

Berlin, February 2021

Research report —

Antisemitism in daily (school) life – Jewish families’ and young adults’ experiences and approaches

The study „Antisemitism in daily (school) life – Jewish families’ and young adults’ experiences and approaches“ was conducted from 2017 to 2020 by Marina Chernivsky, Dr. Friederike Lorenz and the scientific associate Johanna Schweitzer at Kompetenzzentrum’s research department, and accompanied by an advisory council.

In our research, the perspectives of Jewish young adults and their parents on antisemitism were examined on the basis of 23 qualitative interviews conducted during the course of two years throughout Germany. A main point of focus in the interviews was put on the context of school and memories of the interviewees’ own time in school, which for many interview partners constitutes or has constituted a formative phase of life. From the perspective of parents, schools are often unsafe and stress-inducing social spaces for Jewish children. Dialogue partners not only shared their experiences and assessments concerning educational institutions but also reflected upon their perception and judgement of the societal situation regarding antisemitism in Germany, their Jewish identity and their parental role at large.

Main results

All interview partners anticipate potentially violent situations and many of them have become victims of or have witnessed antisemitism. However, antisemitism is perceived and processed in different ways. In the recounted events, memories of verbal forms of antisemitism outweigh other forms. These include violations of boundaries, identity mapping (the assignment of stereotypical qualities), and ‚jokes‘. The accounts of violent acts of speech partially go over into memories of existentially hazardous situations and being threatened with physical violence.

Many of the young adults recount having trivialised antisemitic situations at first at school and only retrospectively having been able to categorise them as experiences of injustice or at times of violence. The de-thematisation and passivity of their social surroundings and the schools surrounding antisemitism inflicted on the interviewees in such a manner that they themselves had trivialised antisemitic situations. The participants could often only see the violent nature of these incidents and the implications they had on their individual and social wellbeing in retrospective.

Many of the (former) pupils we interviewed feel they were oftentimes left to deal with their experiences by themselves. From their perspectives, teachers were often indifferent to these incidents and could not clearly name the antisemitic dynamics in specific situations. The interview partners partially perceived the teachers as being overwhelmed in dealing with antisemitism. Interventions through teachers were mostly experienced in case of obvious insults or slurs. Hurtful comments regarding the Shoah or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, however, were often not only ignored, but stated by teachers themselves.

The following structural aspects of successful interventions by teachers and principals were

brought into play by the interviewees: the signaling of an openness to pupils and parents reporting antisemitic incidents, taking seriously indicators for antisemitic situations, timely reactions and a transparent way of dealing with complaints.

The data also shows that antisemitism influences the development of identities and life perspectives of Jews in Germany and clearly affects biographically relevant decisions. A width of strategies for dealing with these facts became clear in the interviews. These differences are to be considered in order not to objectify or homogenize the individual experiences that Jews have lived through.

The complete research report titled *Jewish families about their experiences with and approaches to dealing with antisemitism in daily (school) life* is available to download in German: <https://zwst-kompetenzzentrum.de/antisemitismus-im-schul-alltag/>

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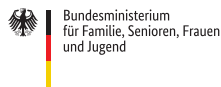
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