include provisions regarding the development of individual assistance plans by the centres' personnel together with the beneficiaries.

The National Action Plan regarding the prevention and combating of violence against children for the period 2009-2011 was finished. However, a considerable number of the provisions have not been implemented or have been implemented only partially due to the lack of financial resources.

As a result of the government's initiative, a telephone line providing children with free assistance has been launched at the beginning of 2011 and aims to be in accordance with European standards. The NGO International Centre for Protection and Promotion of Women Rights, "La Strada", managed the National Hotline 0800-77777, which provided assistance in cases of human trafficking, especially of women and children, including trafficking with the purpose of sexual exploitation. The last years the activity of National Centre for Child Abuse Prevention (NCCAP) should be mention. The Centre was created and managed by NGO.

At the same time, despite of the mentioned efforts, statistical data remains worrying. According to the NGOs report [5], in 2012, it was found that 76% of all children aged 2-14 experienced violent discipline at home, which includes both psychological abuse and physical punishment. The statistics of the General Police Inspectorate shows an increase of notifications of cases of violence against children in the family from 138 in 2013 to 230 in 2015. A national survey (2010) revealed that half of all children witness parental disputes. Children were found to be quite often (21%) or very often (6%) victims of bullying in educational institutions. Between 2013 and 2015, the General Police Inspectorate indicated a 50% increase of criminal case files where children were victims of sexual offenses (from 166 to 332). The increase in the numbers of reported cases of violence against children might be explained by the improved reporting by professionals as a result of the implementation of the Instructions on inter-agency cooperation mechanism for the identification, assessment, referral, assistance and monitoring of children victims and potential victims of violence, neglect, exploitation and trafficking, which started in April 2014.

Online child safety statistics highlight quite alarming data. According to a study on the safety of children online in Moldova, published by the International Center "La Strada", 34.5 percent of children browsing the Internet use the WEB room and 47% of children who make new knowledge through the Internet communicates exclusively through this means were asked to meet people "friends" outside the internet. 23 percent of those surveyed exchanged personal photos with people from other countries, known

only in the virtual environment, and 13 percent received unsubstantiated suggestions - to watch pornographic images on the Internet [9].

Taking into account the importance of Internet security, the NII Crimes Control Center organized/ coordinated informative actions in cooperation with many stakeholders and NGOs. The development of web site "<http://internetsigur.md/>", aimed at protecting the rights of young people on the Internet, may be mentioned (with the support of the European Union and Council of Europe).

If the person has become the victim of such actions or knows about such a case, he can call on the following telephone numbers: 022 577 153, 078 090 902 - Guard Unit of the National Investigation Inspectorate (NII) or to the e-mail of the Center for Combating Computer Crimes: ccci@mai.gov.md

Every year in February in Moldova, as in other countries, the Internet Safety Day is being launched, launched in 2004 as part of a European Union Project. In 2017, in the Republic of Moldova, Internet Safety Day had the logo "Be the change: unite for a better internet", and deployed with the active involvement and joint efforts of the government, civil society and business representatives. The event includes a series of actions dedicated to promoting online security and information security, raising awareness of online threats.

At the moment, one of the priority is implementation of the National Action Plan for the implementation of the Child Rights Protection Strategy 2014-2020 and advocating for the allocation of necessary financial resources.

The institute of Ombudsman for Child Rights Protection would be mentioned that it focused on: health care, education and protection system. As a result of the government's initiative, at rayon level were created the Service for Psychological Assistance (SAP), with aim to assist children, parents, teachers, to solve different at risk situations.

At the same time, recognizing the government efforts to combating the violence against children, NGOs active in the field have a critical attitude towards government work.

Some findings of research on School Violence:

According to UNESCO Report (2017), all children and adolescents are at risk of school violence and bullying, but those who are vulnerable because of factors such as poverty, social status associated with ethnicity, linguistic or cultural differences, migration or displacement, and disabilities, who are orphans or from households affected by HIV, may be more likely to be targeted [6].

In 2016 in Israel and in Moldova 100 students per country were involved in the research addressed to the subject of school violence. In the current article we would like to present only some findings.

Taking into consideration the risks of school violence and bullying, we explored many issues related the attitudes of boys and girls towards them. To the question on

Reasons for violence/bullying the answer options were the following: a) physical appearance b) gender or sexual orientation c) ethnicity or national origin d) social status/ the material situation e) others. The comparative results offered the following picture:

- ❖ in Israel (100 students): a) 25% of respondents think that students had been bullied because of their physical appearance b) 25% - because gender c) 21% - because ethnicity or national origin d) 19% - because social status/ the material situation e) 10% - others (figure 2).

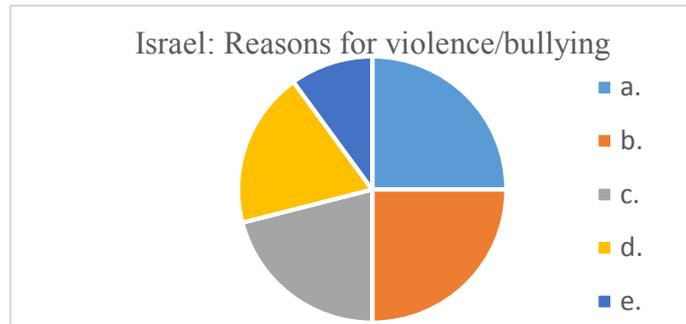


Figure 2. Reasons for violence/bullying (Israel)

- ❖ in Moldova (100 students): a) 25% of respondents think that students had been bullied because of their physical appearance b) 25% - because gender c) 9% - because ethnicity or national origin d) 21% - because social status/ the material situation e) 20% - others (figure 3).

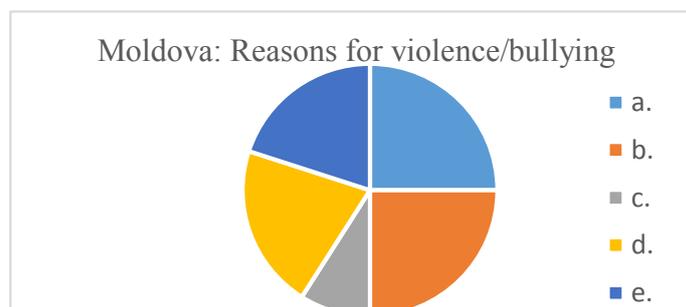


Figure 3. Reasons for violence/bullying (Moldova)

Thus, in Israel and in Moldova 25% of respondents think that students had been bullied because of their physical appearance and 25% - because gender. In Moldova 21% of respondents mentioned as reason - social status/ the material situation, in Israel – 19%. At the same time, there are differences related ethnicity or national origin: in Israel – 21% and in Moldova - only 9%.

One other question addressed during our research was *Who do children tell when they have been bullied?* The answer options were the following: a) teacher b) parents /family member c) official person (director, police, social assistant) d) friends e) no-one. The comparative results offered the following picture:

- ❖ in Israel (100 students): a) 10% of respondents recognised that in case of bullying they would appeal to the teacher b) 25% - to the parents/ family member c) 10% - to official person (director, police) d) 25% - to the friends e) 30% of respondents recognised that in case of bullying they would not appeal to anybody (figure 4).

- ❖ in Moldova (100 students): a) 15% of respondents recognised that in case of bullying they would appeal to the teacher b) 20% - to the parents/ family member c) 10% - to official person (director, police) d) 25% - to the friends e) 30% of respondents recognised that in case of bullying they would not appeal to anybody (figure 4).

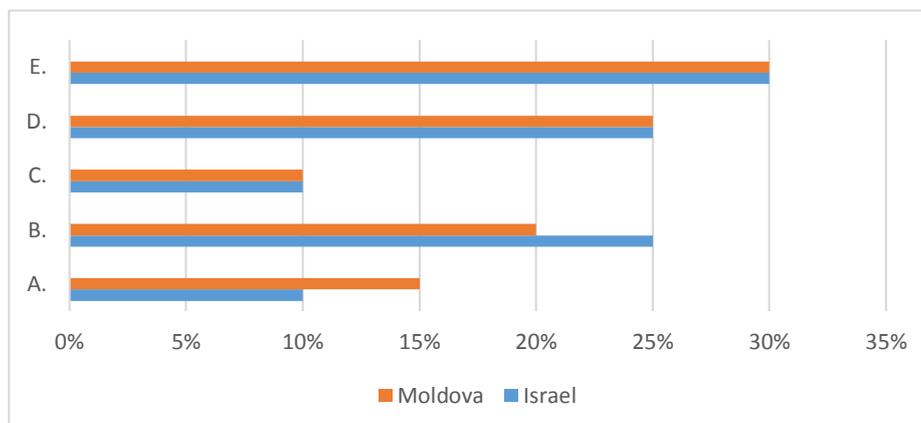


Figure 4. Answers on question Who do children tell when they have been bullied?

The data in Figure 4 demonstrates several common positions for both countries. Only in Israel children have greater family trust than in Moldova. In Moldova, teachers are more confident. The challenge is that in both countries 30% of the respondents would not address anyone for help.

From the gender perspective, students' answers were very close. Thus, boys were very reserved to ask for help in case of aggression on the part of others because of fears of being considered as unworthy of male behavior. Girls mentioned that in more serious cases they can appeal to mothers, in most cases closing themselves.

As prevention strategies for school violence, it was indicated:

- By boys: strict discipline, order and punitive system in school; treating all acts of violence equally; cooperation between teachers, parents and pupils; the specific treatment of each problem that occurs along the way;
- by girls: denying violent pupils in school; transmission of aggressive pupils to the police; Positive communication of teachers with girls and boys; cooperation between teachers, parents and pupils; educational non-violent communication program.

There are no significant differences between countries.

Taking into account the results of the above study, we consider it necessary to address holistically the problem of violence prevention in school, the rights of girls and boys should be the basis of all intervention programs.

Conclusions

1. Legal framework in Israel and Republic of Moldova includes important provisions on child and youth protection from different forms of violence, including domestic violence and school violence. At the same time, both countries are focused the efforts

on implementation of legal framework. One of the challenges for Moldova remain the lack of adequate resources for children rights protection services.

2. Despite of different international and national context, Israel and Republic of Moldova have accumulated valuable experiences of preventing and combating violence in school, including bullying. Exchange of good practice would be very useful.
3. Both countries should extend the Anti-bullying initiatives at school level and at society level. Anti-bullying initiatives should be focus on: information and awareness-raising campaigns to deepen understanding of what is bullying's behaviour, its associated risks and consequences; the promotion of respect for human rights and safety in school and online; information of children about how to protect themselves, how to enhance their resilience and how to avoid situations where their image, honour and reputation may be compromised. Both at school and online, children and youth need guidance in developing their ability to make good decisions and in building positive values and life skills, including taking responsibility for their actions towards others.

References

1. Benbenishty R., Astor R. A. School Violence in an International Context. A call for global collaboration in research and prevention, 2008.
2. Convention on the Rights of the Child/ the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In: its General Comment. No. 13 (2011). On The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence.
3. Israel children's rights: international and national laws and practice, 2007. <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/child-rights/pdfs/ChildrensRights-Israel.pdf>
4. National Violence Index – 2014. Israel. https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/publications/reports/ie_17_violence_index_2014
5. Shadow Report on the implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child in the Republic of Moldova. The Alliance of Active NGO's in the Field of Social Protection of Family and Child from the Republic of Moldova. Chisinau, 2017. http://www.aliantacf.md/sites/aliantacf/files/publicatii/APSCF_raport-alternativ-2017-EN.pdf
6. School Violence and Bullying: Global Status Report. UNESCO 2017 <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002469/246970e.pdf>
7. https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/reports/ie_17_internet_bullying/en/Internet%20Bullying.pdf
8. https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/news/min_maor_con_090517
9. <https://www.ziarulnational.md/securitatea-virtuala-a-copii-or-in-pericol/>