

THE ESCALATION OF VIOLENCE IN MODERN SOCIETY: IMPLICATIONS AND EDUCATIONAL RESPONSES

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Abstract: This article explores the various facets of violence, identifying key commonalities among definitions, including repetitive occurrences, intentional harm, imbalanced power dynamics, and the desire to inflict psychological and physical suffering on victims. The categorization of violence into physical, verbal, and sexual forms is a longstanding practice. Violence is defined as the deliberate, unjustifiable infliction of harm on others, encompassing a wide range of negative consequences endured by victims. However, the mere act of harm is insufficient to classify an action as violent; it must be accompanied by intent. Harmful behaviors encompass verbal and non-verbal actions, spanning physical harm, material damage, and psychological distress, such as intimidation, humiliation, and social isolation. This article underscores the urgency of addressing violence in our society, emphasizing the pivotal role of educational institutions in creating safe and harmonious environments for children and students.

Keywords: Violence, Media Influence, Youth Behavior, Educational Interventions, Prevention Strategies

Field: Social sciences, Pedagogy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, violence is the dark side of our everyday life that disrupts our normal existence. Violence has existed in the past, but it wasn't given as much importance in the media. Now, on our televisions, there is a large number of images and films accompanied by violence, and even in our news, there is constant reporting on killings, abuse of children and adults, and so on. Wherever we are, whether at school or on the streets, we encounter an increase in violent behavior and a growing number of robberies committed by minors, all of which naturally become a social problem.

There are several definitions of violence, but they all share common elements, such as frequent repetition of violence, deliberate harm, disproportionate power dynamics, and the intent to cause psychological and physical pain to the victim. The categorization of violence into physical, verbal, and sexual violence has been known and written about for a long time.

Violence is also defined as "the deliberate and unjustified infliction of harm on another. What we refer to as "inflicting harm" can be seen as the broad term for the negative effects of behavior that others endure. In accordance with this, inflicting harm alone is not sufficient to label an act as violence, but it is necessary. Behavior that inflicts harm can be broadly categorized into verbal and non-verbal forms and may involve physical harm, material damage, or psychological harm, such as intimidation, humiliation, social isolation, and similar actions (Popadic, 2009, p. 13).

Employees in educational institutions play a significant role in the prevention and intervention of violence. In line with this, a series of regulations have been adopted to govern their actions both in the prevention of violence and in responding to cases of violence (General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Violence, 2022; Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse, and Neglect in educational institutions, 2007). These regulations outline activities that should be undertaken in educational institutions to prevent violence, including teaching about values and acceptance of diversity, promoting non-violent communication, and imparting moral and democratic values.

In addition to prevention, these regulations also specify the actions that employees should take in cases of violence, i.e., post-violence intervention. This primarily involves the consistent application of prescribed procedures in cases of violence, working with the victim and perpetrator, as well as collaborating with the family and other relevant institutions (Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse, and Neglect in educational institutions, 2007).

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2. RESEARCH ON SCHOOL VIOLENCE

Despite the fact that in the Republic of Serbia, legal regulations stipulate that one of the fundamental goals of education and upbringing is to provide a safe environment for children in educational institutions and to work on developing non-violent behavior, as well as establishing zero tolerance for violence (Law on the Foundations of the Education System and Upbringing, Article 8, point 2, 2017), educational institutions themselves are places where a large number of children first encounter violence (Janković, 2017).

UNICEF has launched the program "School Without Violence - Towards a Safe and Supportive Environment for Children." The implementation of this program began in the school year 2005/06. This program is carried out in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Council for the Rights of the Child, the Institute for the Advancement of Education and Upbringing, and since the school year 2008/09, it also involves the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. The main goal of "School Without Violence" is to create a safe and supportive environment for learning, work, and development. The duration of this program is not limited by time and is intended primarily for children, teachers, and school staff, as well as parents and the entire local community (www.unicef.rs).

One of the most comprehensive research efforts on school violence in our country was conducted as part of the project "School Without Violence - Towards a Safe and Supportive Environment for Children," initiated by UNICEF in collaboration with various government organizations in Serbia in 2005. This program is primarily aimed at students and employees in schools but also involves parents and the entire local community. Some data from various phases of the research have been communicated to both the professional and wider public. Additionally, a review and publication presenting the results in 160 schools across Serbia is in preparation.

One of the extensive studies, based on responses from 58,027 students from 120 schools and 7,860 employees in schools, including 5,645 teachers, 267 professional associates, 273 principals and secretaries, 73 school police officers, and 1,602 members of technical staff, concluded that student interactions are marked by frequent violent situations. However, the terms "perpetrator of violence" and "victim of violence," among others, were considered too strong and burdensome to describe such situations adequately.

There is a widespread climate of violence in classrooms, leading to a pervasive sense of insecurity among students. Every fourth student (27%) reports that there are students in their school they fear because they might be bullied and harassed. When it comes to forms of violence, students most commonly report direct verbal violence (insults and mocking) at 47%, followed by verbal relational violence at 34%, and physical violence at 20%. Students most frequently admit to engaging in direct verbal violence (33.5%) and then physical violence (15.7%). Overall, the study indicates that verbal violence, like in other countries, is the most prevalent form of peer violence. The research also highlighted the widespread occurrence of adult violence against children and violence by students against adults (www.unicef.rs).

Ozegovic conducted a study with the aim of determining the most common forms of aggressive behavior among elementary school-age students and identifying the causes of aggression and reactions to aggressive behavior. The results of this research showed that more than two-thirds of students had been exposed to some form of aggressive behavior, while 39.92% of students had not had such experiences. The most pronounced forms of aggression included name-calling (50%), teasing (44%), physical attacks (43%), threats (25%), and extortion of money (9%). In the majority of cases (53.16%), students openly admitted to engaging in some form of aggressive behavior themselves (Ozegovic, 2008).

In all schools surveyed so far in Serbia, research has been conducted on the types and intensity of violence. The study, conducted in 50 schools (with a sample of 26,947 students and 3,397 adults), showed that 65% of students had been exposed to some form of violent behavior at least once, and 24% had experienced it multiple times in a three-month period. The most prevalent forms of violent behavior included verbal abuse, spreading lies and rumors, threats, and intimidation (<http://sbn.mpn.gov.rs/o-skolibe-z-nasilja/o-programu-4046>).

The results of research on peer violence conducted in the Republic of Srpska showed that 60.5% of the 1,241 respondents believe that peer violence exists in schools. The participants considered physical violence to be most common in primary schools, and such cases are usually reported to the class teacher. In contrast, psychological violence was reported as more prevalent in secondary schools, and it is most often reported to the school counselor. Approximately 18.4% of the respondents recognized the presence of violence by school staff against children.

Students, 46.6% of them, believe that cases of peer violence are resolved by involving students, class teachers, the school counseling service, and parents in discussions. The research indicated that

children in schools recognize educational and preventive activities, but only 45.8% of elementary school students and 32.4% of high school students actively participate in them.

The Deputy Ombudsman for Children in the Republic of Srpska stated that the presentation of the research on peer violence in 18 primary and 17 secondary schools in the Republic of Srpska, conducted in 2012, is part of the celebration of Children's Week organized by the Ombudsman for Children of Srpska (<http://www.banjaluka.com/vijesti/drustvo/2013/10/09/vrsnjacko-nasilje-u-porastu/>).

Mikanovic and Popovic conducted a research study titled "Informal Violence in Elementary School." Through this research, they identified that students in the final grades of elementary school are exposed to various forms of informal violence, including rumors, provocations, segregation, marginalization, media harassment, and media insults. According to the research results, students are most exposed to provocations and least exposed to media insults.

Regarding the correlation between academic success and forms of informal violence, they found that a connection exists between academic success and rumors, segregation, marginalization, and media insults. In terms of involvement in extracurricular school activities, there is a statistically significant correlation only with provocations. Despite identifying different forms of informal violence, it is crucial to note that their prevalence is lower when academic success is higher. This suggests that students with better academic performance tend to exhibit better behavior and interactions with others. However, preventive programs to combat violence among elementary school students are still necessary (Mikanovic, Popovic, 2013).

The National Team for the Prevention of Peer Violence conducted a study on the attitudes and experiences of students, teachers, and parents regarding peer violence in schools in Serbia in 2019. The research showed that 47.4% of students have experienced some form of peer violence, while only 18.5% of students who experienced violence sought help from school staff. Source: https://www.zastonelement.org/uploads/1/1/4/4/114459677/istrazivanje_prevenicija_vrsnjackog_nasilja_u_skolama_u_srbiji.pdf.

In 2019, UNICEF released data indicating that approximately 65% of schoolchildren had experienced violence at least once. In the same research, they also reported that around 22% had reported experiencing frequent violence (<https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/vrsnjacko-nasilje-u-srbiji/>).

According to the research "Study on the Attitudes, Knowledge, and Experiences of Elementary and High School Students Regarding Peer Violence," conducted in 2020, nearly half of the respondents (48.8%) had experienced some form of peer violence, while a significant 13.9% of the respondents had been victims of violence in the last month. Source: <https://www.unicef.org/serbia/media/5246/file/Istra%C5%BEivanje%20stavova,%20znanja%20i%20iskustava%20u%C4%8Denika%20osnovnih%20i%20srednjih%20%C5%A1kola%20o%20vr%C5%A1nja%C4%8Dkom%20nasilju.pdf>.

In 2020, the organization ASTRA - Action Against Human Trafficking published a report on peer violence against children in Serbia. The report states that approximately 40% of high school students in Serbia have experienced some form of peer violence, and more than half of them have reported feeling unsafe in school. Source: https://www.astra.rs/upload/document/publication/file/2021/ASTRA_Vrsnjacko_nasilje_2020.pdf.

3. CONCLUSION

From everything we have highlighted so far, it can be concluded that peer violence is prevalent in schools, but it is necessary to continue with the prevention of violence in schools, starting from the very beginning of education.

In order to achieve one of the fundamental goals of education, which is to create a safe environment in schools and establish zero tolerance for violence, it is necessary to take daily preventive measures that educate children about the importance of non-violent communication. Collaboration with parents and other relevant institutions (such as the Center for Social Work) is essential to provide full support to children who are victims of violence and to work with children who perpetrate violence in order to change their behavior.

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