

Educator's Modes of Identifying and Coping with Pupil's Exposure to Domestic Violence in Schools in East Jerusalem

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Abstract—The phenomenon of child abuse and violence towards them has negative effects on children at diverse levels: the social level, the personal level, the physical level, and emotional level. Various studies around the world have examined the extent of the phenomenon and its dimensions, methods of handling it, and developing the services for treating it, including a program for its prevention. This paper includes a first of its kind study in East Jerusalem that deals with the teachers' and educators' ability & Modes to identify, and ways of coping in schools there, with cases of children who suffer domestic abuse. It discusses identifying attributes of educators' coping in schools there with problems of domestic violence towards children. The analysis of the study results shows that educators have the ability to identify, and the knowledge of the subject of domestic violence, their method of treatment varies between internal work with the student himself and coping through the welfare services and the police. However, they still face many difficulties dealing with the cases: systemic difficulties and the barriers, family difficulties and the barriers, barriers by the teacher's families, parents' pressure on the students, and political difficulties and barriers.

Index Terms—Domestic violence, educators, east Jerusalem, identifying and coping, minorities.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, the phenomenon of child abuse and violence against children has benefited from broad interest amongst many, and mainly, western societies worldwide. This interest is manifested in the laws of various countries and their policies, as well as in studies that investigated the scope of the phenomenon and its dimensions, methods of handling it and developing the necessary services for dealing with it, including programs for its prevention [1]-[10].

Similarly, studies have been conducted that explored the diverse influences of abuse on child development, including the social and emotional effects of violence that children experience in their homes [2], [11].

In recent years many studies that have explored the phenomenon of child abuse note the large extent of the phenomenon in its unexpected proportions [3], and observe the increase in its scope globally [4], [12], [11]. Some of the studies even define it as a social, health, human and legal problem, whose scale affects all groups in the population [13], [14]. This issue has been termed one of national emergency

due to its broad scope and negative affect [12].

The study aims to explore, through observation, East Jerusalem teachers' methods of identifying, handling and treating cases of students who experience and experienced domestic violence, and their coping, their successes, and their disappointments while exposing the cases and their treatment.

The uniqueness of this study lies in its being the first of its kind conducted in East Jerusalem schools, through its consideration of the uniqueness of the education system in that sector, and its social and political structure. The results & analysis will assist in educators coping with pupil's domestic violence.

II. MINORITY GROUPS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Violence is a broad topic that occurs in most societies around the world and, like every other group, minority groups also suffer from displays of violence. Reference [15] asserts that minorities suffer more than other groups due to the social isolation they usually encounter, which lures in its wake violence within the minority itself, and from this minority outwards. Similarly, in societies of ethnic minorities around the world, a tendency may be observed to use violence due to the social, economic and political situation these groups encounter in majority states. Furthermore, the danger of the impact of violence increases amongst minorities due to their being exposed to traumatic experiences in their daily lives [16], [17].

Reference [18] finds the level of domestic violence amongst Afro-American families in the USA to be higher than that in the population at large there. This disparity stems from social segregation and exclusion, from the high rates of unemployment and the poor socio-economic situation of that minority vis-à-vis the broader population. Reference [19] aver that this last factor amongst minority groups causes unemployment, dependency on services of the majority, and social problems, and is eventually liable to lead to violence. The separation and the distance from the majority culture reduce the possibility of familiarity with other cultures, and thus the minority remains faithful to its rules, trapped within its "bubble", and keeping its problems to itself. This situation limits the labor market amongst the minority, limits its freedom of movement, and also leads to the use of violence as a tool for solving problems.

In Israel, Palestinian society is also defined as a minority group. The professional literature notes the use of violence – both physical and emotional – within that society. The study

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by [20] shows that the rate of emotional violence in that sector stands at 12.6%, and amongst the population of the refugee camps, that suffers more from problems of unemployment and a shortage of educational and social opportunities, the rate of emotional violence is even higher. Palestinian children are exposed to political and social distress and are at risk. Reference [21] finds that 35% of the Palestinian adolescents, who participated in the study on physical abuse, experienced this from their parents at least once during that period of research.

Therefore, the issue of violence is a complicated problem globally. The socio-economic and the political condition of the minorities increase its complexity amongst diverse minorities globally, due to the difficulties in reporting to the majority authorities, and the intricacies in receiving services from them.

III. THE EXPOSURE OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Due to the sensitive condition of the minority and the sensitivity of the issue of domestic violence, a difficulty was generated in exposing cases of children who experience domestic violence; as such exposure is a particularly difficult process for several reasons [22]:

- Small children do not complain as they are threatened or deceived by the abuser or are afraid of being accused.
- By nature, there are positive biases regarding the connection between parents and children, and, similarly, the social norms protect family privacy and prevent others, such as neighbors and teachers, from reporting this. Moreover, the social reaction towards violence or child abuse varies between one society and another, and differs between Western and non-Western societies [23].
- When the injury is physical, it is sometimes hard to know if it was caused by abuse or by a fall.
- Usually, mothers of abused children also experience abuse, and are therefore are incapable of helping their child to reveal the matter. Moreover, they themselves sometimes abuse their child.

IV. EDUCATORS, PROFESSIONALS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In view of the difficulty of exposure, the ability of professionals, who are in contact with the children, to identify cases in which violence is suspected, has particular weight. The research literature indicates that, as professionals, the teachers are in a key position in everything regarding identifying cases of violence amongst children and their prevention, especially in areas of conflict, because school has become a protected place to which children can escape [24]. Apart from the home, it is the place where the children spend time almost daily. They create personal connections there with the adults who care for them, talk to them and teach them, and who therefore can identify any signs of neglect or violence [25], [26], [27]. The responsibility for the pupils' welfare is in the hands of each teacher & educator [28]. These are professionals who are closest to the pupils, and their daily contact enables them to identify every sign or behavior that hints at a suspicion of any abuse. They can observe the pupils'

behavior in many situations, weave close relationships with them, and usually enjoy the pupils' respect – a relationship that affords them an advantage over other professionals.

These close relationships find pupils tending to tell their teachers & educators about every problem they encounter or exploitation they experience. Therefore, the teachers & educators are in a key position to gather data and signs of child abuse, and their status allows them to give their pupils information and advice regarding the various social services available to them in times of distress [25], [26], [29], [30]. Correct identification of the reasons for the risk and its results can help change the situation amongst pupils for whom signs of risk have been identified [31].

V. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study employs the qualitative research method to examine the ways teachers & educators in east Jerusalem schools handle cases of children who experienced and experience domestic violence in their families. This method enables subjective observation, as far as possible, of reactions, emotions, deliberations, and considerations underlying each case and every treatment. The qualitative tool was found to be the most suitable for the demands of this procedure, the individual being the main “means” – a flexible, sensitive tool, capable of perceiving situations. Moreover, the qualitative tool enables the researcher to be part of the encounter and to participate in the discourse, while maintaining a balance between involvement and empathy, and distance and critical thought. This qualitative human tool is capable of reacting; it is characterized by sensitivity, can relate to clues from the environment and to personal needs during the research, and adapt itself to the situation [21], [32].

The current study relies on two tools: qualitative in-depth interviews and focus groups.

In-depth qualitative interviews: This is the research tool selected as the main tool suitable for examining the subject. Twenty-six interviews were conducted with educators from schools in East Jerusalem. Focus groups: are an additional research tool selected for this study, that serves as another source of information regarding the information obtained in the interviews. Two focus groups were formed, each with six participants (six of the participants in the focus groups also participated in the in-depth interviews).

The analysis of the material and the interpretation relied on field anchored theory. The research population embraced 26 educators working in municipal schools in east Jerusalem. This population included subject teachers, homeroom teachers, an educational counselor, a social worker and an art therapist.

VI. FINDING AND ANALYSIS

The findings of this study raised diverse and complex topics, and in this paper I have related to three main themes: 1. Methods of identification; 2. the reaction of educators to students who experienced or experience domestic violence, and their ways of coping with these cases; 3. Difficulties and barriers to coping.

- 1) The first theme, that dealt with methods of identification by educators who participated in the study found that educators in East Jerusalem schools know that there are indeed cases (they claim many) of students hurt by domestic violence. Educators who participated in the study noted facts regarding the existence of the problem amongst their students and their knowledge of it. They could describe most exactly the cases they discovered, the signs of violence and the number of male and female students who experience domestic violence in their families and in the classroom. Furthermore, the research findings on this topic indicated the ability to identify, and the knowledge of, the subject of domestic violence, the use of diverse theoretical concepts and their origins in educational, psychological and sociological disciplines.
- 2) The second theme in the research findings located the ways adopted by educators to treat or cope with cases of violence that they identified in the course of their educational work in schools. Their method of treatment varies between internal work with the student himself and coping through the welfare services and the police, and their use of the right to report according to the Mandatory Reporting Law. The research findings identified four ways educators, who participated in the study, can deal with the problem and intervene. Personal coping with the student, typified by identifying and listening to the student, and further tracking through personal sessions in which individual support and learning help is provided to every student regarding personal self-defense, and the use of tools to reduce the threshold of violence in the family. Coping vis-à-vis the family, which is characterized by involving members of the family in order to handle the problem of violence towards their children. The involvement split into two differing approaches, wherein the first was instructing individuals in the family (brothers, father, mother, grandmother). This was conveyed through lectures and meetings with the parents, especially the mothers, and with the school parent committee, as well as in personal sessions with individuals from the family of the student, who, it is feared, experiences domestic violence. The second approach in coping with the family is authoritative involvement that includes warning the parents, threats of transferring the handling of the case to the police or to the welfare office, and threats that the very transfer of the case to the welfare authorities and to the law can entail punishment and the loss of national insurance payments. Educators claim that the warnings produce effective results, and testify to their success in dealing with various cases. Coping through the school administration - some educators preferred not to treat cases that they identify by themselves and chose to inform the administration. They preferred to follow the school culture rather than the contextual regulations; they preferred the administration to take upon itself the legal obligation to report cases and their continued treatment. They claim that thus they are saved the legal and personal responsibility towards cases of violence that they identify. Coping through the legal enforcement system: Seven educators considered this method, but due to a lack of trust in the system and the fear of the results of intervention of the welfare and the law enforcement systems, they recanted and turned to the school administration so that this would continue the treatment vis-à-vis the authorities in view of the complexity of the context in East Jerusalem.
- 3) The third theme in the research findings pertained to the obstacles and difficulties that educators encountered in this study, when they wished to treat and cope with cases of domestic violence that they identified in school, and the barriers to coping that arose in the findings. These were divided into three main categories. The first category included the systemic difficulties and the barriers; unfolded the lack of trust in the welfare and the legal enforcement systems, and the lack of compatibility of the laws, regulations, methods of intervention and the treatment of children, and the shortage of resources that assist in the intervention and the school policy blocking this. The second category included the family difficulties and the barriers, and included the fear and the hesitation from parental and family reactions of students who were hurt towards educators and the school. These reactions varied from threats and warnings to school to attacks on school property and educators. It further included the barriers by the teacher's families who prevented involvement outside of school in cases of identifying violence towards the students, due to the fear of reactions by the students' families. These posed a problem to educators, and also included the parents' pressure on the students, and constraints to lie regarding violence towards them, or their punishment for revealing and sharing events with an educator. The punishment varied from physical punishment to punishment through removing the student from school, his transfer to another school, or even being kept at home. The third category was political difficulties and barriers. It included the uniqueness of the location in the Jerusalem space, and how one's place of residence influences the method of treatment.

VII. DISCUSSION

Identification, exposure, and awareness of pupils suffering from domestic violence are feasible amongst educators, who are positively committed to successful intervention and coping with some of these cases. At the same time, and despite the preparedness and awareness, the teachers & educators remained paralyzed and bound, and were blocked in diverse ways due to the complex situation in East Jerusalem, and the political context of the space. They were further stymied for reasons associated with culture, which emphasizes the complexity and the challenge in coping and due to their involvement in cases of domestic violence towards pupils that were exposed in schools in East Jerusalem. It forces educators to face the challenge of finding an alternative solution, compatible with the culture and the context, that will lead to an effective intervention system both for the pupils and for the family, such as the informal system

that comprises school educators, parents and other professionals, who can help as regards awareness, exposure and intervention, and will afford a familiar entity for support at this level.

In addition, there is a need for customized training for teachers in the spirit of psycho - social educational Approach, which will help educators in dealing with the pupils in essential and helpful way.

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