

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PEER VIOLENCE

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Abstract. *Violence is a serious social problem that exists both in developed and underdeveloped countries. As a society in transition, Serbia is unfortunately not an exception, and in the last thirty years, based on objective statistical data, Serbia leads in the region regarding the rise of this social phenomenon. The subject of this research is to identify the possibilities and limits of the emergence, spreading and suppression of various manifestations of violence in schools, as well as to use the collective awareness of peer-to-peer relationships, that is, to ask students about their views on whether peer violence problem exists and what their active role in addressing it is. The goal of this research is not to identify wide-ranging effects of peer violence on society, but to promote the need to recognize peer violence as an important trigger for future social problems, and in that regard, invite schools to prepare programs to prevent violence in schools through teaching and extracurricular activities, where students would have subject positions. Based on the research results obtained, we can see that peer violence significantly affects school atmosphere and has an impact on the overall personality development of students who attend the final grade of the eight-year city school. It has been proven that a large number of surveyed students do not report violence because of fear, prejudice, conformism; however, students talk about it to their parents and teachers in private, seeking help and support. We conclude that students are not sufficiently empowered and encouraged to actively grow up in the school environment, which opens up new research questions on the ways, dynamics and readiness of the society to increase the number of preventative activities in schools.*

Key words: *violence, social changes, school, reaction programs to stop school violence*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Violence is a serious social problem that exists both in developed and underdeveloped countries, and Serbia, as a poor society in transition, is unfortunately not an exception. This social phenomenon has been on the rise in the last thirty years. Under the influence of war and armed conflicts in the Balkans, the devastating economic situation and the long-standing social crisis in the society we live in, violence is widespread, which is particularly noticeable in schools which are seen as mini societies. In 1994 and 1995, there was a sudden increase in juvenile delinquency in and outside schools in Serbia. The forms in which violence appears are of a general nature, and are closely linked to conflicts in society, historical events, and contemporary trends of globalization. The development of society from traditional, industrial and postindustrial carries with it the consequences that affect individuals, and above all the family. Under the conditions of globalization, megatrends of the 2000's change the world and its view, searching for the new paradigm of social life on a global scale. Different social movements, new marriage and family challenges, the information technology revolution, education reforms (lifelong education, electronic learning) represent the determinants that cause a social crisis in post-socialist societies such as ours. The goal of the theoretical part of this research is to discover the possibilities and limits of the emergence, spreading and suppression of various manifestations of violence in schools, as well as to ask students about their views on whether peer violence exists, to what extent and what causes it, all in order to define the continuity of peer violence issue which not only remains undefeated in Serbia, but it actually increases and amplifies.

When we talk about the social context of violence in schools, we refer to social causes and consequences, and the consequences of violence are multiple, thus the need for this type of study is justified in terms of creating a culture of peace and cooperation. One more aspect that is sociologically interesting is the dynamics of education in the new millennium Serbia, firstly in terms of promoting the possibility of overcoming the causes the peer violence issue, and secondly (lack of) information about law and regulations which can be used to solve peer violence issues without violence, reflected in social relations among peers, parents and teachers. The goal of this research is not to identify wide-ranging effects of peer violence on society, but to promote the need to recognize peer violence as an important trigger for future social problems, and in that regard, invite schools to prepare programs to prevent violence in schools through teaching and extracurricular activities. This would help avoid huge costs of combating violence, increased morbidity and mortality, as well as an increased number of suicides, abuse of drugs and alcohol, as well as pathological phenomena, declining work potential of the population and education opportunities due to the poor quality of life in families affected by peer violence, erosion of social capital and many others (Ajduković & Pavleković, 2000). Associates Gojković & Vukičević (2011, 1-2) have confirmed with their research that there is a high degree of physical and verbal violence among high school students. Physical violence is usually committed by boys, while verbal and social violence is mostly committed by girls.

2. HISTORY OF THE IDEA

Violence is not a new phenomenon we are faced with, it just has not been sufficiently scientifically explored, since the existence of violence and its manifestations also incorporate social issues, cultural, educational, family, national, traditional issues and

most importantly questioning the trust in social institutions, family, social processes and social relations. In the National Strategy for Preventing and Protecting Children from Violence (2008), violence against children is defined as a „general problem permeating all societies, all cultures and all regions of the world. Millions of children experience violence every day. Violence against children is a serious violation of children’s rights. Violence inflicts pain on children, seriously endangers their development, well-being, and even their life, and the consequences are often severe and long-lasting”.

In the history of social thought and sociology as the most general social science, there are certain legacies concerning the problematization of social conflicts, and it goes from Machiavelli and Hobbes to Marx, Weber and Zimel, Darendorf and Kozer who defined the role and significance of social conflicts and pointed to its connection with social development (Mitrović, 2008, 21).

Sociological discourse sees violence through the concept of authority, power and control, in the context of gender, family, social status, material wealth, and power. Based on the sociological approach, violence is caused by: structural factors, stress, conflicts, poverty and unemployment, especially in certain subcultures. All family members play a role in maintaining violence and transferring it to the next generation. Psychological theories on the causes of domestic violence cannot explain some of the characteristics of this phenomenon, such as: why are women, children and weak family members the most frequent victims of violence, that is, why in 90% of domestic violence cases perpetrators do not suffer from any mental disorder, or why more than 50% of perpetrators and/or victims did not experience any abuse in their childhood – all these could be causes of violent behavior, or experiencing violence in adulthood. Any disbalance in authority and power in parental and partner relations is a potential trigger that can lead to violence (Ignjatović, 2011, 21) in family, peer and social relations in general.

3. PREVIOUS STUDIES

One of the most extensive studies on the presence of peer violence and violence against children in elementary schools in Serbia was carried out in 2005 within the program *School without Violence*. The sample included 32 617 respondents, 28 931 of which were students (from 3rd to 8th grade) and 3 686 adults working in schools (2 650 of which were teachers). The study covered a 3-month period prior to the start of the research, while some questions related to the entire education period. The results show that violent behavior is present in schools, both among older and younger students, among both boys and girls; 65% of students experienced at least one violent attack in the last 3 months (ranging from 48% to 80%); 24% of students experienced repeated acts of violence from their peers (in one or more forms), ranging from 14% to 47% (UNICEF, 2005).

The research conducted by Tomonjić and associates (2010) says that 32.35% of students are exposed to violence, and 15.3% of students themselves behave violently. Many students are used to violence, they have insufficient knowledge of the phenomenon of violence, and they are unwilling to honestly answer the questions related to this phenomenon, fearing the consequences. Older students have lost confidence in school psychologists and class teachers, and they are less willing to trust their parents as well, while considerably more willing to trust their peers.

Popadić and Plut (2007) conducted a survey in 50 primary schools throughout Serbia, and according to students’ statements, a large number of them experienced some form of

peer violence (percentages vary from 48% to 80% depending on the school). 35.7% of students complained about violence committed by adults, and 42% were witnesses of verbal aggressiveness of students toward teachers. The most common forms of peer violence were insults (45.6%) and scheming (32.6%). Boys more often than girls declared that they commit violence but that they are also more often exposed to violence by their peers and adults. Older students were more often violent and more often exposed to violence by adults, while age differences and exposure to violence were minimal. We can see that every tenth student who is the victim of violence only suffers and conceals violence. After one decade and the abovementioned research results, the problem of violence is more evident, however, students and teachers, as well as parents hide this violence, as if they were in apathy and „psychological slavery” caused by difficult everyday life in the Balkans or does this reflect the anomie in Serbian society?!

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The main hypothesis of socio-economic theories is based on the view that adverse social conditions cause a person to behave in a socially unacceptable way. The theory of anomie was defined by E. Durkheim from France, while it was further developed by R. Merton from the United States. This theory claims that privileged groups are considered to be able to achieve their goals, while many institutions are inaccessible to less privileged social groups. Therefore, the control of society is weakened and standards and norms are violated. Starting from Durkheim's concept of anomie, Merton concludes that if we have delinquent behavior among young people, it is a result of too much tension which arises because of the unbridgeable gap between the cultural goals and the available resources to achieve these goals. For this reason, individuals and social groups try to reach the desirable outcomes using unacceptable means (Stevanović, 2013, 19). Social disorganization theory claims that the main cause of social changes are wars and transition periods. Changes can take place on an individual, family or global level. Young people feel frustrated because they are not accepted by the community they belong to; therefore, they are not able to satisfy their higher-level needs, more advance social needs, and their dissatisfaction results in delinquent behavior (Stevanović, 2013, 21). Due to the lack of support from the immediate social environment, the development of desired social defense mechanisms in both children and their parents which would help them resist this social phenomenon does not take place (Stevanović, 2013, 7).

Modern society school is defined as a specially organized social institution specifically aimed at the development of the personality of children in terms of the process of secondary socialization. It is a space that provides a positive atmosphere for learning and growing up of students irrespective of their nationality, family status, skin color, religion, etc. If we observe it from the standpoint of personality development, within teaching domain ie, through teaching content and their interpretation through various forms of work and teaching strategies, school should influence the development of positive characteristics of students which are manifested through the interaction of the individual and the social environment as specific interpersonal relationships (Malinović-Jovanović & Malinović, 2013, 73).

When studying peer violence, it is necessary to take into account the social context. Overall social inequality in a society fuels school violence and ethnic intolerance and conflict, although it is not the only cause of violence in society and in school. Certainly,

as a social institution, school is the source of symbolic violence through its organization and management, but also through its authoritarian teaching styles, and through its curricula. All of these represent significant causes of school violence which is added to domestic violence, street violence, as well as violence seen in the media every day.

When we talk about risk factors that could lead to violence among children, numerous studies have dealt with the influence of upbringing and growing up conditions. Based on the results of his research, Olweus (1997) came to the conclusion that child upbringing by parents and the conditions in which a child grows up influence the occurrence of violence among children, through four factors. The first factor refers to parental warmth. Children whose parents are emotionally indifferent to the child's needs and who provide little emotional support, attention and interest for the child are more often disobedient, aggressive and display problems in behavior. The second factor is overly-permissive parenting. If parents do not set strict limits in relation to violent behavior toward peers and adults, the level of the child's aggression will increase, which will further increase the risk of violent behavior. The third factor is physical punishment by parents. Many studies have shown that children who are exposed to violence, directly or indirectly, eventually become abusers themselves, that is, they abuse children in the same way. The fourth risk factor is the child's temperament. It often happens that parents of children who are more hyperactive, have no patience, ignore their child, or react aggressively (Nedimović & Biro, 2011).

All of the aforementioned confirms that the primary social group – the family – as a bio-psycho-social community, failed to resist the general social crisis that has seriously endangered the economic role of the family and practically prevented it from providing mechanisms for dignified parenting due to the contradictions imposed by the consumer society.

5. METHODOLOGY

The subject of the empirical part of this research is the assessment of the eight-year primary school students' opinions on peer violence in a city school in Pčinja district, with special emphasis on the forms and ways of overcoming violence among pupils in the final grade of primary school. This research should show the uniqueness of each student's opinion or perhaps their lack of opinion on peer violence, whether it exists and if they can recognize it, in order to identify differences in opinion on the phenomenon and presence of peer violence, and depending on gender of students and other factors, counting on the vitality and contradiction of the expressive and instrumental role of mother and father in the examined area, which is an underdeveloped area in southern Serbia. The subject of the research also triggered the need to define the following *objectives*:

1. Analyze opinions of students on the recognition and existence of peer violence against them;
2. Analyze opinions of students on the existence of physical peer violence against them;
3. Analyze opinions of students on the existence of emotional peer violence against them;
4. Analyze opinions of students on the existence of digital peer-to-peer abuse against them;
5. Analyze opinions of students on whether their peers seek help if peer violence is committed against them.

In relation to the theoretical framework of the research and through an insight into the previous studies, the following research *hypotheses* were also proposed:

1. Students are able to recognize and report that peer violence has been committed against them;
2. Students are ready to suffer physical violence;
3. Students are able to recognize when psychological violence is being committed against them;
4. Students are able to recognize when digital abuse is being committed against them;
5. Students agree that peers seek help if peer violence is being committed against them.

The methods and techniques for data collection and processing used in this research have been selected in accordance with the nature of the issue, subject matter, objectives and goals of the research and the hypotheses proposed. Descriptive method was used to process the data obtained by the survey. The questionnaire consisted of five questions, based on the hypotheses. The data were analyzed in the SPSS-13 Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. The final results are expressed in percentages, and the results of the research are presented using the descriptive method, with charts and tables. For the purposes of statistical data analysis in this paper, the χ^2 test was used (test of independence between variables for the results obtained), as well as the Yates correction which is used in statistical analyses of data when sample sizes are small. The sample was chosen randomly, and it included 60 students of 8th grade from „Jovan Jovanović Zmaj” primary school in Vranje. More precisely, the sample consisted of 30 boys and 30 girls. The research was conducted in December 2017. Students were given paper versions of the questionnaire. Prior to completing the questionnaire, it was emphasized to them that the survey was anonymous and that the results would be used exclusively for research purposes. In the analysis that follows, the data are classified based on parents’ level of education and the socioeconomic status of students. The sample was gender-balanced and consisted of 30 boys (50.0%) and 30 girls (50.0%) (Table 1), while the structure of the sample based on the parents’ level of education indicated that children mostly come from middle class families (Table 2). Moreover, the sample was also balanced regarding fathers’ education level, as confirmed by the data showing that the highest percentage of students’ fathers (78.3%) had high school degree, and Table 3 shows that the highest percentage of students’ mother (68.3%) had high school degree.

Table 1 Sample structure based on students’ gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	30	50.0%
Female	30	50.0%
Total	60	100.0%

Table 2 Sample structure based on students’ fathers’ education level

Fathers education level	Frequency	Percentage
High school	47	78.3%
College	9	15.0%
University or more	4	6.7%
Total	60	100.0%

Table 3 Sample structure based on students’ mothers’ education level

Mothers education level	Frequency	Percentage
High school	41	68.3%
College	15	25.0%
University or more	4	6.7%
Total	60	100.0%

Table 4 shows that the highest percentage of students sees their socioeconomic status as average (91.7%), and that there were no students who said to come from upper class families, therefore, when we analyzed the results we excluded the possible effect of socioeconomic inequality risk factor on the phenomenon of peer violence.

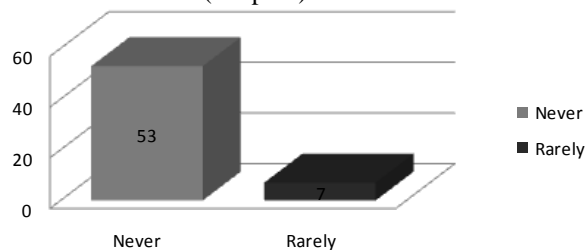
Table 4 Sample structure based on students’ socioeconomic status

Socioeconomic status of students	Frequencies	Percentages
Low	5	8.3%
Average	55	91.7%
Total	60	100.0%

6. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Protection from peer violence in educational institutions is a complex process which all employees, children/students, parents/guardians, as well as the local community should participate in, and this research and the results obtained can help create conditions for them to grow up safely and protect them from violence. With regard to this, the high-priority task for educational institutions, but also for all institutions dealing with upbringing, education and preservation of psychophysical health of children is to openly deal with the problem of peer violence. Violent behavior among children is aggressive behavior of a child who aims to hurt and inflict physical pain and/or moral suffering to another child who is trying to avoid it. Numerous studies have shown that boys inflict peer violence more than girls. Boys more often commit direct forms of violent behavior, while girls often use relational aggression and indirect violence (Đorić, 2009). However, by analyzing the opinions of the students surveyed, this claim will be either confirmed or rejected.

In the first step of analyzing students’ opinion on the recognition and existence of peer violence against them, empirical findings of this study were examined based on the following question: *Are your friends acting violently toward you at school?* and the results obtained show that the highest percentage of students (88.3%) had never experienced peer violence in school (Graph 1).



Graph 1 Distribution of students’ answers to the question: *Are your friends acting violently toward you at school?*

Table 5 Distribution of students' answers to the first question based on gender (Cross-tabulation)

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Question No.1	Never	26	27	53
	Rarely	4	3	7
Total		30	30	60

Table 5 shows that the majority of boys (26) and girls (27) have never experienced peer violence.

Table 6 Differences observed in the answers to the question "Are your friends acting violently toward you at school?" based on students' gender (χ^2 -test)

	Value	df	Level of significance
Pearson's χ^2	0.162	1	0.688

In the table with limit values, with the level of significance of 0,05 and with $df = 1$, $\chi^2 = 3.841$, whereas with 0,01, $\chi^2 = 6.635$. Given that the result $\chi^2 = 0.162$ is lower than both of these previously mentioned values, we can conclude that this result is not statistically significant at the significance level of 0.05, which further indicates that there were no differences among boys and girls in their recognition and suffering from peer violence (Table 6).

Table 7 Distribution of students' answers to the first question

	Frequency	Percentage	
<i>Do your schoolmates hit you, pull your hair, bind you, kick you, bite you or hit you with some objects in school?</i>	Never	50	83.3%
	Rarely	4	6.7%
	Sometimes	5	8.3%
	Often	1	1.7%
	All the time (every day)	0	0.0%
	Total	60	100.0%

Analysis of students' opinions on whether they see themselves as victims of peer violence was checked with the first question. The results shown in Table 7 indicate that the highest percentage of students (83.3%) have never experienced physical violence by peers in school, which further indicates sporadic cases of peer violence.

Table 8 Distribution of students' answers to the second question based on gender (Cross-tabulation)

		Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
Question No.2	Never	25	25	50
	Rarely	2	2	4
	Sometimes	2	3	5
	Often	1	0	1
	Total	30	30	60

Based on the distribution of answers, Table 8 shows that the majority of boys (25) and girls (25) have never experienced physical violence by their peers, and only ten of them, or 6% of the total number of surveyed students spoke publicly about it. These results can be interpreted from another aspect as well – to identify the level of objectivity or prejudice when it comes to speaking publicly about the experienced peer violence.

Table 9 Distribution of students' answers to the third question

		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Have your schoolmates ever rejected you, excluded you from group activities and games, made fun of you, insulted or ignored you, called you offensive names, or made fun of you because of the way you dress?</i>	Never	50	83.3%
	Rarely	2	3.3%
	Sometimes	4	6.7%
	Often	4	6.7%
	All the time (every day)	0	0.0%
	Total	60	100.0%

Analysis of students' answers to the third question (Table 9) shows that the highest percentage of students (83.3%) have never experienced emotional abuse by peers in school.

Table 10 Distribution of students' answers to the fourth question

		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Have your schoolmates ever offended you, harassed you, sent you threatening and offensive messages and used false identity on the Internet?</i>	Never	47	78.3%
	Rarely	3	5.0%
	Sometimes	5	8.3%
	Often	5	8.3%
	All the time (every day)	0	0.0%
	Total	60	100.0%

Analysis of students' opinions based on their answers to the fourth question (Table 10) shows that the majority of students (78.3%) have never experienced peer-to-peer digital abuse, which can be a reliable indicator that students do not use social media to communicate, which is highly questionable in terms of objectivity based on these answers.

Table 11 Distribution of students' answers to the fifth question

		Frequency	Percentage
<i>Have you ever asked your parents and teachers for help when you felt that peers were committing violence against you?</i>	Never	0	0.0%
	Rarely	0	0.0%
	Sometimes	1	1.7%
	Often	15	25.0%
	All the time (every day)	44	73.3%
	Total	60	100.0%

Analysis of students' opinions based on their answers to the question *Have you ever asked your parents and teachers for help when you felt that peers were committing violence against you?* (Table 11) shows that the highest percentage of students (73.3%)

always ask parents for help if suffering from peer violence, which is contradictory to the answers to previous questions, where only ten of them, or 6%, said that they experienced peer violence. These results prove that the 8th grade students did not give very honest answers, that is, they did not make a clear distinction between different forms of violence, which requires additional education through workshops and conversations with parents and teachers as well as professional services staff in schools.

Table 12 Differences observed in the answers to the fifth question (χ^2 -test)

	Value	df	Level of significance
Pearson's χ^2	3.485	2	0.175

In the table with limit values, with the level of significance of 0.05 and with $df = 2$, $\chi^2 = 5.99$, whereas with 0.01, $\chi^2 = 9.21$. Given that the result $\chi^2 = 3.485$ is lower than both of these previously mentioned values, we can conclude that this result is not statistically significant at the significance level of 0.05, which further indicates that there were no differences among boys and girls in their tendency to ask parents for help if they are experiencing peer violence (Table 12).

7. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS – THE READINESS OF THE SOCIETY TO PREVENT PEER VIOLENCE

The question of the readiness of a society not only to preventively, but also reactively respond to a particular social problem is often raised and studied. American sociologist Edwin Lemert believes that perpetrating violence is just one form of deviant behavior. From a sociological point of view, deviant behavior is any behavior which significantly deviates from, that is, violates the social norms of a community and causes a social reaction of disapproval. Deviant behavior encompasses what an individual does, thinks, his or her attitudes and feelings. Such a person violates social norms and violates society's interests, and in the end provokes social reaction which can take various forms. The main forms of social control which exist in almost all societies are: customs, law, religion and education. Communities can greatly differ in terms of their level of readiness for prevention. If the nature of the prevention program is not in line with the level of community's readiness, it is very likely that the preventative measures taken will be unsuccessful. The effectiveness of preventative programs planning also depends on this. The theoretical debate on community readiness for prevention began in the nineties of the 20th century. Mary Ann Pentz, the creator of the Midwest Prevention Program (formerly known as the Project STAR – Students Taught Awareness and Resistance), was the first to use the term Community Readiness and to build the foundation for this project (Žunić-Pavlović, 2006). It is very important to be aware of and informed about the existing preventative activities in the community, attitudes, attention to the current problems, knowledge about the problems, resources, however, not only financial resources, but also the staff expertise, support, motivation.

Collective consciousness, as argued by Emil Durkheim, is the driver of all social changes and social phenomena. If an individual's activity and results are recognized, that individual will identify with the organization and community, and identity can be the

strongest driver for new creative and committed activities and engagement. Such a strong collective identity with one's organization or type of work creates a sense of security, self-confidence, self-respect and respect for others (Šijaković, 2008).

8. CONCLUSION

Based on the abovementioned results obtained, we can see that peer violence significantly affects school atmosphere and has an impact on the overall development of students' personality. It is also well-known that many students do not report violence because they are afraid, or do not know who to seek help from, etc. In the second wave of modernization, the amended regulatory framework extends the list of children's rights and it is necessary to respect the rule of law by educating parents, teachers, and students about these laws in accordance with the following school laws and internal protocols in Serbia: The Law on Foundations of Educational System, Law on Social Protection, Anti-Discrimination Law, Juvenile Crime Law, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Family Law, and a large number of regulations, general and special protocol action plans to protect the children from abuse and neglect in primary schools. Children are our future; therefore, our focus should be on their education and upbringing. Continuous education of teachers and parents, as well as all the individuals working with children is of great importance. More work is needed in raising awareness on peer violence and its consequences of peer violence through various forms of public campaigns. The data obtained confirm the above fact, since based on the sample of 60 students and the data collected we have concluded that the surveyed students are not open and honest when speaking about peer violence in their school, as confirmed by the data in Table 11.

Based on the statistical analysis done using the χ^2 test and the Yates's correction, the following was concluded: the first hypothesis was confirmed, students can recognize peer violence and believe that it exists; the second hypothesis was rejected, with 83% of students claiming they have never experienced physical violence, while 11% of students say that it rarely happens.

Statistical indicators do not point to any difference between boys and girls in terms of suffering peer violence, thus the previous research data where men are predominant perpetrators are not adequate for comparison. The third hypothesis was also rejected, since the students believe that there is no psychological or emotional abuse against them, and 83.3% of students said that they have never experienced this form of violence by peers in school. This figure applies to both boys and girls, which practically means that there is no statistically significant difference gender-wise. The fourth hypothesis was rejected as well, since the students say that 73% of them have never experienced digital abuse, 8.3% of children say it happens often, 8.3% of children experience it sometimes, and 5% of children rarely. There is no statistically significant difference gender-wise with regards to digital abuse. The fifth hypothesis was confirmed, since the majority of children, 73% of them, seek help if they experience peer violence, which is the most important proof that peer violence is socially invisible as a problem, since it is hidden by the students themselves. However, when parents are mentioned to the students, they say that peer violence phenomenon is resolved between parents and school. Moreover, there is no statistically significant difference gender-wise with regards to reporting peer violence. The empirical finding obtained has triggered new research topics on the possibilities of overcoming the

consequences of peer violence, preparation and organization for inclusion of students in workshops for more open and objective discussions on the issue of peer violence - how to recognize and report it. We should not neglect the fact that our respondents are not sufficiently encouraged to speak openly about peer violence, some children feel afraid to reveal it, they do not trust the institutions, they do not recognize the hidden intentions of their peers, and they often misunderstand the definitions and concepts of what actually peer violence is and how by fighting against it one can build self-esteem and trust.

The message that the empirical finding sends is clear: it is necessary to identify the dynamics of working on preventative activities in the school year calendar, in order to inform students in a timely manner so that violence does not happen at all. Educational workers, parents and later on the institutions that act when peer violence had already occurred play the most important role.

Gašić-Pavišić (2009) emphasizes the need to prepare Serbian students for their future teacher calling by including the content related to the theoretical approaches and research data on violence in schools, as well as to familiarize them with preventive programs and reactive strategies as part of their professional preparation.

Based on the data provided by the Public Prosecutor's Office in Kruševac, and on the imposed measures, more and more girls every year commit violence and delinquent activities. This is another indicator that the problem of peer violence intensifies. Pedagogical and psychological services in schools and teachers must be informed on how to approach a child who exhibits aggressive behavior. It is necessary to recognize the psychosomatic reaction of a child to certain situations, all of which are early warning signs. When we notice them, the child/student should be referred to experts who deal with such issues. Cooperation with the family is very important. Family factor also triggers another topic, an increased number of divorces, which also affects children's development. It often happens that families do not cooperate with schools. Parents do not have time, especially when it comes to single-parent families, parents who live in rural areas, who travel, and spend a limited amount of time with their children. Therefore, it is important to use all protection mechanisms available. Children/students should be included in community activities which will provide the child with adequate support. *The Day Care Center for Children and Young People with Behavioral Problems* was opened in Vranje in 2016. This day care center is located in the Center for the Local Social Care Services. This center is open to children between the ages of 10 and 18, to children with behavior problems, children at risk but also to healthy children who can serve as an example and role model to other children and show them positive values. In this day care center, children learn through workshops and interaction. Social skills activities for children are organized on a daily basis: psychological empowerment, computer courses, educational and psychological workshops organized with the aim of informing children about current topics important for their education. The topics present in the day care center are: *Healthy lifestyles, How to react to violence, Assertive communication skills and tolerance, Adolescence and how to recognize it*. Moreover, there are activities of resocialization, cultural events, creative workshops, sports activities, all in all, everything that positively affects their development of self-confidence, self-esteem, teamwork and strengthening of their affinities. Their key guiding principles are: adopt positive behavioral patterns, education, development of social skills and healthy lifestyle. The day care center team works closely with primary and high schools who refer children to them.

It is necessary to raise the awareness on the prohibition of all forms of violence against children and any degrading treatment of children. It is important for educational institutions to prioritize prevention of peer violence, to educate school staff, students and parents, to strive towards building a safer environment, towards greater application of the existing program in real life, and towards resocializing children who were perpetrators of violence in the community.

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VRŠNJAČKO NASILJE U DRUŠTVENOM KONTEKSTU

Nasilje je ozbiljan društveni problem koji postoji u razvijenim i nerazvijenim regionima. Srpsko tranziciono društvo, nažalost, nije izuzetak i poslednjih tridesetak godina unazad i prema objektivnoj statistici prednjači u porastu ove društvene pojave u regionu. Predmet istraživanja je sadržan u određivanju mogućnosti i granica pojave, plime i suzbijanja različitih objektivnih manifestacija nasilja u školi, a kroz prizmu kolektivne svesti vršnjačkih odnosa odn. mišljenja učenika o tome da li je vršnjačko nasilje prisutno i njihove aktivne uloge u rešavanju istog. Cilj istraživanja, nije sagledavanje širih posledica po društvo, već promovisanje potrebe da se školsko nasilje prepozna kao važan okidač za buduće društvene probleme i u tom smislu pozovu škole na pripremu interventnih programa za suzbijanje nasilja u školi u putem nastavnih i vannastavnih programa i aktivnosti, u kojima će subjekat biti učenik. Prema dobijenim rezultatima istraživanja uočavamo da je vršnjačko nasilje u značajnoj meri latentno prisutno u kreiranju školske atmosfere i da vrši uticaj na sveukupan razvoj ličnosti učenika završnog razreda osmogodišnje gradske škole. Dokazano je, da veliki broj ispitanika - učenika ne prijavljuje nasilje zbog straha, predrasuda, konformizma, ali da se o njemu učenici izjašnjavaju posredno obraćajući se roditeljima i nastavnicima, skriveno za pomoć i podršku. Zaključujemo, da učenici nisu dovoljno osnaženi da aktivno učestvuju u odrastanju u školskom ambijentu, što otvara nova istraživačka pitanja o načinama, dinamici i spremnosti društvene zajednice da pojača aktivnosti u prevenciji nasilja u školi.

Ključne reči: vršnjačko nasilje, društvene promene, škola, interventni programi za suzbijanje nasilja u školi