Policy Briefs

Using Modern Technology to Address Bullying Problems in Children

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A brief overview of the Iraq Policy Program

The Iraq Policy Program aims to bridge the gap between youth elites and decision-makers by training young elites to effect positive change through influencing the decision-making process. The program aims to empower participants to prepare policy papers and propose policy alternatives aimed at enhancing system performance and supporting its legitimacy. This program enables participants to communicate with decision-makers and understand the main difficulties and problems affecting the implementation and follow-up of public policies. Additionally, the program seeks to provide participants with a realistic understanding of the decision-making environment in Iraq, as well as an understanding of the opportunities and challenges of change.

The program stages

Preparation: Assisting participants in acquiring the fundamental skills to prepare policy papers and effective advocacy campaigns. Discovery: Clarifying important public policies in Iraq by experts through stakeholder engagement, frameworks and institutional procedures, practical realities, and discussions surrounding each public policy, as well as reform prospects. Engagement: Training participants to develop promotional campaigns and coordinate meetings with government officials to initiate their campaigns. Enrichment: Supervising participants to prepare a policy paper in their area of interest to enrich dialogues, develop policy alternatives, which can help address current challenges.

About the Center

The Platform for Sustainable Development is a registered center with the Non-Governmental Organizations Department at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers under the number (1S2106012). It serves as a space for thought, dialogue, and action towards positive change.

Vision

We seek to establish a platform for dialogue and policies that contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Iraq.

Mission

Filling the gap between the state and society to ensure the essence of democracy by engaging citizens in the decision-making process through training, monitoring, analysis, research, awareness, and advocacy.

Strategic Goals

- Preparing a youth elite that rises to its social responsibilities through studying problems, proposing policy alternatives, and working towards their implementation.
- Utilizing knowledge outputs and encouraging youth to work towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals
- Presenting statistics and issues that occupy the political arenas and societal circles to reflect a deeper understanding of the Iraqi reality.
- Creating a network of active, informed, and committed citizens dedicated to the project of building the Iraqi government.

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Bullying, encompassing physical attacks, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and other harmful behaviors, is a prevalent issue faced by elementary school students. It should be tackled through the use of modern technology, research, and investigation. Bullying is a form of psychological terror that can have long-lasting effects on students, resulting in victims who may become vulnerable or bullies themselves. It involves various practices executed by individuals or groups, such as physical violence through hitting, causing harm to a person's body and belongings, including pushing and kicking, as well as verbal abuse through hurtful words or writing, threats, and social bullying that damages a person's reputation and social relationships, such as spreading rumors, intentionally neglecting someone, not playing with them, and embarrassing them in front of others. Moreover, cyberbullying through various electronic applications is also part of the problem.

The impact of bullying on individuals is profound. Victims often experience depression, anxiety, anger, excessive stress, helplessness, a lack of interest in performing their school duties, and a decline in academic performance. This can lead to absenteeism from school due to a sense of insecurity, a lack of trust in their surrounding environment, and isolation. Victims may refrain from participating in school activities and eventually drop out of school or transfer to another one. The effects of bullying on individuals are far-reaching and can have a significant impact on their mental and emotional well-being.

According to a study conducted by the American Psychological Association, 40% to 80% of elementary school children experience bullying, especially students with special needs and those from low-income backgrounds. In a survey on child violence in schools conducted by the Iraqi Hope Association, funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was revealed that approximately 73% of the surveyed youth in Baghdad have experienced violence and bullying within elementary schools, with the negative effects continuing to affect them.

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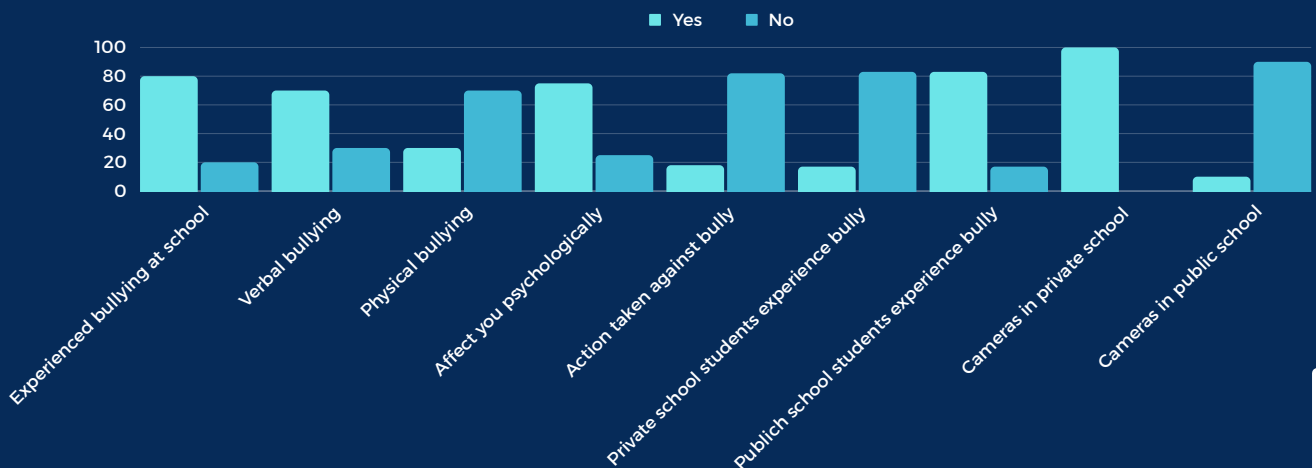Platform Center for Sustainable Development

In another study conducted in several European countries, bullying, mockery, and belittlement have been found to lead to headaches, stomach pains, feelings of tension, and bad moods. The more cases of bullying increase, the more negative health symptoms accompany them.

During a survey conducted by the writer among some government and private schools, several questions were raised, including:

- To what extent does bullying affect students and what are the worst cases that have occurred within the school in order to study the impact of bullying on individuals and its repercussions on Iraqi society, and its effects on individuals?

- Has there been a problem among students due to a bullying or harassment incident or a specific accident? Please mention the most influential incident that occurred and what measures were taken to prevent the recurrence of such incidents.

- What are the regulatory measures in the school to limit and control cases of violence and bullying?

- Which groups are most affected by bullying?

Figure (1) Results of the Survey for a Sample of (150) Students in Baghdad Governorate

The majority of the surveyed sample responded to the existence of bullying and the necessity of combating this behavior and reducing it, emphasizing that the impact of bullying is very negative. One case mentioned was of a sixth-grade student who was suffering from bullying due to his parents' social situation, as their divorce and the sharing of their news among the students led to the student's depression and leaving school. The school administration couldn't punish the bullies due to the difficulty of proving the bullying case.

Therefore, his family decided to transfer him to a private school that was stricter in enforcing rules and controlling bullying. As for the most affected groups, it became apparent that they were students from low-income backgrounds and those with special needs. Another question was posed, asking if there was a problem with installing surveillance cameras inside classrooms. Approximately 20% of respondents expressed discomfort with cameras inside the classroom, citing concerns about restricting teachers' freedom. However, the majority opinion was positive, considering the benefits of having cameras outweigh their drawbacks.
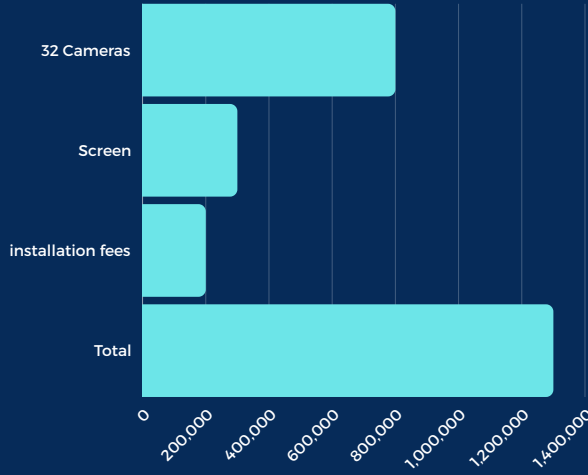
In a survey conducted on a sample of elementary school students in Baghdad, including both Al-Karkh and Al-Rusafa, totaling 150 male and female students, the survey results were as shown in Figure (1):

The use of modern technology and the installation of surveillance camera systems inside schools, along with the appointment of a technician and camera monitor or training the social researcher present in the school on how to use the cameras to enforce discipline and address

bullying incidents observed by the cameras, is considered an important solution that significantly reduces the problem of bullying. This highlights the importance of modern surveillance systems in detecting the problem and the role of the trained social researcher in addressing bullying issues revealed by the cameras. Private school administrations affirmed that the use of modern technology and the presence of surveillance camera systems inside the school, including sound recordings, were indeed effective. To combat bullying, private schools emphasized the necessity of implementing anti-bullying programs, while government school administrations stressed the importance of installing surveillance camera systems due to their significant role in monitoring student behavior. To implement surveillance systems through the installation of cameras, it is necessary to study the cost of covering each school. The proposed installation of (32) cameras per school was examined, and after studying their value and cost, the results were as follows:

Figure (2) Cost of Purchasing and Installing Cameras in One School

The above amount is relatively small, and it is possible to divide the amount into measures if negotiations are conducted with companies selling and installing cameras to offer discounts on camera fees and reduce the final cost to cover one school. Collaboration between private entities and schools is also possible. In addition to the Ministry of Education, private entities may easily resolve the issue. Surveillance systems in schools are among the most important methods for the smooth operation of the educational process and combating bullying by detecting violations, identifying perpetrators, and holding them accountable.

Cameras, with the assistance of educational and social specialists, can facilitate the implementation of appropriate approaches to dealing with students and guiding them towards proper behavior, thereby protecting students from incidents and enabling quick intervention to prevent injuries or accidents. Moreover, monitoring teachers' rights and ensuring each teacher's commitment to their duties will be facilitated. Additionally, surveillance cameras in schools will address some negative incidents, including theft, violence, and property damage.
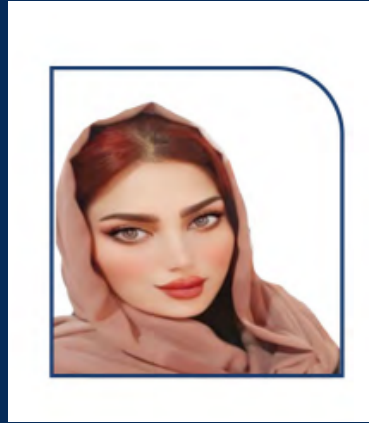
References:

- UNESCO research on International Day Against School Violence, 2019.
- Survey conducted by the Iraqi Hope Association as part of the Peaceful Communities program.

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YOUR JOURNEY IN POLICY WORK STARTS WITH US

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