Students' risk behaviors and selected dimensions of a school culture: a students' perspective

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School culture and climate was found to be associated with youth substance use, school victimization, school misconduct and low academic performance (DeWit, 2002)

To examine opinions of 14-years old students about selected dimensions of school culture in two Warsaw middle schools chosen because of the high or low prevalence of student risky behaviors (alcohol, cigarette, pain reliever use, violence)

The study was conducted in 2010 in four purposely selected Warsaw schools; two "good" and two "bad" ". Two schools were selected for further analysis - a school labeled "A" with the highest and a school labeled "B" with the lowest indicators of risky behaviors. Essays written by 143 students (from schools A and B) about the theme "How are you getting along with your school?" were analyzed.

School A

- · Lack of respect, tolerance, vulgarism
- · Aggressive, violent behaviors and bullying Drug use
- · Negative attitudes towards good students
- · Conflict between fans of two different football clubs

Risky behaviors in school A and in school B 28 % Alcohol use 60% Pain reliever use 72% 41%

22% Tobacco use 51% **Truancy** 35% 24% 47% 41% **Violent behaviors**

Additional information

Use of social service 7% 23%

School B

Fights

- ·Cigarette smoking at the school toilets •Damaged school property
- Unfriendly behaviors of affluent students

More negative statements about school





I feel good

Students' school bonding

School climate

Relationship between

teachers and students

More positive statements about

I love my school. My school is cool



Teachers' positive attitudes towards students: "Teachers respect students, during lessons is good climate (...), teachers are nice, indulgent (...)"

Readiness to help students: "I like that some teachers are ready to work over time to help students to improve their school performance"

Teachers' reaction for students' problem behaviors:

"Teachers don't react in the situations when students humiliate other students"

Annoying behaviors of teachers: "(Teacher)... is not okay, always makes fun of me and calls me "orphan", because I'm not good enough in physical exercises"

school

Positive teachers' attitudes towards students: "Teachers are nice and indulgent (...), (...) are friendly"

Readiness to help students: "Teachers try to help students. They are good for them"

Problem solving: "Unfortunately, some teachers are very confrontational and don't understand students' needs"

Teachers' reactions for student problem behaviors: "Teachers should react in the situation when students smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol"

Consequences for students who smoke cigarettes: "I don't like the situation when students who smoke cigarettes outside of school don't face any or little consequences"

Criteria of recruitment to a special type of class: "I don't like that people with hyperactivity were sent to an intensive sport class instead of a class with a special integration program"

Unaccepted teachers behaviors: "Teachers (not all) smoke cigarettes during breaks and are bad models for students"

School uniform (polo shirt and blouse in a black color): " In polo shirts we (students) feel as prisoners or servants for teachers and the director"

School culture Values and procedure standards

Discipline during lessons: "(...) teachers after 20 ineffective attempts to stop students talking, put a bad mark or write a note"

Time of break - "To sit up at the desk all day long without possibility to go outside during breaks is very boring for very ambitious and vigorous 14-years old teenagers"

- Students from school A described more severe problems in area of school culture and climate (e.g. insecurity) than students from school B
- · Teachers' lack of skills in effective coping with student risky behaviors was found to be a key factor associated with students' negative attitudes toward school