Trauma-Sensitive Environment and

Understanding the Concept of a Safe School in Georgia

Research Report

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Introduction

Trauma-sensitive environment at schools is of particular importance due to the fact that trauma has a severe effect on child's learning abilities, behavior and relationships. The outcomes of the recent neurobiological and psychological research (Van der Kolk, 2005 & Greenwald, 2000 as cited in Cole, et al, 2009) show that traumatic experience reduces child's concentration, memory, speech and organizational skills that is in close correlation with his/her academic performance. Traumatic experience is often revealed in child's inappropriate behavior in the classroom and difficulties in relationships with people around (classmates, teachers).

It is of utmost importance to raise awareness of teachers and school administrative personnel on the peculiarities of trauma and their impact, so that they could identify the reasons behind child's complicated behavior and learning delays, and take appropriate measures (e.g. informing parents, consulting specialists, redirecting child to psychologist, etc.) for minimizing the negative effect trauma can have.

Part I – Trauma-Sensitive Environment and Georgian Schools

Traumatic Experience and Students' Academic Performance at School

Learning literacy, participating in discussions, solving mathematical dilemmas, are based on many factors, such as organizational and analytical skills, ability to carry out assignments, get engaged in the learning process, as well as trust. Attention, emotional and behavioral self-regulation also serve as prerequisites for academic achievement. Traumatic experience hinders the development of speech, communication skills and self-perception in children. Trauma-experienced children find it difficult to accomplish class assignments and instructions, process new information and understand causal effects. In addition, creative thinking that helps children to solve everyday problems is also hindered (that is revealed in playing, for instance).

Trauma-experienced children perceive school environment as a "battle field", where anxiety overweighs self-control. In order to feel secure, children often behave the way that causes disappointment and negative reaction in those around (including teachers). This enhances the perceived threat and confrontation in children, that results in their self-stigmatization. A teacher without special education and skills might not be able to understand child's "inappropriate" and "troublesome" behavior and its reasons. Therefore, trauma-experienced children often become victims of this misunderstanding. No matter whether child expresses external (expresses anxiety in any way) or internal (does not speak, is depressive, keeps distance) behavioral patterns, it is his/her behavioral response to trauma that rises problems in learning and creates tensions with peers and teachers (Cole, et al., 2009).

Most educational systems ignore the fact that trauma can have direct, indirect or potential impact on child's ability to learn. Trauma-informed approach influences paradigm shifts in personnel and organization and supports the recognition of negative effects/outcomes trauma can have, as well as understanding and meeting the needs of trauma-experienced children. In other words, trauma-informed approach envisages establishment of a specific climate/culture, practice and policy at schools that would be responsive to particularly sensitive and trauma-experienced children. On the other hand, trauma-sensitive policy positively affects school itself (raises quality of functionality and transforms it into a child-oriented space) and positively changes the life trajectory of vulnerable students (McInerney & McKlindon).

Despite the fact that neither school is a mental health facility, nor teachers are therapists, compared to the last century, today, teaching requires additional, alternative strategies and skills due to the fact that the evaluation system (e.g. test scores) does not actually represent main, fundamental

criterion for the assessment of academic performance. Since particular attention is paid to the "technical" assessment of academic performance, other important components, such as mental health is largely neglected (Oehlberg, 2008).

It is noteworthy, that school environment mainly focuses on the symptoms of traumatic stress and not its causes, which in fact is the stress. School personnel (teachers, administration) interpret these very symptoms incorrectly: they are perceived as bad/inappropriate behavior and not as stressful (caused by stress) one. Therefore, a "troublesome" child with a "bad behavior" is confronted with various discipline measures. Such reaction enhances sense of neglect and (emotional) vulnerability and keeps stressful behavior unresolved, that in the end, is reflected in child's academic failure.

In trauma-sensitive school, the focus shifts from punitive measures to child's reintegration into the school society. School becomes trauma-sensitive and no longer neglects the problem of traumatic stress. In addition, it does not stop on identifying traumatic stress and redirecting child to external services. Trauma-sensitive school denies a passive role and the environment where children cannot express and develop their abilities to full extent (ibid).

A trauma-sensitive environment recognizes that trauma is not an event in itself, but a response to traumatic experience when person's ability to resist dramatically decreases. Terr (1991) defines childhood trauma as an outcome of external influences that make person vulnerable and destroys defense and copying strategies established in the past. The list of traumatizing events is quite long, starting with physical threat and damage and ending with severe/brutal/violent treatment, neglect, abandonment, loss of loved ones, etc. (Terr, 1991 as cited in Cole, et all, 2009, p. 18). The severeness of trauma depends on various factors, and children from one and the same family react to traumatizing events individually. However, teachers find it hard to understand that person's social context influences the intensity of traumatic symptoms. Harvey (1996) explains that individual response to trauma is defined not only by the personal strength and characteristics of the case, but also by the support to the trauma-experienced person and the degree of this support (Harvey, 1996 as cited in Cole, et all, 2009, p. 19). Harvey (1996) also speaks about the "ecological agreement" between traumatized person and social environment. This is a construct involving empathy and support towards traumatized person from his/her surroundings. Interventions that provide "ecological agreement" is achieved through activities enhancing its relationship with individual and environment. Therefore, it reduces human isolation, enhances sense of belonging to relevant social context, equips him/her with constructive coping strategy and enhances social competences (ibid).

School is an important community for children. "Ecological agreement" in school environment means environment where academic personnel understand the negative effect trauma can have on child's behavior, learning process and formation of relationships. Within such environment, trauma-sensitive approach is envisaged in all aspects of school life during the whole learning day. Individual support to student also focuses on development of number of social skills. Often, links between child's behavior and traumatizing experiences is invisible or vague; nevertheless, trauma-sensitive environment provides the instrument necessary for identification of needs.

Concept of Trauma-Sensitive School

School is trauma-sensitive if its teachers, administrative personnel and parents are united around a common goal: create space, where trauma's negative effect on students' academic performance is recognized, students are provided with protective and supportive environment, and are given chance to establish positive relationships with peers and adults, be self-confident and improve learning outcomes. The key principles of trauma-sensitive school are described below.

School has a common, shared vision on the importance of trauma-sensitive environment →

It is important for every school representative (teachers, administration, consultant‪s, psychologists, school bus drivers, school cafeteria cooks...) to have a clear understanding on the meaning of trauma and its effect on students' academic performance.

School provides socially, emotionally and academically safe and protected environment for all children →

Difficulties children encounter within the school environment are caused by number of reasons (among them – trauma) that threaten their general welfare and are often neglected by the school representatives. Children feel these dangers and respond to them differently (mostly causing condemnation and unacceptance by adults). Therefore, school should be able to provide its students with multilevel safe environment in classroom, school playground, cafeteria, training room or school bus. This is essential for student academic security and does not let external problems (children bring to school) to obstruct students' academic performance and personal development.

School responds to students needs in a complex way by considering the nature of their relationships, self-regulating skills, academic competences, physical and emotional wellbeing →

Trauma outcomes can be multidimensional, having various forms. Trauma-experienced child can conceal and deeply hide his/her experience instead of revealing it. Thus, one needs to pay huge attention to identifying child's actual needs and reasons beneath them. Trauma-sensitive school recognizes the tight links between the following four aspects: child's relationships with teachers and peers; behavioral, emotional and attention self-regulating skills; achieving success in academic and non-academic domains; and physical and emotional health. School should empower students in this respect and help them overcome their difficulties and be successful within and outside the school environment.

School connects students with the school community and provides opportunity to apply acquired skills into practice→

As a rule, trauma-experienced children seek for the sense of security and belongingness in school. School can meet these necessities if it cultivates acceptance and tolerance within its space by teaching children to respect each other's needs. Therefore, individual support services should not differentiate trauma-experienced children from their peers and adults they [children] trust. On the contrary, school should help children in becoming full members of the class and school communities (Cole et al., 2009).

It is noteworthy that integrating trauma-sensitivity in the educational system envisages the paradigm shift, and thus, transforms school policy and teaching methodology. Despite these challenges, trauma-sensitive school provides such benefits through reduction of bullying and harassment among students, improvement of students' academic achievements, improvement of school general climate (e.g. reduced stress in students and teachers), increased sense of security/protection, better possibility to maintain new and qualified academic personnel, etc. (Oehlberg, 2008).

Child Protection System in Georgia

Georgia started reforming its child care state system in 2005. LEPL Social Service Agency implements a multicomponent program of child protection, among them - the programs of child protection from violence and child rehabilitation/habilitation. It should be admitted that since 2010 the child care state system has prioritized child protection from any form of domestic or external violence. On May 31, 2010 a joint degree of three ministries (the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia) was issued aiming at identification of the cases of violence against children, providing security and rehabilitation services for child victims of violence, and monitoring the conditions of child victims through certain measures and procedures. The main idea of creating such a document was caused by the necessity to react to the outcomes of the national research on Violence against Children in Georgia conducted in 2007. The abovementioned research revealed the forms and scales of the violence against children in Georgia. According to the data, 79.8% of parents physically punished children, while 82.3% used the methods of psychological punishment (UNICEF, 2007-2009). The punishment was aimed at establishing discipline. The study showed that 19% of parents physically punished children under the age category of 0-1 (ibid).

The study of 2013 revealed the weakness of the child referral system adopted in 2010 that still exist nowadays and prevent the effectiveness of the system itself. Based on the focus of the current research, among these weaknesses the role of school and teachers in identification of violence behavior against children and reaction to it can be identified as one of the essentials. Based on UNICEF study of 2013, school administration and teachers had never been trained on the specifics of identifying violence against children and referral procedures. While the resource officers (so-called "Mandaturebi") were specially trained in this respect. School personnel do not possess any knowledge for identifying the cases of violence against children, including less visible or less severe ones. Therefore, school system does not acknowledge the responsibility it has in prevention and intervention of violence that in the end, hinders the effective performance of the child protection system (UNICEF, 2013). The research showed that compared to teachers, school resource officers can better identify the signs of violence, are more motivated to react, express willingness to immediately inform parents, Social Service Agency and social works (ibid). In addition, the problem lies in the fact that event after adopting the child protection referral document that states "identification of violence against child is the direct responsibility of all institutions having contact with children, including school, medical facilities, rural doctors, specialized child care institutions, agencies, district services or patrol police (Child Protection (Referral) Procedures, Article 6.1), neither special guidelines were prepared, nor trainings were provided for teachers or school resource

officers in this respect. According to the UNICEF 2013 report, the obligations concerning reaction to the violence cases against children is transcribed neither in teacher's job descriptions, nor in any other official ministerial documents concerning school. Therefore, school administration or teachers' response to the violence against children only depends on their voluntary knowledge and individual interpretation of referral document or respective procedures (UNICEF, 2013).

Safe Environment in Georgian Schools

Providing safety and protection in Georgian schools is mainly provided through the development of technical infrastructure (installing video surveillance, establishing fences around school perimeters) and introduction of Resource Officers System. In the first place, these measures are aimed at providing physical security and protecting children from physical violence. However, it should be admitted here that the concept of safe school in Georgia is based on the product-providing approach that envisages immediate response to a case and short-term problem solving. While the international practice is based on the process-oriented approach that is more preventive in nature, and not only interventional, aims at complex improvement of school climate, focuses on timely identification, management and reflection on risky and generally antisocial behavior in order to avoid the similar problems in future. In addition, process-oriented safety vision envisages teaching social skills and cultivating proper values in school teachers. However, this requires the adaptation of school curriculum, raising awareness of school personnel, modernization of teaching methods, and introduction of psychological and social services at schools (Gorgodze & Janashia, 2012).

While discussing the safe environment at schools, the vision and evaluation of students should also be considered. Unfortunately, there is a lack of studies on safe schools in Georgia (and are only concentrated on psychical safety) since this topic is of lesser interest for academic circles and state institutions (Ministry of Education and Science and its agencies) as well. The only source concerning the students' attitudes and visions on school safety could be found in the publication on "Safe School without the Participation of Society" published in 2011 (Gorgodze, at. al., 2011).

The abovementioned publication comprises of the views of students of four public and two private schools concerning the environment at schools where students can feel safe and protected. It is noteworthy that the students from this study speak a lot about the relationships between students and teachers. For instance, the students believe it is very important not to be distinguished from one another in respect to academic performance by their teachers; teachers should be able to listen to their students and give them opportunity to express themselves; manage the educational process

peacefully without insulting, threatening, intimidating or quarrelling with students; teachers should also respect students instead of asking for respect unilaterally. As the students participating in the research admitted, it is also of utmost importance to create an environment where students would not be able to bully each other, no one would come to school with weapons or blunt objects, resources officers would not treat or punish students unfairly (e.g. writing protocols or threatening to send them to specialized schools). The research participants admit that the main function of resource officers is to control students, and teachers use this as leverage to intimidate students. Therefore, the students perceive school as a space constantly controlling and threatening them, restricting their freedom and violating their rights (ibid). Naturally, the environment focused on control and punitive measures cannot raise the sense of safety and security in students. In fact, students' antisocial behavior is quite predictable under such tense and stressful circumstances, which can be refereed as protest and responsive reaction to stress factors (Antadze, et. al, 2011).

An alternative measure to the control and punishment-oriented strategies is the development of school's educational function with the priority on child care, empowerment and support. This approach does not exclude controlling function, but modifies the controlling mechanisms. In particular, resource officers' service or video surveillance is an external controlling mechanism (child controls his/her behavior while he/she is being watched/observed), while it is essential for a child to understand the meaning of the responsibility on his/her behavior. Under proper circumstances, the "external" control mechanisms become child's "internal" ones that in fact is the prevention of antisocial behavior and essence for personal development. Instead of intimidation and punishment, a support-based approach requires the development and enactment of the consolidated state strategy that should be implemented on school level by qualified psycho-social services; at the moment the latter is not even a mandatory service in Georgia and does not even exist in the majority of Georgian schools (ibid).

In order to obtain more information concerning the safe school concept in Georgia, we conducted a number of in-depth interviews with the education experts within the scope of the current research (so-called expert research). It is noteworthy that the interviews with the experts went beyond the safe school concept and also concerned various flaws in the general education system of Georgia that are, of course, tightly connected with safe environment at schools.

Main findings of Expert Research

Firstly, the respondents admitted that together with the physical security (e.g. safe infrastructure), the components of psychological safety and the quality of internal school climate should also be considered. The importance of introducing preventive programs [a component of informal education] at schools was also underlined, that supports the development of psycho-social skills among children/adolescents. On the other hand, it was also mentioned that the Georgian general education state policy (e.g. the national curriculum) does not envisage any complex approach to safety at schools that would include psychological, social and academic safety together with the physical one.

> *"Safety has many components and includes physical and psycho-social security. The issues of environment and infrastructure, hygiene, physical conditions of school and accessibility are very important. Another issue is the relationships and attitudes within the school walls. There is no state demand concerning the psycho-emotional safety." (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management)*

> *"Preventive measures that are considered by the national curriculum are very limited, unfortunately. Maybe a class is lucky enough to have a teacher undertaking these measures on voluntary basis; but the complex standards considering preventive measures, unfortunately, do not officially exist." (Head of Preschool Program, Psychologist)*

According to the respondents, teachers and their qualification still remains to be the main challenge in the general education system. Teachers are considered as the main actors implementing any kind of reform into the practice. Therefore, the quality of their motivation and alliance is of particular importance. The respondents believe that nowadays, teachers do not have any motivation to care for lifelong professional development, which is rooted in unsatisfactory remuneration, as well as passive parents not demanding high standards and quality from schools; in addition, school is a closed circle where the academic personnel are not refreshed on permanent basis, but stay on their positions for decades, without fearing to lose their jobs due to low qualification.

> *"No matter what you change, if a teacher does not follow you, nothing would have effect. Today, majority of teachers lack professionalism; they are not motivated to implement certain activities for professional development." (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management)*

"Teachers are not permissive, or interested, lack motivation and see no benefits. To start with, some of them teach for 40-45 years and their conditions have not improved during this time. Young generation does not want to work at school, as besides motivation, they need salaries." (Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions)

The respondents also spoke about the ineffectiveness of the current arrangement of teachers training and certification. The certification process increases teachers' salaries if they meet formal criteria. Nevertheless, certification process does not create a solid ground for modernization of teaching methodologies and increasing of teaching quality, since it does not change major factors – attitudes, sentiments and motivation of teachers to feel more responsible towards their jobs and professional development.

"Teachers trainings have been in progress for number of years, modules are created, etc. However, this is kind of a ritual: you pass an exam, someone gives you a credit and a certificate. After certification, teacher's salary can increase to 1000 GEL, while his/her method of conducting a lesson would remain the same as before." (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management)

"Trainings are not necessary for knowledge; they are necessary for studying attitudes. They [teachers] should change their attitudes. I can acquire knowledge in one day, my skills are developed gradually, while changing my attitudes is the longest process." (The National Center for Teacher Professional Development)

In respect to safe school, the respondents admitted that despite the number of reforms, the authoritarian style of teaching is still dominant in Georgian schools (mainly, public schools are meant). This is confirmed by the fact that the main function (but not the only one) of school is identified as that of giving formal education, while the raising function is largely neglected in Georgia. At the same time, formal education is implemented though old "Soviet methods."

"Majority of our teachers have developed their teaching skills from the soviet perspective. Field knowledge is also declarative in manner and they have no skills to develop within the sphere. They cannot take children to certain knowledge; they find constructivist approach difficult. This generation is focused on memorizing by heart and not on discovery and creation of new knowledge." (The International Institute for Education Policy, Planning and Management)

"Teaching is not the only function; school should also be educational, that it not a reality at the moment, despite our desire. Unfortunately, our schools cannot adapt to the needs of contemporary children. Each new generation is better than the previous one, and this fact should be seen." (Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions)

"School should give a child basic education and what is the most important, it should raise a child. Today, these two components, education and upbringing are inseparable. School mission is to prepare a child for being a citizen." (The National Center for Teacher Professional Development)

Despite the fact that the respondents speak about the necessity of complex approach to modernize the school system and this should be of priority for the state, they still mention a lack of qualified teachers, and see it as the major problem of current system. They believe that the majority of teachers lack knowledge and skills oriented on child's (student's) needs. In the first place, under child's needs they mean teaching how to comprehend new knowledge, think independently and freely, develop critical reasoning and independent thinking, and express their opinion.

"When teacher thinks that he/she knows something and transfers this knowledge to students as absolute truth and does not provide alternative means, child becomes passive and stops thinking independently. And in the end, we get a person unable and unwilling to express his/her opinion. This is typical authoritarian approach." (The National Center for Teacher Professional Development)

"[Teachers] lack the technique of explaining and delivering. They have technique of massive supply; but when three or four, or even one student needs something, they say that cannot dedicate time to them, as the others will simply destroy the whole class in the meanwhile. They cannot regulate this. I think these methods should be learnt." (Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, Psychological Service Unit)

It should be mentioned here that the Psychological Service Unit at the Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions is a governmental structure providing free service to children and adolescents. Children are directed to this unit based on an official referral (e.g. school redirects students and parents to them), or on individual basis (e.g. parent takes child to them without school's interference). The interview with the representative of the abovementioned unit showed that there is a huge demand on psychological service: in 2015 total of 1230 applications were submitted (both, referral and individual application), while in January-March 2016, total of 307 cases

were observed. The Psychological Service Unit is addressed for various problems: emotional problems (decreased mood, anxiety, irritation…), destructive behavior (escaping from school, disrupting lesson, provoking conflict, alcohol or substance abuse…), anti-sociality, problems with communication, suicidal thoughts or behavior, academic problems (problems with literacy, attention deficit, concentration problems), etc. In addition, the respondents admitted that this agency also provides services to parent by offering free consultations on management of child's behavior, maintaining achieved results, etc. The agency is applied by a large number of people, while the number of professionals working in the system is quite limited.

Concerning the preventive programs, the representatives of the abovementioned unit mentioned that their activities may serve as preventive measures at some point, especially the activities like taking children to camps, where they can interact with each other in an alternate space without any gadgets. However, these activities are more of preventive measures than a preventive system that encompasses more high-scale and complex approach. And since it is impossible to mobilize the enormous human resources who could work with all Georgian children, it is more reasonable to work with parents and raise their awareness how to ensure proper development of their children. Besides, it is also important to inform teachers concerning the psycho-social and creative function school has in addition to its usual function of giving formal education.

> "We created free therapeutic groups for children heavily dependent on social networks, mobile phones, etc. These groups comprised of various art-therapy activities, consultations, field trips specially focused on children. And we achieved very good results. We can even call it a preventive program; however, it is nothing compared to what has to be done. Preventive programs should be more systematic, comprising of awareness raising of parents and training of school teachers." (Office of Resource Officers of Educational Institutions)

> "Development of psycho-social skills is very important for each person, and in particular, for adolescents and children. And this is one of many components under school responsibility. In our reality, school process is not providing this opportunity." (Head of Preschool Program, Psychologist)

Main Findings of Focus Groups with School Teachers

In parallel to the expert research, we decided that getting insight of school teachers will be of value as well. For this purpose, a focus group with school teachers was organized (groups discussion method) involving public and private school teachers. The respondents' experience of working within the school environment varied between 5-15 years. Some of the respondents had also

worked as school administrators and class tutors. It should be mentioned that two of the respondents had studied on the Master's program in Education Management. The focus group results are presented in several categories: a) child's academic performance, b) teacher professional development, and c) concept of safe school.

According to the focus group participants, several factors influence child's academic performance, such as degree of parent's (guardian's) involvement of a parent in the learning process, socio-economic conditions of family (when a family is concerned on meeting primary needs, child's academic performance moves to the second stage), and teacher's role – whether or not a teacher performs an interesting and engaging lesson.

> *"Based on my experience, I can say that the requirement from the family is the most important. If a child knows that he/she is under control and the parent is interested in his/her academic performance, he/she performs more effectively." (Respondent #2, Public School)*

> *"Socio-economic factor is also very important. This is the general truth when a person has other needs (basic needs), it is very hard to think of development and literacy." (Respondent #1, Public School)*

> *"To my mind, teacher has one of the essential roles. There are teachers who simply do not try to make their lessons interesting that in the end, seriously affects children. As there are children studying only the subjects of the teachers they like, and neglect those, whose teachers they dislike." (Respondent #3, Private School)*

When speaking about teacher's role, the respondents mentioned that for effective classroom practices, a teacher should possess class management strategies that enable him/her to foresee the interest of the whole group, as well as student individual needs. However, on the other hand, a teacher needs motivation to conduct lesson in an interesting way - taking care of teacher's motivation is the state's obligation.

> *"Based on my experience and observation, student's academic performance is largely based on class management. In every class, in every group there are several students who need different, special approach based on their psychological conditions. Student's difficult behavior can be caused by number of reasons, but I still believe that if the lesson is properly planned and class is properly managed, all children are engaged to some extent." (Respondent #1, Public School)*

"A teacher without motivation cannot raise students' motivation to learn. In the first place everyone thinks of their selves, families, and it is hard to think of anyone else in this case. If the state provides support to teachers, they will be much more motivated, and the students' academic performance will also increase." (Respondent #4, Public School)

The focus group participants also spoke about their need for professional development. They admitted that they are willing to have systematic trainings on practice-oriented teaching as the theory related trainings, even concerning the translations of international literature, are not enough for teachers to implement acquired knowledge into practice. Besides, the respondents also spoke about the necessity of a common space where they could exchange their experience and problems with peers.

„The trainings mostly aim at teaching theory instead of developing practical skills. Teachers in our school have strong theoretical background. However, it is of immense importance to put this knowledge into practice correctly and this is what we lack now. Getting familiar with translated literature is never enough. Discussing the cases and issues that occur in Georgian reality – this is what makes sense." (Respondent #1, public school)

It is important to mention that when discussing the safe school concept, the respondents focus on the physical safety first (e.g. resource officers, perimeter control, video-surveillance).

"When parents ask us what security measures we have at school, we answer the following: the security guards are working in our school for 24/7 monitoring who enters and leaves the building. There are cameras all around the school and fenced perimeter controlled by the guards." (Respondent #3, public school)

One of the private school teachers spoke about an example of psychological safety at school. The respondent described a case when she enhanced the acceptability of students towards one of their classmate having health issues using creative and positive measures.

"We have a new student this year with Alopecia problem; his/her mother worried that he/she could be bullied by the classmates. So, to increase the tolerance towards the newcomer we decided to take a measure. We announced September to be the month of empathy. We took the students to the center of disabled people and organized a concert for them. Thus, we tried to create safe and secure atmosphere for the child with alopecia. (Respondent #3, private school)

In respect to the emotional-social teaching component at schools, a very interesting experience was shared by one of the public school teachers who collaborated with the National Center for Teacher Professional Development Center in the recent past and participated in number of programs organized by the center (e.g. School networks and teacher induction programs). The respondent spoke about the extracurricular creative activity she used for raising the level of literacy among students and their love for knowledge. The mentioned project encompassed writing and staging a play based on the novel of one of the contemporary Georgian writers. The respondent mentioned that this approach was very successful as it raised the curiosity and motivation among the students.

> *"I implemented a project entitled "A Writer" with my students. First, they wrote a script together and performed it on the stage. There was a student with low academic achievements and problems with misbehavior. Though, he/she did not learn his/her part of the play, he/she participated in the project anyway. I was very happy with this decision. Since then his/her academic performance in my subject on Georgian grammar and literature has significantly improved. He/she is reading books and watching movies that I'm suggesting, participates in group discussions with classmates more easily and does not put himself/herself aside." (Respondent #5, public school)*

It is also noteworthy that several participants of the focus group have children with autism or down syndromes in their classrooms. Based on the respondents' narratives, we can admit that their attitude towards children with special needs is quite positive and tolerant. However, it also should be admitted that these teachers have never attended any special trainings concerning the work with children with special needs (schools have not cared for that). As the respondents mentioned, mostly, they prepare individual curriculums for children with special needs and apply their own strategies in teaching.

We were also interested in how the respondents understood the meaning of "child with troublesome behavior." Two teachers appeared to be quite sensitive towards this issue. They mentioned that the teacher should not neglect any behavior of his/her students, even less visible than hyperactivity, disruption of lesson or sharply expressed aggression. The teachers admitted that children express their concerns or protest in different ways, directly and aggressively, or silently and through total indifference towards the teaching process.

> *"For me as a teacher, misbehavior and difficult student is not only someone who tries to disrupt teaching process but who refuses to participate in the class activities. I think the*

latter is even more difficult to deal with rather than hyperactive children." (Respondent #1, public school)

One of the respondents mentioned that creating emotionally and psychologically protected environment in school mostly depends on teacher's attempt and experience, since the national curriculum does not contain a holistic approach concerning the socio-emotional component of education. Therefore, each teacher works based on their individual approach. Under these circumstances, it is less expected that students would have a defined environment (enhancing the sense of security), and teachers would have an opportunity to work with the agreed upon principles, share experience and improve pedagogical practice. The respondents also spoke about the necessity of having a constant position of a psychologist(s) at schools.

"All of us experience moments when we need to be supported and heard. And if students are not able to receive the help they need because there is no psychological service provided at schools, students' right to be safe is violated. The number of psychologists should be increased in Georgian schools and parents should also understand that providing the psychological service does not mean that a child is having some serious mental problems." (Respondent #3, public school)

"Mostly, it is up to teacher's good will and his/her qualifications whether or not students' emotional and psychological characteristics are considered and treated carefully. There is no official school policy in this respect." (Respondent #1, public school)

Though the tendencies observed in the focus group discussion, cannot be generalized, it should be admitted that the respondents acknowledge the directions that they need professional development and enhancement, and what type of support from the state would be the most effective for them (e.g. trainings focused on the enhancement of practical skills, application of theoretical knowledge into practice). It is also noteworthy, that the focus group respondents share the experts' views concerning the fact that the educational component (envisaging psycho-social support and empowerment of children) is largely neglected in Georgian schools that is rooted in the absence of coordinated educational policy.

Based on the fact that there is a severe deficit of psycho-social services for children at Georgian schools, and the trauma awareness of the school personnel is quite low pointing at the fact that safe school policy (including physical, psycho-emotional, social and academic safety) is not prioritized in

Georgia today, we decided to search for the tools of psycho-social empowerment of children outside the school system.

The following chapter presents the results of a case study that is based on the evaluation of the activities conducted by the non-governmental organization FELIX. During six months' period (November 2015-April 2016) FELIX conducted three-tier program of psycho-social rehabilitation (art-therapy, mythodrama, and PlayWrite) with the child and adolescent victims of Tbilisi flooding of 13 June 2015. The case study comprised the youngest beneficiaries of the art-therapy program under the age category of 8-12. In order to find out what type of psycho-social support was provided by FELIX, we interviewed the director and one of the psychologists of FELIX. Both of them worked with the program beneficiaries for over six months, made observations and evaluations concerning the conditions, changes and achievements of the beneficiaries. In addition, within our research, a group of psychologists conducted an independent assessment of the beneficiaries before and after the therapy program using specialized research instrument (test). Pre- and post-program assessment was conducted with the beneficiaries of all three abovementioned therapy programs, however, the current publication present only several cases of art-therapy beneficiaries (identities of the beneficiaries are kept anonymous). Besides, we also interviewed the teachers of the art-therapy beneficiaries (for the research purposes, the teachers having active contact with the victims of the flooding were selected) in order to find out what type of support (if any) the schools provided to the disaster victims. However, before proceeding with the analysis of the teachers' interviews, it is of interest to discuss the issues identified by the FELIX representatives concerning trauma and school functions in general.

Part II – Case Studies and Psychological Assessment

Non-governmental organization FELIX

The art-therapy program implemented by FELIX was both preventive and interventional in nature. The interventional (therapeutic) component of the program specifically aimed at the beneficiary children having particularly high post-traumatic stress signs (loss of appetite, insomnia, psychosomatic pains) caused by flooding; these signs were identified on pre-assessment stage of the program. While the preventive component was directed at the children not having deteriorated psychological and/or physical health problems in the pre-assessment period; however, they were under the theoretical threat of revealing the problems after some period. Nevertheless, in both cases, the main objective of the program was to empower the victims. Therefore, each of the

participants was engaged in the individual or group activities directed at reducing trauma and enhancing the sense of safety.

> *"We selected the activities that would best apply to coping with the sense of loss, as all of the beneficiaries have lost their homes, stuff… plus, we selected the activities connected with increasing the sense of safety. New environment and harsh change of surroundings, changing home or school, getting away from the environment you are used to, decreases the sense of safety that child cannot acknowledge, but make him/her feel undefined and disturbing anxiety." (Director of FELIX)*

Of course, the specialists participating in FELIX program, expected that the child victims of June 13 flooding would have tense emotional state. However, during the process some additional cognitive and behavioral difficulties were observed not directly connected with the June 13 disaster. In particular, the FELIX psychologist mentioned difficulties with the learning violations and development of narrative speech, as well as memory problems, that serve as prerequisite for hindering child's academic performance. Among the behavioral problems, the following ones were underlined: failure to comply with the instructions, neglecting social etiquette (e.g. violating queue, taking others' possessions without asking), verbal aggression, etc.

> *"To tell you the truth, I never thought we would encounter that intense and sever problems. We were focused on that tragic event of June 13, while we came across lots of issues that went far beyond the June 13, such as the problem of psycho-emotional development, issues of cognitive sphere, behavioral peculiarities, attention deficit, aggressive background in the family; we even had cases of clinical diagnosis, certain phobias, etc." (FELIX Psychologist)*

According to our respondents, it is important to underline that the program beneficiaries found it difficult to participate in the activities that required independent decision making or independent problem solving, as well as expressing opinion on various issues. FELIX psychologist admits that usually children repeated each other's or instructor's opinions instead of independently thinking or expressing their own ideas.

> *"The children resisted to certain activities that involved challenges. Under challenges I mean the activities that need problem solving or decision-making skills. They asked us to paint for them, cut for them, or help them in doing some staff. There were cases when they duplicated on repeated what others said, or instructor's interpretations. They were not open, had very little self-reflection." (FELIX psychologist)*

FELIX representatives also mentioned that for maintaining and reinforcing the progress achieved through art-therapy, the involvement of parent, and generally, family, is of utmost importance. The respondents underlined that empowering parents and gaining their trust is a real challenge. First of all, parent awareness should be raised so that they could identify child's problems and correctly define their needs. The character and intensity of parent-child relationship, observation on child's behavior and knowledge of the behavior management strategy that parents often lack, are also very important. That is why parent empowerment is essential. Often, parents are not even aware about the state services where they can get consultancy, recommendations or special services.

"For instance, parent tells you that a child does not listen to him/her and is naughty, and this is a problem. While this is only a side factor of the real problem, such as self-injuring or aggressive behavior, low academic performance, problems with integration, management of emotions, etc. And the parent tells you that the child is just naughty." (FELIX Psychologist)

"Communication with a child is performed accurately when you see him/her as an independent personality having his/her own ideas, wishes, emotions, perceptions, and you respect them. Hence, this is how ideas, opinions should be shared between a parent and a child, not by imposing your own will or opinion on a child." (FELIX Director)

Psychological Assessment of FELIX Beneficiaries

The current chapter presents several case studies in order to vividly display the problems revealed in the working process with the FELIX program beneficiaries. The case studies show the conditions of the beneficiaries identified before art-therapy program (the pre-test) and the results achieved after the program (the post-test). This component of the study was conducted by the psychologists hired within the frameworks of present research.

The assessment was conducted in the families of the therapy program participants. At first, both, the children and their parents were informed about the aim of the research, and the parents were asked to sign the informative confirmation letters. After getting the written consent, the parents started filling in the questionnaires. Following the parents, the questionnaires were also filled in by the children. As a rule, the assessment lasted for approximately 1 hour. The post-therapy assessment was conducted 5-6 months after the pre-test. The post-test procedure was identical to the pre-test one.

The research instrument consisted of three components, and thus, the children were evaluated in three different directions: strengths and difficulties, anxiety level and self-esteem (for detailed description of the research instrument, please see annex #1).

Case #1: Beneficiary X, male, 12 years old. The family was affected by Tbilisi flooding, and assigned I category. This means that their house was totally destroyed.

Based on the post-test results, the changes are observed on almost all scales of the strength and difficulties questionnaire. The indicator of emotional distress and the overall stress level are decreased by two units, as well as the indicator of relationship difficulties with peers. In general, the post-test results are within the normal range; the indicator of hyperactivity/concentration has slightly increased compared to the norm, while it has increased by two units if compared to the pre-test results, which indicates to serious changes. The difficulties with concentration can be explained by the ongoing changes in the child's life, such as replacement of house, etc. However, even during the pre-test, the parent mentioned that the child had concentration difficulties obstructing the learning process. In overall, we can conclude that the indicators of the beneficiary have normalized, stabilized, stress has decreased and emotional and behavioral difficulties are less observed (see Diagram #1)

Diagram #1
Streangths and Difficulties
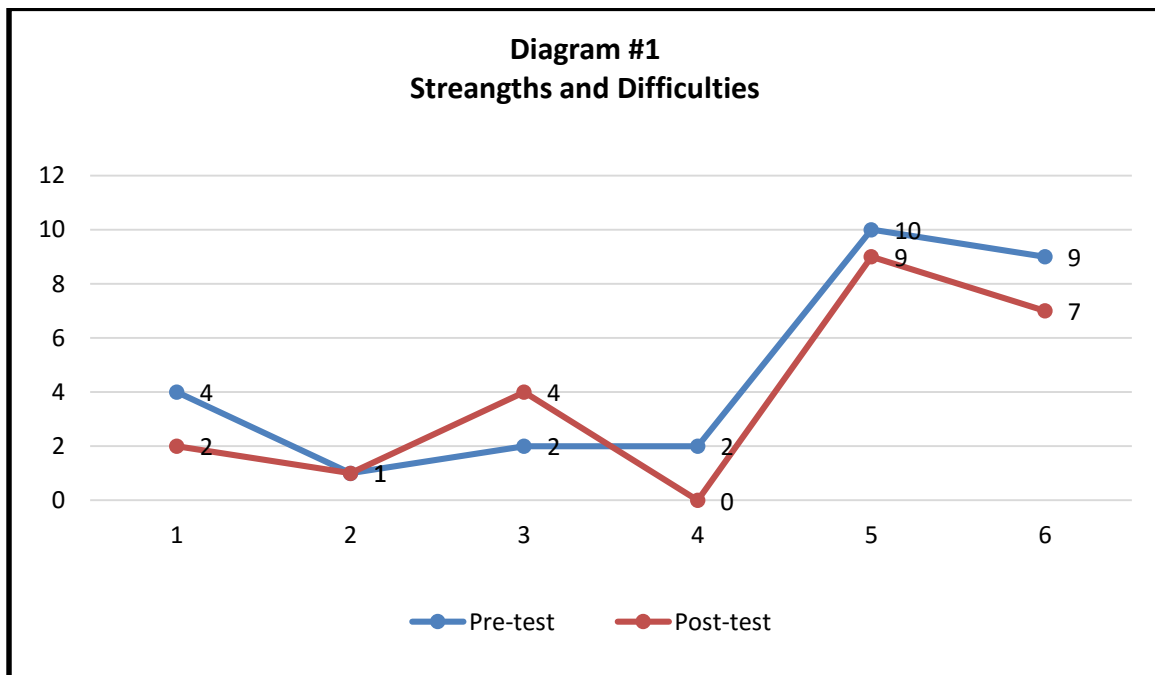
The decreased stress level is logically linked to the decreased anxiety indicator. The overall point of anxiety has decreased by five units that is a rather good indicator. The changes are observed on all three scales of anxiety. The physiological factor has also decreased by two units meaning that the beneficiary is not suffering from palms sweating, tremors, spasms, appetite or sleep difficulties. However, at some degree these conditions were also observed during the pre-test. In addition, the oversensitivity indicator has also decreased by two units suggesting that the child is calmer, gets less irritated on undesirable stimuli, is less sensitive towards the attitudes of others. The factor of concentration on anxiety has decreased and normalized suggesting that the child is less anxious on negative experience, has less expectation of threat or fears concerning future (see Diagram #2).

Diagram #2
Anxiety
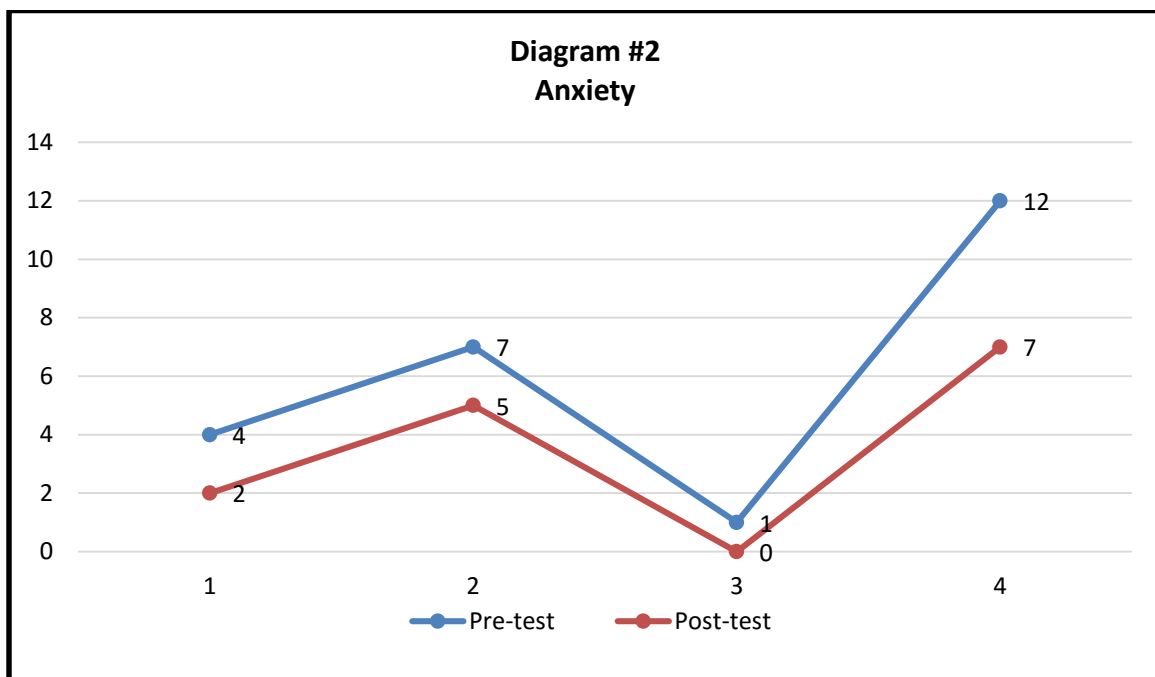
Certain changes are also observed on self-esteem scale, however, the results of pre and post-tests are identical. The changes are displayed on the scale of intelligence, happiness and success. According to the post-test results, the beneficiary believes that his intelligent has increased, however the difference is not that big. Much more important changes are observed on happiness scale – the indicator has increased by nine units (see Diagram #3). As for the summarized points for "real me" and "ideal me", based on the post-test results, these two concepts got closer to each other. In overall, it should be admitted that based on the post-test the level of stress, emotional and behavioral difficulties, and anxiety have significantly decreased, while the level of self-esteem has increased.
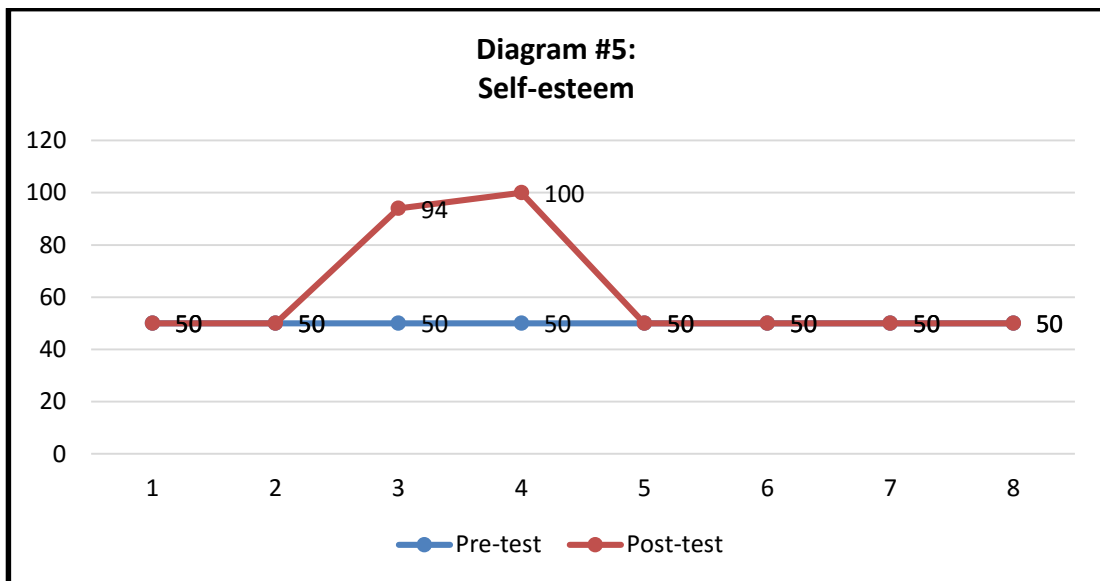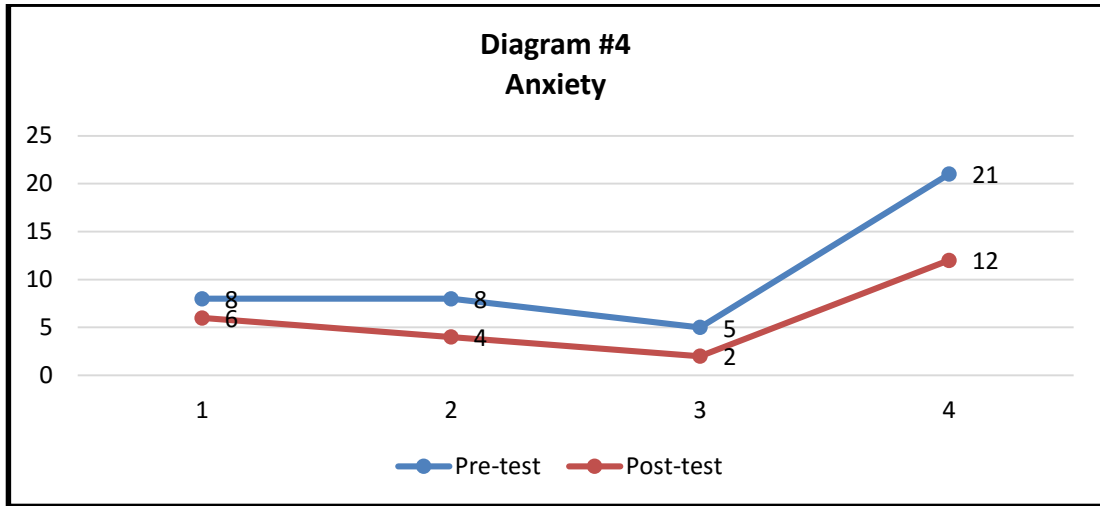
Diagram #3
Self-esteem
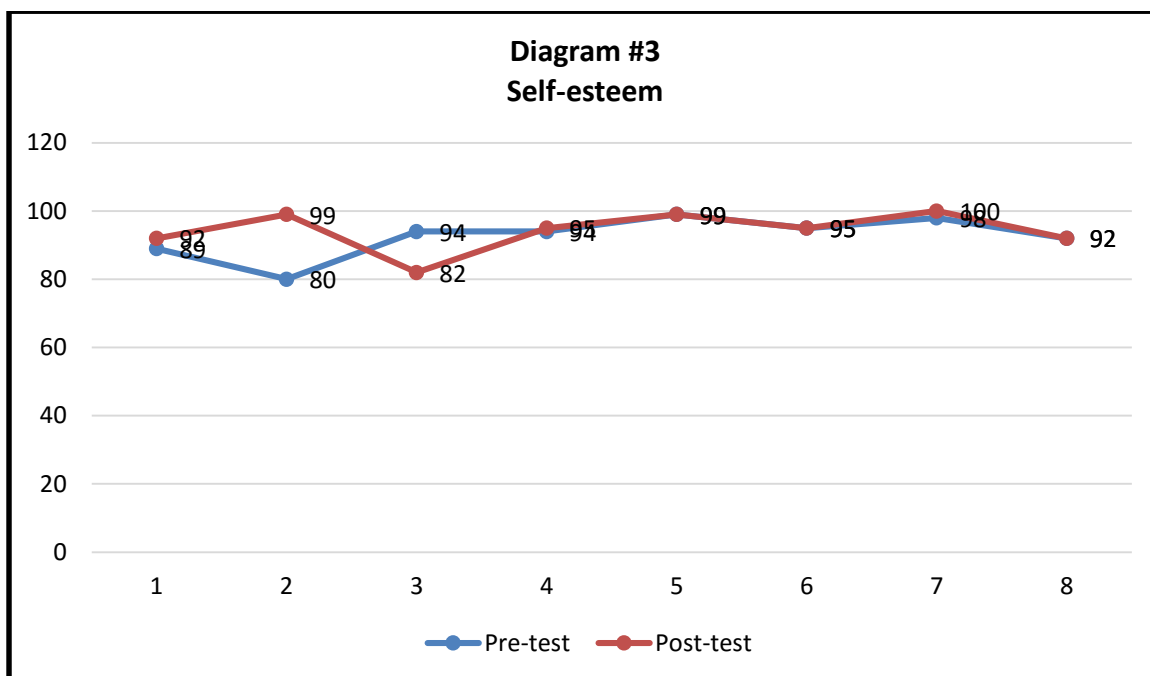
Case #2: Beneficiary Y, male, 7 years old. Their house was flooded, however, the major harm was done by the fire that happened 6 months prior to the Tbilisi flooding.

In case of beneficiary Y, the post-test revealed that the overall stress, as well as general anxiety levels have decreased. The indicator of behavioral difficulties has also diminished. The child better fulfills the instructions, opposes in a lesser degree and is prone to collaboration. Therefore, the indicator of relationship with peers has decreased. The child easily gets involved with the other children and is sociable. The reports of the beneficiary Y and his parents coincide in the most of the cases. Based on the evaluations of the both sides, the indicator of the prosocial behavior has increased. The child became more collaborative and considers others' opinions more frequently.

Both, general score, as well as the separate factors of anxiety have significantly decreased. Apparently, the beneficiary gets engaged in various activities more easily, and his self-confidence has increased. This is also confirmed by the fact that the child believes he is more successful. The abovementioned factor has increased by 44 units on the self-esteem scale. The difference between "real me" and "ideal me" has diminished that logically indicates that the anxiety level has also decreased (see Diagrams #4 and #5).

**Diagram #4
Anxiety**

Pre-test: (1) 8, (2) 8, (3) 5, (4) 21
Post-test: (1) 6, (2) 4, (3) 2, (4) 12

**Diagram #5:
Self-esteem**

Pre-test: 50 (points 1–8)
Post-test: (1) 50, (2) 50, (3) 94, (4) 100, (5) 50, (6) 50, (7) 50, (8) 50

In addition to the pre and post-therapy psychological assessments, the FELIX psychologists involved in the art-therapy program analyzed the individual cases of the project beneficiaries independently. The present report displays only two cases out of many. The names of the beneficiaries are changed due to ethical reasons.

Case #3: Vaniko, 11 years old.

One of the FELIX psychotherapists admits that Vaniko had difficulties in describing himself in respect to certain physical and behavioral characteristics in the beginning of the therapy program. While reflecting on various activities he tried to speak formally and cut his story short; he used to answer

to questions with "I don't know." He looked sad and lifeless, rarely smiled. Vaniko did not express any warmth towards his group members and did not react when someone else treated him warmly. He observed others though never engaged in social interaction, never asked for attention, support or help.

It should be admitted that there was some difference between Vaniko's mother's and FELIX psychotherapist's assessments. This is maybe attributed to the fact that a parent (who does not possess special knowledge or information) may not be adequately evaluating her/his child's conditions, and not asking for specialist's help on time; while if this is true, it can lead to the deterioration of child's emotional-psychological conditions after time.

As Vaniko's mother mentioned in an interview, the child got irritated easily, was sensitive and soft-hearted; thought that everyone is better than him, and said that other kids make fun of him; he did not have friends that often causes his tears. Vaniko's mother believed that his sons suffered from inferiority complex. Besides, Vaniko's mother described him as talented (easily absorbs) and loving child who likes when cuddled, and cares for younger children (e.g. by embracing someone), especially little children; he was not aggressive, never hit anyone, while overreacted if he was injured. The mother "blamed" Vaniko's grandmother in Vaniko's overreaction who usually called ambulance when the child sneezed or coughed. Vaniko's mother recalled his teachers who used to say that the child had no problems in interacting with other boys or girls at school, and usually played with them. However, he tried to avoid children who loved "wrestling" or harmful behavior. When angry, the child liked to be alone (rushing to another room and closing door behind) and asked the family members not to contact him. The parent also mentioned that Vaniko had some difficulties with motoric function that is revealed in his bad handwriting.

Vaniko's mother believed that 13 June Tbilisi flooding had no effect on his academic performance, as the flooding happened in summer, while the learning process started in fall. However, the parent also mentioned that the house change caused by the flooding troubled Vaniko. As she admitted, the school was also supportive by allowing to pay the minimal fee (Vaniko goes to the private school) on the family's request.

The mother evaluates positively Vaniko's involvement in the art-therapy program and the therapeutic effect it had. She admitted that Vaniko became close friends with another boy from the program; they interact even after the program activities are finished. She described Vaniko was very happy to go to the therapy program and came back home on high spirits. At home he said that this program suited him well and he could express himself. In addition, he liked how other people from

the program behaved. He was proud with his works and shares his experience with the family joyfully. She admitted that she expected this program to be short comprising of several meetings; and was very happy that the program lasted longer; she even said that this program somehow comforted her after the 13 June disaster.

According to the evaluation of the FELIX psychotherapist, Vaniko controls expressing feelings with the help of adults, shows initiative in peaceful conflict resolution; eagerly engages in new activities and situations; expresses happiness when the job is finished. Vaniko trusts and easily interacts with the adults he knows; is friendly with the majority of the adults, his guardian and teachers; shares his sorrow with adults; is polite, admits the importance of adult's experience, understands when to approach them for advice, and considers this advice.

Vaniko easily joins the ongoing activities. He imagines and conducts activities involving more than one child; calmly listens to others, acts freely, expresses himself adequately when been surrounded by others' attention; express interest towards novelty, asks questions, tries to conduct new activities.

Vaniko can differentiate what is right and what is wrong, can explain other's behavior; explains his reaction to other's behavior; understands what is caused by his or other's actions; does not touch other's property without asking first. Vaniko considers that in different circumstances various things can happen. He can bear changes of certain number of events in a day.

Case #4: Kato, 9 years old

According to the FELIX therapist, Kato was resistant to changes in the beginning, had strong attachment towards some of the group members, i.e. her classmates; did not resist or expressed discontent when offered unfavorable conditions; found it difficult to stand in a queue or wait for her turn; sometimes she interrupted the narrator and asked inadequate questions; she scarcely expressed her emotions verbally and usually, and duplicated other's speeches. Kato was passive and asked for others' help or support as feared of being unsuccessful. She found it difficult to work independently and did not enjoy the process; was frightened to take responsibility and fulfill her obligations; she also could hardly describe her strengths and weaknesses; could not describe her talents or skills in certain spheres (e.g. "I cannot paint well"). FELIX social worker also mentioned that compared to other children, Kato expressed high degree of conformity and was motivated to be liked by everyone.

Together with the assessments of the specialists, it is of interest to see how Kato's parent (mother) evaluates her. It is obvious from the interview conducted with her mother, that she refers Kato's resistance to her (acquired) *stubborn character.* The mother admits that Kato is particularly stubborn and even aggressive (swears, pinches and hits the family members) when someone contradicts her. The parent also recalled that Kato would not write an assignment at school not because she could not, but because she *protested*. However, the mother links this behavior to Kato's stubborn character, and adds, that this is significantly negative feature of her daughter. She also mentioned, that Kato is quite self-confident especially when she wants something. The mother thinks that this self-confidence is often excessive and unnecessary.

She describes Kato as a respectful and responsible child who would not go to school if her assignment is not done. She considers the abovementioned as Kato's strength. According to her, Kato is a sociable child easily engaging with unknown people; is rather creative and interested in theater, music and singing.

Kato's mother recalls that she managed to take children away from the 13 June catastrophe on time. Kato was asleep the whole night and thus, quite easily coped with these events than her older sister. However, Kato often admits that she misses her home and playing in the yard with her friends.

Kato's mother admits that she is happy with Kato's participation in the art-therapy program because, in the first place, Kato joyfully waits for the therapy day, feels comfortable and satisfied. She even noticed that Kato tries to do the program activities at home as well. The parent added, that maybe Kato will more adequately see things around her after this.

According to FELIX psychologist, at this stage Kato can calm herself down and control her feelings. She can work independently; gets engaged with the group activities freely and with interest, can even show initiative. She reasons with other children about rules in order to equally consider everyone's interests. She can concede and acknowledges that other people also concede. Kato developed an ability to quietly meet situational changes or activity changes during a day. She can evaluate behavior and distinguish what is right and what is wrong: she explains other children's behavior and discusses her reaction to that. Her sense of compassion has increased; she better understands what others can feel.

Within the present project we also interviewed FELIX director concerning the school function and preventive programs at schools. The respondent mentioned that the lack of stress management capacity (psycho-social support for minimizing posttraumatic stress) at schools served as basis for

creating the six-month art-therapy project. The lack of capacity could negatively affect the academic performance of schools and could create additional problems. According to the FELIX director, mostly, Georgian schools are concentrated on the development of cognitive intellect, while emotional intellect is largely neglected that is essential for personal development and self-realization.

"The educational system does not only comprise of academic performance. School develops person, and a person consists of both cognitive and emotional intellect. When only cognitive skills are paid attention, emotional skills and conditions are neglected, the cognitive skills are not developed properly. Development only in one direction does not support the development of full personality." (FELIX director)

The respondent believes that the Georgian school system is not oriented on child as it is concentrated on formal education only, and neglects the importance of informal space for children and adolescents that would provide psycho-social services and preventive programs. The necessity of such spaces is caused by the fact that children do not live in "sterilized" environment and there are lots of traumatic events around them (e.g. domestic violence); they go to school with negative emotions and are met only with formal educational activities there.

"Prevention does not only envisage providing information or discussing it at the lesson. Prevention means participation in certain activities where child can comprehend, feel, develop skills necessary for his personal development. This is one of the pre-requisites that makes school more adaptive and child-oriented." (FELIX director)

In-depth interviews with the teachers of FELIX beneficiaries

As it was already mentioned, we conducted series of in-depth interviews with the teachers of the children affected by 13 June Tbilisi flooding. The researched aimed at identifying the trauma awareness and sensitivity among the school teachers. In overall four in-depth interviews were conducted with the teachers working in different public school having children affected by Tbilisi flooding.

The age of the respondents varies between 33-75 years; while their experience of working as teachers varies between 11-55 years. All four respondents were female; one of them had both, field and professional skills certificates, while another teacher had only field competences certificate. The other two respondents had no certificates at all.

At first, it is important to mention that none of the respondents think that 13 June disaster somehow affected the child victims. They see no behavioral changes or deterioration in children, thus have not used any interventional activities. Herewith, it should be underlined that the respondents never mentioned the importance or necessity of preventive activities as no significant changes were observed in the behavior of these children (though this is the teachers' assessment only).

"Despite such huge problems, there were no visible changes in his/her behavior I could observe after flooding." (Respondent #1)

"Looking at the child's behavior, it does not seem that he/she is traumatized. He/she behaves very well." (Respondent #2)

"I think that children were not affected by flooding as much as their parents. They are too young and can easily adapt to new circumstances. Conflicts in family, neglect and indifference are what really make them feel bad." (Respondent #4)

Based on the interviews we can conclude that in general, trauma sensitivity among the teachers is quite low. According to the respondents, there are two environments that can traumatize child: school and family. At school child can be traumatized (including "morally" traumatized) by teacher's insults or remarks in front of the whole class, physical abuse (e.g. falling down), bullying (e.g. due to child's social or economic conditions, speaking with provincial accents, etc.)

"I believe teachers should not rebuke or make some abusive comments to their students in front of their classmates. It might be very stressful for a child. I think it is better to talk to him/her individually and explain his/her mistakes face-to-face." (Respondent #3)

"It's traumatizing when children bully each other about clothing, telephone brand, car, etc. Children suffer from this." (Respondent #4)

In respect to families, the teachers speak about various traumatizing factors such as parents' divorce or migration (e.g. of a mother), child physical abuse or neglect from the family members, constant tension or conflict between the family members. As for the behavior of the traumatized child at school, the respondents differentiate secret, uncommunicative children from the aggressive ones.

"Destroying a family can traumatize child. One of my students once wrote in his/her essay that he/she would be happy if the parents were together again. When I read this, I felt

myself traumatized too. After, I just told him/her that such things often happen in our lives."
(Respondent #1)

"A traumatized child can be aggressive and oppressive to other children, especially if he/she has good leadership skills. And sometimes it happens vice versa - they are closed and refuse to interact with others." (Respondent #2)

While discussing the strategies for coping with trauma, a general tendency was observed that the teacher and class tutor are the only sources for supporting a child. The respondents mention that they have applied several methods for supporting bullied children, such as speaking individually to conflict participants, informing parents and getting more information from them concerning their child; having friendly relationships with the children, showing warmth and love, etc. School psychologists (if any) are addressed or the individual teaching curriculum is elaborated only in case of children with special needs which are often referred as "inclusive children" by the respondents.

"My strategy is to make friends with my students. From the very beginning I explain to them I'm not a person who will punish them; that I shouldn't be treated like a stranger but rather we are going to make decisions together." (Respondent #1)

"Class tutor and other teachers should be careful and avoid conflicts between the school students. They should support even bullies and make them understand they are not doing right. This is our main duty." (Respondent #3)

"No, no, no, I have never addressed a psychologist. All my students are normal and healthy mentally, as well as psychologically." (Respondent #2)

Low trauma-sensitivity among the school teachers is also confirmed by the fact that they differentiated traumatized and "troublesome" children, though they describe the both categories with the identical indicators. The reasons for impaired behavior are the same as for the traumatized child's behavior. However, in case of "troublesome children" one extra factor was also mentioned, i.e. age and different features caused by age. In particular, under "troublesome children" the respondents mean less organized children, emotional with aggressive behavior or passive without revealing feelings. In addition, they do not have high academic performance, are hyperactive, do not obey teachers or family members. Therefore, the respondents have never mentioned that the "troublesome children" might have had experienced trauma or have had under stress, and not be simply disobedient, poorly raised children with "troublesome" personal characteristics. Besides, one gets an impression that while speaking of traumatized children, the teachers express more empathy

than when speaking of "troublesome children". In overall, based on the interviews, it is obvious that the respondents do not acknowledge a conditional line between traumatized and "troublesome" children.

"Troubled child is an obstinate and rebellious one, who does not obey any rules. The troubled student always has problems with studying. This is why he/she needs some special teaching curriculum that requires extra time and energy. This is the real problem for a teacher. I'm not able to do this all the time." (Respondent #2)

As it was expected, when speaking about the safe school concept, first of all, the respondents mean physical safety, and admit that the resource officers provide complete security at schools. They also mentioned that discipline and order guarantee the safety at schools: children take care of school property (e.g. do not scratch or destroy desks, etc.), do not fight, listen to teachers, do not leave the school building. Moral violence (most probably, bullying) among children and the necessity to consider the emotional background was also mentioned that is difficult to achieve in the Georgian schools and depends upon teachers' professionalism and good will.

"A safe environment at school means when children are in good relationships with each other and there is no conflict between them. This is how I understand the idea of a safe school. We have very good resource officers that make students and teachers feel safe and secure." (Respondent #4)

"There should be discipline and order in school. Students should listen to their teachers, don't fight with each other, don't leave the school building and take care of school property." (Respondent #2)

Conclusion

The concept of trauma-sensitive school, going far beyond the concept of a school as a formal educational institution, recognizes the importance of informal teaching and concentrates on the psycho-social safety and support to students. While in Georgian case, this concept stays neglected by the educational system, as well as by the society in general. Despite the fact that the government develops the mechanisms of child protection in the school environment (as well as beyond it), the efficacy of these mechanisms are still questionable due to the following circumstances:

- The safe school policy is mostly interventional in Georgia, rather than preventive, and focuses on physical safety (resource officers, video surveillance, control of the school perimeter);
- In order to maintain discipline, the measures focusing on control and punishment dominate in school practices, while psycho-social educational function of school is neglected;
- There is a lack of informed and motivated human resources (school administration and academic personnel, resources officers, etc.) for a) ensuring the maximum efficacy of at least those protection mechanisms that exist at schools, b) monitoring and enhancing their effectiveness through collaboration with relevant state structures;
- The state does not require from schools to have psycho-social support services within the school environment (e.g. position of psychologist) that would support the integration of preventive and therapeutic programs in the learning process.

In the end, we would like to underline that it is of utmost importance to transform general educational system into a child and adolescent-oriented one that would equally consider students' academic and psycho-social needs and implement relevant mechanisms in school environment. For this, it is essential for educational policy-makers to understand the strong correlation between students' psychological well-being and their academic achievements.

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Annex #1 - Research Instrument used for psychological pre- and post-therapy tests conducted with the FELIX beneficiaries

Strengths and Difficulties

Theoretical Framework. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire is meant for screening of behavioral and emotional difficulties of a child and adolescent. (Goodman 1997; 1999; Goodman et al. 1998; Goodman and Scott 1999).

Research Instrument. The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) was elaborated by Goodman in 1997, and is aimed at children and adolescents of the 4-17 age category. The questionnaire consists of 25 statements and the following scales: general stress, emotional distress, behavioral difficulties, hyperactivity and concentration skills, communication difficulties, prosocial behaviors. The test participants evaluated the statements considering their perspective - whether or not they a behavior characteristic for them. The questionnaire can be applied by clinicians for screening, research and clinical assessment.

Anxiety

Theoretical Framework. The questionnaire aims at the assessment of the experienced anxiety levels among children and adolescents (Gerald and Reynolds, 1999, p.323). The questionnaire is based on the Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (CMAS), created by Casteneda, McCandless and Palermo in 1956.

Research Instrument. The Revised Children's Manifest Anxiety Scale (RCMAS), was elaborated by Reynolds and Richmond in 1978, and consists of 28 statements. The participants evaluate the statements with plus or minus ("+", "-") symbols considering whether or not they agree with the statements. 5 subscales are identified in the questionnaire: physiological factor, worry/oversensitivity factor, concentration on anxiety, and additional two factors for lie scale. Questionnaire can be administered by clinicians, researchers or teachers both, individually and in a group work. The instrument is aimed at children and adolescents of 6-19 age category.

Self-Esteem

Theoretical Framework. The questionnaire is meant for the assessment of self-esteem, the central aspect for the personal development and growth. (Bakholdina1a, Bakholdinaa, Movsesiana, Stupinaa, 2013).

Research Instrument. Dembo-Rubinstein scale, as a self-esteem assessment method was created by Tamara Dembo and Susanna Rubinstein in 1950-1970 (Rubinstein, 1970). The test participants evaluate themselves using 10 point vertical line based on the various factors. The method deploys the following scales: intelligence, happiness, success, active participation, indifference, conflict-resolving skills, optimism, power of will. Afterwards, participants evaluate themselves according to "desirable self". In the end the path between "real me" and "ideal me" is assessed.