Transforming schools to challenge social norms around violence against children. The case of Moldova

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‘If I don’t beat him, some may thing I don’t care about my child. Spanking always helps!’ (mother, FGD)
Violence against children in Moldova

• 76% of children aged 2-14 years experienced violent method of discipline
• 48% - were subjected to physical punishment (MICS 2012)
• Beating a child – accepted and sometimes encouraged
• Beating – perceived as an effective method of discipline
• Limited awareness on the consequences of violence
A qualitative research on violence, 2014

- Children should obey their parents, and not question their decisions
- ‘Beating is a good method. To teach the child. I am not hitting him in the head. Spanking is fine.’ (parent)
- ‘If the word does not help, the belt does!’ (parent)
- Although not accepted by everyone, many parents feel the pressure from other to punish their children
- A parent who cannot punish the child – may be perceived as a weak parent
School and violence

• 42% of teachers admitted applying violence towards students (Study HRE, 2010)
• 82% of students witnessed teachers’ violence on students (Study HRE, 2010)
• Domestic violence is not the business of the school, but a family issue; parents know the best
• Interfering or reporting violence – socially unacceptable
• Many teachers shared community’s perceptions on violence
• Only some 40-50 cases of violence per year registered/reported by schools
Government initiatives to address violence

- Inter-sectoral referral mechanism, to identify, register and address violence
- Protocols for professionals
- Revision of job descriptions

But... the policy and regulatory frameworks changes did not influence the practices of professionals
Building schools capacities to prevent and address violence. Rationale

• Schools – an entry point in the community to address violence (~94% enrolment rate)
• Teachers – viewed as authorities, models and trusted sources (community wisdom)
• Changing schools – a way to change communities’ expectations on violence
• Teachers – a support for parents
• Children – agents of change
**Intervention approach**

- The Ministry of Education in the driving seat
- Child rights NGO – bringing the expertise, including from abroad (Romania)
- Focus on teachers attitudes, beliefs and values, rather than on protocols
- Continuous engagement with teachers (one year)
- Monitoring, support and coaching at local level
- Creating reporting mechanisms for children
Results

• Teachers confessed changing their attitudes, values, expectations and parenting practices
• Less tolerance to violence – abuse better recognised
• ‘I was so blind before! Now I see it clearly.’ (teacher)
• Teachers stated increased confidence to intervene, engage with the families and report violence
• Around 10,000 suspected cases of violence registered and reported through schools (after 1 year)
• 4,000 reports – from children/students and parents
What helped the change?
Engagement with teachers

• Non-violence coordinators
• Clear functions for coordinators – work with other teachers, students, at school level, parents
• Quarterly workshops – at district and school levels - focused on teachers attitudes, beliefs and expectations
  o Assessing their attitudes and beliefs
  o Exploring their beliefs about children, parents, their roles and responsibilities
  o Self-assessment; introspection
Engagement with teachers

• Bringing the child perspective, including neuroscientific and behaviour angle, adverse childhood experiences
• Empowering teachers and changing their self-perception – community models and agents of change; the power to influence destinies
• Equipping them with guidelines and tools – how to engage with students; how to promote non-violence in schools; how to communicate with parents
Engagement with teachers

• Each workshop followed by homework – small tasks designed to build their self-confidence
• Continuous support and coaching
• Assessment/debriefing after events at local level
• Modelling, peer-support and strengthening self-efficacy – sessions to share their experiences, lessons learned, what worked, and what did not
Engagement with students

• Lessons in all schools
  o Recognising violence
  o Learning about mechanisms to report violence
  o Learning about community resources

• School events on non-violent communication

• Homework – engage with families and the community
Comunitatea mea are grijă de copii

Toți copiii trebuie să crească într-o comunitate în care se simt protejați.

Dacă știi un coleg sau prieten care este în pericol și are nevoie de ajutor, vorbește cu:

- Coordonatorul pentru protecția copilului
- Psihologul școlar
- Asistentul social
- Primarul
- Medicul de familie
- Polițistul
- Centrul comunitar
- Alții

UNICEF for every child
Public – private partnership

- Engagement with electricity company
- More than 700,000 households reached
Lessons learned

• Focusing on teachers attitudes and beliefs, rather than their knowledge of mechanisms
• Revision of job description accompanied by supportive supervision and coaching
• Change requires time. One-time trainings do not work
• Empowering teachers to feel in control of the process. Supporting change from within the community
• Working with students and creating reporting mechanisms (feedback loop)
• Ensuring visibility – changing social expectations
Thank you!