School Violence in Niger: Between "Parental Abdication" and Underqualified Teachers in the City of Niamey.

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Abstract: Despite policies aimed at preventing and combating violence in schools, secondary schools in Niamey (the capital of Niger) continue to grapple with violence in its many forms. Among these forms of violence, student violence is particularly prevalent. This sociological study primarily seeks to highlight the effects of parental disengagement and underqualified teachers on student violence in Niamey's secondary schools.

Keywords: Violence, school, parental disengagement, underqualified teachers.

I. Introduction

Violence in schools is a global problem, its manifestations now observed not only in developed countries but also in developing countries (Coslin, 2006, p. 8). A widespread phenomenon affecting both students and school staff (teachers and administrative personnel), school violence is at the heart of much discussion and is a favorite topic in newspapers and on television. The extensive media coverage surrounding school violence can lead one to believe that it is more prevalent today than in the past. However, this perception is biased, as L. Badolo points out (L. Badolo, 2018, p. 18). Therefore, while it is important not to confuse its increase with the increased detection of such violence, it is undeniable that school violence is a serious concern, profoundly disrupting the learning process worldwide.

In the United States, there is, on average, a school shooting every week. In OECD countries in Europe, approximately 4% of students report being hit or pushed at least a few times a month, although this percentage varies between approximately 1% and 9% depending on the country.

In Africa, according to UNESCO, violence in schools (including gender-based violence and harassment) is a growing concern, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. "In recent years, the increasing number of victims of violence in schools has sparked outrage in the region, with events such as the case of a 12-year-old schoolboy beaten to death by his classmates." In Niger, recently (in April 2024), a student at a high school in Niamey broke his teacher's forearm with a club. Nigeriens still remember the 2022 murder of a primary school teacher by his student in Tahoua. These concrete and striking cases, however, should not obscure other forms and manifestations of violence in the school environment. School violence is not limited to isolated incidents, nor is it a new phenomenon. In a 2017 research report on the prevalence and causes of violence in schools, 48% of students surveyed reported being victims of violence at the hands of their teachers. M. M. Abdourahamane demonstrates in his work that violence and indiscipline in secondary schools are recurring phenomena in African schools (M. M. Abdourahamane, 2022).

The various reports and research studies are consistent: violence exists within the Nigerien school system, particularly in secondary schools in Niamey, the capital. This violence often occurs within schools (classrooms, etc.), but it can also be perpetrated outside of school (on the way to school, on social media, etc.). It leads to a heightened sense of insecurity, with serious consequences for students' education. This situation necessitates sociological investigation. What factors explain the phenomenon of violence among secondary school students in Niamey, Niger? To attempt to shed light on this question, this article, after addressing some methodological aspects used to collect empirical data, will present and discuss the main findings, focusing on two key points: parental disengagement and teacher under-qualification as major factors contributing to school violence in Niamey.

II.   Research Methodology

2.1 Theoretical Stance

Violence in schools is analyzed and interpreted in various ways. The very notion of violence is linked to different concepts and approaches (L. Maquet, 2021, p. 19). As a reminder, the word "violence" comes from the Latin term vis, which means force, vigor, power, violence, the use of physical force, but also quantity, abundance, or the essential nature of something. The core meaning of the word vis is the idea of force—and, more specifically, vital force (Y. Michaud, 2018, p. 3). In the social sciences, and more specifically in sociology, violence is analyzed as a raw (physical) fact, but also as a complex social phenomenon linked to power structures, inequalities, and social reproduction, ranging from interpersonal conflicts to structural forms. Violence has always been of great interest to many sociologists, even if they speak much more about crime or the analysis of delinquency. This does not make it a sociology specifically of violence, but rather of criminal behavior.

"Violence is in fact a cross-cutting theme that runs through a multitude of research fields and paradigms. We see research in urban, political, educational, sport sociology, etc., focusing on the manifestations of violence in their field of study, using methods as diverse as they are varied, giving as many definitions. Despite this polysemy of specialties and methods, we nevertheless distinguish two ways of understanding violence in sociology" (S. Crépon, 2022, p. 5).

For the purposes of this article, the theoretical stance adopted is one that attempts to combine deterministic and interactionist approaches. School violence is thus considered a social pathology (anomie) in the sense of Émile Durkheim. It is the disintegration of norms that drives students to violence. Violence emerges when social rules weaken or become blurred, creating a state of anomie where individuals lose their bearings and social control. This leads to an attempt to establish a causal link between student violence and the family and school environment. School violence is also seen as the result of interactions (social relationships). Acts of violence are committed by students in response to the actions of other actors in the school (in this case, teachers).

2.2 Review of Research Methods and Techniques

To contextualize the issue of violence in secondary schools in Niamey, this study relies primarily on documentary research and empirical investigation. The documentary research, based on a range of scholarly works addressing violence in schools, provided important theoretical information that was used in defining the research problem and writing this article. The empirical research involved gathering data in the field to test the hypotheses. The preferred approach was qualitative, consisting of an analysis of non-numerical empirical data. Semi-structured interviews were used for data collection. The snowball sampling method was employed. The investigation focused primarily on two secondary schools in the 5th arrondissement of Niamey (namely, CSP Tasnim Academy and CES Gaweye) and one school in the 4th arrondissement: CES Aéroport. It took place from February 1st to May 2nd, 2024. Qualitative data was collected using interview guides sent to teachers, students, principals, deputy principals, supervisors, and parents of students at these two secondary schools. A total of 65 interviews were conducted, 44 with men and 21 with women.

Strategic Groups	Distribution by sex		Total	%
	Male	Female		
Teachers	17	5	22	38,84%
Administrative Staff	4	2	6	4,25
Students	17	10	27	41,53%
Parents	6	4	10	15,38%.
Total	44	21	65	100%

All empirical data were categorized based on their convergence with the themes of the interview framework. This empirical data, combined with data from the literature, formed the basis for the analysis and interpretation of this research. Data processing was done manually, which facilitated manual thematization. With that said, let us now turn to the main results and discussion of this research.

III. Results and Discussion

3.1   School Violence:

The Result of "Parental Abdication" "Violence is never innate in humans. It is acquired through education and social practice," as the French anthropologist F. Héritier aptly stated. Dysfunction in the normative framework within families (parental negligence) is one of the main factors highlighted in this research when analyzing the phenomenon of student violence in secondary schools in the city of Niamey. It is worth recalling that significant studies have already implicated family education. Parental negligence, laxity, or even abdication of responsibility is considered the primary cause of student violence. According to M. Boukerma & F. Aghlal (2014), "the family is indeed the first space for a child's socialization. Children who adopt violent behaviors are, in many cases, those whose families have failed in their duties towards them."

The problem of parental resignation is highlighted by E. Fethi (2009) who is outraged by the considerable decline in the care given by certain parents to the education of their children. According to this author, parents are increasingly seeking to be replaced by housekeepers or even Information and Communication Technologies. (ICT); which are clearly involved in entrenching violence and indiscipline among children. In the Nigerien context, we are currently seeing in Niger that families are increasingly abandoning their role as educators (F. Mayaki, 2021). The substance of the interviews shows that there is a causal link between student violence and the family environment. In an interview a supervisor said:

"Parents are largely responsible for this violence and indiscipline at school because of their abdication of responsibility in their children's education. If students feel entitled to openly criticize or insult their teacher, if some students even dare to hit a teacher, it's because they received a poor upbringing at home. It's up to parents to educate their children first and foremost" (A school supervisor, interviewed on February 13, 2024, in Niamey).

In another interview with a teacher, we find the following: "You know, education doesn't only happen at school; it starts first at home, in the family. That's where children learn how to live in society; they won't learn all that in front of the blackboard. Sometimes, parents neglect their children's education" (An English teacher, interviewed on February 15, 2024, in Niamey). The results of the empirical study confirm the theory that violent school-aged adolescents come from families who have abdicated their educational role. These families often go so far as to condone their children's violent behavior, which can exacerbate student indiscipline and violence.

3.2. Teacher Underqualification as a Source of School Violence

"A teacher's role is not only to instruct, but also to support each student in their individual and social development. They have an educational function. They must take care of children, especially given their young age, during school hours. 'Taking care' here expresses the idea of 'concern, concern, and a relationship with another who is vulnerable,' according to Francine Saillant's article in the dictionary of the body (Marzano, 2007, p. 877)" (Degorre, 2017, p. 82). In every country in the world, schools crystallize societal tensions and, sometimes, amplify them. Violence reflects a certain state of social relations and, therefore, depends on the social and cultural context. More specifically, the living environment, specific to a given community, determines the thresholds of antisociality and severity of the acts committed by individuals (Duhamel-Maples, 2007, p. 41).

Thus, in addition to dysfunctional normative frameworks within families, the attitude of some teachers is also a determining factor in explaining school violence. Significant research has already highlighted the importance of teacher training and stance in relation to the problem of school violence. For R. Gasparini (2000), it is important to critically examine the lack of training among certain actors in the system, specifically the inability of teachers to consider the metacognitive dimensions of learning and their poor performance in teaching management. According to this author, the schools most affected by violence are those where students judge teachers most negatively and where there is a poor relationship between teachers and school administration. Along the same lines, S. Tonkiewicz (2000) emphasizes that the behavior of some teachers can sometimes be the cause of violent behavior among students. E. Debarbieux (1998) argues that there is a genuine management problem that requires tremendous courage from both public policymakers and unions. This underscores the importance of ethics and school culture in addressing the various forms of school violence.

L. Chemin (2011), in his work based on personal experience and observations of student behavior, demonstrates how inappropriate remarks made by a teacher can, in some cases, explain a portion of the antisocial behavior observed in students. According to the author, these remarks, which are in fact judgments, primarily concern academic performance, social competence, and the student as a whole. These judgments take various forms, ranging from an unfortunate remark to an insult. In these situations, students feel humiliated, belittled, denigrated, or otherwise negatively labeled. This feeling of disrespect is the most significant factor in the emergence of violence and indiscipline at school. By attacking the student's self-image, the teacher also affects the student's self-esteem. The work of B. Annette (2021) highlights simple and proven solutions to help teachers address common classroom management challenges they frequently encounter. Among these challenges is the effective management of violence and disruptive behavior. According to Annette, students are often distracted from their work or start talking because they are restless and desperately need to move around due to fatigue. The author proposes a simple, two-pronged approach to resolving this issue:

1) Be mindful of how much time your students spend sitting in class. Students must be so busy that they don't have time to slouch or stop working. Teachers who are aware of the amount of energy these young bodies and minds are just waiting to be released benefit from this awareness.

2) When you notice that your students have been sitting for about thirty minutes (or even less for younger students), give them a few moments to stretch. That said, in the Nigerian context, the interviews conducted as part of this research establish a link between student violence and teacher underqualification. Qualification can be defined as "know-how," initial training, and collective experience. For example, in one interview, a teacher stated:

"The problem of violence in schools arises on three levels. First, it's a problem of the education a child receives at home. Then there's the problem of bad influences, and we must have the courage to say it: the problem with the teachers… Most teachers are volunteers or those doing their national civic service—graduates, certainly, but people who lack the skills and the calling to teach. They are people who often maintain relationships with their students. And with social media today, there are no secrets anymore. So you see. This is one of the reasons for the lack of respect that leads to violence against teachers. It's a real problem" (interview of May 2, 2024, with a French teacher). In another interview, a ninth-grade student stated: "…Some teachers flirt with girls. And if they

see you with the girl they're flirting with, you become their enemy. I have a friend who was a victim of this." Sometimes the teacher tries to humiliate him in class. There are students who react, who do not accept it. And sometimes there is a fight or insults" (interview of 8/04/2024 with a third-grade student).

IV. Conclusion

While various forms of violence have always been observed in schools, it appears that violence is now spreading to more and more schools in Niamey, leading to a growing sense of insecurity. In the school environment, several variables can contribute to explaining the phenomenon of student violence. We focused primarily on two: parental disengagement and the underqualification of teachers. The results of this research suggest that school violence in Niamey's middle and high schools is a behavior ingrained through family upbringing and social interactions (specifically, interactions between students and underqualified teachers). In Niger, private schools are often perceived as more disciplined and offering higher quality education. The data from this research tend to show that private schools are not immune to the phenomenon of violence. School violence affects both private and public schools. In conclusion, one might ask whether school violence is linked to the commodification of education?

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