

# THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS IN CAMEROON

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## **Abstract**

In Cameroon, violence in schools has reached a worrying level in recent years. Increasingly constant and deadly, it has become a daily occurrence in virtually all schools. Faced with the scale of this situation, the entire educational community in particular, and all Cameroonians in general, are committed to combating violence in schools. To this end, many platforms like ASBEC (*“Association Santé et Bien-être”*) are committed to preventing such violence. Based on interventions rooted in the theoretical foundations of multisystemic therapy, we act on the determinants of violence in schools in order to reduce the prevalence of violence in schools. Our approach involves several stages. Assessment enables us to understand the relationship between violence and its overall systemic context. Preventive measures involving the teenager and the members of his or her system focus on the positive aspects of the teenager's life. Interaction with these different people helps to encourage responsible behaviour and reduce irresponsible behaviour among all those involved. Prevention is geared towards the problems within each system, as well as the interaction between systems. With this approach, we are working towards the primary and secondary prevention of violence in schools in the Cameroonian context.

**Key words:** violence in schools; multisystemic therapy; prevention.



## **Introduction**

In Cameroon, violence among young people in general and in schools in particular has become a growing problem over the years. It is constant, deadly and a daily occurrence in almost all public and private schools. In both urban and rural areas. On the evening of 5 September 2023 (the second day of classes after the school holidays), numerous videos of pupils brawling made the rounds of social networks. This shows the scale of the problem in schools.

Eradicating violence in schools is therefore of paramount importance, and must involve effective prevention. With this in mind, a number of civil society organisations, such as the Association Santé et Bien-être (ASBEC), are committed to combating violence in schools. This is achieved through prevention.

## **Intervention methodology**

In order to reduce the prevalence of violence in schools through prevention, ASBEC has developed an intervention method rooted in the theoretical foundations of multisystemic therapy (Henggeler et al, 1998; Henggeler et al, 1997; Henggeler, 1999; Henggeler, Melton, et Smith, 1992). Using this method, we act on the determinants of violence at school.

Following the logic of the theoretical foundations to which it refers, the intervention is carried out in several stages. The first stage, assessment, enables us to understand the relationship between the overall systemic context and violence in schools. This involves identifying the factors specific to the pupils themselves, as well as those specific to the different systems to which they belong (family, peers, community, school environment, etc.).

Following the assessment, we adopt appropriate preventive measures and

strategies for each of the determinants of violence in the school environment. Once the factors contributing to this drift have been identified during the assessment, we develop content (messages, posters, flyers, etc.) that highlights the link between violence and all its determinants.

Using these materials, we organise awareness campaigns both in schools and in the community (Lipsey et al., 1998; Hawkins et al., 1998). This raises awareness among pupils, but also among members of the community, who understand that the explosion of violence in schools is not solely linked to the school, but is the result of a slow and sinuous process involving all the systems in which children evolve.

The intervention itself focuses on the problems that exist within each system and on the interaction between the systems to which adolescents belong. To begin with, given the technical and financial resources at our disposal, we targeted a few schools in the city of Yaoundé to implement this approach to preventing violence in schools.

### **Results obtained**

At this stage in the development of our approach, we cannot yet talk about results in terms of reducing the prevalence of violence in schools. Here, we are referring to awareness-raising. Indeed, with our various interventions, the members of the community and the players in the educational community understand that violence in schools is the result of a process that involves each individual.

With this awareness, pupils and members of their respective communities focus on the positive aspects of young people's lives. Interaction with these different people encourages the emergence of responsible behaviour and the reduction of irresponsible behaviour among all concerned. This change is in line with the primary, secondary and tertiary prevention of violence in schools (Klein et al., 1977). This is because everyone gradually understands their role in increasing or reducing violence in the school environment. And we hope that within the next two to three years, this new dynamic will bear fruit in terms of reducing the prevalence of violence in schools.

### **Conclusion**

We have thus presented an approach to preventing violence in schools in Cameroon, where this type of behaviour is very common and often fatal. To promote

the well-being of the members of the educational community, ASBEC has undertaken to combat this violence using a prevention approach inspired by the multisystemic approach.

During the experimental phase of this approach, we targeted a few schools and neighbourhoods in the city of Yaoundé for implementation. Our prevention strategy raises awareness of the various determinants of violence in schools. It also helps to reduce irresponsible behaviour and encourage responsible behaviour. In the long term, this will be beneficial insofar as a good number of factors relating to the systems to which adolescents belong will disappear. This will help to reduce the prevalence of violence in schools.

Given the scale of this phenomenon, we plan to extend our prevention approach to the whole of Yaoundé and the surrounding area, and indeed to the whole of Cameroon.

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