

Comprehensive Study of School Discipline Issues in the OECS: Research Report - Summary



OECS Education Reform Unit (OERU)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the OECS Ministers of Education requested that research be conducted to investigate factors that lead to relatively high rates of indiscipline in school and suggest policy options. This request grew from rising concerns expressed by education system stakeholders in all OECS countries over issues of growing verbal and physical violence and disruptive classroom behaviour, all of which impair the capacity of the education system to effectively accomplish its main aims.

In response to this request, the OECS Education Reform Unit (OERU) undertook this comprehensive study, building on its previous research work. The objectives of the study were:

- Describe and analyze the prevalence, nature, and sources of school discipline problems in OECS schools, with special emphasis on violence (any type of violence involving pupils, teachers, parents or others that affects the school environment)
- Identify policy implications and formulate recommendations to OECS Ministers of Education for actions aiming to 1) prevent, 2) reduce opportunities for, and 3) effectively manage school discipline problems.

The study design was grounded in the research literature on determinants and prevention of school violence and disruptive behaviour, looking at causes rooted in the school, family and community environments and its outcomes for pupils, teachers and principals.

2. METHODOLOGY

Study populations

Quantitative component. After pre-testing, self-administered questionnaires were completed by representative, randomly selected individuals in the following populations:

- 3703 pupils aged 14 to 16 inclusively attending OECS secondary, senior primary or junior secondary schools (93% of the target sample)
- 444 secondary school teachers in OECS schools teaching 14 to 16 year olds (Forms 3 and 4); (92% of the target sample) and
- 78 principals of OECS schools.

The table below shows the breakdowns of the samples by OECS country.

Table 1: Sample breakdown by country

Country	Pupils	Teachers	Principals
Anguilla	69	18	3
Antigua and Barbuda	427	49	8
BVI	62	14	3
Dominica	608	67	12
Grenada	815	71	11
Montserrat	28	9	1
St. Kitts and Nevis	263	43	8
St. Lucia	734	78	13
St. Vincent and Grenadines	697	95	19
Total: all OECS	3703	444	78

Qualitative component The qualitative component of the study involved focus groups in Antigua, St Kitts and Nevis, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, representatives of secondary teachers, teachers' unions, parents (PTA); guidance counsellors, welfare officers, police and probation officers; retired educators, community groups, religious officials and education officers.

Study management

The quantitative data collection was carried out by the OERU with the assistance of education officers and school personnel in each country. The qualitative component was conducted by members of the study team during site visits. Data entry and analysis were carried out at the OERU.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Frequency and locations of discipline problems

Some discipline problems are highly prevalent in the OECS, including shouting, insulting, and ridiculing and cursing among pupils – all observed three or more times in the past week by roughly three-quarters of the pupil population (see Table 2). Indiscipline in the classroom is also very prevalent: 70% of pupils have seen classroom misbehaviour three or more times in the week preceding the survey, and 57% have seen pupils break class rules three or more times in that same week. Threatening and physical harm among pupils are observed three times a week or more by about 40% of pupils. While some discipline problems are perceived to occur at about the same rate by teachers, principals and students, there are often differences between their perceptions. In general, principals tend to see discipline problems as occurring less frequently. Teachers see shouting and classroom rule-breaking as the most frequent forms of indiscipline, with 84% of teachers observing rule-breaking and 83% observing shouting at least three times in the last week.

Table 2: Frequency of school discipline problems

In the last week, how many times did you see pupils:	%. Three times or more in the past week		
	Pupils n = 3701	Teachers N = 444	Principals n = 78
Break class rules	57%	84%	76%
Be rude to a teacher	52%	56%	46%
Shout at other pupils	76%	83%	50%
Insult each other	73%	70%	39%
Make fun of other pupils	72%	60%	35%
Bully other pupils	46%	47%	27%
Try to hurt another pupil's feelings by leaving them out of things	7%	34%	19%
Curse other pupils	71%	58%	46%
Misbehave in class	70%	75%	65%
Tell another pupil they will hurt them	44%	39%	30%
Hit other pupils	40%	19%	19%
Hit a teacher	3%	2%	1%
Use a weapon in a fight	7%	6%	5%

Among various forms of discipline problems, principals and teachers are most likely to find lack a proper attention to homework as a serious or very serious problem, followed by classroom misbehaviour and verbal violence (Table 3). Physical violence among pupils is rated as a serious or very serious problem by 47% of teachers and 36% of principals.

Table 3: Severity of school discipline problems

How serious are the following discipline problems at your school?	%. Serious or very serious	
	Teachers n = 444	Principals n = 78
Lack of proper attention to schoolwork	81%	78.2%
Misbehaviour in class	61%	60.2%
Verbal violence involving pupils	57%	51.3%
Verbal violence involving teachers	15%	6.4%
Bullying	42%	32.0%
Physical violence among pupils	47%	35.9%
Physical violence involving teachers and pupils	5%	1.3%
Gangs	30%	15.3%
Drug or alcohol use	34%	24.3%

According to the teachers surveyed, verbal and physical violence is far more likely to occur after school and during breaks between classes than before school, within the classroom and in evenings and weekends. It is important to note, however, that almost 16% of teachers state that verbal and physical violence occurs often or very often in their classrooms. Another 49% of teachers state that it occurs sometimes in the classroom. This means that almost two-thirds of OECS classrooms experience verbal and physical violence at least sometimes. Principals have a consistently lower estimate of the frequency of violence at all points during the school day (Table 4).

Table 4: Time of day that verbal and physical violence occurs

Time of day	(%: Often or very often)	
	Teachers n = 444	Principals N = 78
Morning, before school	6.6	0.0
In class periods	15.6	6.4
In breaks between classes	42.4	33.3
After school	50.7	43.6
In the evenings	20.9	20.5
On the weekends	9.5	7.7

Principals consistently report less frequent violence in all locations than teachers, although both report violence most frequently in the school yard (Table 5).

Table 5: Location of verbal and physical violence

Location	(%: Violence occurs here often or very often)	
	Teachers n = 444	Principals n = 78
Classroom	32.7	21.7
Bathrooms	5.2	3.8
In school yard	48.6	34.6
In hallways	31.1	21.8
Streets close to school	32.9	25.7

As Table 6 shows, all public spaces in the school are supervised less than half of the time. The spaces where and when violence most often happens (in the hallways and school yard, during breaks and after classes), are unsupervised more than 60% of the time.

Table 6: Supervisory practices

Location	Space is supervised during: (% yes)			
	Before school	During breaks	Lunch hour	After school
Bathrooms	13.0	19.0	15.9	14.5
In school yard	35.8	43.4	38.4	30.7
In hallways	27.5	37.6	30.1	18.1
Streets close to school (supervision of school entrance)	41.4	40.5	37.5	29.4

3.2 Disciplinary actions

The study provided data on the extent to which teachers use specific positive disciplinary actions: detention, extra work, sending pupils to the principal and stopping fights, and negative actions: physical discipline, not stopping fights, hitting, cursing or ill-treating pupils, or making fun of pupils. These are shown in the table below. Sending pupils to the principal (43% of teachers had done so at least once in the last week) occurs more frequently than giving detention (28% in the last week) or extra work (38% in the last week). Just over one-quarter of teachers (27%) state that they stopped a fight among pupils at least once in the last week. 73% had praised a pupil. Negative actions are somewhat less frequent, with 20% of teachers having physically disciplined a pupil at least once in the last week, 16% having hit a pupil, and 20% making fun of a pupil.

Table 8: Teachers' positive and negative disciplinary actions

Action	Frequency: at least once in the last week, %, n = 444
Positive actions	
Discipline a pupil by giving detention	28%
Discipline a pupil by giving extra work	38%
Send a pupil to the principal	43%
Stop a fight among pupils	27%
Praise a pupil	73%
Negative actions	
Physically discipline a pupil	20%
Not stop a fight, leaving pupils to work it out	9%
Hit a pupil	16%
Curse a pupil	9%
Ill-treat a pupil	5%
Make fun of a pupil	20%

Seventy-three percent of teachers reported having to discipline the same pupil more than once, at least once in the last week.

3.3 Predictors of discipline problems

Multivariate linear regression analyses were used to identify the strongest predictors of discipline problem frequency. Table 9 shows that, among pupils, the strongest predictors were poor teacher practices (of arriving late, being absent or leaving early), followed by quality of the school environment (orderliness, quietness, cleanliness). Other predictors included tendency to attribute misbehaviour to external factors (work too difficult, teacher disorganized), lower form level, and stronger parental support.

Table 9: Predictors of discipline problem frequency, pupils

Scale	Interpretation
Teacher practice	Teachers' practices of irregular attendance and lack of punctuality are the strongest predictors of high discipline problem frequency
Quality of school environment	In schools where the environment is perceived more favourably, discipline problems are observed less frequently
Reasons for pupil misbehaviour	Pupils who attribute pupil misbehaviour to external factors rather than internal factors perceive discipline problems more frequently
Form level	Pupils in lower forms are more likely to observe high frequency of indiscipline
Parental support and involvement	Pupils whose parents are more supportive of the school observe discipline problems more frequently

Among teachers (Table 10), teacher involvement in positive discipline, quality of school environment, and presence of un-owned, unsafe spaces were the strongest predictors and frequent school discipline problems

Table 10: Predictors of discipline problem frequency, teachers

Predictor	Interpretation
Teacher involvement in positive discipline	The greater the frequency of discipline problems they observe in the school, the more often teachers engage in positive disciplinary practices.
Quality of school environment	Schools with poorer environments have a higher frequency of discipline problems
Unowned spaces	Schools with more unsafe, un-owned spaces have more severe discipline problems

3.4 Desired fates of misbehaving students: approaches and predictors

When asked what should be done about discipline problems, 31% of teachers and 16% of principals agreed that corporal punishment was the most effective method. Over 90% of both samples agreed that punitive measures should be followed by remediation.

The predictors of a remedial approach versus an authoritarian approach to managing discipline problems were examined using regression analyses, summarized in Table 11. Less favourable attitudes to corporal punishment, presence on unsafe, un-owned spaces in the school, greater teaching experience, a broader view of the teacher's role (extending beyond the classroom) and shorter school tenure predict positive views of a remedial approach.

Table 10: Predictors of attitudes to a remedial approach with misbehaving pupils, teachers

Predictors	Interpretation
Attitudes toward corporal punishment	Teachers who favour a remedial approach to misbehaviour are also less favourable toward corporal punishment
Un-owned spaces	Teachers whose schools have fewer unsafe un-owned spaces favour a remedial approach to misbehaviour
Experience	Teachers with more experience favour a remedial approach
Teachers' roles	Teachers with a broader view of their roles favour a remedial approach
Tenure	Teachers with a shorter tenure at their school favour a remedial approach

3.5 Qualitative findings

The qualitative component of this study addressed some of the more complex policy-related issues related to school discipline in OECS schools, as well as environmental factors contributing to the problems. Documents supplied by Education Officers were also used as background information in this part of the study.

3.5.1 Prevalence of aggression and violence

Aggression and violence are seen by all stakeholders as an increasing problem in OECS schools. Most prevalent in large city schools but also seen in all sectors, it is seen as stemming from several sources. First, teachers' negative attitude to less able pupils and obvious concern for able pupils results in resentment, aggression and hostility. According to counsellors and education officers, the curriculum creates competition, which results in aggressive behaviour. Also, according to these stakeholders, the cliques created at school cause aggression which is now increasing with the subtle violent behaviour of the girls. Drugs, violence, and injuries caused by knives and cutlasses are the most common aggression-related problems that are observed. The consumption and sale of alcohol on school premises and at school functions is also common. Many different kinds of weapons have been found among school children, including umbrella spokes, three tines removed from a fork leaving one for wounding, guns, knives and screwdrivers. Senior pupils are violent to junior pupils, and sexual aggression is common as boys are expected to be sexually active at a certain age. External stakeholders (police and probation officers), noted that the environment outside school is filled with violent images and music, which primes children to act out within school.

Stakeholders identified many factors that are contributory to the high prevalence of violence. These factors are discussed in the sections below.

3.5.2 Administrative and legal context: system-level factors

Ministry-level policies

Education Acts In OECS countries, the Education Act is the main administrative and legal framework for school discipline. While six countries have passed new Education Acts (Dominica 1997, St. Lucia 1999, Grenada 2002, BVI 2004, Montserrat 2004 and St. Kitts and Nevis 2005), the others are still working on this process. Some countries also have discipline policies at the Ministry and/or school levels. Table 79, below, summarizes the policy documents obtained from education officials

Table 79: Summary of Discipline Policy Documents and Studies

Country	Documents	Issues covered or addressed
OECS Region	Model Education Bill of the OECS: Final Draft. K. Anthony, April 1996.	Division 5: Discipline, Suspension and expulsion of pupils includes the following subsections: School rules to govern discipline, Corporal punishment, Abolition of corporal punishment, Suspension for minor offences, suspension for major offences, and Action by Chief Education officer.
Dominica, St Kitts and Nevis and St Lucia	Pre-social assessment for secondary education project for Dominica, St Kitts and Nevis and St Lucia: Gomart, E. World Bank, July 2001.	Preparatory study for a secondary education reform project in these countries, involving 27 discussion groups (235 participants) with pupils, parents, teachers and school leavers. Study focused on: obstacles to secondary school entry, causes of dropout, equitable access and outcomes, value of and satisfaction with education. Violence was raised as a key issue by pupils and addressed through a recommendation on conflict management, school, security
Anguilla	Albena Lake-Hodge Comprehensive School Behaviour Management Policy (undated)	Roles and responsibilities of Governing Board, Principal, Deputy, Senior teachers, school counsellors, head of year, head of department, subject teacher, form tutor and outside agencies. Rewards and sanctions are outlined, the latter for a range of misbehaviour.
	Primary School Behaviour Policy	Description of purpose and content of behaviour codes for primary schools. Rights and responsibilities of Principals, teachers and other staff, pupils and parents Rewards and sanctions are outlined, the latter for a range of misbehaviour
Antigua and Barbuda		
BVI		
Dominica	Commonwealth of Dominica School Safety and Discipline Policy (First draft, undated): T. Serrant, Planning Officer	Reviews previous evaluations and studies including a background study prepared by the author (Serrant, T. In search of a theory: Understanding school violence within the Dominican context) Outlines rights, responsibilities and values enshrined in existing legislation (1997 Education Act) Proposes and vision, goal, objectives and target population Outline position and policy for: physical safety and security; emotional safety; discipline; institutional arrangements, and monitoring and evaluation.
	Guidelines for Corporal Punishment, Merit/Demerit /Detention system	Provides guidelines and criteria for corporal punishment, merit and demerit systems, and detention
	Ministry of Education, Sports and Youth Affairs draft protocol for use of mobile telephone (undated)	
	Generic school rules for primary and secondary schools	Covers attendances and punctuality, dress code, uniform, grooming, behaviour/deportment, fighting, theft, harassment, honesty, vandalism, banned materials/substances
	St Martin Secondary School; Pupil Handbook	Includes school policy on behaviour/deportment, fighting, theft, harassment, honesty, vandalism, banned materials/substances, and a merit and demerit system.
	Marigot Secondary School, Behavioural Prevention/ Intervention Policy	Includes a aims, objective, rationale and processes for prevention and two levels of rehabilitation.

Country	Documents	Issues covered or addressed
Grenada	Situation analysis of children and their families: Grenada	Includes a section on education, as part of an assessment of child development and participation.
Montserrat		
St. Kitts and Nevis		
St. Lucia	Draft regulations for primary schools in St-Lucia, July 2003	Includes preventive actions and sanctions for punctuality and regularity, school and personal property, conduct, dress code, application to study, and safety
	Case study of school management processes: Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Youth and Sports, January 2003.	Comprehensive qualitative and quantitative case study of a successful secondary school, involving interviews, observations, and questionnaires to 183 pupils
	Report of the Working Group on Discipline in the School System, prepared for the Ministry of Education, Human Resource Development, Youth and Sports, July 1998	Policy guideline are proposed relating to three areas of the Working Group's mandate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategies for strengthening discipline in schools - Sanctions, preventive measures and corrective/punitive measures - Development of a cohesive effort with social partners
	Research Project: Study of School Violence. Sources: Perpetrators and reasons. July 1998	Report of a study involving questionnaires administered to 192 pupils, teachers, principals and parents, selected from a representative sample of 12 schools. Study measured prevalence, origins and reasons for violent behaviour and most likely perpetrators; includes recommendations
St. Vincent and Grenadines	Report on programme for pupils at risk in St Vincent and the Grenadines	Summarizes findings and recommendations of a Working Group for setting up a special programme for pupils with academic and/or behavioural problems.

Corporal punishment: Corporal punishment is a key area of debate within the context of education policy reform. While the focus group interviews suggested that some countries are considering alternatives to corporal punishment, no evidence was found of programmes in place. According to focus group respondents in all countries, children perceive the removal of corporal punishment from the Education Acts as removal of the main incentive for acceptable discipline.

Focus group participants noted that additional administrative and legal frameworks are provided in some countries through policies and legislation outside the education domain. For example, Grenada has a national policy on crime, elements of which are relevant to discipline problems in youth. It was noted however, that enforcement of some laws that could contribute to improved child protection and school discipline is lacking, for example, regarding the sale of alcohol.

Discipline policies The focus groups revealed many differences among OECS countries in the implementation of discipline policies. In St Vincent and the Grenadines, according to respondents, no clear policy or legislation exists. Respondents from Antigua and Barbuda mentioned that there was a policy on paper. In both St Vincent and Grenada, schools maintain their own rules and regulations, with input from their PTAs. However, respondents here and in St Vincent and the Grenadines noted that there was a need for clear policies and positions at the Ministry level. Areas where lack of clear policy direction appears to be most problematic include: children entering the system from the US, parents emigrating, loss of parents, children of migrants, pupil services, and recruitment of teachers and administrative personnel.

Two major and related concerns in all participating countries were the lack of clarity and consistency in school discipline policy and position at the level of the ministries of education. There is some perception that these ministries are reactive rather than proactive in developing policy. A consequence of this is that there is no consistency of discipline within or between schools. According to participants within the education system, ministries should be more proactive and leadership should be more considerate of whose values are being projected, as lack of consideration and lack of consistency result in tension in the system. Respondents from outside the education system (youth groups, religious groups, counsellors, police) noted that the ministry needs to coordinate with other agencies to be consistent when dealing with country-specific issues. The lack of consistency was a particular concern for police representatives.

There was considerable concern expressed in the focus groups about the lack of pupils' voices in the formulation and management of school policies. Existing rules are seen as failing to focus on the developmental needs of pupils. According to respondents in all countries, the main aim of discipline policies should be to establish boundaries for behaviour in order to improve self-worth, and to communicate the idea that pupils' choices have both rewards and consequences. Pupil involvement through pupil councils and other mechanisms is low, so pupils do not feel engaged in discipline issues.

Ministry-level management of the school system

Ministry delegation and effective chain of command Several issues were raised regarding the effectiveness of delegation processes and the chain of command between ministries and schools.

In several countries, it was noted that there was no clear demarcation of the role of the Ministry and the Department. In all participating countries, respondents noted that a tendency to make decisions unilaterally, coupled with a micromanagement approach resulted in lack of school empowerment to deal with discipline issues. As a result, teachers do not feel a part of the structure of the system. Moreover, it is often not clear how the ministry delegates authority.

Owing to a lack of empowerment of principals backed by a clear policy, the authority of the principal is seen as a facilitating rather than a directing force. Parents, PTA representatives and Education Officers interviewed also felt that disciplinary decisions made by principals were at times unfair or based on a child's family background instead of the actual behaviour.

Education officers' roles and effectiveness: According to many participants, including E Os, principals, teachers and counsellors, the role of Education Officers is not clearly defined. In settings where school principals have complete authority to manage their schools, education officers do not intervene in school business. In other settings, it was noted that the prevailing view of E Os is based on a "colonial *Inspector*" system, where discipline is perceived as "This is what we do to people when we have power over them". This role could be better defined through action research.

Inter-agency coordination: The focus groups elicited numerous comments about the need for inter-agency collaboration and its potential to help reduce discipline problems. Some successful initiatives were noted in Grenada, where there was an awareness of inter-sectoral policy alignment, and where some collaboration goes on among school, police and probation officers. However, policy alignment across sectors remains a problem in many areas and countries. Probation, police and religious officers argued that all agencies should be involved in developing outreach programmes.

One of the challenges for improved collaboration is tracking and monitoring of pupils, as the education system does not always have good records management processes.

According to focus group participants, partnerships helpful to school discipline issues could be further developed with the religious sector, both through churches and with ministers of religion. In addition, there are few incentives for youth leaders. In many cases, girl youth groups are active, but boys are inactive. This is seen as contributing to boys' discipline problems.

Resources and services for pupils

Pupil services and guidance An issue raised in all countries as contributing to discipline problems was the lack of formal structures for pupil services, especially guidance and counselling programs. Guidance counsellors in schools are not monitored or assessed, and confidentiality is a major concern.

Academic press and curriculum This issue refers to pressure on schools and pupils for academic performance, and the capacity to achieve optimum performance, given that the resources and curricula that are in place. The issue of curriculum was indeed raised frequently in the focus groups, where its lack of adaptation to pupils' needs is seen as contributing to discipline problems. Principals, E Os, and parents in Grenada and St-Vincent and the Grenadines reflected that the curriculum was too academic for many pupils, and fails to deal with needs of children at risk, for

example, through remediation programmes in reading. Many children are overburdened with the academic curriculum, finding it difficult to cope, while their special strengths in other domains are unrecognized and un-nurtured. The emphasis is placed on passing examinations, rather than education for all and educating the whole child. Teachers' negative attitudes to pupils less able to cope with the academic pressures are a concern. At the same time, some respondents feel that there is not enough focus on the preparation for the transition from primary to secondary school. A corollary is a lack of emphasis on practical skills in a curriculum that is seen as having too many subjects. Some respondents noted that the pressure on academic subjects leaves no time for programmes in art, music or drama. As has been noted in previous studies, the curriculum is particularly poorly adapted to boys, increasing their boredom at school and reducing their incentive to stay in school. Youth agency respondents felt that schools should have a pastoral care curriculum, with year heads serving as pastoral counsellors.

Parents in both Grenada and St Vincent and the Grenadines noted that conflict management skills should be part of a structured curriculum. Another problem noted in St Vincent and the Grenadines was that indisciplined pupils are allowed to be on sports teams, sending the message that the reputation of the school takes precedence over the discipline of the pupils.

3.5.3. Community factors

Community characteristics

Neighbourhood SES and culture: Respondents in all countries agree that poverty is a root cause of indiscipline. Children who come to school dirty and hungry receive teasing and derogatory comments from teachers and pupils, and react negatively. Police, youth and religious groups noted that children's violent behaviour originates in the home, where violence is modelled by adults unskilled in conflict resolution. In addition, factors in the home environment are complemented by village or community factors. The problems are exacerbated by teachers and school administration, whose negative responses to children from different areas result in children being labelled and lost for life. In the end, societal issues are reflected in the schools, where the behaviours of concern - drugs, weapons - knives, cutlasses, fist fights - reflect behaviour in the community.

Police and probation officers in St. Vincent and the Grenadines noted the existence of subcultures among pupils, endemic to particular areas that reflect ways they deal with problems at school. In some subcultures, bad behaviour is valued and violent behaviour from pupils is the expected norm.

Community cohesion and religiosity More generally, a factor that is seen as contributing to school violence and indiscipline is a lack of community cohesion, or a concept of community working together for its children. This issue relates to that of inter-agency collaboration, discussed above. Religious and NGO representatives emphasized the need for community members to model correct behaviour instead of merely lecturing to pupils about values.

Lack of religious education is seen as a particular problem, as many respondents note that youth who are involved in church are usually involved in positive behaviour in the community. In the

view of community religious leaders, the lack of religious education fails to provide children with a frame of reference for their behaviour.

Criminal activity and control

Gang activity Many respondents, including probation officers, police, youth religious groups and principals noted that the presence of criminal gang activity in the neighbourhood has deleterious effects on school discipline. The gangs are rooted in high poverty areas, and gang membership is a way of children seeking security. Both male and female gangs are a concern. Female gangs engage in prostitution, stealing, violence, and shoplifting.

Gang members infiltrate or hang outside schools showing attention-seeking behaviour that includes plugging toilets and other acts of school vandalism. Although the gangs are not necessarily present within the schools, groups in school mimic the behaviour of gangs. Gangs also encourage behaviours such as wounding with knives or nails, attempts to strike teachers and threats to teachers, verbal abuse, fights and indecent language.

Territorial and domain feuds related to gang activities influence pupil behaviour and violent acts. They also increase the availability of weapons and the tendency for pupils to make weapons. It was noted that rivalry among schools and stoning incidents are becoming more common.

Parents' role in coping with gang-related discipline problems is not always positive, according to some respondents. In some neighbourhoods parent support children in violent behaviour, for example, where a parent comes to school to encourage bad behaviour. In other cases witnessed by respondents, in some cases, parents give their children weapons to take to school to handle confrontation.

Role of police presence The role of police presence as a deterrent and control on behaviour problems that occur in and around schools was discussed in the focus groups. The main issues that involve police with the schools are shoplifting and drug trafficking. There is concern about the lack of appropriate resources to deal with young people who become police-involved: for example, police are concerned that shoplifting is being committed by children who are not in need but who have emotional problems that go unheeded. It was also noted that the lack of juvenile detention facilities means that youth are housed with hardened criminals. Police have expressed concern for the number of 16-year olds in prison for serious crimes (drugs, wounding, burglary, sexual offences).

Many respondents felt that police presence is not adequate around the schools. Bullying, fights, disrespect for teachers, parental hostility to teachers in school and on the street were all given as examples where there is not enough involvement by police for teacher protection. In addition, the role of the police is weakened when, as was mentioned in one country, young police officers socialize with some of the gang members.

3.5.4: Child and family factors

Parent- related factors

Parental engagement in school A contributor to children's discipline problems in school is the lack of parental engagement in school. Respondents in several groups felt that parents do not show continued interest in their children's education – instead, they show up only at examination time.

The roles of PTAs was seen by focus group participants as not necessarily positive. While, according to some respondents, parents are crying out for help/attention, PTAs tend mainly to concentrate on fund raising and are sometimes dysfunctional. Youth agency participants noted that partnership between home and school needs to be strengthened, and trained counsellors should go to the homes.

Parenting style In all focus groups, parental lack of control was seen as the main reason for discipline problems, where too many absent parents are leaving children to raise themselves. Appropriate guidance is seen as especially important during the formative years: external stakeholders felt that society and the school system do not realize the importance of early correction. Concern was expressed by many stakeholders about the lack of structure and supervision in children's lives and that they have too many privileges too early. Lack of religious guidance was also mentioned as contributing to lack of a frame of reference for children.

Problems are perceived in the way parents relate to and interact with their children around school issues: that parents talk down to their children and not with them, that they do not listen to their children, and that they do not spend quality time with pupils, equating material possessions with love. Teenage parents are unable to pass on family values.

Television and peers were also cited as negative sources of influence on discipline problems and as areas where parents have or exert little control.

Gender differences were noted in parenting: girls were said to mature faster than boys because of nurturing by mother. Equivalent nurturing of boys is lacking. It was suggested that parenting skill training is needed to improve on differentiated parent behaviour toward male and female children. Lack of father figures and male role models were seen as contributing to these differences.

Some of the difficulties in parenting styles were attributed by participants to the changing economic base, as OECS countries move from an agricultural work force to a tourism work force, where hours are longer and extend to the evening with children being neglected as a result.

Family characteristics

Abuse, neglect, family violence Police and probation officers in the focus groups were particularly concerned about abuse, neglect and violence in children's homes. Children model the abusive and disrespectful behaviours seen in the home, as well as the exposure to sex, violence and easy money they see on TV. Lack of supervision and child abandonment contribute to poor family conditions, as does parental migration.

Family SES Parents, principals, counsellors, probation and police officers and religious leaders noted that economic factors contributed to discipline problems - lack of parental supervision, younger parents without parenting skills, and parents' workloads do not allow for parental supervision. According to respondents, promiscuity results from the emphasis placed on material things, in the context of single parent homes being deprived of the basic necessities. Emphasis on material wealth pushes families to live above their means, and then sometimes to resort to prostitution, robbery or other criminal activity. Children become involved in these activities through their families.

3.5.5: Within-school environment

Physical environment

School and classroom environment Parents, teachers and principals in Grenada and St Vincent and the Grenadines thought that crowded classrooms with attendant heat, noise, dust, lack of resources and aesthetics were not conducive to learning and contribute to indiscipline. Education officers noted that when countries accepted funds for school construction from donor agencies, there was inadequate control over the building design.

Presence of un-owned spaces and ease of access by outsiders There were mixed views in the focus groups about the contribution of un-owned spaces to discipline problems. In some groups, it was felt that the lack of outdoor supervision encourages children to perform violent acts, bullying before school, after school and during break and lunch. Other groups noted that it was not a consequence of the design of the school but the location and the type of pupils contributed to the problem.

The lack of control over access to the school is seen as contributing to discipline issues. Overall, according to principals and teachers, school security is not a priority and most schools do not have a crisis management plan. In some cases, parents enter schools and go directly to classrooms to confront teachers; while in others, children are able to leave the school unnoticed.

Socio-organizational management and structure

Presence/enforcement of discipline policy In all countries, it was noted by focus group participants that discipline problems are partly due to principals' lack of training in school management and discipline strategies. There is a need for a whole school approach to discipline, based on policy as opposed to a case-by-case approach.

Perceived effectiveness of discipline management Several shortcomings were noted by the focus groups in terms of schools' capacity to manage aggressive behaviour. Parents noted that early warning signs among children that will later be prone to violence were being ignored. These include: uncontrollable outbursts, truancy, bullied pupils, culture of name calling, violent threats, bathroom writings, threats to principal, and cruelty to animals. Earlier attention to these issues

could prevent later aggression. Stakeholders observed that children who pose a danger to teachers are not being helped or dealt with by the authorities.

In some settings, lines of authority are blurred because of political interference. Parents are able to bypass school Education officers and the school and go directly to the Ministry to have their case settled. For example, parents with a direct association with a politician can threaten to have a teacher removed.

Education officers noted that the insufficient authority given to principals contributes to discipline problems, in that senior officers might not support principals and therefore principals were reluctant to take strong actions. Teachers and principals noted that principals are often reluctant to take responsibility and decisive action, fearing lawsuits and/or interference from Ministry.

According to parents participating in the focus groups, leadership in OECS schools is weak. Discipline management is perceived as ineffective, characterized by double standards and few rewards or incentives for good behaviour.

Stability/turnover/consistency High rate of teacher turnover, universally noted as a problem in OECS schools, does not allow for the bonding and one-on-one help that can help prevent discipline problems. The pattern of teacher turnover is such that better teachers are moved to better SES schools, exacerbating problems in lower SES schools who accumulate less experienced and less competent teachers.

Learner support mechanisms/resources Education officers expressed particular concern about the inadequate presence and frequency of counselling in schools, which did not effectively reach problem schools. The problem is especially acute among bottom stream pupils. The lack of counsellors and other professionals means that at-risk pupils cannot gain access to guidance and skills training that would help address their frustrations. Education officers noted that in their experience, schools without resident counsellors have more problems.

Teacher factors

Teacher qualifications and training Representatives of service clubs, youth groups and religious groups stated that ineffective school and discipline management were partly due to lack of teacher qualification and training. According to these respondents, teachers need to know how to speak to pupils, how to carry themselves and how to set and maintain standards. However, in some cases, teachers are not able to satisfy these requirements. Education officers, principals, PTA representatives and youth groups pointed out that pupils display indiscipline because teachers themselves are young and undisciplined. Teacher recruitment and selection processes sometimes fail to address the behaviour of the potential teachers. There was consensus among all participants that teacher education programmes do not adequately prepare teachers to deal with the problems of today's youth. According to stakeholders, school climates are poorest where the classes are boring and teachers treat pupils in an aggressive, hostile manner.

Undermining of pupils' success motivation A contributor to the aggression and defensiveness observed in pupils, according to parents, community groups, religious leaders, counsellors and Education Officers is that teachers undermine pupil's success motivation. They do not emphasize the development of appreciation of self-worth and self-appreciation, telling pupils: "you are worth nothing, will become nothing". Children who perform poorly are labelled by teachers, while those who perform well are given greater attention.

Teachers' experience/sense of competence in discipline This question raised additional issues about teacher competencies in managing classroom discipline. For several focus groups including Teachers' Unions, the presence of young and inexperienced teachers in the classrooms narrows the gap between "adult" model and pupils, undermining teachers' authority. Additional challenges are created when young teachers are given difficult classes, such as classes of repeaters. Children react negatively to inexperienced teachers whose tone of voice and inconsistent application of rules fail to command respect. Moreover, within the same school, different teachers may have different consequences for infractions, contributing to a sense of arbitrariness of discipline policy. The lack of classroom control is a major issue in many schools, as teachers unable to cope (or "running away from the problem") send pupils for counselling instead of managing issues within their classrooms.

From the perspective of stakeholders within the school system – education officers, principals, teachers' union – teachers are caught in difficult situations when it comes to discipline management. First, many teachers feel threatened by the new Education Acts and their emphases on pupils' rights. This is seen as challenging teacher authority. As well, some teachers are reluctant to discipline pupils out of concerns of being sued. However, according to parents, teachers are the key players in the classroom and should be skilled to diagnose causes of poor performance and manage discipline.

Education officers, principals, and parents in the focus groups argued that classroom management and discipline should be a course rather than a small component of teacher education so that teachers are better prepared. Better training for counsellors was also suggested as a means to more effectively manage discipline issues.

Level of engagement/connectedness: Focus group participants including ministry officials, parents, youth groups and PTA representatives noted that teachers generally are not very engaged with the school or with the pupils, which limits opportunities for preventing or resolving discipline problems. For example, teachers rarely attend PTA meetings. The lack of male role models in these settings was seen as a problem. In addition, counsellors and parents suggested that teachers should develop closer relationships with their pupils so that they could be more aware of their backgrounds.

Teachers' lack of comfort with children's rights. The increasing focus on children's rights and the right to education is creating new tensions between home and school. On the school side, there is resistance and hostility to approaches that seem to limit the range of disciplinary tools available to teachers and to negate teacher authority. However, there is recognition among stakeholders that decisions like expulsion that relate to children's rights to education must be made based on policy, and in a fair manner by an independent body. In the views of some stakeholders, the increasing

emphasis on rights leads to disrespect of authority, as awareness of rights is not being matched with the need for responsibility. As a result, a double message is being sent to children.

Home-school interface

Parents' roles in schools Several important issues were raised in the focus groups about how the home-school interface contributes to discipline problems. First, a lack of communication and partnership between home and school means that parents are not aware of their children's behaviour, or only become involved if there is a conflict. Parents' role is relegated to fundraising or to listening to complaints about their children. They are present in the school at the time of registration and graduation, but not throughout the school year. They have little or no input into discipline issues, and there is no positive communication between home and school about the child. As a result, parents become intimidated by the school and are even less likely to try to make contact.

Value differences between home and school: When home environments are more permissive than school environments, children have mixed messages, and tension is created. Although this could be addressed through better parent education, focus groups participants noted that little was being done by schools, community groups or churches. The lack of religious education in home and school is seen as a factor in failing to curb discipline problems, as the children that need to be reached do not come to church.

Dynamism of PTA and parental involvement In general, collaboration of home and school is limited to PTAs. It was suggested by focus group participants that parental involvement should extend beyond this, to other forms of involvement within the school. However, volunteerism at school is not encouraged. Moreover, PTAs tend to be mostly formed of the board and executive, without broad involvement. Parents need to be educated to share roles. There is a particular need to involve fathers in PTAs, as it is perceived as a woman's activity. Also, there is a need to involve parents of children in difficulty, as they are the least likely to be involved with the school.

3.5.6 Action areas identified by stakeholders

The results of these focus groups confirmed many of the findings seen in the quantitative data, but add additional elements to be considered. Above all, it seems clear the discipline problems are of enormous concern to stakeholders in the OECS school system. Although there is no clear consensus on how to deal with discipline problems focus group participants offered many suggestions. These are summarized below.

Policy level

- Ensure that clearly defined discipline policies are in place to guide educators.
- Bring regulations in line with convention, so that there more overall consistency in approaches to school discipline.
- Ensure an organized Physical Education (PE) programme in the schools
- Help schools begin to create values needed in a globalized environment

Management practices

- Empower teachers
- Give principals power and authority
- Train principals in discipline management
- Train counsellors
- Maintain effective chain of command and be consistent
- Institute use of intervention strategies instead of placing an emphasis on using violence (corporal punishment) and sarcasm to discipline pupils
- Institute a procedure for documenting violent behaviour and reporting in a timely manner
- Before a child is disciplined, investigate the child's background and know the causal factors
- Conduct spot checks in schools known for drug drop-off and-pick up
- Improve pupil responsibility, school pride

Teacher preparation

- Remember that teachers sometimes come from among the bright but undisciplined pupils: train them to analyze behaviour and build up pupils.
- Educate teachers to differentiate between punishment and discipline.

Curriculum

- Teach life skills
- Change the focus on academics and provide:
 - Coping skills
 - Conflict resolution
 - Psychological counselling
 - Guidance and counselling at the school level

Parenting

- Provide parenting programmes for young parents who need parenting skills
- Implement programmes that help parents nurture children
- Hold parent and child sessions

Community linkages

- Develop community-school councils
- Address the problem of indiscipline in society and not just in school

Physical conditions

- Improve conditions of buildings

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This comprehensive study of school discipline issues has produced the first complete portrait of the prevalence of violence and discipline problems and the factors that contribute to them, across the entire OECS. Its findings complement many of the existing country- and school-specific studies conducted previously, and confirm much of what is already widely perceived throughout the region. Where this study provides added information, however, is in helping to disentangle the relative importance of the various types of factors that contribute to violent, disorganized, fearful and disengaging school environments.

Overall, the results confirm that discipline problems are both frequent and severe in the OECS school environment, with the vast majority of teachers, principals and students observing indiscipline, conflict and violence at least weekly.

Most significantly, the results of the study point to the enormous contribution made to school indiscipline and violence by factors that are well within the control of school and education system management. These include a school environment that is clean and quiet, has strong academic press, offers many activities and has trained teachers who are interested in pupils. A clear and coherent school discipline policy that is known to teachers and pupils, and actively and consistently enforced also plays a role in school outcomes. Qualitative results pointed to the key role by high level education policy, at the ministry level, in defining and supporting appropriate disciplinary practices throughout the education system.

Another critical factor that is within the purview of school management is supervisory practices that leave spaces within the school unwatched by adults or un-owned. The possibility of unsupervised entry into the school compound, pupils travelling long distance between classrooms, and pupils getting pushed around in hallways are the most consistent predictors of verbal and physical aggression, across times and spaces. This factor is important for pupils, teachers and principals, and appears to be especially important in determining the severity of violence experienced by female teachers.

A third issue that emerged from the study, confirming previous anecdotal accounts, is the high frequency of lax teacher behaviour: arriving late, leaving early, and being absent from class when scheduled to be there. These practices are highly associated with poor school discipline policies and high levels of indiscipline and violence. The apparent lack of professionalism and lack of accountability among some teachers are disturbing in themselves, but the fact that they contribute to violence and indiscipline that affect all teachers and pupils raises serious concerns.

Over and above these factors, the study replicated previous findings about the importance of teacher competence in maintaining discipline. The study also extends these findings to show that teacher engagement is not only important in academic outcomes, but in keeping violence in check and maintaining pupil discipline. And, they clearly show that teacher involvement in school discipline is associated with lower rates of discipline problems in school. School discipline policies that identify clear expectations for teachers in helping to manage pupils' behaviour, both within and outside the classroom, may help reduce physical and verbal violence in schools.

In this study, despite the great emphasis often placed on it by educators (as in the qualitative findings), parenting factors were of far less import than within-school factors. Thus, the tendency to blame parenting inadequacies for discipline problems seen in school may overestimate their role, relative to school-based factors.

Attitudes of teachers and principals to disciplinary practices measured in this study showed overwhelming support for corporal punishment, but coupled with remediation. There is little evidence that the OECS teaching corps is moving away from the punitive practices that have been associated with exacerbation of the problems of pupils in difficulty. According to the qualitative findings, teachers are uncomfortable with the implications of moving disciplinary practices towards a more remedial approach. These attitudes may also be contributing to discipline problems in schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In November 2005, the findings of the study were presented to stakeholders at meetings held in Antigua and Barbuda and St Lucia. These stakeholders included meetings with teachers, principals, students and parents as well as Education Officers and other Ministry of Education officials. These meetings served as the springboard for the development of recommendations to OECS Ministers of Education, aiming to address and prevent school indiscipline and violence through effective policy measures.

Given that this comprehensive study:

- confirmed that discipline problems are both frequent and severe in the OECS school environment,
- showed that many factors within the responsibilities of the OECS education system contribute to higher rates of indiscipline and violence:

It is recommended that **OECS Ministers of Education enable and support the following actions:**

A. Support the development, implementation and enforcement of clear and comprehensive school discipline policies.

It is recommended that OECS Ministers of Education support the development, implementation and enforcement of clear and comprehensive school discipline policies, at the national level and the level of each school. The formulation and implementation of these policies should involve stakeholders (teachers, parents and students) so as to ensure their overall endorsement.

B. Ensure that all professionals within the school system have the capacity to manage discipline issues.

It is recommended that OECS Ministers of Education ensure that all professionals within the school system have the capacity to prevent, address and manage discipline problems. This will require:

- Improving principals' and teachers' capacity to effectively manage discipline using strategies over and above the administration of corporal punishment;
- Ensuring adequate teacher recruitment, training and professional orientation/development to effectively deal with disciplinary problems, including development of professionalism and broader sense of responsibility;
- Developing and enforcing clear policies to sanction those teachers who display the unprofessional practices that are contributing to disciplinary problems; and
- Improving collaboration between schools and Ministries of Education in discipline management of discipline, clarifying the role of Education Officers as support/resource to schools.

C. Allocate additional resources to deal with discipline problems through counselling and remediation.

It is recommended that OECS Ministers of Education allocate additional resources to deal with discipline problems through counselling and remediation. This should include special programmes that will avoid the negative effects of exclusion (suspension and expulsion), complementing teachers' and principals' enhanced repertoire of strategies and capacities to address discipline problems.

D. Improve the quality of school environments.

It is recommended that OECS Ministers of Education improve the quality of school environments. Recommended strategies are:

- Improve the quality of school and classroom environment, by better organization, orderliness and noise control;
- Improve supervisory practices with schools, allocating resources as required to reduce opportunities for indiscipline and violence;
- Improve the quality of school layout, minimizing un-owned spaces when adding to or building new schools.

The OERU is committed to providing or arranging to provide technical assistance where this is feasible, and will perform a coordinating role whenever necessary.

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