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## PHENOMENON OF VIOLENCE IN THE SOCIAL SPACE CONTEXT

*Researched is the phenomenon of violence in the social space context. The article is devoted to the issue of violence and researches the conditions influencing the existence of violence in the society. The social nature of violence is analyzed, as well as the sociocultural aspects of human behavior determining the bias in the understanding of the situation's sense and the mechanisms which form a specific reality. There is a special focus on child abuse. The article is based on research data.*

**Key words:** social space, sociocultural aspects, non-violence, violence, aggression, defense.

## ФЕНОМЕН НАСИЛИЯ В КОНТЕКСТЕ СОЦИАЛЬНОГО ПРОСТРАНСТВА

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*Исследован феномен насилия в контексте социального пространства. Статья посвящена теме насилия и исследует условия, влияющие на развитие насилия в обществе. Анализируются социальная природа насилия, а также социокультурные аспекты поведения человека, обуславливающие понимание смысла как ситуации, так и механизмы, которые формируют исследуемую реальность. Особое внимание уделено подростковым правонарушениям. Статья основана на исследовательских данных.*

**Ключевые слова:** социальное пространство, социокультурные аспекты, ненасилие, насилие, агрессия, защита.

### Introduction. Topicality of the research question

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by deep social changes. Now possessing the immense power of science and technology, man has become even more dangerous for himself. Despite their pursuit of non-violence, people have not stopped killing each other on the contrary, they are doing it more artfully and on a larger scale. Topicality of researching violence is also determined by the fact that in a crisis situation arising in the modern society it is important to analyze the condition and level of social sciences, including their objectives and the methods they use as the most effective ones. In the modern dynamic society changes occur quickly, and violence and aggression escalate just as quickly.

Moreover, acknowledged methods and devices which do not contain violence or aggression (but can become violent in certain psychological situations) are considered violent in all cases. Mechanisms of resisting violence, of protecting people in the society and different social institutions have not been sufficiently addressed yet. A number of topical questions have been left unanswered. For example, it is still unclear what the conditions of the existence of violence in the society here and now are, if transformation of the society and transformation of violence are interdependent, and if deep transformation processes and the transition from one system of social relations to another lead to violence escalation. As our modern world is becoming more and more dynamic, volatile and inevitably more "vague", these questions are getting more urgent. The researchers are

also concerned with creating a systematic picture of society transformations through non-violent relationships and activities.

### Modern analysis of the phenomenon of violence

The meaning of the word *violence* in modern society is quiet broad. Its definitions vary both historically and culturally, from minor offences to major crimes and even life-threatening situations. This notion includes all kinds of physical, psychological, spiritual and economic suppression. Modern analysis of violence includes analyzing:

- ◆ social nature of violence;
- ◆ sociocultural aspects of human behavior determining, either willingly or not, the bias in the understanding of the situation's sense;
- ◆ mechanisms which form a specific reality, which are responsible for creating a worldview beyond an individual's sentient experience;
- ◆ methods to reduce the influence of violence on social processes.

The social phenomenon emerging as a result of deep transformations in the society can be sociologically conceptualized and viewed in the context of social space. Violence can be viewed as a special reality which, being a part of the social space, determines social practices and the perception of the agents in the system of social relationships.

Studying the influence of violence on the social space is especially important at the modern stage of social development. As society transforms, social space goes into a state of flux as tension is growing. Both individuals and social groups feel uncertain about their place in society and future prospects. The state of entropy the social space is in makes it more dependent on random factors which may change the social patterns dramatically. The very outlines of social space become blurred and thus individuals and social groups lose their important milestones.

In this context, reflection and social space interpretation become issues of paramount importance. The extent to which they are scientifically studied directly influences the vector of social development. However, while social space has been extensively researched, the current level of social development calls for a deeper understanding of the nature of violence. Therefore, this phenomenon has to be analyzed and researched.

Social media are a hallmark of modern society [8; 9; 11; 12]. In online communities violence also goes online. The development of violence in the networking social system is based on societal norms. Discussion of the role of societal norms in this process is based on their extensive studies in different societal paradigms [2; 4; 6; 10; 13].

Development of open social systems can be researched using synergetic approach, which was developed from systematic approach. It is sometimes considered that, when studying relatively simple systems in a balanced state, using synergetic terminology can be superfluous. However, in relation to modern society and the phenomenon in question this approach needs to become more profound and concrete. In order to research the phenomenon of violence, we should use synergetic as a special methodology and a strategy to analyze open social systems. This approach is beneficial as it allows to combine determinism and free will approaches. The synergetic approach makes it possible to trace principal changes in the phenomenon of violence, which are closely connected with societal transformations.

Despite being widely researched in sociological literature, the problem of violence has hardly been studied in the context of social space. However, this aspect is especially important in the modern world, as violence is an important instrument of forming social space, and this instrument has been used by some authors aiming to influence the social space in their field. It is therefore necessary to introduce new approaches. The issue of violence has to be viewed in a broader context, with a wider range of factors included. What we should also take into account is the personality of people whose perception and actions are under social and legislative control.

Violence against children and teenagers deserves special attention due to the fact that it lays the groundwork for perceiving and transmitting violent behavior by future generations. To identify the problems connected with violence against children in the context of social space, we need to study the peculiarities of their social space and socialization.

Our focus is not on society in general, but on the Russian society here and now. We shall view the phenomenon in question in the context of "Moscow urban space". The life of children and teenagers revolves around their family (home) and the space outside home (school, street, etc.).

Factors to be analyzed when researching home environment include family structure, the amount of time a child spends at home, the atmosphere at home, and the satisfaction a child gets from interacting with parents, as well as positive attention a child receives from family members and negative sanctions, many of which can be viewed as abusiveness, and how acceptable a child considers different punishments.

Other factors to be considered include violence a child suffers outside home, such as abuse from teachers at school and on the streets.

We shall analyze the problem using the complex research *The phenomenon of violence against children in Moscow* carried out in 2015–2016 by Lomonosov Moscow State University<sup>1</sup>. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used<sup>2</sup>.

As a result of our research, it has become possible to obtain a description of the situation from different viewpoints: children, parents, experts (teachers, other education staff, lawyers, psychologists, psychophysicologists, children's rights ombudsmen, etc.). Thus results can be juxtaposed and the incongruities analyzed.

The results of the survey can be analyzed in different aspects: sociological, socio-economic, psychological, legal.

The respondents are teenagers of both genders (an equal number of males and females) aged from 14 to 17, the majority being aged from 15 to 16. Thus children in the research are presented by adolescents of that age.

Most parents are aged between 36 and 45, mothers being slightly younger than fathers. Sociologically, the picture is as follows. 61,6% of the respondents live in an intact family. 31,3% live with their mother or with mother and stepfather, while only 2,7% live with their father or father and stepmother. Thus the absolute majority of adolescents (93%) live with their mother as part of their family, and more than 1 out of 3 do not live with their father. It shows that mother is a much more important figure than father for most teenagers. Thus communication with their father is diminished, as well as the perception of masculine behavioral patterns, which are important for shaping gender stereotypes for both boys and girls.

Approximately two thirds of the teenagers did not note any financial problems in their families. 6% of children report suffering from lack of money, which makes them feel inferior to their classmates.

91,6% of teenagers spend more than 3 hours of their spare time at home every day, including 40,5% who spend more than 6 hours there. They spend their free time doing homework (66,6%), social networking (60%), practising their hobbies (45,8%), doing household chores (44%), playing computer games (40,2%), watching television (38%). 78,2% of teenagers say that they do what they like most of the time or even always. It is also inter-

<sup>1</sup> The sociologic research *The phenomenon of violence against children in Moscow*. It was carried out in October 2015 – March 2016 with participation of Masters of MSU Graduate School of Social Sciences under the supervision of Natalia L. Smakotina, Ph.D. in Sociology. The population is pupils of Moscow schools and their parents. Data collection method is questionnaires for pupils and their parents. The questionnaires had quotas by type of educational establishment. The sample size is 1665 respondents.

<sup>2</sup> They include media content analysis, statistics data analysis, questionnaire survey of Moscow pupils aged 14 or older, questionnaire survey of their parents, expert survey of experts in the field of violence against children, the focus groups method. For processing and analyzing data, the following methods were used: correlation information mining, systematizing and comparison, graphical representation.

esting to note how teenagers evaluate relationships in their families. 80% speak about close, loving relationships, saying they can get love, care and understanding. 20% describe the relationships as poor and troubled. 87,4% feel comfortable in their family, while 12,6% feel insecure, useless, unwanted or involved in family conflict. 60% of teenagers note a loving relationship with their parents, while 40% feel love is lacking or even non-existent (5,1%). More than in 75% of families, parents often give pocket money to their children. 2 out of 3 children are praised for their achievements and given moral support if they fail in something. Other manifestations of care and love are, from the children's point of view, deficient. 40% of parents rarely spend their free time with their children, 80% do not attend concerts, cinemas, etc. with them. More than half of children seldom or never have heart-to-heart talks with their parents, which allows for the conclusion that parents are not close enough with their teenage children.

1 out of 3 teenagers is not satisfied with quality or quantity of their communication with parents. If a child is disobedient, half of the parents use persuasion, and a quarter forbid to do something a child likes. Children often complain that their parents behave in an non-constructive way: they shout (34,1%), take offense (18,1%), stop paying attention to the child (7,1%) or resort to violent methods: threaten to punish or hit them (5,1%) or beat them (4,8%). Thus one can assume that, according to children, up to 5% are in a socially dangerous situation and up to 20% are at risk of physical assault.

Like their children, the majority of parents describe the psychological atmosphere in a family as positive (80,5%). In other cases, there are unstable relationships and emotional stress. More than 90% of parents believe that they do not spend enough time with their child, which can explain the difference in the assessment of the situation of the child in the family from the point of view of adolescents and their parents. Comparative analysis shows a difference in how parents and their children view the relationships and behavior at home. According to their parents, children spend more time at home than the adolescents themselves testify. The structure of their activities also differs: parents overestimate the time a child spends on preparing lessons and watching TV, and considerably underestimate their communication in social networks (parents – 35,4%, children – 60,0%).

Children and parents give roughly similar estimates of giving the child pocket money. However, their views on other positive forms of communication differ significantly. While 90% of parents say that they often spend their free time with their children, only 63% of children state the same. According to the parents, they often have heart-to-heart talks with their child (71,8%), whereas only 46,8% of children agree with this. This shows the parents' underestimation of the child's needs for positive communication, its depth and quality. In comparison with children, parents overestimate the frequency of using constructive methods of education (persuasion, reasoning) and underestimate the use of non-constructive ones (shouting, threats of punishment, beating). However, parents estimate using such methods during the past year somewhat less, but, in general, similar to their children. Parents mention forbidding to do something as educational measures more often than children, while ignoring the child, scolding or hitting them are mentioned by parents more rarely. Irritation,

conflict in the family are also named as reasons for such punishment, as well as lack of reasons.

The attitude of parents towards physical punishment is also important. 46,1% of the respondents consider physical punishment generally permissible, including 2,0% who consider it normal. Paradoxically, children are more likely to accept aggression from their parents than parents display it (58,5% and 7,5%, respectively). It can be explained by the fact that parents are more inclined to give socially desirable answers.

Parents used punishment as an educational measure. It was used most often because of the child's bad grades at school or improper behaviour in the family. However, other reasons are quite significant: parents' irritation (60% of respondents), conflict in the family (46%) and even the absence of "any reason" (23%). So, according to children, they were more of an object of their parents' emotional reaction than actually deserved blame. The punishing parent, as well as the encouraging one, is the mother (83% of the answers), and 21,4% said it happened often or very often. The father acts this way much less often (62% of the answers), often and very often – in 12,1% of cases.

Boys are more tolerant to the use of physical punishments compared with girls (9,1% vs. 4,8%).

The level of tolerance to the use of physical punishments depends on the type of family. More tolerance to the use of physical punishments is shown by children who live only with their father ("it is normal" – 16%) or with their father and stepmother ("it is normal" – 15,4%). Thus in these types of families the use of physical punishments is viewed as a norm.

The level of tolerance to the use of physical punishments also depends on the relationships in the family. It is significantly above average in families where the relationships are bad (16,3%) or indifferent (14,9%). This level also depends on the financial situation of the family, the involvement of children in youth subcultures, alcohol consumption and detentions at school. It is significantly above average in poor (21,2%) and low-income (17,2%) families; among families whose children are actively involved in any youth subcultures (10,8%); regularly consume alcohol (17,1%); regularly get detentions (19,2%).

Thus, in all the above-mentioned types of families and behavioural types of children, the use of physical punishments is viewed as a norm.

Children who were abused in their families do not only assimilate these ways of interaction, but also practice them with other people in resolving conflict. Various studies show that people who as children experienced abuse or violence from parents become aggressors themselves and use violence against other people, including their own children, considering this a normal and typical phenomenon [3; 5; 7].

The main reason for the relatively high popularity of physical and mental violence against children in the family is a condoning attitude towards punishment, the recognition of the acceptability of using not only psychological but also physical violence of parents over children for educational purposes. It should be taken into account that the views of parents and children on the acceptability of using corporal punishments almost coincide. It follows that when becoming parents, the current children will use corporal punishments for their own children. The problem is that all the respondents will transfer to their future families the

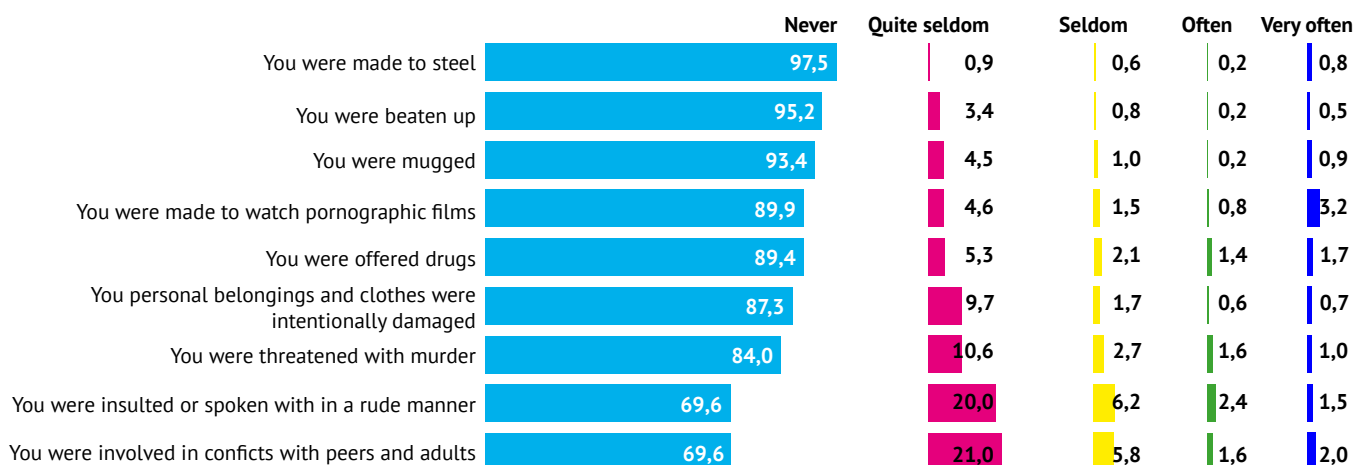


Diagram 1. Types of violence against children on the street (in %)

image of “well-intentioned” moral violence in order to exercise the parental will and to help the child’s personality in choosing a life path. For the children who took part in the survey, well-intentioned “moral violence” is a stereotype of behavior that they learned and that was transmitted to them by previous generations. In this regard, attempts to link the prevalence of child abuse to the “cult of violence and cruelty in the media” seem inconclusive.

In this case, we can say that violence is a cyclical social phenomenon that is transmitted from generation to generation, and for a healthy development of society it is necessary that this “vicious circle” be broken. One of the problems of modern society is the change of attitudes towards marriage, family values, the role of mother and father. The modern emancipated woman decides herself when she will have children and whether she will bring them up with their father, which significantly reduces father’s participation in a child’s upbringing, and entails specific social and psychological problems of the child’s personal development. Mother provides both care, emotional support and encouragement and negative sanctions, even abusive treatment at times. Apparently, the increased workload that the mother must bear limits, despite her own desire, her ability to find enough time for her child, and also to use only constructive methods of upbringing.

Let us consider the situation outside the family. According to the survey, adolescents in most cases (87,8%) feel comfortable outside the family. However, attention should be drawn to 12,2% of the respondents, who feel insecure, unnecessary, involved in conflicts. Outside home, adolescents may be subjected to ill-treatment in two areas: at school and on the street. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that teachers use means of emotional pressure degrading the child’s dignity much more often than parents: 40,4% of teenagers noted that they were ridiculed by teachers in front of the whole class and 26% were humiliated and offended, 30,4% were rudely told off by the teacher and 5,6% (somewhat more than in the family) were physically assaulted by the teacher. One of the mechanisms of communication is trust. The mistrust of the teacher and the lack of emotional contact with him is also evidenced by the fact that only 5,4% of children would turn to the teacher for help if they were subjected to violence. Approximately the same number of children would ap-

peal to strangers in the courtyard. Two-thirds of the adolescents, at least in isolated cases, have noted a biased attitude towards them by teachers in the school over the past year, which was reflected in underrating their homework, and 20,7% have experienced this attitude often and very often.

Parents are much less likely to talk about teachers’ prejudiced attitude towards their child than the children themselves testify. About 20,7% of children and 5,0% of parents claim about such cases. Similarly, parents mention child ridicule, rudeness and insults less often than their children do. Perhaps parents are not sufficiently aware of the incidents that their children perceive as psychological abuse by teachers.

An important point is the relationship between peers. Teenagers are also exposed to risks in school from older students and classmates.

When studying violence against children, it is important to understand which types of violence are more prevalent on the street and what their content is. Diagram 1 shows how children assess the types of violence they encountered on the street.

Despite the usual idea that the street is a more dangerous space (compared to family and school space) children are less likely to encounter violence there. The vast majority of children answered that they were not subjected to street violence (from 97,5% to 69,6% depending on the type of violence). Nevertheless, street space is still a condition for various types of violence. The most common type of violence against children on the street is the offer to drink spirits (often and very often – 11,9%).

In the prevalence among other types of violence against children on the street, the second place is occupied by being made to watch pornographic materials and films (often and very often – 3,8%); rude deterrence and insults (often and very often – 3,8%); Involvement in conflicts with peers and adults (often and very often – 3,6%); being offered drugs (often and very often – 3,1%). On the third place is the threat of beating (often and very often – 3,1%).

To make an integral assessment of the prevalence of child abuse in the streets, a cluster analysis was carried out, which divided all schoolchildren into 3 groups according to the degree of violence they suffer on the street. The division of schoolchildren into groups is shown in table.

Table

**Segmentation of schoolchildren in terms of the intensity of violence against children on the street (in %)**

High degree	2,1
Medium degree	21,7
Low degree	76,3

The absolute majority of children indicate a low degree of violence in the streets (76,3%). Approximately one in five children are indicates a medium degree (21,7%), while a very small number of children indicate a high degree of violence in the streets (2,1%).

Diagram 2 shows the division of schoolchildren into groups according to the degree of violence against children in the street, depending on the parameters of the family and the child.

More children defining the degree of violence in the streets as high or average are observed among boys (37,5%) compared with girls (19,7%).

More children indicating a high and average degree of violence in the streets are observed among children aged 15 (21,7%), 16 (25,2%) and 17 (29,2%). Thus, the degree of violence against children in the streets increases with the increase in their age.

More children indicating a high and average degree of violence in the streets are observed among children who live in families with aloof, alienated (36,7%) or poor (35%), relationships, where they are indifferent (41,4%) or there is constant irritation (38,2%).

More children indicating a high and average degree of violence in the streets are observed among children living in poor (60,5%) families; among children who get satisfactory and bad grades (54,2%); who are involved in youth subcultures (42,4%); among children who smoke (47,7%); regularly drink alcohol (64,9%); who regularly get detentions (58,3%).

Thus, violence in the streets is inflicted on, first of all, boys; children aged 15 to 17; children from families with poor family relationships; children from poor families; children with poor academic performance and deviant behavior (actively included in youth subcultures, smokers, alcohol consumers who regularly get detentions).

Hobbies the adolescents have characterize their "internal situation", which is also important for assessing their risk of becoming a victim of violence, and also (in the present and future) of becoming the one who inflicts it.

The most popular hobby of adolescents is communication with peers, which is confirmed by the survey data. 90,1% of the respondents spend 2 or more hours per day outside home with friends, including 42,5% –who spend there more than 5 hours. If we consider that communication with friends occurs at home via social networks, (67,8% of teenagers use them actively), then by volume it surpasses other activities of adolescents. At the same time, 17,7% of the respondents are active supporters of youth subcultures. Membership in extremist youth groups listed by teenagers (skinheads, nationalists, etc.), and partly in fan clubs, can be considered as risk factors for violence.

Considering an adolescent as part of a coherent social system that includes family, school and informal communication outside home, especially with peers, shows that the risk of child abuse is present in all of these areas.

The perception of violence is greatly influenced by the information space. An analysis of the content of TV programs for the

purpose of studying the social processes (objects, phenomena) presented in them made it possible to reveal the nature of the reports in the media. All reports on violence against children were grouped according to the nature of the presented information. Two types of information were singled out: a "case study" (the type of message is based on a direct statement of the fact of violence and its discussion) and a "scandal" (the source reports on violence directly). Materials falling into the group of "scandals", as a rule, cause a stronger public resonance due to their greater emotional colouring.

Violence against children was classified according to its types: physical, mental, economic, psychological and sexual.

The theme of physical violence against children is covered most frequently in the media (mainly in materials that cover the facts of intentional infliction of serious or moderate harm to health). This is primarily due to the fact that this type is usually more obvious than others, whereas psychological and mental violence falls into the category of more latent types of delinquency.

In our opinion, the negative consequence of the peculiarities of covering violence against children is that in almost all programs connected with this topic the authors explicitly demonstrate the results of violent actions (frames showing visible injuries to the child or a detailed verbal description of them). It can traumatize the audience and push them away from viewing not only news stories on this topic, but also from viewing, for example, analytical programs that draw public attention to possible ways to prevent the phenomenon under consideration, to its social causes and consequences.

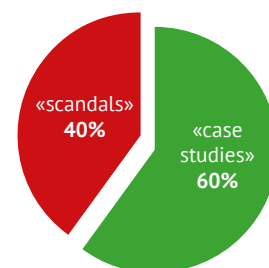
The topic of economic and sexual violence is hardly covered in mass media, despite the fact that in relation to the total number of recorded crimes committed in Moscow in 2015, they make up approximately 30% and 10% respectively.

Mental and psychological violence, as a rule, is accompanied by more "vivid" violations of children's rights and "drowned" by them, without attracting a significant share of public attention.

Materials related to violence against children are focused on different things: the activities of government agencies, institutions and representatives; preventive actions; protection mechanisms; causes of violence; the subsequent rehabilitation of children, as well as various statistical data, general provisions, etc., falling into the category "other".

The media practically do not name or analyze possible causes of violent actions against children. As a rule, the audience is given an opportunity to draw a conclusion about what social backgrounds are behind this or that unfavourable situation. This is especially typical for news stories which in 75% of cases provide a detailed description of a situation without conducting any analysis of its reasons.

Stories devoted to cases of violence against children most often contain information about the activities of state authorities regarding the protection of children's rights, comments by officials, children's rights ombudsmen of Russia and Moscow, their representatives, social workers and law enforcement offi-



Nature of the media reports

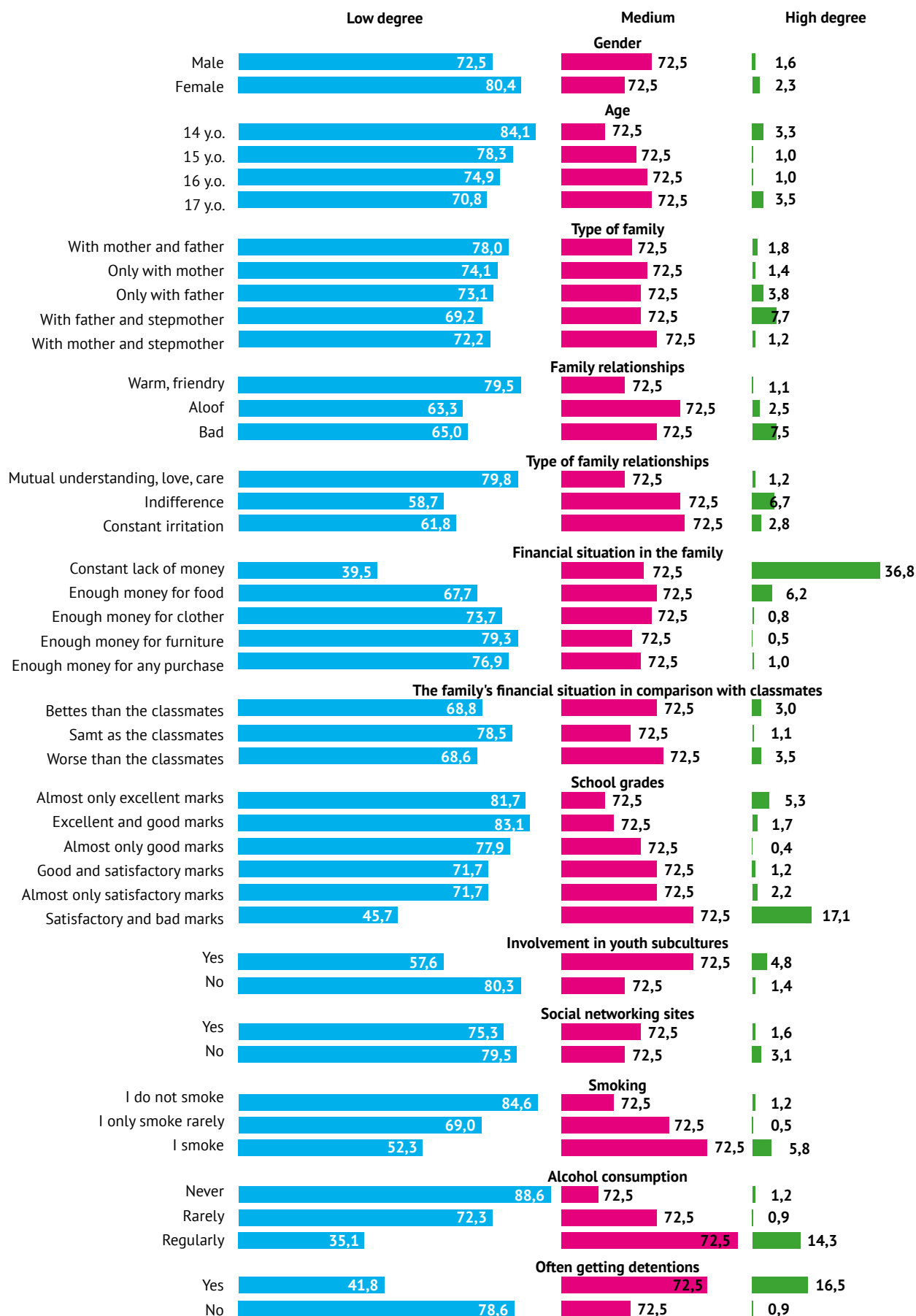


Diagram 2. Segmentation of schoolchildren in terms of the intensity of violence against children on the street, in various groups of schoolchildren \* (in%)

cial. It should be noted that mechanisms for protecting children from manifestations of violence in the media are characterized directly through the activities of the above mentioned institutions, therefore these categories are closely related in content and occupy leading positions in the frequency of reference to them.

Quite frequently, the media covers materials containing links to various kinds of statistics that characterize the situation with child abuse in the country. The problem, however, is that they often contradict each other, especially differing depending on the subject who presents the information. As a rule, state officials describe the situation in a more optimistic way, whereas representatives of social movements and independent experts usually draw the attention of the audience to a biased reflection of the situation by official statistics.

One of the important problems in the study of violence is the inadequate understanding of the consequences of violence and sources of assistance. Violence against children is considered only as a wrongful act of the aggressor, so the public believes that punishing him will be enough. This position was reflected in the fact that the majority of children (58,6%) and parents (71,7%) would turn to the police for help in case of child abuse. The significance of violence as a psychotraumatic impact requiring specialized assistance is underestimated by the respondents. Only 15,7% of children and 34,4% of parents would seek psychological help. It should be noted that parents and children have different opinions on seeking assistance from teachers. 32,1% of parents and only 5,4% of children would contact teachers, which shows that the hope that parents put on teachers is unreasonable, since children do not see them as a source of help. 10,0% of pupils and 14,2% of parents would turn to the crisis hotline for help. It proves that up to the present time, emergency psychological help by phone remains unclaimed by the population.

## Conclusion

Thus, answering the questions posed, we can say that the major condition of the existence of violence in society here and now is the state of society itself - instability, imbalance, unpredictability. Transformation of the Russian society, the transition from one system of social and economic relations to another lead to an increase in violence (especially psychological and

mental) and to the emergence of new types of violence (informational). In this case, we can talk about the interdependence of the transformation of society and violence. Violence, or rather its level, reflects the state the society is in. It should be noted that the phenomenon of violence in one form or another has always been present in history, as many used it as a tool to influence the social space in their activities, with more or less success. This confirms the fact that violence is part of social reality.

To date, there are at least two factors that do not let violence disappear regardless of the state of society. The first one is lack of a common representation about what violence is in science, everyday life and legislation. There is a discrepancy in the terminology used, for example, "physically punishing" and "beating" are not the same thing. Consequently, different types of corporal punishment are mixed, and there is no focus of attention on their social and pedagogical context. It is also disputable to find "slapping", "beating up", "driving out of the house" in one row. Therefore, any abrupt "movements" in the direction of combating violence can engender new violence. Especially when it comes to family, family relationships, where often the restriction, the ban as educational measures (for example, banning the children from watching certain programmes) begins to be perceived as violence, but nonetheless is present in many cultures of the world. The second factor is an inadequate understanding of the consequences of violence and sources of assistance.

At the same time, despite the dynamic processes, there are no sufficient grounds to say that Russian society is experiencing more violence than other countries and is not able to develop mechanisms for reducing violence and protecting against it. The society is actively forming mechanisms of social and psychological assistance to victims of violence, there is a growing need for non-violent forms of communication, teaching methods, the development of the Ombudsman institution, most notably the development of the institution of the Ombudsman for the Rights of the Child. Over the past few years, research has been conducted on the problems of violence in Russia. There is a process of developing a holistic vision of transformations in society through non-violent attitudes and activities. Despite a number of issues that remain relevant, the Russian society has embarked on a complex path of progress in understanding this complex social phenomenon.

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