

# **BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY**

## **Willingness to Seek Help for Dealing with School Violence among Students with Intellectual Disability: The connection between different types of violence, level of distress and help Seeking.**

Shlomit Tamir

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## ABSTRACT

School violence is a common phenomenon, in the world in general and in Israel in specific, which threatens the security of students and teachers and damages the educational process (RAMA, 2016; Yablon, 2010; Benbenishty, Khoury-Kassabri & Astor, 2005).

Whereas the issue of violence in the regular educational frames was discussed in academic articles, very little attention had been devoted to violence in special education ( for example Bryen, Carey & Frantz, 2003; Flynt & Morton, 2004; Reiter, Bryen, & Shachar, 2007 ) and even less to the way special education students deal with violence targeted at them (Yablon, 2013; Levi, 2015).

In general, looking for help is one of the ways a student can deal with school violence. However, previous studies suggest that it is a complicated process and that supporting factors are needed in order to facilitate the call for help and in the actual helping of the student.

The present study focuses on students with mental disability studying in special education institutions. The goal of the research was to examine the coping patterns of these students with different types of violence (physical, verbal, and social) and their willingness to seek help. It is important to note that previous studies conducted amongst students in regular educational institutions found a low rate of students asking for help (Newman, 2000; Oliver & Candappa, 2007, Raviv et al, 2009; Tishby et al, 2001; Williams & Cornell, 2006), in spite of the fact that asking for help can assist the student. In addition, among those who sought help it appears that at first the students prefer dealing with the issue themselves (Crick & Dodge, 1996), then they seek help from their peers (Newman, 2000), the parents (Yablon, 2003) and lastly a formal help (Boldero & Fallon, 1995; Gelerenter, 2009 ;Gilat, 2011).

For examining the willingness to seek help several questionnaires were used, for example (Gelerenter, 2009; Cornell & Sheras 2003), a sociodemographic questionnaire and a functional questionnaire. The filling out of the questionnaires was done after receiving the proper authorizations from the head scientist in the Ministry of Education and a signed parent approval, and in coordination with the educational institutions,. Each questionnaire was conducted separately and individually in school, each question was read aloud and the students was asked to answer. The study included 107 mentally disabled students, 54 out of which boys (50.5%) and 53 girls (49.5%). The age range was 9-21 years old, and the average age was 15.19. The findings of the research suggest that violence is highly frequent in the special education system and that almost every boy and every second girl were victims of school violence. 76% of the students reported experiencing at least one type of violence. In addition, it seems that most students (80%) exposed to violence in its different forms sought help. When examining the connection between the violence type and seeking help, it was found that more students sought help after experiencing verbal violence (83%) in comparison to physical (81%) and social (78%) violence. In addition, the connection between the severity of the violence and the willingness to seek help was reviewed. Previous studies suggest that the severity of the violent act is a significant factor for students considering whether to seek help or not (Newman & Murray, 2005; Wogo Geffen 2003), and that seeking help is accelerated when violence occurs often, when the student feels existential threat (Yablon 2008), and when the threatening factor is bigger and stronger than the victim (Newman & Murray, 2005; Unnever & Cornell, 2004). In relation to the severity of the violence, the results suggest that there is an apparent positive correlation only between social violence severity and seeking help.

This study regarded also the willingness to seek help in relation to age and gender. It is noted that among students with normal development studies have shown that as the child grows up, his willingness to seek help reduces, and that girls seek help more than boys (Yablon, 2003; Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004; Hunter & Boyle, 2004; Yablon, 2010; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Newman, Murray, & Lussier, 2001).

Unlike these studies and similar to recent studies conducted in special education schools among population of mentally retarded students (Levi, 2015, Yablon, 2013) in this study there were no findings of gender differences, nor age group differences, in the tendency to seek help in case of any kind of violence.

Additional interesting finding deals with the person students address when seeking help. Findings suggest that students would prefer approaching their homeroom teacher, then to another person (parent, brother, a fellow student), another teacher, an assistant and finally school counselor.

To sum up, this study shows that, theoretically, the type of the violence and its severity would suggest what is the willingness level of seeking help among mentally retarded students. Practically, it is apparent that in order to examine and establish the extent of violence among mentally and developmentally retarded students, there is room to monitor the extent of violence more than it is done in regular education.