

## THE FAMILY CONTEXT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTHS WHO EXHIBIT VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

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**Abstract.** *This paper seeks to clearly distinguish the factors of the family context that may represent particular risk factors for the appearance and perpetuation of anti-social behavioral patterns in children and youths. We considered not only the structural family characteristics of future bullies, but also the integrative-disintegrative processes within the family. The paper aims to clearly distinguish the family factors for which there is strong empirical evidence about their impact on the formation of future bullies. The general assumption is that there are certain specific family contexts, certain family variables that favor the emergence and perpetuation of patterns of violent behavior in children and youths. It is important to acknowledge these factors, because of the fact that certain family circumstances represent risk factors for the violent behavior of children and youths. Therefore, their acknowledgement and their identification represent the starting point of interventive and preventive actions of the society and its institutions towards solving the problem of violence.*

**Key words:** *violence, family, children, youth, risk factors.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Bullying among children and youths represents an increasingly widespread phenomenon. Frequent incidents of violence among peers indicate the fact that this pattern of behavior is quite common among the student population. That the situation is pretty alarming is also indicated by the data on the frequency of severe physical violence between children that often proves to be fatal for the victims.

Starting from the *concept of risk and protective factors* that respects the widely accepted scientific view that most behavioral problems are multiply determined or

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conditioned by a number of different determinants, we consider the need of identifying and removing the causes of this form of interaction among young people very important. Such social activities are of great educational importance.

What we consider *risk factors* are factors that predict an increased risk of developing behavioral problems, while *protective factors* resist risk factors, increase resistance to their actions and inhibit the development of problems, even in situations of risk exposure.

Risk and protective factors are not taken as factors that exclusively predict an increase or decrease in the probability of the formation, development and maintenance of problem behavior. The presence or absence of certain factors is not a guarantee of developing or failing to develop problem behavior. The ultimate outcome is conditioned by the dynamic nature and the cumulative effect of risk and/or protective factors, as well as their mutual interaction. Therefore, the concept of risk and protective factors is considered a probabilistic model of explaining the formation and maintenance of various forms of antisocial behavior (Popović-Ćitić 2005; Popović-Ćitić 2007; Popović-Ćitić and Pavlović-Žunić 2005; Popović-Ćitić and Popović 2009).

The social factors of such behavior should be sought primarily in the nuclear family, because for a child to develop into a healthy, mature person it is necessary for it to grow up in a harmonious family environment. Besides the family, peer groups are of great importance for the processes of socialization, development of personality, and independence from parental influence in the later stages of the maturation process. The school also contributes significantly to the formation of a mature and stable personality, as an institution which achieves its influences through the contents of the school curriculum, through the teaching process and the organization of school life. On the other hand, culture, as a system of beliefs, habits, customs, behavioral norms, which is being transmitted through multiple interactions between the individual and his cultural milieu, also influences the process of forming the personality of a child.

Family, however, sets the foundations of the child's future personality. Therefore, the phenomenon of aggressive behavior has been viewed through different theoretical and empirical findings on family factors of such behavior. It was found, inter alia, that the increase in violence in society is directly linked to the increase in domestic violence; that children and women are the most common victims of domestic violence; that the consequences of violence are numerous and that they have a significant impact on the mental health not only of those directly exposed to them, but also of bystanders; that the amount of violence experienced in childhood contributes to the development and resorting to violence in interpersonal activities (Barnow, Lucht and Freyberger 2001; Marchand, Schedler and Wagstaff 2004; Pihlakoski et al. 2006; Romano et al. 2005). Therefore, consistent, genuine and meaningful relationships that ensure family stability and harmony are essential for the proper functioning of the family.

The family context, within which the education of a child is being carried out, involves a number of factors whose influence can directly be reflected in the psychological and physical health of the child. These factors do not refer only to the actions of the parents, but also include other factors such as family socioeconomic status, family structure, parental mental health, etc. The outcome of educational influence of the family depends on the quality of these factors.

On the other hand, the coherence of family functioning is largely influenced by the social circumstances in which the family lives. These circumstances include a whole

range of factors such as the rate of employment in society, the socio-economic stability of society, its degree of development, the system of social values, neighborhood characteristics, etc.

However, it should be noted that the presence of certain risk factors in the family during the development of children and young people do not necessarily lead to the occurrence of violent behavior. Factors which have an influence on individuals in other domains of life also have an impact on the appearance or nonappearance of violent behavior towards peers. In most cases, risk and protective factors that come into play at all levels of influence are organized into five basic domains. These domains are: family, school, peer groups, communities and the wider social environment. Factors that operate in each of these domains are in dynamic interaction with each other, which has a reciprocal effect. The effects of the factors in these domains directly or indirectly reflect on the individual, namely they condition the development of individual risk or protective factors. The cumulative influence of factors of life domains on an individual causes the formation, development and maintenance of antisocial behavior. The formation of a certain pattern of antisocial behavior may then influence the development of other forms (e.g., drug abuse can lead to delinquency and vice versa).

Thus, risk and protective factors have a cumulative effect. The presence of a number of risk factors in the developmental environment of young people inevitably increases the probability for the occurrence and repetition of antisocial behavior. In contrast, the presence of a large number of protective factors works towards reducing this probability (Popović-Čitić and Pavlović-Žunić 2005; Popović-Čitić 2005; Bašić 2009).

The paper aims to clearly distinguish family factors proven (through empirical evidence) to have an impact on the formation of future bullies. The general assumption is that there are certain specific family contexts, certain family variables that favor the emergence and perpetuation of patterns of violent behavior of children and youths. The importance of acknowledging these factors is reflected in the fact that certain family circumstances can represent risk factors for the violent behavior of children. Therefore, their acknowledgement and identification represent the starting point of the interventive and preventive actions of society and its institutions in the endeavor to solve the problem of violence.

For the purposes of this paper, we will try to clearly isolate the risk factors of the family context which may represent particular risk factors for the emergence and perpetuation of anti-social behavior patterns in children and youths. Attention will be focused not only on the structural characteristics of families of future bullies but also on the integrative-disintegrative processes within the family. As risk factors in the family context which may be of importance for understanding the emergence and consolidation of patterns of violent behavior in children and young people, the following are considered particularly important: ineffective parenting, family dysfunction, family structure, parental psychopathology, as well as child neglect and abuse.

## 2. FAMILY RISK FACTORS FOR THE EMERGENCE OF VIOLENT BEHAVIOR

A number of factors may contribute to the emergence and continuation of violent behavior among children and youths. Certain authors, for example Gordana Budimir-

Ninković, divide these factors into two major groups. She makes a difference between *internal* and *external* factors that influence the occurrence of violence (Budimir-Ninković 2009). *Internal* factors are related to the personality of an individual (inherited and acquired characteristics - physical and psychological characteristics), and *external* factors are related to the social environment (family, school, peers). This tells us that the causes of violent behavior, inter alia, should be sought in terms of family life, family interpersonal relationships, (mis)understandings between parents and children, and among the children, in the educational practices and attitudes of the parents, etc. (Côté et al. 2006; Ram and Hou 2003). But the causes should be sought in the school and this is usually due to: lower grades, misunderstandings with teachers, delays, absence from school, lack of peer understanding, the violent behavior of young people which makes them feel strong and significant, a lack of empathy for the victim, the overpowering desire to prove oneself, and so on (Romano et al. 2005). However, the causes should also be sought in the society due to: economic, political, social and moral crises, wars, unemployment, disruption of the value system, and so on (Romano et al. 2005).

When it comes to the influence of others as models for someone's own behavior, according to Jasna Hrnčić, there are certain models of the antisocial behavior of children established by modern multivariate studies carried out in the field of psychology (Hrnčić according to Jovanović 2007). From a sociological standpoint, the *Stage model of social interaction* is particularly important, a model which describes the four stages of the development of antisocial behavior. The model is dynamic and bidirectional. According to the author, the ultimate outcome is the antisocial career in adulthood. The first phase begins with the collapse of parental effectiveness in the disciplining of a child. Ineffectiveness is defined as verbal aggression (offensive behavior, shouting, swearing and threats of physical punishments but with no follow-up). Such parents hardly recognize and classify a child's behavior as problematic, often wrongly label it as deviant, and they do not use punishments effectively. This behavior of the parent shall cause the child to recognize its own aggressive behavior as inefficient, because it neutralizes aversive behavior of other family members. After multiple repetitions, aggressive behavior escalates, increases in duration and amplitude, and can turn into violence which includes physical assault on the parents who become powerless in overcoming the child's antisocial behavior. This is a manifestation of the basic mechanism of development of open anti-social behavior, which is the basis of violence. In these families, parents and children often have equal power, and switch in the roles of victim and aggressor. In families in which parents adhere to strict disciplinary measures, children are victims of violence, and develop their own aggressive behavior or became neurotics. An antisocial child does not recognize the line between good and bad behavior, spends time on the street unsupervised, and easily becomes connected with groups of deviant peers.

The reaction of the social environment is the second phase, characterized by the aggressive behavior of an antisocial child (explosive temper tantrums, insubordination, etc.), which results in rejection from non-aggressive peers, and poor academic achievement. The child becomes doubly rejected – by the parents and peer groups – and this leads to failure in the development of social skills, and disorders in the process of socialization. Such a child is often in a situation to be ridiculed and punished, and all this leads to the development of antisocial attitudes and aggressive and violent behavior. At the age of 10-11, such a social environment necessarily pushes the child into the next

phase which is characterized by deviant peers and the learning of anti-social skills. Rejected children, subjected to aggressive and violent behavior, usually identify with a group of deviant peers who have an extremely negative attitude towards school and other adolescents.

The fourth phase, the career of an antisocial adult, is inevitable for those who have gone through the previous stages. The social fate of those who come to this stage is characterized by a marginalized existence, unemployment, failed marriages, divorce, offenses, arrests, mental disorders and having antisocial children.

Domestic violence has been a subject of newspaper articles and the subject of social studies only since the end of the twentieth century. The public is alarmed and attention is drawn to a problem that has certainly existed since the dawn of family life, only when the modern family in their transformation reached the form in which the individual and his rights rise above the collective and patriarchal. The problem of domestic violence is usually well concealed and kept as a family secret, so the delayed reaction of science for the exploration of this phenomenon is all the more understandable.

At the family level, it was observed that parental bigotry, misunderstanding, frequent quarrels, domestic violence and similar situations are the immediate cause of various forms of the antisocial behavior of juveniles (Jovanović 2009; Howells and Rosenbaum 2008). Conflicts, disagreements, insults, humiliation, oppression, contempt, neglect and emotional coldness usually disrupt the family atmosphere, prevent positive identification, cause fear, anxiety, tension, uncertainty, ambivalence, and other negative emotions. Such an atmosphere in the family endangers the mental stability of the children, favors the development of negative personality traits, as well as maladjusted and delinquent behavior.

Findings from previous studies suggest that there is a general pattern (according to Farver et al. 2005). Children who are exposed to violence in the family and the community generally lag behind their peers in terms of the development of socio-cognitive skills, show a tendency towards aggressive behavior toward peers and have less developed social skills and social assessment skills. Also, there is a link between violence in the family context and violence in the emotional relationships of a group of high-risk adolescents (Laporte et al. 2009). Adolescents usually transfer negative childhood experiences related to domestic violence in different ways into intimate relationships, depending on their sex and the level of risk to which they were exposed.

It should be noted that most of the risk factors leading to the occurrence of violent behavior in children and youths also contribute to their victimization. Specifically, it was found that poor environmental conditions, a dysfunctional family, emotional deficits and difficulties, risky behavior and previous victimization represent such high-risk factors (Finkelhor 2008).

The initial causes of violent behavior are related to early family experiences (Delbert 1994, 3). They include: 1) "weak family ties, ineffective supervision; 2) exposure and reinforcement of violence at home, and 3) building up expectations, attitudes, beliefs and emotional responses that support or tolerate the usage of violence."

The association between family risk factors and violent behavior is already evident at the age of two, and it has been given attention in most social science theories which offer an explanation of violent behavior in children and adolescents. Based on the synthesis of the results of a large number of empirical studies, it is possible to distinguish several

groups of family risk factors that most authors consider essential or critical (Popović-Čitić 2007). These are: ineffective parenting, family functioning, family structure, parental psychopathology, and child abuse and neglect. In the following subsections we will discuss each of these groups of factors in more detail.

### **2.1. Ineffective parenting (ineffective parenting skills)**

Research suggests that several ineffective parenting skills stand in relation to the formation and maintenance of aggression and violent behavior in children and adolescents. These include harsh and inconsistent discipline, poor parental control and supervision, as well as a low level of the positive engagement of parents (Popović-Čitić 2007; Singer and Mikšaj-Todorović 1989).

Parents with poor skills of disciplining unintentionally train their child in an aversive way through the empowerment of the child's negative behavior (Buehler and Gerard 2002; Côté et al. 2006; Ram and Hou 2003; Thornberry 2005). The interactions between a child and the parents, accompanied by the lack of follow through of the parents, frequent conflicts and intense negative emotions especially train the child in the use of aggression as a social strategy for negotiation in interpersonal relationships.

A special group of parenting skills that is associated with an increase in the risk of occurrence of violent behavior is reflected in the low level of positive engagement of the parents (Buehler and Gerard 2002; Côté et al. 2006). Positive parental involvement includes several skills, such as: praising children for desirable behavior; providing clear guidelines, suggestions, advice and guidance to achieve the prosocial goals and behaviors; the use of positive reinforcement for increasing the motivation of children to perform assigned tasks; providing suggestions and choices instead of commands to control the child, and favourable responses to the self-initiated behavior of the child.

In addition, a growing body of research points to the existence of bidirectional influences in family socialization that are associated with the violent behavior of children. The characteristics of the child, such as temperament, impulsive responding, the level of attention and opposition can significantly affect the behavior of the parents (Coplan, Browker and Cooper 2003; Thornberry 2005). It is quite possible that negative parenting skills are in large part a reaction to the challenging, oppositional and aggressive behavior of the child. The child's behavior can shape parenting skills and the parents can shape the child's behavior. In contrast, the characteristics with which children are born and which protect them from the risk are: positive social orientation, resilient temperament and high intelligence (Popović-Čitić and Popović 2009).

Poor parental control and supervision are usually factors for violent behavior in children and youths (Romano et al. 2005; Ram and Hou 2003). Poor organization of family life includes: the lack of clear expectations regarding the behavior of the child, the failure of parents in supervising their own children (awareness of where and with whom their children are) and excessively hard, harsh and inconsistent disciplining. Children exposed to such organization of family life and parental practices are at a higher risk of becoming future bullies. In a study conducted in our country by Stojković, Dimoski and Edimović (2013), the factors of family context associated with the appearance of

disorders in the behavior of adolescents were identified: excessive control by the father, less closeness with the mother and a greater degree of conflicts with the parents.

It was also found that different factors of the family context may influence the occurrence of different forms of bullying. Important predictors of direct bullying include domestic violence and a cold upbringing from the father and mother, and of indirect bullying include a cold upbringing from the mother and a limiting educational attitude of father (Nedimović 2010).

It was observed, as well, that certain parental attitudes and behaviors are favorable to behavioral problems. Parental attitudes and behaviors related to substance abuse, crime and violence affect the attitudes and behaviors of children (Popović and Popović-Ćitić 2009). Children whose parents approve or justify the violation of laws are at a greater risk of becoming bullies. Children whose parents are abusive in or outside their own homes are at an increased risk for violent behavior.

## 2.2. Family functioning

Family functioning can to a great extent determine whether a child will become a bully or not. As a criterion for the functionality of the family we take its ability to meet the needs of the family members in four core areas: 1) *personal functioning* – which refers to the satisfaction of every member in the family, 2) *marital functioning* – refers to the content that determines the feeling of sexual and emotional satisfaction of the partners, 3) *parental functioning* – which provides child care, support, understanding, education and socialization, and 4) a *socio-economic functioning* – refers to the development of family values, economic stability and harmonization with social and cultural facilities (Golden-Vukov 1988). In addition to these, other dimensions of family functioning include: the quality of communication, roles, emotional attachment among family members, family affective responses concerning the feelings that prevail in a family atmosphere, control of behavior, responses to the loss and change, as well as to family problems. Therefore, it could be said that every family has a particular: 1) structure and organization; 2) rules governing inter-family relations, relationship with the ecosystem, as well as with previous generations; 3) external and internal borders; 4) its members perform certain roles which involve responsibility, control and power; and that 5) members manage the economy needs, desires and expectations that they placed before each other, and whose satisfaction significantly shapes the quality of the family relationships (Berger 1992, according to Ljubičić 2010b).

In dysfunctional families there is neither progress nor change. Dysfunctionality primarily consists of the persistence of inadequate forms of interaction between subsystems whose borders are rigid or too diffuse, the hierarchy is reversed, and the rules are difficult, variable or unpredictable. Dysfunctional families are characterized by: a) the inversion of family power (for example, a child who controls the parents), b) such family boundaries that cause an exceptional networking between members or clear and insurmountable differentiation, and c) family ties that allow (short-term) solutions to the problem of tensions in the system. In addition, the solution can only be based on emotional negotiations, which divides the family into temporary (in the case of an

unstable coalition) or permanently (stable coalition) warring camps. Communication in these families is usually indirect and highly incriminating (Ljubičić 2010a).

Families with dysfunctional family relationships are those families which are structurally disintegrated, but on the inside severely undermined because of objective difficulties or due to subjective reasons which have led to severe disturbances of family relationships and serious disagreements or conflicts. The most common reasons that lead to disruption of family relationships are:

1. *subjective causes*: psychological and sexual incompatibility between spouses, the difference in the character, habits, views, social origin, age, education, etc.,
2. *economic causes*: unemployment, low wages, child support and support for other relatives, illness of family members which financially exhausts the family, etc.,
3. *antisocial behavior of family members*: alcoholism, drug abuse, educational neglect, bullying, etc.,
4. *disorders in the physical, mental or psychological personality structure*: disability, mental retardation, psychosis, epilepsy, etc. (Grandić 2007).

According to Dragana Stjepanović-Zaharijevski (Stjepanović-Zaharijevski 2007, 27), a dysfunctional, disintegrated family is characterized by: “the lack of unity and lack of consensus among the members on the relevant issues of family life, emotional disconnection, lack of support, lack of solidarity and cooperation (which leads to disturbance of family roles, heavy and frequent conflicts that are not resolved), and thus may cause psychopathological or sociopathological disorders“. The structure of power in these families is disrupted, and the differentiation is insufficient. Boundaries are disturbed, blame is cast, and yet the phenomenon of sacrifice is present. The sense of reality in a dysfunctional family is reduced. The predominant feelings are: cynicism, hostility, hatred and sadism, hopelessness and despair. The family cannot endure changes, because it is prone to repetition of one and the same forms and there are no solid diverse relations of exchange with the outside world. The disrupted flow of socialization is the consequence of the influence of this family environment. Family relationships in which aggression, rejection and control are the usual manners of behavior are usually associated with an atmosphere that is unfavorable for the development of a child’s personality. Such families maintain a very superficial connection with the social environment and just seem integrated; the needs of the child are subordinated to the needs of the parents, their self-centeredness is in the foreground; it is an immature, deviant and disintegrated family – characterized by discord, aimlessness, and the breakdown of family togetherness. According to the previous explanation, we should also add to this conception of family dysfunctionality, the disintegration of families with the following characteristics: disorganized families, networked families, families with chaotic rules and families with rigid rules (Ljubičić 2011; Nikolić and Joksić 2011; Singer and Mikšaj-Todorović 1989).

From the elements of a family environment, the following ones have a particular importance for or condition problems and behavioral disorders: insufficient or inadequate care of the parents for the development and education of their children, poor interpersonal relations between spouses, criminal and other socio-pathological behavior of adult family members, poor and inadequate emotional attachments between parents and children, as well as other pedagogically unwarranted attitudes of parents towards children (Bradford, Burns Vaughn and Barber 2008; Marchand, Schedler and Wagstaff 2004; Todorović and Stojiljković 2007).



When studying the association between the family and the violent behavior of youths, it is necessary to make a distinction between: a) impacts arising from the social status of the family and other objective circumstances, such as low social status, poverty, poor housing conditions, disease, death, etc., which the family is usually not able to overcome (Côté et al. 2006), and b) the factors and influences that originate from the interaction within the family atmosphere and which affect the atmosphere of the family, as well as factors that promote the moral principles which are cherished in the family (Buecher and Gerard 2002; Ram and Hou 2003).

Research results (Ochoa Munsitu, Lopez Estevez and Emier 2007; Stjepanović-Zaharijevski 2009; Todorović and Stojiljković 2007) indicate that there is a close connection between empathic communication from the mother towards the father and child's exposure to violence at school. Specifically, children who grow up in such an atmosphere are usually never bullied at school. In the process of the education of children, we can single out two factors which are especially important for the process of socialization: a warm-hearted relationship with the child versus a cold relationship (acceptance versus rejection) and giving freedom to the child in different activities (so-called, permissiveness), as opposed to the strict control of its activities or restrictiveness in relation to the child. However, although the importance of this relationship is often mentioned, it is usually stressed that its effect on the child's behavior depends, primarily, on the emotional context within which activities of the child are controlled. Also, completeness of the family has been associated with the violence of children in school, and appears as a protective factor (Stjepanović-Zaharijevski 2009). A complete family is usually a guarantee of the protection of children from violent behavior at school. A complete, healthy and functional family represents an optimal environment for the development of children.

Family functioning is a domain that also includes the separation or divorce of parents, family conflicts and domestic violence. It was noted that divorce can be a predictor of the violent behavior of children (Johnston, Roseby and Kuehn 2009; Kelly 2009; Popović-Ćitić 2007; Ram and Hou 2003). Research results indicate that children from broken families consistently exhibit a higher rate of externalizing and antisocial behavior compared to children from preserved and functional families with both biological parents present. Children from divorced families are likely to have behavioral, internalizing, social and academic problems compared to those from complete families. The largest and most reliable effects are evident in terms of externalizing symptoms, including increased aggression, disobedience, antisocial behavior and problems with authority, peers and parents. Drug abuse is also more common among children whose parents are divorced. Internalizing problems such as depression, anxiety and low self-confidence are usually present. The divorce of parents during early and middle childhood represent a greater risk for externalizing behavioral problems in boys than in girls. On the other hand, it has been shown that the manifestation of conduct disorder among adolescent girls is statistically significantly associated with parental divorce.

In a survey which was carried out in our community by Ljubičić (2010c) on a sample of 50 juvenile offenders, it was proven that young people who are given a measure of institutional protection usually come from single-parent families (they usually live with their mothers), families in which the emotional relationships between its members are

cold or in which there is a selective closeness between family members, in which marital conflicts are frequent, where communication is based on mutual accusations.

However, the fact that children with behavioral problems only come from single-parent families has not been confirmed in all studies. The results of a study conducted by Vidanović and Anđelković (2009) show that adolescents coming from complete and single-parent families do not differ in their level of aggressiveness. Similar findings were obtained in terms of studying the specificity of the family context of juveniles accused of crimes against life and the body in relation to those convicted of offenses against private property (Ljubičić 2006). It has been shown that most of these young people come from complete and not incomplete families.

Although reduced family income after divorce and the absence of one parent in the child's daily life contribute to the development of behavioral problems, it was found that in determining the resulting behavioral problems in children and adolescents from families with divorced parents, interpersonal conflicts between the parents are more significant than family status itself (Bradford, Burns Vaughn and Barber 2008). The risk for aggression and antisocial behavior in childhood in children from divorced families is more mediated by parental conflicts than the divorce of parents. Parental aggression and family conflicts increase the risk of later delinquent behavior, especially among male children (Bradford, Burns Vaughn and Barber 2008; Popović-Čitić 2007; Popović-Čitić and Popović 2009; Wienke et al. 2009). Yet children of both sexes, who come from families that are characterized by physical conflicts between the parents, have more problems adjusting and have more externalizing behavioral problems than children who have grown up in families without interparental conflicts or where only verbal conflicts were present.

The most common reasons which cause dysfunctionality of the family may be socio-economic and/or subjective ones (Côté et al. 2006; Romano et al. 2005). Subjective reasons are related to the character mismatch of family members, due to disagreements in terms of habits, worldview, education, generational discord, political or religious dissent, etc. Causes of a socio-economic nature are: unemployment, a long and serious illness of a family member, antisocial behavior of a family member and more. On the other hand, the manner of family functioning and family relations are conditioned by the social environment in which the family lives: adverse social circumstances, an economic crisis, unemployment, residential problems, etc.

Thus, socio-economic characteristics of the family have a significant impact on its functioning (Jovanović 2009; Khoury-Kassabri, Avi Astor and Benbenishty 2009; Stevković 2007; Stjepanović-Zaharijevski 2009). Belonging to a family which is characterized by a lower socioeconomic status often causes a bad social reputation, lower income, substandard housing, anti-social behavior of adult family members and the negative impact of the environment. Poor housing conditions determine a higher tendency toward vandalism, destructive behavior, lower verbal intelligence, and a sense of isolation and rejection. Uninhabitable housing and overcrowdedness are considered to be a direct factor of relations in the family, lowering the threshold of tolerance, increasing tensions and hostility between parents, which hinder the process of socialization. Adverse housing conditions are the side effect of the lower socio-economic and social status of the family, and thus the negative effects of socialization are being accumulated.

The educational and qualificational characteristics of parents are indicators of the socioeconomic status of the family (Côté et al. 2006; Fuller et al. 2002). The parents' employment affects the economic stability of the family, while providing a positive role model for the child. At the same time, the parents' employment leads them, to a large extent, to be excluded from the socialization process of their children. The reduced presence of the parents in the development of their children, less successful supervision, less frequent interactions in solving the children's problems may reflect negatively on the regular process of socialization.

However, some research findings do not show that the socioeconomic status of the family can be considered an universal factor for the occurrence of behavioral disorders. For example, in a study undertaken by Ljubičić (2011), which included 30 juveniles who were subjected to some measures of increased supervision, 20 of those who were sent to a reformatory (experimental group) and 50 non-delinquent participants (control group), it was found that there were no statistically significant differences in terms of the financial circumstances of the families, nor between the participants from the control and experimental groups. Findings also testify to the pathology of the relationships between family members of delinquents (the existence of coalitions or triangulations), inadequate communication (accusatory communication and distrust), rigid or non-existent borders between subsystems of parents and children, with a pronounced requirement of loyalty from the child, as well as the inconsistent rules which are not in accordance with the current life cycle of the family.

Some neighborhoods also provide an opportunity for learning violent behavior and involvement in violence (Delbert 1994). The presence of gangs and illegal markets, particularly drug distribution networks, not only represent a high level of exposure to violence, but are also models for violent behavior and offer positive rewards for serious violent acts. Such neighborhoods are characterized by the presence of a large number of incomplete families, ineffective parenting, school violence, a large number of students who drop out of school, a large number of adolescent pregnancies, drug abuse and high levels of unemployment.

Research shows that domestic violence significantly reproduces violence in society (Georgiou 2008; Stjepanović-Zaharijevski 2009). Specifically, a statistically significant correlation was observed between exposure to domestic violence and exposure to violence in school. Children who are exposed to various forms of violent behavior in the family are often the victims of violent behavior at school or become bullies. Therefore, it should be borne in mind that a child exposed to domestic violence can be *directly* victimized when it is a direct victim of violence, or *indirectly* victimized when it witnesses violence committed against other family members (Stevković 2007). Indirectly, the child may be exposed to *physical*, *psychological* and *sexual violence*. We must be aware of the fact that these three forms of violence are closely linked, and that one form of violent victimization of the child also includes elements of the other two.

Numerous and complex problems arise in the family also due to migrations: economic, war and urban migration (Haynie and South 2005; Jovanović 2009). Changing the social environment is a complex process that can cause numerous difficulties and tensions. A new environment can cause divergence in the views of parents and children, changes in the moral code and disorientation in social and cultural circumstances which are frequently changing. The conflict between old and new values, the old and the new

environment, can greatly reduce and threaten the educational functioning of the family, and can act destructively. Links between a family's socioeconomic status, the behavior of family members, family relations, quality and educational style, completeness of the family and the appearance of delinquent behavior are frequent, overt and immediate.

### **2.3. Family structure**

Certain features of family structure are associated with a high risk of occurrence of violent behavior and delinquency. These are: family size, birth order and parental status. A large number of family members, such as families of four or more children, is associated with a predisposition to violent behavior in children and adolescents (Raine 1993, Reiss, and Roth 1993, according to Popović-Čitić 2007).

However, not all children from large families become violent. A large family is not by itself a determinant of such an outcome. Other variables may interact with the size of the family, and contribute to an increased risk. These usually include: gender, the socioeconomic status of the family and the birth order of the child. For example, large families could represent a risk factor for antisocial outcomes only if the siblings are males. The existence of female siblings in a large family may even represent protective factors from developing behavioral problems among male children (Jones et al. 1980, Raine 1993, Tygert 1991, Reiss and Roth 1993, according to Popović-Čitić 2007). In addition, family size is emerging as a significant risk factor only in families of low socioeconomic status, but not in families with high socioeconomic status. Finally, being a middle male child (in order of birth) in a large family of low socio-economic status increases the risk of aggressive and violent behavior.

Parental status is also associated with violent behavior (Popović-Čitić 2007; Stjepanović-Zaharijevski 2009). Growing up with a mother is associated with a lack of acceptance of authority, and aggressive behavior of the children. The association may be mediated by male gender, the low socioeconomic status of family and living in urban areas. However, it is important to bear in mind that incomplete families are deficient in terms of the number of members, but not necessarily in terms of functionality and togetherness.

### **2.4. Parental psychopathology**

Children of parents who have psychopathological problems exhibit higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems than children of parents who do not have such problems (Popović-Čitić 2007). The forms of parental psychopathology which are associated with an increased risk for violent behavior in children are: parents' addictions, the mother's depression and anti-social personality disorders of the parents.

The rate of behavioral problems in children whose parents are addicted to alcohol is higher than that of children whose parents are not (Jovanović 2009; Popović-Čitić 2007; Popović-Čitić and Popović 2009). However, one should bear in mind the fact that alcoholism on the part of the parents is not a direct and specific risk factor for aggression and antisocial behavior, but rather indirect, and is mediated by other variables such as the fact that both or one parent is addicted to alcohol, the sex of the parent who is an

alcoholic and the sex of the child. If both parents are alcoholics, the rate of behavioral disorders will be higher. Also, children whose mothers are addicted to alcohol exhibit more psychological problems than children whose fathers are alcoholics. Male children who grow up in alcoholic families are at a greater risk for behavioral disorders, while girls are at a higher risk for the occurrence of anxiety and depression.

In children of parents who have a history of abuse of other substances, such as opiate addiction, higher rates of internalizing and externalizing problems are also present, in comparison to children of parents who do not have such a history (Jovanović 2009; Popović-Ćitić 2007). Children of parents who are addicted to opiates show increased rates of minor behavioral disorders, and general psychopathology. The risk for aggression and antisocial behavior may be mediated by the child's sex, and the comorbidity of psychopathology of the parents. Boys who grow up in a family where mother is addicted to drugs and depressed at the same time are especially at risk to express behavioral disorder.

Depression of the parents, especially the mothers, may also be connected to an increased risk for the occurrence of the violent behavior of children (Farver et al. 2005; Popović-Ćitić 2007). Children of depressed mothers, more often than their peers, exhibit emotional problems followed by serious behavioral disorders. The effects of the depression of the mother on the emergence of behavioral disorders in children are usually indirect. It was determined that the association between maternal depression symptoms and the development of behavioral externalizing problems is partially mediated by the quality of the interaction between mother and child, even with the controlling effects of socioeconomic status. Depressed mothers are much more negative in their interactions with their children, more likely to use physical punishments, are more verbally abusive, their control and supervision of the children's activities are less effective, the level of close interactions with the children is lower, and responsiveness is followed by less warmth.

Antisocial personality disorder and parental criminality, especially of the father, is considered a strong and specific risk factor for the development of antisocial and violent behavior in children (Popović-Ćitić 2007). Children whose parents have a history of criminal behavior are at a very high risk for the development of the same behavior (Dannerbeck 2005; Thornberry 2005).

It should be noted that parental psychopathology may be indirectly related to violent and antisocial behavior in children and adolescents, with the exception of antisocial personality disorder (Popović-Ćitić 2007). The association may be mediated by variables of family context, such as the number of parents who have psychopathological problems, the number of psychopathological problems of the parents, the quality of the interaction between parent and child, the level of parental control and supervision, the socioeconomic status of the family and the quality of the neighborhood. Direct effects are stronger with the criminal behavior of parents. In any case, particular effects of psychopathology in the case of the parents may be mediated by genetic, psychological or environmental factors. Also, parental psychopathology may predispose a child to impulsivity, aggression and violent behavior not only due to the effects of social factors or experiences, but also due to genetic factors. Finally, the effects of the interaction between hereditary and environmental factors in a child's parents may also be relevant.

### 2.5. Child abuse and neglect

It was determined that there is a link between the history of the maltreatment of children and psychopathology in childhood, adolescence and adulthood (Barnow, Lucht and Freyberger 2001; Butigan 2007; Milić 2007; Popović-Čitić 2007; Stevković 2007). Physical and sexual abuse, as well as a history of neglect, are associated with an increased risk of manifesting a multitude of behavioral problems in children and adolescents. However, it should be noted that many children who have experienced abuse did not later have these kinds of consequences.

Physical abuse and neglect in childhood may be a risk factor for the development of violent behavior. However, sexual abuse in childhood, although it may be associated with the development of violent behavior and conduct disorder in childhood and adolescence, is usually connected with series of developmental problems that do not involve aggression and symptoms of psychopathology. Aggression and violent behavior are one of the many symptoms that can be manifested in sexually abused children. Therefore, it is emphasized that a far more specific risk for violent behavior can be found in physically abused and neglected than in sexually abused children.

However, it should be noted that the correlation between different forms of maltreatment of children and an increased risk of later violent behavior may be mediated by a number of factors. First, the age of the child who has been abused or neglected may be of importance. Sexual abuse before the age of seven usually results in significantly worse outcomes for the children, than when the abuse occurs later. The greatest risk exists when a child is abused before the age of five (McClellan et al. 1996, Glod and Teicher 1996, according to Popović-Čitić 2007). Second, gender and ethnicity may be important mediators. As previously mentioned, the risk of violence is higher among boys who are physically abused or neglected in childhood in comparison to girls (Widom and Maxfield 1996, according to Popović-Čitić 2007). Third, cognitive factors may play an important role. Early experiences of physical abuse in childhood are associated with an inadequate social information processing (Cannon et al. 2010). Fourth, physical and sexual abuse and neglect can result in a variety of different emotional and behavioral problems. One such outcome is an increased risk for depression (Barnow, Zepelin and Freyberger 2001). Finally, the biological factors of the central nervous system may be associated with an increased risk for violent behavior in abused children. It was found that physical or sexual violence that occurs at ages younger than 18 has a great influence on the cortex and the limbic system, the two areas that are important in the processing of cognitive and emotional information, including inhibitory impulses (Canon et al. 2010). All of these disorders can increase the risk of aggressive responses to environmental stimuli.

Finkelhor and Korbin (according to Žegarac 2004), looking from an international perspective, indicate that certain groups of children are most at risk for abuse and neglect: 1. children of poor health; 2. deformed or handicapped children (although some of them have specific protection in society); 3. female children; 4. children who were born in unusual, stigmatizing or difficult circumstances; 5. unwanted children; 6. children with certain traits and behaviors that are not much appreciated in society; 7. children born out of wedlock, and 8. children born in situations of rapid economic changes.

Generally, there is evidence which points out that abuse and neglect in childhood lead to an increased risk for violent behavior in adolescence and adulthood (Barnow, Lucht

and Freyberger 2010). The association is particularly strong for physical abuse and neglect, and sexual abuse of weaker individuals. In addition, abuse is not a specific risk factor for violent behavior, since it affects the increase in the risk of developing a number of different psychopathological problems, of which increased aggression is only one. The effects of abuse and neglect on the occurrence of violent behavior are indirect, correlational and interactive, non causal and non linear. The mechanisms that mediate risk for violent behavior in abused children include a variety of psychosocial and neurobiological factors, whose complex interactions are not yet fully understood.

### 3. THE FAMILY CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY SERBIA

In historical times of crisis, many social difficulties arise and multiply, such as poverty, unemployment, forced migration, negative demographic phenomena, social diseases, etc., which negatively and permanently affect individuals, families and society itself.

In the last decades, our society has passed through a storm of social events that have left a number of consequences on the behavior of school-age children. According to Anđelka Milić (according to Jovanović 2007), in a short period of time there were four very strong social upheavals: the collapse of the socialistic system of self-management, the collapse and disappearance of the federal state, civil wars and the formation of ethno-nationalistic states.

The NATO aggression, political upheaval, change of property relations, along with immigration and emigration, economic and monetary collapse, transition, exclusion of the country from international flows of trade, a moral vacuum, the criminalization of society, the rise of violence, endangering of the primary existence of a large part of the population, unemployment, etc., also happened in the meantime.

Families who during a certain period of time live under unusual life circumstances (war and the psychosis of war, exile, family misfortunes, an existential threat to their independence, when death and accidents become an integral part of everyday life) create the conditions for negative changes in the behavior of children, especially in adolescence. In such circumstances, the family atmosphere is characterized by fear, anxiety, uncertainty, pessimism, intolerance, conflicts within the family and aggressive behavior towards the environment, which completely changes the educational model and educational influence.

Social turmoil in Serbia in the last 16 years has been accompanied by minor or major conflicts and various forms of violence. Complete international sanctions against Yugoslavia and Serbia; the wars in former Yugoslavia in which some state agencies and organizations, as well as the citizens of Serbia participated in some way; the armed rebellion in Kosovo and Metohija; the psychological and propaganda war of the West against Serbia; the NATO bombing of Serbia; the large number of refugees and displaced individuals who found refuge in Serbia; the ruthless struggle of political parties for power; violent strikes and demonstrations; street shootings of criminal groups, mafia and robberies of social, public and private property; monetary gain through criminal channels; poverty of a large number of social classes and a high unemployment rate; an increase in drug, arms and human trafficking, and other pathological phenomena all influenced the

spread of violent subcultures in Serbia. Such a violent subculture is transferred to the student population so that violence in schools has become a major problem. This was attributed to the weakening of the educational function of the family, school, media, student organizations, and cultural organizations (Butigan 2007).

According to Smiljka Tomanović (Tomanović 2009), the social context in which children and youths in Serbia mature is a specific anomic transformation of a society that passes through two phases. One is called the period of “blocked transformation”, which lasted during the nineties and the period of “reactivated” (or “extended”) transformation, which followed the change of the political regime in 2000. This context is marked by extreme economic crisis: a significant decline in production and gross domestic product, soaring unemployment, a large extent of the informal economy, all the dominant “predatory” economy, as well as social crisis: the complete collapse of the institutional fabric of society whose mechanisms are very slow to reconstruct and institutions to rebuild, the lack of a consensus (also about the most important issues) in the political apparatus, the vast social inequality and structural polarization of society, hardships and the “brutalization” of everyday life, and the criminalization of society. The general crisis, the rising unemployment rate and the disappearance of national protection mechanisms have led to people developing survival strategies by retreating into the private sphere.

Family life in Serbia in the past two decades is significantly marked by a large burden of material deprivation and social crisis which is reflected in the difficult daily routine. Parenting in this period is characterized by the wasting of huge material and non-material resources: energy, time, emotions, and health.

The results of a study carried out in our country (Tomanović 2002, 2009) show that parental dilemmas are formed between awareness of their own (or family) responsibilities for the welfare and success of children and the perception of the limitations of their own influence in this area, and even feelings of inadequacy as a parent, which is conditioned by a prominent social crisis. Anxious and insecure parents, who perceive their children as “vulnerable”, feel a stronger need to protect them from the environment that is perceived as harmful and risky. Therefore, the author concludes that parental concern about the dangers of the risky behavior of their children (alcohol/drug abuse, violence, “bad company”) on the one hand, and financial problems on the other hand, are a reflection of the anomic “extended transformation” of society of Serbia – the “brutalization” of daily life and long-term economic uncertainty.

The transition from a socialist to a democratic system, as a specific high-risk social process, is characterized by “objective” and “subjective” socio-economic difficulties and tensions (according to Milosević 2007). By “objective” difficulties we, *inter alia*, mean the decline in the standards of living, increased social stratification with the collapse of the middle class, political control over economic activities, the spread of corruption and organized crime, etc. “Subjective” difficulties are related to the confrontation of high social expectations and an, often, unsatisfactory reality, which can affect the growth of general discontent, disenchantment, social passivity and anxiety. Youths and older people are the most vulnerable groups in the process of transition.

The intensity of violence among young people in Serbia (we primarily refers to children of an elementary and high school-age) began to grow with the corresponding disintegration of Yugoslavia, and it culminated at the beginning of the XXI century as a desirable model of behavior (Đorić 2009). Widespread forms of violence during the crisis



of the 1990's was the abduction of material things in terms of general poverty: a small amount of money (pocket money), wardrobe, and certainly the most attractive form of violence from that era which was the stealing of sneakers in the streets, where the victims were generally younger and weaker children. The point is that the generations which grew up during the political, economic and cultural crisis that included civil wars and international sanctions, adopted violence and aggression as their normal means of communication. What especially attracts attention during the study of violence in schools is not just its frequency, but also the needs of bullies to confirm their superiority and power by exposing their victim to public humiliation through the publication of images of bullying on the internet or by means of mobile phones. These events indicate a complete collapse of the value system and the dehumanization of human beings. The need to inflict physical pain and mental suffering is not satisfied only with violence on the object that is chosen, but it goes so far as to pursue the public stigma and humiliation of victims by making a wide audience bear witness to the inferiority and lack of power on the part of victims by watching recorded videos and photos. In doing so, children who are bullies generally do not feel fear of possible penalties, indicating the degradation of the authority of schools, teachers and parents.

In accordance with what we stated at the beginning of the paper, our society is still characterized by the traditional form of family functioning which includes the patriarchal pattern of relations. This pattern usually implies the existence of direct and indirect violence whose victims are young women and children, and the discrimination of children based on sex, always more females than males, so that violent conflict resolution primarily means violence against women. For older women, age itself represents a protective factor and a positive element for vertical positioning in the hierarchy of the community. In contrast, young women usually have a maximally low position. Especially at the moment of when they start their family, when they are subjected to heavy demands and changes in their lifestyle. They are practically strangers, not integrated in the parental family of their husband, and with very limited opportunities of building their own position and the position of their own families without interference from other members of the extended family. The reduced scope of influence in the field of family relations usually stems from a strong personal sense of duty and obligation first to the implicitly imposed obligation to give birth, then to their children. A strong sense of obligation to the husband is also significant. The traditional female role usually includes general support to the husband in all segments, and "emotional managerialism" in particular (Blagojević according Miletić-Stepanović 2006). This lack of choice for women is partly due to the relatively hostile actions on the part of the environment towards all alternatives in behavior when it comes to women.

The results of more recent research confirm that violence against women in the Serbian family is still a widespread phenomenon. For example, the data from a survey conducted in 2000 (Nikolić-Ristanović, according to Miletić-Stepanović 2006) suggest that violence against women is particularly intense, sharp and brutal when it is associated with the alcoholism of their partners. In this way, alcoholism is seen as an excuse for manifesting risky types behavior, directed from men to their wives.

Vesna Miletić-Stepanović (2006) came to similar results in a study conducted in the period from 1996 to 2000 on a narrow population in Serbia, from three major regions. Data obtained in this study show that on the whole sample, active violent behavior in the

family exists in 82,7% of families, which is almost the same as half a century ago, between the two world wars. This devastating fact speaks of a great preservation of patriarchy, which means that: first, the patriarchal system is still functioning very well, and that it is very stable and continuous; secondly, this could be a big obstacle for the future creation of a civil society and axiological transformation of Serbian society.

When it comes to social work in the field of domestic violence, Tanja Ignjatović (2009) based on a review of existing strategic documents and laws, concludes that in Serbia there is still no coherent and comprehensive policy, nor is there a clear and explicit goal of protecting all victims of violence in the family context. Existing norms and solutions are not sufficiently operationalized, and favor the emergence of significant differences in the interpretation and treatment work of professionals. The high tolerance of society to violence and the high level of prejudices related specifically to gender roles, and thus to the violence in partner relationships, all condition the absence of agreement in relation to the view that ending violence and establishing victims' security is the aim of all activities.

The widespread phenomenon of violence against school children within the family and the presence of violence between parents in our country are also evidenced by research carried out in the late 1990's (Žegarac and Brkić 1998). Six hundred children from Serbia, 10 to 18 years of age, and their parents, were examined by means of questionnaires. It was then confirmed that fights between spouses as an obvious form of domestic violence are present to a much lesser extent than arguments: 0,7% of the parents reported that they had frequent fights, 7,3% occasional, while 90,7% of the parents said that they never fought. Children were often present when the parents were fighting in 0,7% of families, occasionally in 6,7%, and never in 84,7% of the families. These data suggest that children in Serbia are usually not spared scenes of violence between parents.

The official statistics of a more recent date also show that domestic violence is still a common practice in our society. According to the data of the Victimology Society of Serbia from 2008 (Kovačević-Lepojević and Radaković 2008) domestic violence was reported by 44 people (35 women and 9 men) or 21% of the total number of persons who called for help. Domestic violence against adults was recorded in 38 cases, while violence against children in the family was present in 9 cases. In 2006, 63 people called the Service due to domestic violence (76 women and 27 men) or 61%, while in the second half of 2005, 31 people spoke to the Service regarding the same issue (23 women and 8 men) or 48%. Compared to the data from the year 2007, we can conclude that the number of men who contacted the Service due to victimization in domestic violence increased when compared to the previous years. In most cases of domestic violence, namely in 22 cases (19 women and 3 men), people were victims of physical violence in the family. In most cases, namely in 21 cases, physical violence was followed by psychological violence in the family. In 19 cases (15 women and 4 men) the individuals who contacted the Service were victims of psychological violence in the family. In 3 cases persons suffered from sexual violence in the family, which was accompanied by physical and psychological violence. Women are often exposed to violence from their current or former husbands or partners, fathers, step-mothers, sons, daughters-in-law and other relatives.

The experiences of the individuals employed in this service have shown that women have suffered continuous violence from their partners, which was often not directed just

towards them. Witnesses and victims of violence were mostly children, then parents of the spouse or other relatives. Also, Service data indicate that children were usually victims of domestic violence, both indirectly and directly. The Service compiled data on the victimization of children from their parents, relatives or friends who contacted them related to the particular vulnerability of children, and indirectly, from persons who contacted them because of some other problem.

It turned out that parents or guardians often manipulated their children in order to achieve personal interests, victory in their conflicts with their partner, while endangering the basic interests of the child. Previous experience has shown that children were neglected, intimidated, abused, cruelly punished and isolated from the environment and other relatives.

The existence of violence in many families in contemporary Serbia, financial difficulties, lack of time and parental uncertainty and concerns, media representations of violence and frequent social disturbances are likely to contribute significantly to the social reproduction of future perpetrators. It is therefore no wonder that there are more and more frequent cases of brutal altercations among elementary and high school children in our schools.

The results of recent research support this notion. A questionnaire-based study on 26,628 third to eighth-grade students from 50 primary schools across Serbia in the spring of 2006 showed that in the period of three months, 65,3% of the students, according to their statements, experienced some form of bullying (the percentages vary between the schools from 48% to 80%). If we analyze cases of repeated violence, 20,7% of the students could be classified as victims, 3,8% as bullies and 3,6% as bully/victims. Violence on the part of adults was reported by 35,7% of the students and 42% of the students witnessed verbal aggression of the pupils towards teachers. The most common forms of bullying were insults (45,6%) and machinations (32,6%). Boys were slightly more likely than girls to characterize themselves as bullies and more often exposed to the violence of peers and adults. Older students were more likely to be violent and more often complained to have experienced adult violence, while age differences in exposure to violence were minimal (Popadić and Plut 2007).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In order to suppress the violent behavior patterns of behavior in the student population, it is necessary to eliminate the causes that have contributed to its spread, and create conditions for wider acceptance of the fundamental values of tolerance, altruism and non-violence. The elimination of these causes can be achieved through a complex, multi-disciplinary approach and the creation of integrative strategies that prevent violence among children and youths.

The path to anti-social behavior and the formation of future bullies begins in early childhood, in families with chaotic and violent relationships between family members, which are burdened by poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, aversion towards neighbors and the wider environment. Future bullies from such families are most often physically abused, punished and exposed to various forms of cruelty, which is incompatible with the formation of a healthy personality. Thus, children in the earliest days of their lives learn

aggression and various kinds of anti-social activities by which they seek to purge their dissatisfaction with life in deviant families and to gain appreciation outside the family, but usually in a socially unacceptable way.

Such children, when they come to school, bring with them their violent behavior, because they do not know how to behave in any other way and they come into conflict with school staff and peers. That usually opens the way for them to be rejected by peers and even parents themselves, which leads to failure in the development of social skills and disorders in the process of socialization. Such children are often in a situation to be ridiculed and punished, which results in the development of antisocial attitudes and violent behavior.

We presented in this paper numerous factors whose presence creates favorable conditions for violent behavior in children and adolescents. Special attention was paid to the specific characteristics of the family context in Serbia loaded with a number of internal and external difficulties in its functioning. This concept of the paper was initiated by the fact that the prediction of the probability of the emergence of violent behavior directly affects the process of planning preventive activities, which (if they are to be effective) must be aimed at eliminating or reducing the negative impact of those factors for which scientific research has shown to increase the likelihood of manifestation of violent behavior. In contemporary science, these factors are called risk factors. For preventive programs and interventions to achieve significant results, they must include as many of these factors as possible. In an effort to reduce violent behavior in children and youths in Serbia, special attention should be paid to the risk factors we pointed out in the paper, bearing in mind the specific social context, the current situation and the events from the recent history of our country.

Taking into account the specific social context of contemporary Serbia, burdened with many problems, it is clear that the efforts to prevent violent behavior in children and youths must focus on the comprehensive influence on a number of factors that contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of such patterns. Therefore, it is clear that we cannot aspire towards applying interventive and preventive programs undertaken in other countries whose efficiency has been empirically confirmed, without their prior modification in accordance with the conditions, characteristics and needs of our society.

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## PORODIČNI KONTEKST DECE I MLADIH KOJI ISPOLJAVAJU NASILNIČKO PONAŠANJE

*U radu se nastoji da se jasno izdvoje faktori porodičnog konteksta za koje je utvrđeno da mogu predstavljati faktore rizika za javljanje i učvršćivanje antisocijalnog obrasca ponašanja dece i mladih. Razmatranje se ne odnosi samo na strukturalne karakteristike porodice budućih nasilnika, već i na integrativno-dezintegrativne procese unutar porodice. Rad ima za cilj da jasno izdvoji porodične činioce za koje postoje empirijski dokazi o njihovom uticaju na formiranje budićih nasilnika. Opšta pretpostavka od koje se pritom polazi jeste da postoje izvesne specifičnosti porodičnog konteksta, tj. izvesne porodične varijable koje pogoduju javljanju i učvršćivanju obrazaca nasilničkog ponašanja dece i mladih. Važnost poznavanja navedenih činilaca ogleda se u tome što određene porodične okolnosti predstavljaju faktore rizika za nasilničko ponašanje dece i mladih. Stoga njihovo poznavanje i identifikovanje čini polaznu osnovu interventnog i preventivnog delovanja društva i njegovih institucija na rešavanju problema nasilja.*

Ključne reči: *nasilje, porodica, deca, mladi, rizični faktori.*