

## COOPERATION OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY IN PREVENTION OF AND DEALING WITH PROBLEM BEHAVIOUR OF PUPILS IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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**Abstract:** The study presents current trends in problem behaviour, or risk behaviour of pupils at elementary, secondary and high schools. Based on theoretical analysis and the results of objective researches it presents opportunities and problems in the area of cooperation of pedagogical and vocational training employees of schools with parents, with special focus on their cooperation in prevention of and dealing with problem behaviour of pupils.

**Keywords:** cooperation of school and family, communication of pedagogical and vocational training employees of schools with parents, problem and risk behaviour, prevention and dealing with problem behaviour

### Preface

Family is an important preventive and protective factor in the context of socio-pathological phenomena, but it is also the dominating risk factor for the occurrence of problem behaviour. For children, family represents the world of their closest ones; family background influences their development. Dysfunctional family background influences the occurrence of socio-pathological phenomena of children; harmonious family background and supportive upbringing are the best starting points for each child.

Family, together with school, represents the dominating educational and socializing factor. Good-quality cooperation of school and family has positive effect on pupils. By cooperation of school and family we understand activities of pedagogical and vocational training employees and parents that help unite their opinions on education and upbringing of pupils.

Active cooperation of school with parents is an important qualitative indicator of the school, as well as the basic precondition for the success of the educational process; it also affects the school climate. According to C. Scholzová (2012), if we want to ensure high-quality education of pupils that is not deprived of the formative component, we must ensure joining of efforts of both educational institutions - family and school - which can only happen through improvement of the communication between themselves, because each high-quality relationship is based on mutual communication. Cooperation of school and parents of pupils contributes to:

- strengthening of the partnership between family and school,
- increased reliability of school in the eyes of parents,
- increased communication,
- the opportunity of united influence of family and school,
- acquirement of such information for school that help to plan mutual activities,
- improvement of school success of children.

Children are intensely influenced by their family background and thus it is important to pay adequate attention to cooperation of school and family. Cooperation of school with family is important in general; it is suitable in prevention, but absolutely necessary in dealing with problem behaviour of pupils.

### 1 Current trends in problem and risk behaviour of pupils

Increase in socio-pathological phenomena in society is also projected in the occurrence of problem behaviour of children and youth – pupils of elementary, secondary and high schools. The causes may be found in macro-environment, or even in the global environment. However, especially strong influence is that

of local environment. Environment may have spontaneously positive influence, i.e. in accordance with socially desirable norms and patterns of behaviour. But it also may have negative influence. Social factors of environment have strong influence and play the determining role in the occurrence of problem or risk behaviour of children and youth. It is so due to the fact that everything that surrounds children and youth – family, peers, school, gangs, media – greatly influences the development of attitudes and values. Etiology of problem behaviour is always determined by multiple factors and it is always the result of interaction among several factors: biological, personality and social ones.

Elementary, secondary and high school teachers more and more often face problem behaviour of pupils, of more or less serious nature (Rahman, Abdulah, 2013). Deviant behaviour of pupils and violation of school regulations is becoming a serious problem that requires constant attention – in a preventive way, but also in a sanctioning way and effective handling. S. Bellová, G. Siváková and K. Tišťanová (2019) state that the issue of inappropriate behaviour of pupils also means the so-called devaluation actions of pupils, in other words – disturbance of the educational process by different undesirable activities of pupils, including devaluating attitudes and actions towards the teacher.

Truancy is a lasting and one of the most common forms of problem behaviour at elementary, secondary and high schools. It is demonstrated by intentional avoidance of school duties. It represents violation of one of the basic regulations that determine the role of pupils, because their duty is to attend school. Truancy is an evasive reaction; its aim is to avoid unpleasant school tasks. It also means fear of exams, or fear of bullying. However, it may also be an adventure. Annual V12 reports of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic suggest that thousands of truancy cases are annually being dealt with. Prevention of truancy is very important, because truancy is closely connected with other socio-pathological phenomena of much more serious nature. It may become one of the factors encouraging criminal behaviour. Pupils committing truancy spend their newly acquired free time in various ways, starting from innocent TV watching or reading at home, through wandering (individually or with a gang), up to smoking, drinking alcohol, visiting pubs or gambling houses, or even committing delinquent behaviour.

One of the most serious problems of today is still pupils' experimentation with drugs, or recreational usage of legal or illegal drugs, which presents a considerable risk of developing an addiction. Drug usage causes problems in the social sphere; pupils neglect their school duties or commit other deviant acts (thefts, truancy, etc.). Drug intoxication can severely damage the health of young people and sometimes even endanger their life. The situation is clarified in TAD (TAD stands for Tobacco, Alcohol, Drugs) school researches: pupils at elementary, secondary and high schools have personal experiences with legal drugs; they also experiment with illegal drugs, most often with marihuana (Nociar, A., 2018). When it comes to alcohol, we can literally speak of risk drinking. It is proved by the results of TAD2 that was conducted among high school pupils: 72.8% of boys admitted to tipsiness and 42% admitted to drunkenness and a blackout; 74.1% of girls admitted to tipsiness and 39.4% of them admitted to drunkenness and a blackout.

Aggressive behaviour of pupils is another negative phenomenon that is on the rise. Aggressive behaviour of pupils is already a relatively common phenomenon at schools. The results of the researches of M. Kolaříková, A. Petrová and E. Urbanovská (2017) prove that. Almost 40% of their respondents (teachers) stated that they often encounter aggressive behaviour at their schools.

While in the past aggressive behaviour and bullying was mostly spread among pupils, nowadays there are many cases when aggressive behaviour is aimed at teachers. A significant threat in this context is also the cyberspace. Cyber-attacks against teachers are the reality that teachers face directly as victims, or they may see it among their colleagues. One of the typical Internet-bound forms of cyber-attacks against teachers is provoking the teacher, recording his/her reaction on the smartphone and putting it on the Internet; another examples are sharing materials that embarrass the teacher, threatening and blackmailing the teacher, etc. In 2016, a research was conducted in the Czech Republic among teachers of elementary, secondary and high schools that focused on cyberbullying aimed at teachers (Kopecký, Szotkowski, 2017). According to its results, 21.73% of teachers (of 5,136 respondents) have been the victims of some form of cyberbullying. The most common forms of cyberbullying were verbal attacks through cell-phones or the Internet, evening phone-calls, threatening and extortion through the Internet or cell-phone, spreading embarrassing and humiliating photos, hacking their electronic accounts (e-mail, social network account, etc.). They also found out that short-term attacks prevailed – such that lasted less than a week, and such lasting one to two weeks.

Elementary, secondary and high schools are attended by pupils who can use modern technologies better than the adults – their parents, educators or teachers. The usage of modern technologies brought along with many advantages also many risks and threats, especially for children and youth. Individual areas of risk behaviour in the cyberspace may be intertwined (Hollá, 2016, Niklová, Novocký, Dulovics, 2019). Technological addictions that occur due to the excessive use of modern technologies, or due to the content itself, are a very serious problem of today. Besides addictions, there are other risks with negative impacts on physical and mental health; desensitization, rise of cyberbullying and others. Hateful comments on the Internet are called cyberhates or hating. It could mean spreading of some texts or videos that propagate or justify extremism, xenophobia or racism. Other Internet risks cover misuse of personal data, inappropriate content, cyberstalking, sexting, sextortion, cybergrooming, weakening the contacts with family and peers, and other.

School is one of the most important socializing factors. It should also play an important role in prevention, because pupils spend a lot of time there. This prevention should be implemented in an effective form, using effective methods. Efficient and effective primary prevention includes continual and complex programmes, interactive programmes, especially programmes that help children face the social pressure, that are aimed at improvement of communication, non-violent dealing with conflicts, refusing risk behaviour, increasing healthy confidence, managing anxiety and stress. According to T. Jablonský (2009, 2010), it is important to implement various cooperative activities to develop interpersonal competences, such as the ability to work in team, because they are becoming more and more important. The strategies and methods of cooperative learning lead to the development of emphatic behaviour, to sensitivity, to understanding, to the development of friendly relationships, to overcoming interpersonal barriers. By developing cooperative competences it is possible to suppress aggressive behaviour. Interaction among peers may support acquirement and modification of prosocial behaviour.

The importance of the role of school in the implementation of prevention is highlighted also by M. Procházka, M. Vítěčková and Z. Gadusová (2016). Effective prevention requires adequate cooperation of school and pupils' parents.

## **2 Cooperation of school and family in prevention of and dealing with problem behaviour of pupils – current situation and**

The cooperation of school and family has always been based on the cooperation of a specific teacher, or vocational training employee, with a specific parent. However, the crucial role is

played by the school management who creates conditions that support cooperation.

School and family cooperate in various forms. Some of the individual forms of cooperation are inviting parents to school, visiting families in their homes, individual discussion, pupil book, and other forms of correspondence. Correspondence is actually the most frequently used form of cooperation between teachers and parents. However, this form is not sufficient anymore and it is important to seek other options. Nowadays, electronic communication is becoming more and more popular. Among collective forms of cooperation, we include classroom meetings (most common form of collective cooperation between school and families), open door days, debates and other activities organised by school. Some parents prefer passive participation on school activities, others prefer active participation.

There are various opinions – often contradictory – of teachers and parents on how authority and responsibility for pupils' education should be distributed. This situation may lead to conflicts between teachers and parents. And ignoring these conflicts may ultimately lead to aggressive behaviour of dissatisfied parents.

On one hand, the problem occurs when parents refuse to cooperate; on the other hand, the problem also occurs when parents want to improperly interfere with the competences of the teacher. R. Zadell (2017) warns that even the well-meaning advice and opinions of parents may cause uncertainty, chaos and pressure in the educational process of pupils. Pedagogical or vocational training employees of schools must regulate the productive participation of parents on school activities by explaining the suitable ways to help.

Communication between parents and pedagogical or vocational training employees is most often focused on the pupil's performance and his/her behaviour. The Act on pedagogical and vocational training employees imposes an obligation on them to protect them from unprofessional interference with their pedagogical or training activities.

The Education Act regulates rights and obligations of parents or legal representatives of pupils; teachers and parents must communicate (parents have the right to be informed on educational performance of their children, they have the right to be provided with educational counselling concerning their children, etc.; parents or legal representatives are required to e.g. comply with the conditions of educational process defined by the school regulations, to inform the school or school facility on changed health condition of their children, their health problems or other important information that may influence the process of education, and other).

Individual communication with parents is most often the task of the class teacher, but it is often forgotten that it is the task of all teachers. Many schools organise regular consultations with parents or legal representatives of pupils. Dealing with problem and conflict situations must be done individually, not on group meetings with parents. Cooperation with parents is supported by vocational training employees, who often also actively participate on this cooperation (e.g. social pedagogues, school psychologists).

Competency profile of elementary and secondary school teachers, high school teachers and class teachers also defines the area of cooperation with parents and legal representatives of pupils. Elementary, secondary and high school teacher:

- uses suitable, verified (recommended) methods and tools (interview, questionnaire for legal representatives, analysis of a pupil's personal file, etc.) to evaluate the influence of socio-cultural environment on the development of pupils;
- respects the dignity of all pupils, applies clear and understandable rules that support good-quality relationships and mutual cooperation with legal representatives of pupils;

- represents the profession and the school in relation to legal representatives and other partners of the school;
- chooses and uses methods and tools (trust box, questionnaire for the legal representatives of pupils, observation, etc.) to identify problems and barriers in cognitive, social, moral and character development of pupils;
- identifies the demonstrations of socio-pathological behaviour, actively cooperates with legal representatives and professionals (colleagues) in order to eliminate them;
- evaluates the effectiveness of interventions (solutions) in elimination of socio-pathological phenomena in cooperation with legal representatives of pupils.

Class teacher, using methods and tools of pedagogical diagnostics, identifies the specifics in personality development of a pupil/child in the classroom, learning styles and behaviour of children/pupils in the classroom, as well as specifics of social and cultural environment (family, etc.) on the basis of his/her own discoveries or on the basis of suggestions from legal representatives, other teachers, or other pedagogical employees. He/she plans and projects cooperation with legal representatives of children/pupils and with general public. Among his/her activities belong cooperation with legal representatives of children/pupils, with pedagogical and vocational training employees of the school and school community, effective communication and cooperation with legal representatives of children/pupils, coordination of counselling for children/pupils and their legal representatives in accordance with their special needs.

It is important to consider the fact that parents, in communication with a teacher, may respond unproductively, e.g. when they inappropriately apply (Lipnická, 2017):

- defending – they uncritically view their children, they deny any problems, they don't see the cause in their children,
- accusations – they find the causes of their child's problems in an unprofessional approach of the teacher,
- protecting – defending their children, overprotecting them and advocating their deficiencies and problems,
- obloquy – obscuring the truth, falsely and unjustly defaming, judging and humiliating the teacher,
- intercession – they ask for benefits for their children, they ask for ignoring their problems, to endure them.

In 2010, we conducted a questionnaire research among teachers at elementary, secondary and high schools in the mid-Slovakian region (Emmerová, 2011). The research sample consisted of 196 elementary and secondary school teachers and 155 high school teachers, total of 351 respondents. The goal of the research was to analyse, from the perspective of teachers, the occurrence of problem behaviour of elementary, secondary and high school pupils, forms of preventive activities in the researched school environment and dealing with the behaving problems as well as cooperation with the family of pupils. Our results show that teachers from practice most often rated the cooperation with family as satisfactory (46.72% of respondents) and as good (25.36% of respondents). Bad cooperation was stated by 15.67% of respondents and very bad cooperation by 2.85% of teachers. Only 2.56% of respondents rated the cooperation as excellent. Generally, we can state that cooperation with family was better rated by elementary and secondary school teachers than by high school teachers.

Within this question, respondents had an option to write down their own opinion. Most frequently stated opinion was that only parents of non-problematic pupils (concerning either school performance and behaviour) attend school meetings and other school activities.

In the research of Z. Hrivíková (2016), 58.29% of respondents stated that the problem a prevention coordinator has to face is parents' unwillingness to cooperate. Also, 81.25% of school social pedagogues stated the problem with insufficient cooperation with parents and the same number of social

pedagogues requires improvement of cooperation with parents on dealing with problem behaviour of pupils. 33.18% of prevention coordinators suggests improvement of cooperation with families.

Situations when pupils need professional help require sensitive approach. Pedagogical or vocational training employee must explain to parents that consulting a professional is in the child's best interest. It is suitable to provide contacts, e.g. an address of the counselling facility.

Pedagogical and vocational training employees must consider the possibility that problem behaviour of a pupil, or rapid worsening of his/her performance, may be caused by family problems. Some attitudes and approaches of parents may have negative impact on emotional development of their children, e.g. being afraid of conflict and difficult situations, being unable to handle failure, being unable to speak of their emotions, etc. Deficiencies in the failure of the dominant socializing agents, including family, may project into problem behaviour of children and youth. Family is a dominant socializing agent and, as stated by B. Kraus (2016), socialization takes place in the environment of various levels, various degrees of quality, and thus, due to the influence of unfavourable and undesirable incentives (persons) in terms of optimal personality development, it may happen that the resulting behaviour will deviate from the norm. Social environment and its negative impact is mainly based on un-supportive, unsuitable, or even pathological family environment. In such environment, children acquire undesirable patterns of behaviour. Such environments include families in which one or both parents are anomalous personalities; families that are only functional on a formal level and don't provide children with incentives necessary for their harmonious development; families that are part of a subculture or a social group that tolerates or even supports such behaviour that is considered defective by the majority society. A significant role is also played by the quality of relationships in family, disagreements in upbringing and inconsistency, but also exaggerated childcare. In many families, parents prefer free, liberal upbringing – however, they misunderstand it as an upbringing without any rules and limits. There is also a significant relationship between alcohol consumption of parents and children. Family environment has a determining influence on the healthy personality development of children and it also provides patterns of behaviour. In this context, M. Hutyrová, M. Růžička and J. Spěváček (2013) point out that there are two possibilities how to cooperate with families: on a restrictive level and on a motivational level. Pedagogical and vocational training employees at schools have in this sense competences on the motivational level; the restrictive level is mainly the competence of the Labour, Social affairs and Family Resort.

Special attention in the area of socio-educational care at schools should be paid to pupils from socially disadvantaged environment and actively work with them. Pupils from a socially disadvantaged environment are according to the Act on education and training pupils living in an environment that due to social, family, economic and cultural conditions insufficiently supports the development of mental, volitional, emotional properties of children or pupils, does not support their socialisation and does not provide them with enough adequate impulses for the development of their personalities.

In the Slovak Republic, these are mainly low-socialized Roma families who live most often in segregated settlements. Nowadays, despite efforts of school institutions to engage parents in the school life, there are still many barriers and prejudices, especially in the Roma community. According to D. Kopčanová (2014), the attributes of school failure of Roma children indicate that the attitude of parents towards education is very important. If a good-quality cooperation between parents and school is established, it has many positive results: development of trust between school and parents, parents and teachers work as a team to create positive learning experience for pupils, pupils benefit from the work of cooperating teams of adults. Good-quality cooperation with parents supports

effectiveness of teachers' and other professionals' work with pupils. Cooperation should be based on teamwork and effective communication, including mutual acceptance, respect and tolerance.

Effective cooperation of school and family can also be supported by vocational training employees at school, especially the social pedagogues. This is recommended also by P. Ďurana and D. Chlebková (2017). Social pedagogues are according to the valid legislative vocational training employees of schools. Their activities at schools in the Slovak Republic are defined in the legislative. According to the Act on education and training, one of the components of the system of educational counselling and prevention is also a social pedagogue and the Act on pedagogical and vocational training employees included him into the category of vocational training employee with clearly defined roles. A social pedagogue: implements preventive activities; provides counselling and intervention focused on children and pupils with risk behaviour, endangered by socio-pathological phenomena and from socially disadvantaged environment; provides counselling to the legal representatives, pedagogical and vocational training employees; undertakes socio-pedagogical diagnostics of the environment and relationships; raises awareness and performs other activities in the area of socio-educational area.

Since the school year 2014/2015, the number of vocational training employees at elementary and secondary schools has increased within the PRINED project. The national PRINED project was aimed to support inclusive environment in kindergartens and elementary and secondary schools in order to ensure the prevention of unjust placement of Roma children into the special school system and through creating special inclusive teams to support inclusion of pupils from marginalized Roma communities. The strengths of the cooperation of social pedagogues with parents within the PRINED project are according to the Final evaluation report the following:

- providing counselling to parents,
- establishing trustful relationships and the fact that someone listens to them,
- field work with families,
- help with upbringing,
- improvement in communication and school-parent-pupil cooperation,
- stronger regard to school attendance.

The importance of establishing the position of a school social pedagogues at elementary, secondary and high schools in the Czech Republic is proved by the results of the study called Introducing the position of social pedagogue at schools (feasibility study), according to which the biggest challenge social pedagogues face nowadays is the passive attitude of the majority of parents towards school (Moravec et al, 2015). At schools with high number of socially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with problem behaviour, social pedagogues are irreplaceable. However, each school is different and thus the social pedagogue's job description must be defined in a broad and open way. Social pedagogues do not work solely with the families from socially disadvantaged environment, but with all families. Especially urgent is their cooperation with families of pupils with problem behaviour. Slovak school practice shows that social pedagogues are also useful at schools attended by higher number of pupils from marginalized Roma communities.

### 3 Conclusion

Cooperation of school and family is extremely important in general, but especially so in prevention of socio-pathological phenomena. When dealing with problem behaviour of pupils, it is absolutely necessary. Schools should try to intensify cooperation with the families of their pupils, inform them on the school environment and on pedagogical and vocational training employees of the school. Communication of the pedagogical and vocational training employees with parents should be emphatic but professional.

In communication with parents, it is important to use comprehensible language, avoid difficult questions and foreign words, speak calmly and soberly, not embarrassing the parents. Parents have the right to be informed on the education of their child, and to cooperate on it. It creates space for cooperation and communication of the school employees and parents. Teachers and vocational training employees maintain the autonomy of their work, but they can't do what parents say, they also can't criticise them. It is important to be aware of the potential barriers and obstacles in communication of teachers and parents (different intellectual potential, different values, not listening to each other, overestimating one's own authority – by both teachers and parents, etc.).

Special attention should be paid to the cooperation with families of children from socially disadvantaged environment. In cooperation with families, very important role is played by the class teacher. It would also be helpful to increase the number of vocational training employees at schools.

Nowadays in the school practice, class teachers are the ones who most often communicate with parents. They, after consultations with other professionals at school, present possible problem solutions to parents. However, all pedagogical and vocational training employees of the school can communicate with parents. Schools should establish clear rules of communication, e.g. determine the time for communication with parents, provide them with possibilities of cooperation that best suit their needs and possibilities.

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