

Document Title: Violence in Educational Relations at School

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Document No.: 208022

Date Received: December 2004

This paper appears in *Policing in Central and Eastern Europe: Dilemmas of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, edited by Gorazd Mesko, Milan Pagon, and Bojan Dobovsek, and published by the Faculty of Criminal Justice, University of Maribor, Slovenia.

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MARIA DABROWSKA – BAK

VIOLENCE IN EDUCATIONAL RELATIONS AT SCHOOL: THE CLIMATE OF LAWLESSNESS IN POLISH SCHOOL

The paper presents the current condition of Polish school which is, at present, undergoing systemic changes connected with the consequences of political transformation in Poland. The weaknesses of previous era have been rejoined by the new ones, stemming from uncritical acceptance of fashionable liberal trends in the West European education.

One could say that the school has acquired, on the social scale, a role corresponding to the role of "scapegoat" in the theory of the displacement of aggression by Allport, as it is an institution easy to identify, unchanged and, at the same time, institution of low social influence which is devoid of the ability and possibility to retaliate. The displacement of aggression is two-dimensional: on the social scale aggression is transferred to school, as it is a weak institution unable to retaliate. Then, aggression permeates the atmosphere of every single school influencing teachers, pupils and the school equipment. Consequential existence of the climate of lawlessness modifies educational relationships within the school. There appear cigarette smoking, alcohol drinking, verbal aggression, vandalism and violence towards the teachers and pupils.

The expansion of the aforementioned phenomena was examined with use of sample of 800 pupils and 315 teachers, collected in the schools of Poznań, the capital of the Wielkopolska region. The research showed that the school of teachers and the school of pupils are two entirely different worlds. For pupils, it is the place of nicotine and alcohol initiation and the area of tolerance for primitive language and behaviour as well as for criminal activities. For teachers, school is a place calm and safe in fact, in which the phenomena described as the climate of lawlessness happen rarely or never. The existence of the climate of lawlessness encourages violent behaviours while the place of broken educational relation is being taken by the hostile relations between pupils and teachers and between the pupils themselves.

INTRODUCTION

It has become fashionable in Poland lately to criticise school and depreciate the process of traditional education. Learning at school ought to be interesting, based on the relation of partnership, democratic, and as stress-free as possible. Stress-free means in this context as similar as possible to the idealistic image of "western" education based on works by, for example, Hubertus von Schoenebeck (Schoenebeck, 1992), R.D. Storm (Storm, 1969), A.S. Neill (Neill, 1968), R.Meighan (Meighan, 1991) or J. Watts (Watts, 1980). Such expectations however cannot be fully satisfied, because the process of education entails various displeasures both for the teacher and for the pupil. The hierarchy proper to school as well as its real function always situate the pupil in the position subject to the teacher, and it is the teacher who executes, admonishes, evaluates or punishes. Moreover, the teacher must do so because "the form teacher sacrifices to the pupil not because the pupil represents a higher social value for the teacher.

Just the opposite, in the educational relationship it is the form teacher who represents higher social value than the pupil, because the teacher is the lawful member of social group whereas the pupil is only a candidate for such a member" (Znaniński, 2001, p. 344).

Florian Znaniński perceived the society as a multidimensional construct comprised of national, familial, religious and state societies. Were all those aspects of society to be examined in Poland, one could assume that they lost their previous stability (Staniszki, 1991, Comisso, 1997). This assumption might be proved by, for example, the increasing number of pathological phenomena within the family (divorces, alcoholism or violence) (Siemaszko, 2000, Pospiszyl, 1994). Church in Poland has lost its unquestioned authority and the state has occurred to be a structure particularly prone to corruption (Staniszki, 2001; Jarosz, 2004). National traditions are being ridiculed and defined as "xenophobia" (Krasnodebski, 2003). Tolerance is the only value which still seems to be highly estimated, but people tend to understand it in quite a particular way as being lenient towards laziness, selfishness and ambivalent towards evil. (Legutko, 1997).

School, as an institution which is responsible for the interrelation between the human personality and all of the aforementioned kinds of societies, seems to reflect the state of general chaos in which they are at present (Kwiecinski, 1992, Surzykiewicz, 2000, Olweus, 1998, Urban, 1997). Contrary to the structures of variables of the educating society defined by Znaniński, the internal structure of school has remained seemingly unchanged for the last 20 years. Thus, it is easier to observe and criticise negative phenomena connected with school than the negative phenomena connected with any other of the malfunctioning institutions. As the school is being more and more heavily criticised, one could risk a thesis that in Polish schools there appears, on a social scale, a phenomenon known in psychology as the displacement of aggression, which comes in the shape of the designation of scapegoat (Allport, 1967).

According to G. Allport, aggression displacement within the groups requires the victims to be easily recognizable, easily accessible and unable to retaliate. Such conditions are to be encountered at school, which is nowadays the institution mainly blamed for inappropriate education and behaviour of the young generation. The aforementioned features are represented in the Polish school in the following manner: Polish school is easily recognizable, because it has remained unchanged. As A. Nalaskowski puts it: "the school remains trapped in the most real of socialisms" (A. Nalaskowski, 1995).

It is easily accessible, because the teachers are a group of low paid, prestige-devoid state officials; thus, their opinion is rarely taken into account. It is unable to retaliate, because, on the one hand, it is limited by the structure of inflexible laws which make it virtually impossible to expel from school the individuals whose behaviour influences negatively the functioning of the institution and of the social group, and, on the other hand, because the various non-verbal forms of teachers' protests meet with general social contempt.

Displacement of aggression is two-dimensional: firstly, the school becomes a scapegoat on the scale of the whole society; secondly, it happens within the school itself, where those are the weakest pupils and the school equipment that fall prey to violence and vandalism. Omnipresent tolerance, understood as leniency, contributes to the development of the phenomenon. More and more frequent displacement of aggression is conducive, on its part, to the development of lawlessness. The term "lawlessness", according to A. Nalaskowski, denotes "every action taken against the aforesaid and

declared principles". Such actions include, for example, giving the pupils better marks than deserved, not supporting the best students, changing the traditional functions of the teacher as well as deforming or omitting scientific or historical information in the process of teaching.

At present, crucial educative problems are being generated by that aspect of the school reality which is defined as "pretended lack of troubles" and is comprised of various examples of the lack of school discipline. The phenomena which contribute to the lack of discipline are differentiated and might be looked at from different angles. Most of them fall into the category of violence, of either verbal or non-verbal kind.

It is not easy to give the definition of violence as such. There exists enormous literature presenting various aspects of the phenomenon. The dictionary definition reflects its complex structure as it defines violence in the following way: "*violence* is a power subduing the power of somebody else, a physical dominance used to impose illegal acts on somebody, political power governing with no legal legitimisation; rape; illegal acts committed with use of physical force; with *use of violence*: using physical force; against the will of somebody" (The Polish Language Dictionary, 1979, p. 986-987). The definition entails the possibility of interpreting the phenomenon in legal (contexts of norm, regulation, law, crime, which are examined in the works of, for example, A. Cohen, R. Cloward, R. Thrasher, W. Miller *et al.*), political power (H. Arendt, G. Sorman) and psychological (the use of force against the will of somebody) terms. Psychological definition of violence may be encountered in the works of I. Obuchowska, A. Fraczek, J. Dobson, A. Piekarska, H. Schneider, L. Berkovitz, I. D. Dollard *et al.*

Various approaches emphasize various aspects of violence: psychological approach connects violence with aggression, criminological one focuses on crime and political one analyses a given type of public government. Irrespective of the approach, however, the nature of violence remains unchanged: it is socially directed and describes a particular type of relations between people, groups or between an individual and a group. Particularity of this relation results from the possibility of exercising dominating power directed at somebody's harm or loss (Sliwerski, 1992; Holyst, 1997). Though violence may take various shapes, depending on circumstances, in fact it always means using dominating force to objectify basic interpersonal relations. The objectification itself does not breach any moral norm, but it, negates, in fact, the fundamental principles of human relations as such, which require the partners to admit and mutually respect their individual autonomy and to be ready to take into account in their actions moral dimension (reckoning of good and evil) rather than pragmatic one (reckoning of gains and losses, which, when devoid of moral dimension, becomes automatically the reckoning of the gains and losses of the stronger partner in the relationship).

The non-pragmatic nature of interpersonal relations should be especially promoted at school because of its special role in the process of education. School is an institution of direct education which is designed to realize a particular type of relations: the educational relations. They constitute the subcategory of social relations which has its root in the influence one side of the relationship exerts on the other. If this influence provokes changes in an individual we can say the education is being realised (Znaniński, 2001, vol II, p. 257). Violence blocks the educational influence of school, which was shown by the multinational research (Goldstein *et al.*, 1984; Olweus, 1998; Blankertz, 1989; Holyst, 1997; Dabrowska-Bak, 1999; Surzykiewicz, 2000; *et al.*).

In the present research there were taken into account actions involving use of physical force, such as: vandalism, all the breaches of traditional norms of behaviour at school,

improper behaviour of pupils towards the teachers and extortions noted among the students, as well as non-violent breaches of school regulations like heavy drinking and cigarette smoking. The occurrence of the enumerated phenomena at school may be defined as the climate of lawlessness.

The problems that are going to be examined in this paper are: Do the phenomena creating the climate of lawlessness appear at school? If they do, with what intensity? How is this respect of school reality perceived by the teachers and pupils?

METHODOLOGY AND THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH

To diagnose the extent of the phenomenon on the city scale a survey has been created, in which the pupils were asked to fulfil the following tasks:

"I present you a few situations which hypothetically could take place at every school. Try to use your imagination and tell us how these problematic situations could be solved. If you have in fact encountered such a situation in your primary school, indicate it please in the left margin of the page in the following manner:

- if the situation took place in fact every day please write **AED**
- if it took place a few times per week indicate **W**
- if it took place a few times per month write **M**
- if it took place every two or three months write **R**
- if not at all write **N**

The situation number 5 was to be described by the pupils with use of the following scale: very often (symbolised by **AED**), often (**W**), from time to time (**M**), rarely (**R**), Never (**N**).

SITUATION 1

In one of the schools the school equipment is constantly being stolen, the school library books are being damaged, the display cabinets are being broken, the benches and the toilets are continuously being devastated. Monthly cost of repairs is around 10 000 Polish zlotys (5 average monthly salaries). What would you do if you were the headmaster of this school?

SITUATION 2

The atmosphere in the school is fairly unrestricted: pupils are often late for classes, they skip particular classes, they do not bring the notebooks and do not do the homework assigned. They also leave the area of school during the breaks and so forth. What would you do if you were the headmaster of this school?

SITUATION 3

A part of the pupils uses extremely vulgar language while talking to the teachers. They also show neglect and contempt towards them. What would you do if you were the headmaster of this school?

SITUATION 4

During the school breaks older pupils persecute the weaker ones as well as those from lower classes, for example, they take their money away, they threaten them or beat them and so forth. What would you do if you were the headmaster of this school?

SITUATION 5

It is generally known that during the discos organised by the school, as well as during the school excursions, beer and wine is drunk furtively. What would you do if you were the headmaster of this school?

SITUATION 6

Some of the pupils smoke cigarettes and they do so also during the lessons. Everybody knows where the informal "smoking places" are. What would you do if you were the headmaster of this school?

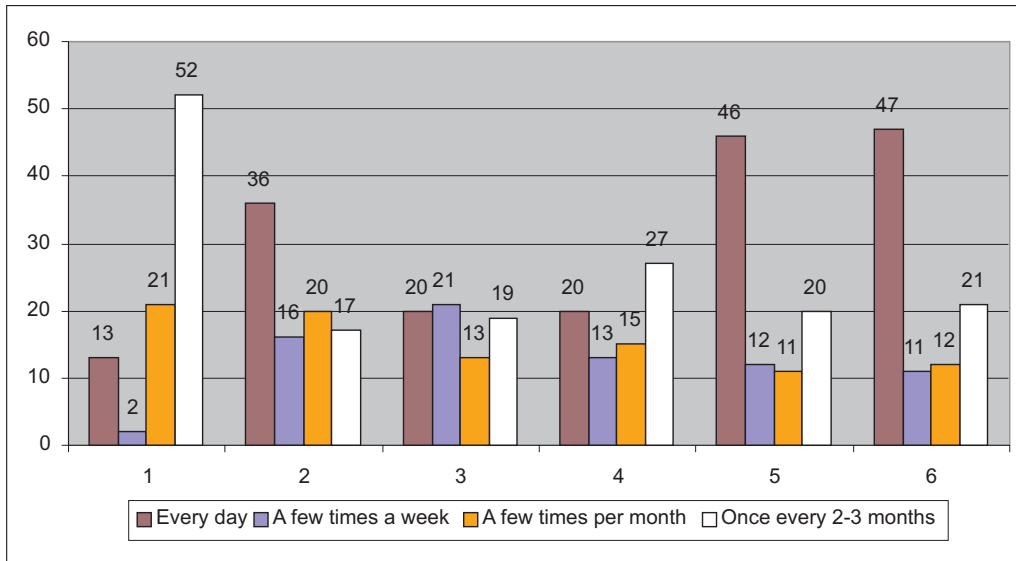
The survey was conducted among the 1st grade pupils of Poznań secondary schools in order to gather as much data concerning the comprehensive schools as possible.

Though the pupils are free to choose whichever secondary school they want, their choice is often determined by the proximity of the school to their homes. Our survey was conducted in November 2003, when the 1st year secondary school pupils still preserved the vivid image of their previous schools in their minds; the change of environment eliminated the influence of aside factors, such as caution or fear. In the personal data part of the survey, the pupils were also asked to give the number of the primary school they had frequented. In this way the research comprised 836 surveys, a 800 of which have been analysed in this paper.

To make the research procedure complete, the interviews with the teachers were necessary. However, as the teachers are often short of time during the usual school day, most of those interviews were conducted during the methodological conferences organised by the City Council in November and December 2003. The survey was also conducted among the teachers studying pedagogy at the first year of extramural university courses. The first year students were chosen in order to avoid any influence of the factors that are connected with the process of studying which could change the opinions of the student-teachers. After having excluded the survey forms that had been filled by the form teachers not working at schools, 315 survey forms collected in both groups of teachers were taken into account in the research.

The research has proved that all the actions defined as the elements building the climate of lawlessness appear in schools. The survey has collected compulsory data concerning the extent of this phenomenon, as the sample examined consisted of the former pupils of almost every primary school in Poznań and partly from the Miejska Rejonowa dzielnica Poznań examined represented 82 primary schools and 14 high schools of which are schools situated in the Śródmieście near Opatowska, Osina, Rowana, Osina, Remierowo, Waręta, etc. Itation in schools in those areas does not differ from the situation in the other schools. The phenomenon seems to be of non-local nature. The intensity of factors contributing to the existence of the climate of lawlessness in schools has been investigated in the table no 1.

Table No 1: the percentage of people surveyed indicting every single situation contributing to the creation of the climate of lawlessness: data in the columns 1, 2, 3 and 4 can be examined only making use of ranking, because the people examined may signalise the occurrence of a few types of factor situations at the same time

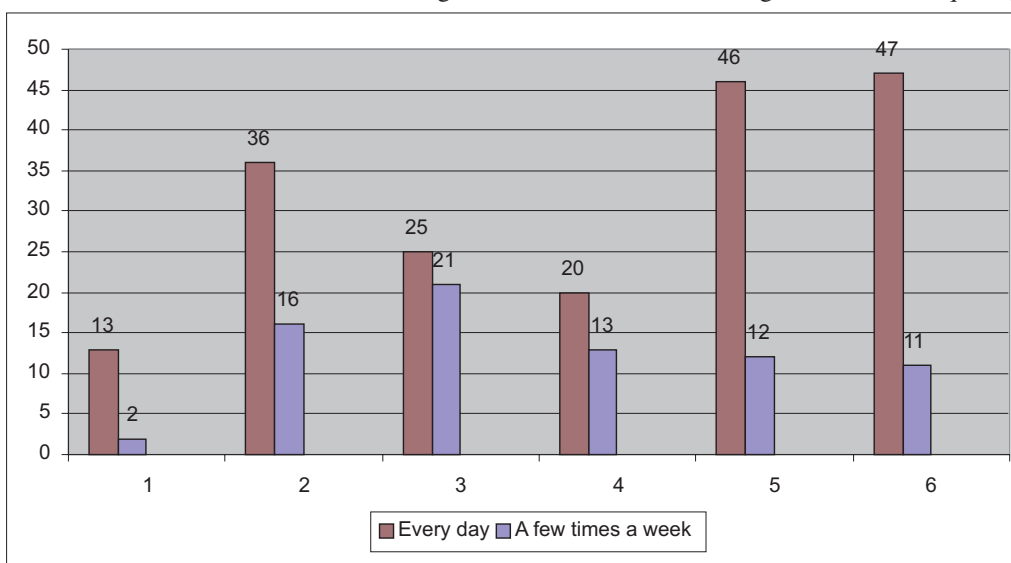


Categories: 1: vandalism, 2: the lack of discipline, 3: aggression towards the teachers, 4: mugging, 5: heavy drinking, 6: cigarette smoking

We may say that the actions contributing to the creation of the climate of lawlessness are very widespread at schools: from the chronic cigarette smoking to mugging. Only 9% of pupils have not encountered cigarette smoking at schools. Alcohol drinking during the discos and school excursions is equally popular. The lack of discipline has achieved the same rank as the alcohol drinking and the percentage of pupils who have witnessed vandalism at school is almost identical to the two aforementioned percentage results. Vulgar and neglectful attitude of pupils towards the teachers as well as brutal behaviour towards the younger schoolmates are only slightly less frequent.

The question that arises is whether the climate of lawlessness at schools is so widespread indeed, as the table takes into account both the actions taken frequently and the actions taken very rarely. Thus, to investigate the matter more thoroughly, we may separate the categories **AED** (almost every day) and **W** (a few times a week) and compare them in another table.

Table No 2: situations creating the climate of lawlessness signalised most frequently



Categories: 1: vandalism, 2: the lack of discipline, 3: aggression towards the teachers, 4: mugging, 5: heavy drinking, 6: cigarette smoking

The analysis of the data shows that the climate of lawlessness is created by the acts which happen at school every day or a few times a week. The most important of them are: cigarette smoking, alcohol drinking and the general atmosphere of leniency. Next on the scale of importance are rude behaviour towards the adults and, at last, criminal acts towards the schoolmates.

Comparing the tables no 1 and 2 one should pay attention to the dominance of categories number 5 and 6 (heavy drinking and cigarette smoking); this tendency may indicate that at least a part of the pupils become chain smokers as early as in primary school period. It also seems that the youth cannot enjoy themselves without alcohol, which means at least beer. The strong position of the second category (the lack of discipline) indicates, that most of the schools function in the state of chaos rather than order. The similar position of the third group (aggression towards the teachers) shows that, throughout his or her period of education, almost every second pupil surveyed observed very often, sometimes as much as a few times a week, disrespectful behaviour of the pupils towards the teachers.

Though the category number 4 (mugging) is relatively weakly represented, we should not neglect the fact that every third pupil during the period of his or her education witnessed mugging at school at least a few times a week, and every fifth pupil every day. It does not mean that the people surveyed were themselves the victims of mugging but the fact that they define such acts as belonging to the everyday school reality is significant.

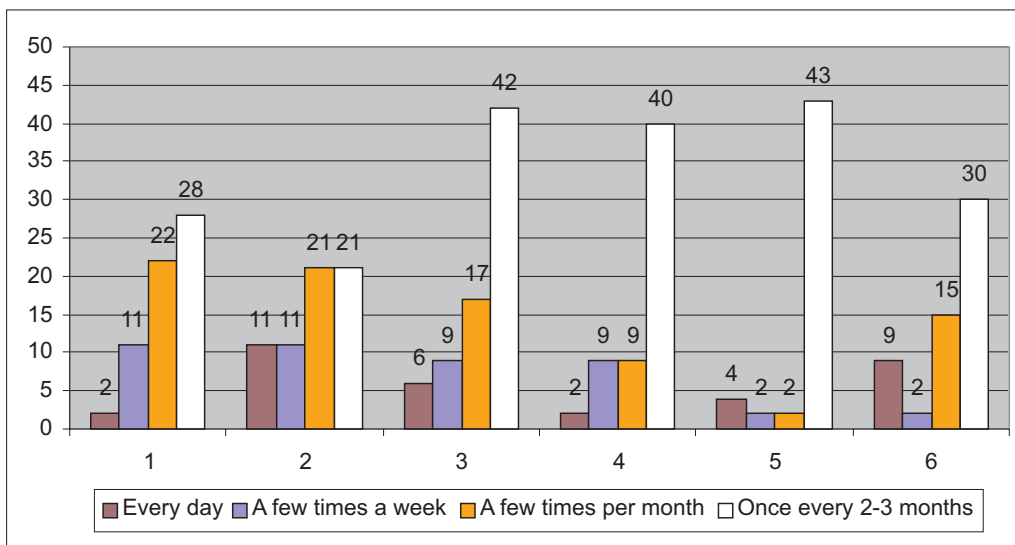
Category no 1 (vandalism) occupies the lowest ranking position. It occurs that the equipment devastation happens at schools more rarely than any of the other phenomena contributing to the existence of the climate of lawlessness. The data analysed put themselves into logical string of consequences: if the educating society cannot execute prohibitions as obvious as a prohibition of using stimulants by the adolescent, it is not surprising, either, that this society is not able to counteract less important breaches of

discipline, such as being late or skipping classes or not doing homework. In consequence, the society itself does not merit the respect of pupils (which is indicated by the strong position of the category no3: aggression towards the teachers) and the strongest pupils, sure of their going unpunished, impose their own conditions on the functioning of school.

THE CLIMATE OF LAWLESSNESS IN THE PERCEPTION OF TEACHERS

The teachers perceive the climate of lawlessness mainly through the prism of the pupils attitude towards them.

Table No 3: the situations creating the climate of lawlessness, according to the teachers.



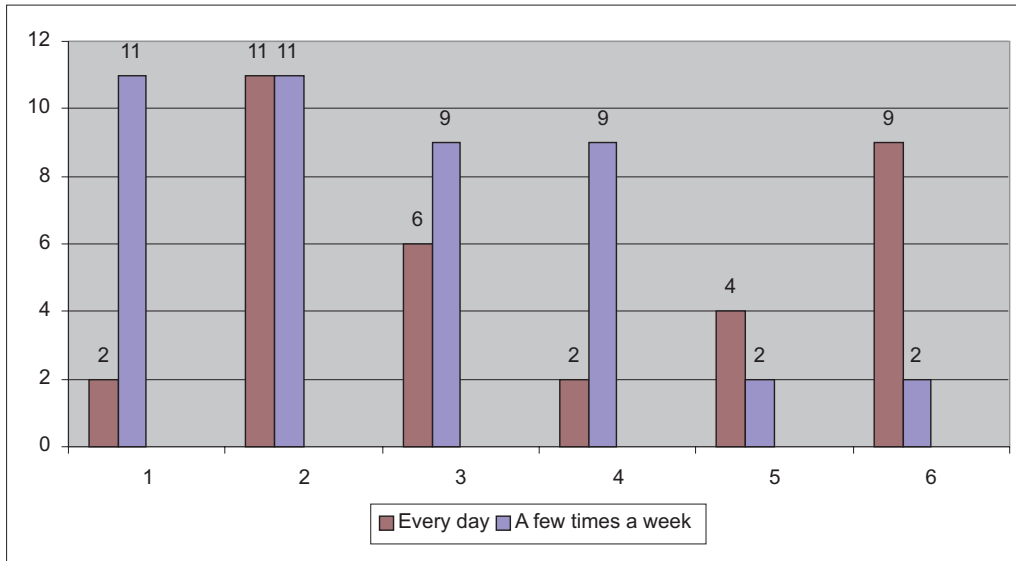
Categories: **1:** vandalism, **2:** the lack of discipline, **3:** aggression towards the teachers, **4:** mugging, **5:** heavy drinking, **6:** cigarette smoking

The improper behaviour towards the weaker is usually accompanied by vandalism and the lack of discipline. Mugging, cigarette smoking, and, the most rarely mentioned, heavy drinking are next in order of importance. Though at least a half of the teachers surveyed signalise that the situations described in the survey took place in their schools, the frequency of appearance of those phenomena is of relatively low intensity.

Such a result means that, according to the teachers, the situations described rarely or never happen at schools but the high percentage of the lack of responses may show the teachers' reluctance to evaluate the school as such. The fact that the teachers surveyed tend to ignore the situations which put the safety of pupils at risk is significant. Pupils are more frank in this respect: in the whole group surveyed only 6% of the entire number of questions were left unanswered.

To investigate the matter more thoroughly we may separate the categories **AED** (almost every day) and **W** (a few times a week) and compare them in another table, just as we did in the previous part of the paper.

Table No 4: the situations creating the climate of lawlessness signalised most often



Categories: **1:** vandalism, **2:** the lack of discipline, **3:** aggression towards the teachers, **4:** mugging, **5:** heavy drinking, **6:** cigarette smoking

The rules which are most often breached at school are those rules of discipline that create the organisational frames of didactic and educational processes. The lack of discipline is the most significant feature of school, both for the teachers and for the pupils. It is also the only feature which somehow joins the perception of school by the both sides of educational relationship, as the research shows that the teachers and pupils perceive the school in entirely different ways.

For the pupils the school is saturated with the phenomena of social pathology. It is the place of alcohol and nicotine initiation, where one can, on the one hand, easily become subject to mugging, and, on the other hand, train in disobedience towards the social norms.

The teachers rarely seem to be conscious of the extent of the aforesaid phenomena, so troublesome for the pupils. The ranks given to the categories no 4, 5 and 6 (mugging, cigarette smoking and heavy drinking respectively) are relatively insignificant, as those are the attitudes to the school property and to the educators themselves that play crucial part for the teachers surveyed. As in the consciousness of the teachers, conversely to the consciousness of the pupils, school remains a territory where the situations described above happen rarely or never, the phenomena enumerated in the 4th, 5th and 6th category are perceived as not very dangerous. However, the fact that the situation is not so satisfactory may be proved by the high percentage of the lack of teachers' answers to the questions concerning the phenomena obviously dangerous for the pupils (mugging, cigarette smoking and heavy drinking), which reflects perhaps remorse of the teachers.

CONCLUSION

Discipline seems to be the crucial variable for the quality of educational relationship in the educating society, both in its internal (responsible behaviour of the both sides of the educational relationship) and external (responsible attitude of the whole society) aspects. Therefore, to change the existing status quo in Polish schools, it would be necessary to take action on two levels:

1. Rethink the legal competences of school in the field of administrative law. One should pose a substantial question: whether those who do not want to learn, who constitute a physical threat for the weaker schoolmates and who damage the school equipment should necessarily be made to learn (to realise the educational duty).
2. Intensify the actions aimed at introducing discipline into schools. The action ought to be supported by the parents, the media and the other institutions created to protect the social order. After all, mugging is mugging, and the fact that the offenders are adolescent or are pupils should not change the society's approach here. Educating society possesses the adequate legal measures already, but it needs to have the will and courage to use them.

Another important matter is to make teachers conscious of the fact that education is based, first of all, on personal example and devising a method of professional selection which would eliminate from their posts those teachers who do not understand that.

If the society does not pay attention to educating responsible citizens, it may risk further growth of anarchy and, in consequence, the reintroduction of police state. As our history shows, such political system is frequently chosen by the citizens tired of general disorder and state of constant threat to their health, life or property.

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