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**International Organisations, NGOs, and Evidence-Based Programmes in Preventing School Violence and Bullying**

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*Summary*: Violence and bullying among children are global problems. They have numerous negative social implications, and collaborative efforts are required to find effective solutions. In order to address this issue, many international organisations, foundations and NGOs (non-governmental organisations) provide different grants or implement various psycho-social and educational programmes aimed at preventing school violence and bullying. While they play an important role in supporting, transferring, or developing anti-bullying programmes worldwide, little attention is paid to this topic in the literature. This paper attempts to fill this critical gap by exploring the role, partnerships, funding mechanisms as well as programme evidence that these types of organisations incorporate into combating school bullying at the international, national, or local level. By presenting NGO-led anti-bullying and anti-violence programmes funded by three different international organisations and relating them to the Norwegian “Ungsinn” system for bullying research and review evidence, the paper identifies comprehensive school preventive and collaborative activities implemented at different levels. At the same time, these organisations face limitations in developing and implementing rigorously tested and effective evidence-based preventive programmes. A significant disparity exists between the outcomes of the programmes’ activities and the lack of evidence needed to demonstrate their effectiveness in preventing or combating school violence and bullying. As a result of the analysis, the paper challenges the reality that international organisations and NGO-led programmes rely solely on evidence-based practices for preventing bullying and school violence, and recommends an alternative approach based on evidence-informed practices and utilising a whole education approach.

*Keywords*: School violence and bullying, prevention, evidence-based, NGOs

*Zusammenfassung:* Gewalt und Mobbing unter Kindern sind globale Probleme und haben zahlreiche negative soziale Auswirkungen. Es bedarf gemeinsamer Anstrengungen, um wirksame Lösungen zu finden. Um dieses Problem anzugehen, stellen viele internationale Organisationen, Stiftungen und Nichtregierungsorganisationen (NGO) verschiedene Zuschüsse zur Verfügung oder implementieren verschiedene psychosoziale und pädagogische Programme, die darauf abzielen, Gewalt und Mobbing an Schulen zu verhindern. Obwohl NGOs eine wichtige Rolle bei der Unterstützung, Übertragung oder Entwicklung von Anti-Mobbing-Programmen weltweit spielen, wird diesem Thema in der Literatur nur wenig Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Die vorliegende Arbeit versucht, diese kritische Lücke zu schließen, indem sie die Rolle, Partnerschaften, Finanzierungsmechanismen sowie Programmnachweise untersucht, die diese Arten von Organisationen bei der Bekämpfung von schulischem Mobbing auf internationaler, nationaler oder lokaler Ebene einbringen. In diesem Artikel werden NGO-geführte Anti-Mobbing- und Anti-Gewalt-Programme vorgestellt, die von drei verschiedenen internationalen Organisationen finanziert werden. Diese Programme werden anhand des norwegischen "Ungsinn"-Klassifikationssystems für die Evaluation von Anti-Mobbingprogrammen bezüglich der Evaluation ihrer Wirksamkeit eingeschätzt. Im Rahmen der Analyse werden umfassende präventive und kooperative Schulaktivitäten identifiziert, die auf verschiedenen Systemebenen umgesetzt werden. Gleichzeitig zeigt sich, dass diese NGOs an ihre Grenzen stoßen, wenn es darum geht, evidenzbasierte Präventionsprogramme zu entwickeln und zu implementieren, welche rigoros auf ihre Wirksamkeit getestet werden können. Es besteht eine erhebliche Diskrepanz zwischen den Ergebnissen der Programmaktivitäten und dem Mangel an wissenschaftlichen Belegen, die für den Nachweis ihrer Wirksamkeit bei der Verhinderung oder Bekämpfung von Gewalt und Mobbing an Schulen erforderlich sind. Als Ergebnis der Analyse hinterfragt der Artikel kritisch die Anforderung, dass internationale Organisationen und NGO-geführte Programme sich ausschließlich auf evidenzbasierte Praktiken zur Prävention von Mobbing und schulischer Gewalt verlassen sollen und empfiehlt einen alternativen Ansatz, der auf evidenzinformierten Praktiken beruht und einen ganzheitlichen Bildungsansatz verfolgt.

*Schlüsselbegriffe*: Schulische Gewalt und Mobbing, Prävention, evidenzbasiert, NGOs

**1. Introduction**

Violence against children and school bullying are pervasive global problems, with long-lasting negative effects on pupils’ mental health, academic performance, and overall well-being (Evans et al., 2018; Wolke / Lereya 2015). Previous research on the topic of bullying has primarily focused on individual, family, and school-level interventions, by looking at psycho-social consequences of bullying on children and youth, teacher’s role in the prevention of bullying, or influences of school climate (Acosta et al., 2019; de Luca et al., 2019; Waasdorp et al., 2022; Wolke et al., 2014). An increasing number of anti-bullying programmes from various foci have been developed in the context of that research, many of them being subject to more or less rigorous evaluation and subsequent inclusion in international meta-analyses (e.g., Gaffney / Farrington / Tofi 2019; Merrell et al. 2008; Ttofi / Farrington 2011; Yeager et al. 2015). Very little attention is given to the role of external actors, such as international donor organisations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in developing, transferring, or implementing globally developed anti-bullying solutions in the form of preventive programmes and projects into the national or local setting. Given the global nature of bullying and the need for coordinated and sustained efforts to address the issue worldwide, it requires partnership, coordination, funding mechanisms and tools of multiple involved actors, institutions, sectors in preventing school bullying.

However, the evidence from the international development field shows that this is not an easy process. Adapting donor-financed interventions and programmes to national or local contexts and achieving sustainability may be difficult. There are a number of challenges that may arise, including poor monitoring, limited political will, inadequate government funding support, undeveloped policies, NGOs conflict with government and donor interests, and problems with ownership and accountability of implemented interventions (Gotsadze et al., 2019). Another critical aspect of transferring donor-driven interventions and programmes identified in the literature is a lack of measures to evaluate the institutionalisation process, inadequate implementation of the evaluation, and the lack of inclusion of the key stakeholder and actor perspectives in the evaluation (Bennett et al., 2015).

At the same time, there has been increased attention towards a “what works” approach in the international donor organisations and NGOs’ fieldwork. Accordingly, there is an increased demand from citizens, governments, and other funding providers from international NGOs to provide the evidence that implemented programmes (or practice, intervention, initiative) are effective and make sure that the funding has an impact and brings change or transformation to the lives of targeted groups. In response to this, international organisations have increased their demands to local NGOs to establish processes of transparency and accountability, as well as designing and implementing an evidence-based approach or conducting evaluation process to prove the effectiveness of implemented programmes.

In light of the above-mentioned developments, this paper highlights the role of international donor / grant organisations and local NGOs in addressing school bullying and emphasises the need for more research in this area. To begin, we present perspectives in relation to school bullying, the role of international organisations and NGOs in developing and implementing school anti-bullying programmes and promoting ideas of evidence-based practice. Moreover, we examine partnerships, funding mechanisms, and programme evidence from international organisations and local NGOs working to combat school bullying at the national, international, or local level. Then, we analyse three NGO-led anti-bullying programmes funded by three different international organisations. Finally, the discussion and conclusion section critically reflect on the findings from our analysis and the application of evidence-based practice in internationally granted NGO-led anti-bullying programmes.

**2. School bullying**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4, promote inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations 2023). In spite of this, school violence and bullying among peers occur globally in different forms, which affect negatively both boys’ and girls’ quality of life and education, while cyberbullying is also on the rise. According to UNESCO (2019, 7) peer violence and bullying have affected almost one in three students at least once in the past month. Peer violence and school bullying can have significant educational, social, psychological, and health consequences on children and youths and may significantly influence their learning opportunities (Evans et al., 2018; Wolke et al., 2014; Wolke / Lereya 2015). School bullying also represents a violation of children’s rights as stated in Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by the United Nations General Assembly (1989). This view is increasingly adopted by researchers in the field (e.g., Cornell / Limber 2015; Lansdown et al. 2014; Smith 2000). Since bullying is the most prevalent form of school violence, and since most worldwide analyses track bullying separately, educational organisations and academics also analyse school violence and bullying separately from other forms of violence (UNESCO 2019, 8).

Recently, a revised definition of school bullying has been introduced by UNESCO as recommendations by the Scientific Committee on preventing and addressing school bullying and cyberbullying at International Conference on School Bullying in 2020. It was additionally presented at the World Anti-Bullying Forum 2021 in Stockholm, by giving a broader explanation of this phenomenon than earlier definitions. According to this definition

 “school bullying is in-person and online behaviour between students within a social network that causes physical, emotional, or social harm to targeted students. It is characterized by an imbalance of power that is enabled or inhibited by the social and institutional norms and context of schools and the education system. School bullying implies an absence of effective responses and care towards the target by peers and adults” (UNESCO 2020).

**2.1 International organisations and anti-bullying initiatives**

Understanding bullying as a serious societal problem, numerous international organisations have become active in tackling school violence and bullying. International organisations can be described and categorised in various ways. They are often seen as multilateral development organisations funded by multiple governments (such as the UN and the EU), bilateral development organisations funded by home governments, as well as various types of foundations and international non-governmental organisations (non-profit, corporate, or religious) or international non-governmental organisations which operate as an agency or a non-profit to address global issues (OECD 2015; Bozic 2022, 28). In order to address school violence and bullying, these organisations have developed various programmes with the aim of tackling violence against children globally. In particular, school violence and bullying are given priority in their work (UNESCO 2023). The same organisations set grants or funding schemes aimed at developing and implementing anti-bullying programmes and interventions in order to prevent and combat violence in the lives of children and youth. With these programmes, they attempt to provide various tools, resources and knowledge for pupils, parents, schoolteachers, or communities which will help them to prevent and deal with the problems of school violence and bulling. Programmes may include classroom-level, whole school-based approaches, or involve various stakeholders from the local or national level. The structures of such programmes are often based on the well-known Olweus model of bullying prevention, with some additional components being incorporated and adopted (Olweus / Limber 2010; Richardson / Fen Hiu 2018).

Apart from developing antibullying programmes, international organisations are also active in addressing these challenges globally through various campaigns and other important preventive activities. UNESCO has been involved in addressing the problem of school violence and bullying, as well as cyberbullying. UNESCO Member States declared the first Thursday of November to be marked as the “International Day against Violence and Bullying at School Including Cyberbullying”, recognising that school-related violence in all its forms negatively affects children and adolescents’ rights to education and to health and well-being (UNESCO 2023). Moreover, UNICEF established the ENDviolence against children campaign, by addressing also school bullying (UNICEF 2023). As a result, the global ENDviolence manifesto to stop violence in schools was introduced and presented to ministries at the at the Education World Forum in January 2019 (UNICEF 2023). ENDviolence has become a global campaign implemented in the partnership with various international, national, and local organisations for international development (UNICEF 2023).

Although their mission is often directed toward global solutions against school based or peer violence, these types of organisations have become active across nations. They often do that by taking a leading role in low- and middle-income countries, providing specific grant schemes, donations, or consultations for the prevention of school bulling and violence. Additionally, they play a key role as donors in supporting social development in low- and middle-income countries (de Zeeuw 2005). A number of aspects related to donor-recipient relations in the development process are addressed in the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness in 2005 as well as by the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008 (OECD 2020). These two mechanisms cover several factors including, among others, ownership for accomplishing development goals, awareness of the recipient's local requirements, improved donor system monitoring, more widespread participation and collaboration of various stakeholders in programme development and implementation.

The role of international organisations is often more extensive, especially in low- and middle-income countries characterised by political and economic instability, when it comes to building capacities within national governments and local NGOs to tackle school bulling at policy and practice level. Governments in low- and middle-income countries often lack adequate institutional capacities, knowledge, human capital, or funding to deal with such a complex issue or create effective solutions by themselves (Sivaraman et al., 2019). Another problem is the neglect of evidence-based approaches in governance or policy making decisions. This can result in ignoring core evidence and the latest research on what proper anti-violence and anti-bullying policy or practice solutions are recommended and how they can be implemented (Sivaraman et al., 2019). Due to a lack of structural mechanisms in such contexts, international organisations have become crucial actors that bring important finances, knowledge, expertise, and policy solutions into the field of violence and bullying against children and youths. Moreover, these organisations also promote the development of collaboration and partnership among various actors and stakeholders to tackle the problem of school violence.

**2.2 NGOs and partnerships towards anti-bullying actions**

International organisations also develop partnerships with local NGOs, and their strategic programmes are often implemented through non-governmental organisations. NGOs play a key role in the third sector, providing a spectrum of services that can be broadly categorised into two categories: welfare services provision and policy advocacy (Lewis 2010). The literature also includes terms that overlap with non-governmental organisations, such as third sector organisations, civil society organisations, foundations, non-profit and voluntary organisations (Lewis 2010). This is due to NGOs' cultural and historical development, as well as their function and role in various nations and regions.

Local NGOs are in a position to be more actively involved in the development of public policy. If local NGOs establish strong relationships with international grant organisations, they will be in a better position to participate more actively in the creation of public policy and in creating partnerships with government organisations (AbouAssi 2013). Nonetheless, it is frequently possible to feel absolute pressure in relation to the growth of the partnership between governments and NGOs in order to deal with various societal issues in an efficient manner. At the same time, NGOs often form various networks in order to dedicate their joint forces to produce change, raise awareness and coordinate activities in cooperation with other organisations and institutions. One example is the European Anti-Bullying Network (EAN), established 2014 after a conference in Athens and funded by the European Commission. The network consists of 21 NGOs from 14 countries in Europe (EAN 2023). This network was established as an umbrella organisation with the purpose of exchanging experiences and coordinating anti-bullying actions through partnership and capacity building with professionals and state authorities involved in the issue, by implementing various anti-bullying projects, campaigns, strategic documents, and scientific conferences (EAN 2023).

Local NGOs, however, frequently experience a tension between their dependence on international financing and donors' unreasonable expectations, on the one hand, and the real needs of citizens and communities, on the other. Local NGOs generally make an effort to preserve this balance in order to have access to financing, despite the fact that their primary obligation is to their beneficiaries. Due to their reliance on international help, NGOs in low- and middle-income countries frequently become highly dependent on foreign grants and donations (AbouAssi 2013, Bozic 2022). As a result, NGOs must compromise significantly by changing their goals and areas of expertise in order to conform to the requirements and financing rules set up by international donor / grant organisations.

In recent years, there has been increased criticism toward international organisations and local NGOs. Because they often duplicate or implement parallel projects, there might be a limited coordination among the organisations that deal with the same issues. A critical aspect of NGOs is their reliance on support and finances from international organisations. This may lead to difficulties when funding ends regarding achieving the sustainability of implemented programmes (Bozic 2022). There is also criticism of short-term funding projects operated by international organisations, which are not able to produce the expected changes in practice (AbouAssi 2010; Winters / Martinez 2015). Furthermore, programmes from international organisations can be disconnected from the local and cultural context, which can further impede NGOs’ cooperation with government actors, who may view the relationship between local NGOs and international donors negatively (AbouAssi 2010; Winters / Martinez 2015). In addition, governments can become passive with regard to solutions when NGOs take over roles that are typically government responsible.

**2.3 Anti-bulling programme evidence-based practice**

Anti-bullying programmes highly rely on an evidence-based approach. The most known international programme is the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme, developed in Norway by Dan Olweus in the 1980s which represents a whole school preventive evidence-based approach with intervention measures activities at various levels (Olweus / Solberg / Breivik 2020). Several large-scale evaluations of this programme in the US and Scandinavia demonstrated positive effects on bullying and victimisation at the elementary, middle, and early high school levels, with effects becoming stronger as the programme is implemented over a longer period of time (Limber et al., 2018; Olweus / Solberg / Breivik 2020). Over the years, many research based anti-bullying programmes have been created internationally and tested by universities in collaboration with other state educational institutions, such as the Zero programme in Norway, PALS (Playground Activity Leaders in Schools) in Canada or KiVa in Finland, just to mention a few.

In some countries, public institutions and universities work together in order to document the effectiveness of certain preventive programmes and make them available for practitioners, researchers and politicians. In Norway, for instance, the scientific online journal platform Ungsinn publishes systematic reviews of mental health interventions and treatments for children and young people (Ungsinn 2023). Interventions targeting bullying and school learning environments are included in this category. Ungsinn is operated by the Regional Centre for Child and Youth Mental Health at the Arctic University of Norway (Ungsinn 2023). Although using evidence in decision making has become the imperative for allocating funding for the preventive programmes, governments, schools, teachers face difficulties selecting and implementing the programme that will provide the best response to the problem of school bullying. Thus, Ungsinn fills an important role in empowering stakeholder in selected appropriate, evidence-based programmes.

The evidence bases of a given program can take various forms and be located at differing levels of scientific rigour. At the same time, standardised procedures to assess the quality of scientific grounding and evidence with respect to these programmes can relate to different aspects and components of those programmes. Accordingly, classification or rating systems as used by Ungsinn (Martinussen et al. 2019) or Green List Prevention, a German Programme Data Bank operated by the Crime Prevention of Lower Saxony (Groeger-Roth / Hasenpusch 2016), usually define levels of evidence by combining quality factors and programme background and components. For example, Ungsinn considers the following factors when evaluating intervention quality: description of the intervention, theoretical foundation, existence of evaluations, and quality of implementation. Scoring of programme quality is performed for description of the intervention, research methods, and implementation. A sophisticated analytic process leads to a hierarchical ranking of programmes along six levels of evidence, ranging from 0 “ineffective intervention” to 5 “intervention with strong documented effect”. For each of these levels, requirements are described. Thus, for a programme to be classified as 1 “well-described intervention”, the only requirement to be met is that a satisfactory description of the intervention is included featuring objectives, target groups, intervention arenas, structure, and methods (Martinussen et al 2019).

Demands for evidence also raise the question of the rigour of evaluation of the anti-bullying programmes. In an earlier study (Ryan / Smith 2009) it was shown that rigorous evaluation design and advanced methods of analysis should be applied to the evaluation process in order to properly assess the effectiveness of school anti-bullying programmes. These designs and methods are now standard practice in evaluating prevention and intervention worldwide, as represented, for example, by the highest level of evidence in Ungsinn. In addition, a rigorous meta-analysis shows that the effectiveness of bullying prevention programmes varies geographically (Gaffney / Farrington / Ttofi 2019, 27). This seems due to the context dependence in effectiveness of specific anti-bullying components of intervention programmes (Gaffney / Farrington / Ttofi 2019, 27).

**3. Analysis of NGO-led anti-bullying programmes funded by international organisations**

For this paper, the authors have selected three programmes that have been collected and analysed within Working group 3 as a part of the European COST Action research programme “Transnational Collaboration on Bullying, Migration and Integration at School Level” (2019 - 2023). One of the main tasks of Working group 3 in the COST Action included the collaboration of researchers across Europe by compiling and evaluating national educational laws about school bullying and migration, as well as collecting and evaluating various programmes interventions and approaches in different European countries around inclusion and bullying prevention in the context of migration. As presented in Table 1., three selected internationally granted NGO-led programmes, that are further analysed in the paper, are implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Moldova. In those countries, unlike other countries included in the comparative analysis of the COST Action, we identified a significant prevalence of internationally granted NGO programmes and the lack of state-led interventions in the field of school bullying prevention. As part of our analysis, The Norwegian "Ungsinn" system for bullying research and evidence review was followed to additionally classify the level of empirical evidence for three selected programs.

 Table 1: A brief overview of the three analysed granted NGO-led anti-bullying programmes

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **International Donor / Grant Organisation** | **NGO’s Programme title** | **Country implementation**  | **Programme components** | **Evidence-Based*****The extent to which the programme is supported by empirical evidence*** |
| Stiftung Kinderpostzegels Netherlands  | Prevention of violence in peer setting | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Bullying prevention, positive school climate, teacher-staff training, parenting-training, social emotional learning  | Some evidence was collected regarding implemented activities, but evaluation studies or studies to collect systematic empirical evidence of the effectiveness of the whole programme are not conducted |
| OAK Foundation | Skills for life  | Bulgaria | Bullying prevention, school - environmental strategies; positive school climate | Rigorous evaluation or systematic evidence of the effectiveness of the whole programme are not identified  |
| Terres des hommes/support of UNICEF Moldova and ChildHub. | Joint efforts to combat bullying in Moldova | Moldova | Bullying prevention, positive school climate, teacher-staff, parent, and children training | Rigorous evaluation or systematic evidence of the effectiveness of the whole programme are not identified  |

Stiftung Kinderpostzegels Netherlands (Child Welfare Stamps Foundation) is an international grant foundation with a long history (Stiftung Kinderpostzegels, n.d.). Established in 1924, the foundation has been active in the Netherlands, as well as internationally with the main focus on creating a safe environment and well-being in the lives of children and youths. The fundraisings for the foundation’s activities run both locally and abroad and include selling child welfare stamps, as well as postcards and other merchandise. Since 2017, the foundation has established a big public campaign for fundraising which usually involves primary school children, and teachers being actively engaged in the fundraising by collecting funding for other vulnerable children and organising the schools' competition (Stiftung Kinderpostzegels, n.d.). The main approach of the foundation is to decrease the prevalence of violence among school-aged children, increase sensitivity to the issue, lower the degree of tolerance for violence, and spread awareness among pupils, teachers, professionals, and parents. As a global foundation, it provides funding for initiatives run by regional and national NGOs in places including Guatemala, Nicaragua, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, and India. (Stiftung Kinderpostzegels, n.d.).

In the European context, the foundation was active in Bosnia and Herzegovina as support to the transitional post-conflict environment. One of the main priorities of their work was the prevention of violence and accordingly, they established the programme entitled “Zero tolerance to violence in the lives of children and youths in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. Within this programme, they developed several sub-programmes intending to target the problem of violence in children’s lives by supporting local NGOs’ initiatives predominately in the fields of child protection, education, and community development. One of these sub-programmes was titled “Prevention of violence in peer settings”, and the main aim was to support local NGOs to develop their initiatives regarding preventing violence in the school setting.

The programme has been implemented by seven local NGOs that targeted different communities and schools across the country. By expanding the knowledge of teachers and expert staff in schools, the programme further empowers them to give an adequate and timely response to the occurrence of violence in schools. Programme activities also include working with children and parents and providing support to children who are either victims or perpetrators of peer violence. In the wider community, the programme aimed to develop policies for the prevention and protection of children from peer violence through cooperation with the non-governmental sector. Application and enforcement of these policies are ensured through building school staff competencies to achieve sustainability in the prevention of peer violence in the school setting.

Some evidence of the local NGOs’ projects in the schools and their effectiveness regarding the prevention of school violence are collected occasionally by local NGOs (seminar and training evaluations, user surveys, participatory satisfaction surveys) mostly regarding activities implemented, but without following strict research guidelines. Also, systematic programme evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the whole programme has not been conducted by grant foundations or locally involved NGOs. The programme can be classified as reaching at least level 1 according to Ungsinn (Martinussen et al. 2019), that is, offering a satisfactory description of objectives, target groups, intervention arenas, structure, and methods. There are also indications that level 2 may at least partly have been reached. Level 2 requires programmes to include a general explanatory model of human behaviour or functioning in combination with considerations about how the programme might correlate with outcomes for the target group (Martinussen et al. 2019, 40).

OAK Foundation is a philanthropic foundation that operates globally, and with their offices in Europe, India, and North America they implemented 11 programmes and provide grants to over 60 organisations, predominately NGOs (OAK Foundation 2023). Education through a learning difference programme has been one of the strategic priorities of this foundation. They partner with different NGOs to tackle various educational challenges, violence prevention, and early childhood development and to support students with learning difficulties who experience further marginalisation due to racism and poverty. In Bulgaria, this foundation financially supported the programme “Skills for life” which was implemented by a local NGO. Programme components were predominately focused on bullying prevention, school and environmental strategies, and a positive school climate.

The programme has developed a holistic approach to countering violence and bullying at school. One of the main goals has been encouraging the creation of a school environment in which the values of healthy communication, mature conflict resolution and tolerance of differences are nurtured. The programme activities involved teachers, school principals, children, and their parents. Further, through the initiative "Key to School without Fear" the programme introduces teachers to the application of the method of teaching prevention programmes in all classes from 1st to 10th grade of three schools in Bulgaria for five consecutive school years. As the programme pointed out, in this way, violence, bullying and humiliation among students will be prevented, and children will grow up healthy, and happy, with good self-esteem and academic success. Based on a review of the programme information, we conclude that no evaluation of the programme seems to have been conducted, and there is a lack of evidence of the programme's effectiveness in preventing school violence. Therefore, level 1 according to Ungsinn can be identified at best.

Terre des hommesis an internationally recognised foundation with a long history of helping children worldwide (Terre des hommes 2023). It was established in Switzerland in 1960, but as a result of separation, two organisations were established, Terre des hommes Switzerland and Terre des hommes Foundation. Although they work independently, they also collaborate sporadically. Terre des hommes Foundation has headquarters in Lausanne and is active in almost 40 countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East (Terre des hommes 2023). The main area of work is focused on child protection, children’s health, children in humanitarian crises (Terre des hommes 2023). The foundation is a member of the Terre des Hommes International Federation which includes sister organisations in Switzerland and other countries.

Terres des hommes has been active in Moldova, and through the support of UNICEF it has implemented a broad anti-bullying programme and campaign for preventing and combating bullying. The programme has been implemented in 30 partner schools across the country by a large team of professionals in the fields of education and child protection. The programme targeted children and youths, teachers, and other professionals. Several tools and interventions have been developed to prevent and intervene in bullying situations. It includes training interventions for children and youths, video lessons online courses, guidelines, and a website for professional support in bullying situations. In addition, an advisory group consisting of representatives of the public authorities, child rights organisations, psychologists, lawyers, and academics has been established within the programme by Terre des hommes Moldova and UNICEF Moldova. Furthermore, the programme also induced proposals for amendments and additions to the Education Code. Within the programme, an awareness-raising campaign was launched entitled “Stop bullying! I Stop. I Speak. I Help.” The goal of the campaign has been to inform and raise awareness among students, parents, and teachers about the dramatic consequences of bullying and cyberbullying on children and youths. Although the programme attempts to comprehensively tackle the problem of school bullying and violence against children, there is no systematic research evidence of the programme's effectiveness. Here also, it seems that we can only identify Ungsinn level 1.

**4. Discussion and conclusion**

Internationally funded programmes through a partnership with local NGOs create an opportunity to tackle challenges associated with school bullying in various countries and address children's needs. Local NGOs seem to be sensitive and responsive to social problems, very often by attempting to deal with an unmet problem in society which might be neglected by the public sector. NGOs are also locally embedded, and they are close to problems and targeted groups.

The analysis of the three programmes supported by international organisations and implemented by local NGOs showed the breadth and scope of the actors, target groups, solutions included as well as various models in the prevention of violence among children. Although the programmes are implemented in targeted schools, they also involved a variety of stakeholders and community members which increases the capacity to design interventions that have a whole-community approach to preventing bullying. All three presented NGO programmes showed a significant engagement with various programmes’ groups they targeted: schoolteachers, parents, children, and community members. In addition, NGOs are more open to testing new methods and approaches in addressing societal problems, and this has been significantly supported by funding from international organisations. Financial sources and voluntary contributions help them to be more flexible in finding solutions. However, they seem to reach only basic levels of evidence according to Ungsinn, that is, the level of well-described interventions. Accordingly, it is not possible to learn about effects, potential side-effects, favourable conditions for implementation, etc. based on rigorous research designs and appropriate methods of data collection and analysis.

At the same time, in the global context, international donor or grant organisations have increased their attention to evidence-based approaches. Programme evaluation, evidence of programmatic performance and results, extensive measurement, and rigours impact have become imperative of in the international development field (Kang et al. 2012; Riddell 2009; Shutt / McGee 2013). Accordingly, international grant organisations are strongly involved in the result-based discourse regarding their interventions. This occurs as a grown need to show, not only the effectiveness of their work, but also to prove the results-based accountability regarding financial expenditures. Usually, external donors are the ones who increase the expectations and pressure on international donor / grant organisations in order to demonstrate the impact and to present data of on achieved results regarding the distributed funds (King et al. 2022). The demands for accountability can come from a variety of donor givers, including citizens, taxpayers, governments, partner countries, or bilateral funding sources. Also, as a part of the development discourse, it is expected from local NGOs to be engaged more in the evaluation and collection of evidence gathering to show measurable outputs of implemented programmes (Sawadogo-Lewis et al. 2022). Additionally, international organisations tend to transfer the same perspectives to governments to increase their capacity in making evidence-based decisions (Shutt / McGee 2013).

However, it is not clear whether and to what extend funds for performing systematic and rigorous evaluations are included in general funding plans, and how the necessary topical and research expertise is made available by external or internal donors, particularly in the case of smaller, national initiatives. Indeed, as Cresswell-Smith / Macintyre / Wahlbeck (2020, 197) observe “(..) although NGOs are often required to report outcomes to funders and other governing bodies, there may be less room for evaluations suitable for academic publications”. More and systematic research on the funding practices of NGOs and international agencies relating to the creation of systematic and rigorous evidence is needed. In this way, unresolved difficulties, needs on the part of NGOs relating to research infrastructure, expertise, and financial resources can be identified. Moreover, this might lead to more national and international networking and collaboration aimed at pooling resources for both programme (further) development and evaluation.

Although international organisations direct substitutional attention towards evidence, measurement, and evaluation, the programmes developed in partnership with local NGOs included in our analyses yield a somewhat sobering picture. All three programmes showed a lack of rigorous programme evaluation, while systematic evidence of the effectiveness of the programme’s activities is not identified. There is a gap between what the programme activities achieve on the one hand and the evidence to interpret whether those activities are effective in term of preventing or combating school violence and bullying on the other hand. What can be expected is that NGOs may face various obstacles including insufficient time and money, technical challenges and inadequate knowledge and expertise for data collection and analysis, which can result in lower data quality and poor evaluation practice. In addition, international organisations, in seeking rigorous evidence for their programmes, should take into account contextual factors. To analyse the programmes’ contribution, a pragmatic methodological approach needs to be chosen, based on contextual circumstances, since it cannot be expected that one size does fits all (Sherbut / Kanji 2013).

Finally, we want to raise the critical and necessary question whether it is realistic in all cases and contexts and under all circumstances to adhere to evidence-based practice only and to lay the “burden of proof” on the NGOs themselves. Following the five steps of evidence-based practice includes the (i) formulation of a practice question; (ii) search for the best evidence; (iii) appraisal of the evidence collected; (iv) application of the results; and (v) evaluation of the outcome (Nevo / Slonim-Nevo 2011). Whereas it might be feasible for NGOs (as practitioners) to implement the first four steps, systematically monitoring and evaluating intervention outcomes might often not be possible due to factors discussed already. Among them are lack of resources (e.g., time, funds) and lack of research expertise (see also Nevo / Slonim-Nevo 2011). Building on the notion of evidence-informed practice as encouraging practitioners “to be knowledgeable about findings coming from all types of studies and to use them in their work in an integrative manner, taking into consideration clinical experience and judgment, clients’ preferences and values, and context of intervention" (Nevo / Slonim-Nevo 2011, 1193) we may ask ourselves whether it is necessary for all NGO-based school anti-bullying and anti-violence programmes to provide systematic and rigorous scientific evidence on their outcomes and effectiveness based on NGOs’ own research efforts. It may be sufficient for them to follow the first four steps to develop and implement their programmes and undertake (at the latest) the fifth step in collaboration with researchers in the field working at universities and further research institutions, thereby drawing also on funding by the state as well as further national and regional educational resources. This would align well with the need to use a whole education approach to tackle bullying and school violence (UNESCO 2020) while promoting mutual empowerment for NGOs, schools, and further educational institutions, and helping make good use of the (sometimes scarce) financial and personnel resources.

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