PEER VIOLENCE AS A PROBLEM OF THE MODERN SOCIETY

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SUMMARY

Introduction: The problem of peer violence is increasingly discussed. It is noticeable that it is not sufficiently researched and there is no sufficient information about its prevalence, forms, prevention methods, repression and coping with the problem and its consequences. It seems that it gets discussed more intensively only in case of a traumatic incident whose consequences cannot be denied and if they make a large impact on the entire society. To show the prevalence and manifestation of peer violence as well as problems in the prevention and addressing consequences of peer violence.

Methods: Data are collected from several studies on peer violence conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and worldwide.

Results: Collected data indicate that the peer violence ranges from 15% to 50% depending on the development of the country where research is conducted.

Conclusions: It is necessary to identify peer violence on time and respond in a timely manner. Any claim of a child needs to be taken seriously, because timely response prevents the child who experienced some form of violence to revenge or become violent. It is important to start raising awareness among children from their early age and train them on techniques of non-violent communication, forms of violence, the ways of expressing violence and its effects on victims and observers of violence and why it is important to talk about it. They need to know where to report violence and what the duties of relevant institutions are. In addition to children, it is important to raise awareness among parents, teachers, politicians as well as mental health professionals. The entire society needs to be involved in the prevention of peer violence.

Key words: violent behaviour - child abuse and neglect - prevention of violence

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INTRODUCTION

Peer violence as a social problem undoubtedly occurs often and as such is increasingly discussed nowadays. Unfortunately, it is more intensively discussed only when a traumatic event happens whose consequences cannot be denied and they make a large impact on the perpetrator, victims and the entire society. On the other hand, peer violence is not adequately understood as the term includes a range of forms of behaviour, from those that are a part of growing up and development (fight while playing, conflicts, prejudice) to serious forms classified as juvenile delinquency (Popadić 2009, Sesar 2011). Such behaviour, as well as many other forms of deviant behaviour, transform into a more aggressive form over years, and both victims and perpetrators are affected by such a trend. The former are victimized as they are directly affected, while the latter are victims of neglect by family, school, local community (Vlai-savljević 2015). This topic is not widely discussed in preschool, psychological and social literature. It is also the fact that violent behaviour is not sufficiently studied within the pedagogical studies, teachers' education and professional development of teachers, social workers, psychologists and healthcare workers dealing with mental health. It is the main reason why educators in kindergartens, pedagogues, teachers, psychologists are badly prepared to cope with the problem of violence (Baldry 2003). As a consequence of such an attitude of individuals, institutions and entire society, peer violence occurs. Although often widespread, it usually remains hidden resulting in negative repercussions for victims,

perpetrators and the society. Violence is never good and it makes no good to anyone – neither for the victims or perpetrators of violence nor for those who passively observe it. It is worrying that there is an increasing rate of peer violence because each society must look after children as the most protected part of the community (Anonymous 2008).

In order to discuss peer violence, we have to define violence first. There are many definitions and they are different because authors perceive it from different angles and with different goals focusing on various aspects of this problem using a large number of words such as violence, aggression, abuse, bullying that are related to the term or related terms bearing substantial and linguistic meaning of violence (Popadić 2009). For many years a Norwegian psychologist, Dan Olweus, has conducted research of violence among children in school environment and he defined bullying in the following manner: "A student is bullied or victimized when she/he is permanently exposed to negative acts by one or more peers, and a victimized child has difficulties to defend herself/himself from violent behaviour." Olweus makes a difference between the terms violence and bullying.

Violence is defined as aggressive behaviour where an attacker uses his/her body or another object to inflict a serious injury or discomfort to another person. According to Olweus the terms violence and bullying can be used as synonyms only if negative acts include physical force. Furthermore, Olweus claims that during violent behaviour there is a misbalance of power, be it physical force/weakness of an individual or a number of individuals who are involved. It is often the case that two

students or even a group of students perpetrate violence against one student, but he pointed out that there is always misbalance of power in cases of bullying or violence (Olweus 1998). Peer victimization and bullying are often wrongly and uniformly used.

Peer violence includes „all forms of physical, emotional and sexual violence and intimidation", which means that there is a wider scope of the concept of violent behaviour perpetrated or experienced by children. Bullying among children often happens without any obvious trigger. Negative behaviour may be expressed by physical contact, words or, in any other way (teasing, making grimaces, malicious gestures) or exclusion from the group (Vejmelka & Rojto 2013).

Research on bullying started more than forty years ago when the phenomenon was defined as "aggressive, intentional act committed by a group or an individual on several occasions and over a period of time against a victim who cannot easily defend herself/himself". There are three relevant criteria for defining aggressive behaviour as violent: (1) recurrence, (2) intentionality and (3) misbalance of power. Having in mind those characteristics, violent behaviour is often defined as systematic abuse of power by peers. Globally, it is recognised as a complex and serious problem by several international agencies. The World Health Assembly adopted a resolution in 1996 stating that violence was the leading world public health issue and called upon the Member States to address the issue of violence urgently. In the school context, mutual bullying is the most frequent form of violence among children and youth. Violent behaviour jeopardizes the children's rights including the right to education as provided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations 1989). There are special risks for vulnerable children such as children with disabilities, refugee children or those affected by migrations, socially excluded children, children belonging to a minority group or simply children different from their peers. Peer violence can be committed on the Internet, Facebook and other available networks (Modecki et al. 2014).

In order to have a complete picture on basic components of this problem, Grin Greene found that four key components can be singled out as basic features of violence. Firstly, violence is a kind of aggressive behaviour whereby the bully is trying to hurt, intimidate or cause fear of a victim. Secondly, violence always includes perceived or real difference in power between a bully and a victim. Thirdly, violent behaviour is generally recognized as a form of proactive aggression, which has no cause. Fourthly, violent behaviour includes repetition of such behaviour. These four characteristics make important features of behaviour that need to be taken into account for the prevention of peer violence (Greene 2003). The victim is generally defined as a person exposed to intentional damaging acts that are often repeated (Smith & Lopez-Castro 2016).

Types and forms of violence

Violent behaviour among peers can be manifested in different forms. Such behaviour is diverse and complex. Violence can be classified as direct and indirect. Direct violence is recognised for its open and direct attacks against the victim (mocking, humiliation, insulting, criticizing, ordering, pushing, pulling), while indirect violence includes the following forms: social isolation, ignoring, gossiping, inciting others to hurt someone. Violence can be verbal and non-verbal.

Field has made the following division of violence:

Teasing as verbal violence, which is considered as the most dangerous and long-lasting form of violence. The most frequent forms of teasing are related to appearance, sexuality and social acceptance. Teasing is painful because of the intent of a bully, sarcastic verbal communication, tone, facial expression and regular repetition.

Exclusion or "relational" violence is based on principles of social manipulation and can be openly expressed – „You cannot sit here with us." – it may also include indirect, subtle, hidden behaviour or non-verbal communication of the bully and others. The bully can manipulate the group without his direct involvement abusing his social status in order to attack the victim. The goal of social exclusion is to form a group identity that makes a strong control mechanism. Every member of the group knows that she/he may be the next victim if he tries to protect the victim.

Physical violence means regular attacks on someone weaker. It can be directly aggressive, such as beating, kicking and spitting, or indirect such as hurting by an act, suggestion, stalking and destruction or hiding of property. It may include grabbing victim's clothes and tearing it or fights in which the victim cannot defend herself/himself.

Harassment usually involves repeated questions, statements or attacks in terms of sexual, gender, racial, religious characteristics or ethnicity (Field 2007).

Sexual - it is defined as unwanted touch, pinching, and comments with sexual connotations (Taylor & Mumford 2016).

Cultural – insults on educational, ethnic, religious and racial grounds.

Economic violence – refers to theft, extortion of possessions or money.

Causes of violence

Some theoretical reviews consider bullies as individuals with no social skills, low self-esteem, failing to process social information, with weak social position in a group and other adjustment issues. Others believe that violent behaviour is functional, adjustable behaviour with some advantages. Empirical studies have not always managed to clarify this issue, partly because of the failure to recognise the heterogeneity of children

and adolescents who bully others. Some of them are victims themselves (so-called bully-victims), while others can be considered as "pure" (non-victimized) bullies. Bully victims are often unadjusted in relation to pure bullies. There was a rather common belief that low self-esteem leads to aggression including violent behaviour (Cook 2010). Suton et al. (1999) believed that bullies are socially incapable and they do not have adequate social behaviour.

Rodkin et al. (2015) identified three sub-types of bullies: popular and socially intelligent group, popular moderate group and unpopular socially intelligent group; the study pointed out the heterogeneity of children and adolescents involved in bullying. Overall, there is a need to understand better heterogeneity of students committing violence against their peers and their different motivation.

To show prevalence and forms of manifestation as well as problems we are facing in the prevention and addressing consequences of peer violence.

METHODS

Obtained data were collected from several studies on peer violence conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and worldwide. The data for the work were used from the following databases: Google, Pubmed, NCBI web site, Croatian scientific bibliography (CROSBI), Croatian Journal of Journalistic Studies (Hrčak).

Key words for browsing the database are: peer violence, child abuse and neglect, abuse in school, epidemiological study, prevalence, prevention of violence, behavior; child maltreatment, cross-study comparison.

RESULTS

In their studies Juvonen & Graham (2014) reported that approximately 20-25% young people were involved in violent behaviour as perpetrators, victims or both. Large-scale studies have shown that 4-9% of young people have violent behaviour and that 9-25% of children of school age were bullied. A smaller subgroup of young people who were both bullies and victims was identified.

In a meta-analysis by Modecki et al. (2014) concerning intimidation and prevalence of bullying on the Internet that was conducted on a sample of 335.519 young people (aged 12-18), it was estimated that the average prevalence of 35% for the traditional violent behaviour (of both the bully and victims of crime) and 15% for the participation of bullying on the Internet.

In a study by Taylor & Mumford (2016) on teen relationships and intimate violence of young persons aged 12 to 18 years (n=1,804), it was found that out of 37% examinees who reported about the current and previous year, 69% reported life victimisation. Although psychical abuse occurred more frequently (over 60%),

rate of sexual violence (18%) and physical violence (18%). Results of the study have shown that only 12% of examinees reported perpetrators of physical violence and 12% sexual violence. Although a smaller percentage of perpetrators of violence was reported, these percentages of violence were significant and raised concern.

Ybarra et al. (2016) found in their survey that national epistemological data on life rates of psychological, physical and sexual violence against adolescents were missing both for perpetrators and victimisations for the same sample of young people. In a study involving 1058 randomly selected, young persons aged 14-21 from the United States completed online questionnaires during 2011 and/or 2012. Half of the young women (51%) and 43% of men reported victimisation.

Results from Latin America show a high prevalence of violent behaviour in 40-50% of teenagers in Peru and Columbia. A survey on peer violence among adolescents from Peru included 12000 children. The results have shown that 47.3% of examinees were abused at the age of 8, 30.4% at the age between 12 and 21.9 % at the age of 15 (Oliveros et al. 2009).

As far as Africa is concerned, Greeff and Grobler (2008) found in their research that 56.4% of South African students had experienced violence. A recent study was conducted in Algeria on a sample of 1452 school children 8, 10 and 12 showing that 25-35% of children experience violent behaviour (Tiliouine 2015).

Although the problem of peer violence is present and topical, there have not been many studies published in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) that could present the current situation and confirm that the issue is being actively addressed. The joint Balkan Epidemiological Study on Child Abuse and Neglect (BECAN) study involving nine Balkan countries confirmed that it is a big problem and of similar nature. The Balkans epidemiological study on abuse and neglect of children was aimed at collecting internationally comparable data on exposure to violence in childhood. The threefold stratified sample of 42194 children attending school was used as a method (rate of responses of 66.7%) in three classes (aged 11, 13 and 16) in schools in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYRM), Greece, Romania, Serbia and Turkey. The research results for Bosnia and Herzegovina were devastating, which was the worst in almost all observed aspects of exposure to violence. The exposure to physical violence was 42.5% (FYRM), and 51.0% (Bosnia) in 2017. Numerous data on sexual violence were the highest for lifetime prevalence in Bosnia (18.6%), and the lowest in FYRM (7.6%). Sexual violence and the contact with sexual violence in the previous year, 2017, were the lowest in Romania (5.0 and 2.1%), and highest in B&H (13.6 and 7.7%). Past neglect and lifetime prevalence was highest in BiH (48.0 and 20.3%), and lowest in Romania (22.6 and 16.7%). Most participants from all the countries repor-

ted positive experience with parents' involvement in solving problems of violence against children (Nikolaidis et al. 2018).

In 2009 the Public Health Institute of Una-Sana Canton researched peer violence in schools of Una-Sana Canton. The study included 627 students from three municipalities of Una-Sana Canton (Bihać, Cazin, Sanski Most). The total sample included 320 male and 307 female students aged 10 to 16 years. It was reported that 44.3% of examinees had never been exposed to violence, 4.5% of examinees often experienced violence and 2.2% had experienced it every day. Almost half of the examinees tend to respond to violence violently, which results in a tendency of increased violent behaviour in the school environment. Most acts of violence happen actually in classrooms when teachers are absent, and it causes occasional or permanent feeling of insecurity in 11% of examinees. This study concluded that peer violence in schools is a significant problem both for children and parents, for school staff and entire society having in mind consequences arising from it, and it requires a multidisciplinary approach and continuous work with the most vulnerable population – children attending primary school (Cepić 2010).

A research conducted in Serbia by Popadić & Plut (2007) found that the most common form of peer violence was insulting, mocking, giving insulting names 45.4%, gossiping 32.6% and physical violence 19.3%.

In their research conducted in several counties in Croatia, Reić - Ercegovac (2016) obtained the following data: peer violence in the form of insults and offensive names was experienced by 76.8%, beating or pushing 56.7%, pulling hair or clothes 37.6%, sending nasty messages via SMS, email or social networks 45.3%.

A significant number of students-observers of violence remained silent, 29.1% of them being boys, who were more often silent about the violence they had seen against other students, 37.9%, as compared with girls 21.5% (Kodžopeljić et al. 2010).

The family and the socio-economic environment, or the social environment, are very important for preconditions for the emergence of peer violence, as confirmed by research in New Orleans from 2016. In addition, the findings suggest that the social environment in the community and the household are important targets for interventions in terms of reducing exterminating behavior and improving long-term outcomes for young people at risk of exposure to violence (Fleckman 2016).

Nikčević-Milković A (2006). In all the researches concluded that the higher percentage of all forms of peer violence in Gospić, but in the rest of Croatia, caused by the great war destruction of this town and the war trauma and the low socio-economic status that are present in this city refected to children.

Violence is more common among boys and older students, as well as students who perceive more destructive interpersonal relationships among pupils in school.

Most violent violence is experienced by younger students and students who perceive more than the school is insecure. The authors suggest that the school, with the support of the local community, initiates and conducts a preventive program of peer violence with the aim of creating constructive and prosocial relationships among students and ensuring a sense of security for everyone, especially for younger students.The teacher plays the most important role in achieving and maintaining a high quality interpersonal relationship with the student (Vlah & Pergar 2014).

Veliki & Ozdanovac are examining which preventive programs aimed at reducing peer violence are conducted in elementary schools in the Osijek-Baranja County area and what their success is. The research was conducted with professional associates (pedagogues and psychologists) employed in 67 elementary schools in the Osijek-Baranja County. Research findings have shown that most schools (91%) in this county are implementing one of the peer violence prevention programs. The results also show that the schools in which the preventive program runs for several years consecutively estimate that there is a greater reduction in violence in these schools. The opinions of pedagogues and teachers gathered through the questionnaire are largely confirmed by research in the Osijek-Baranja County area, as most respondents point out the lack of a general system, teachers regularly (often and often) include pedagogues when they discover peer violence, pointing to the necessity of conversation primarily with the parents, and only later if it is necessary to involve others (psychologist, social worker, health workers, police).

DISCUSSION

Children or persons below the age of 18 are protected by the Constitution of BiH and international documents ratified by our State. As a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child of 1989, Bosnia and Herzegovina has the obligation to protect children's rights and in this case there is also the obligation of combating violence against children including peer violence. In order to comply with its commitments, Bosnia and Herzegovina established the Council for Children under the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees. The Council creates and analyses activities aimed at the protection of the rights of the child through State mechanisms and activities of civil society organisations. In its Action Plan for Combating Peer Violence for the period 2015-2018, the Council for Children of B&H, inter alia, called upon relevant Ministries of Education and Pedagogical Institutes to make a specific plan to prevent peer violence in schools based on an initiative of the B&H Council for Children, and to report on completed activities. They also called upon all institutions, organisations and associations working with children and for children (in all fields, i.e. education, healthcare, social protection, culture, sport, security, justice

etc.) to develop codes of conduct for employees and ensure continuous education and implementation of the Code of Conduct (Anonymous 2016).

The importance of teachers in preventing, recognizing and assisting children is important because they are the caretakers of the teaching process, present at all times and are acquainted with procedures for dealing with cases of peer violence, if they exist. There are special protocols in schools in the Middle-Bosnian canton that the teaching staff has only developed and there are certain guidelines from the Pedagogical Institute, but not at the level of the decree, and do not constitute an official document, although teachers and school management serve with it. The Protocol on the Treatment of Violence in Schools (hereinafter referred to as the Protocol) regulates the rights, obligations and responsibilities of the school principals, professional associates, teachers / educators, classmates, pupils, parents and other school staff in situations of increased risk and violence at school, to protect students and all employees (Anonymous 2013).

Consideration of the problem of inter-religious violence can not therefore be seen separately from other violence against the child because they all influence the psychological state of the child with the possible serious consequences, which was largely confirmed by the BECAN research, most concerned with the investigation of the consequences of all kinds of violence over a child (Nikolaidis et al. 2018).

Abused children often have problems with verbalizing internal emotional states and experiences for fear, shame, trauma recovery, and memory difficulties, visual expression through symbols can help them cognizably difficult to understand and externalize the symptoms of trauma and feelings of impotence. Knowing the specificity of the drawing of abused children can make a significant contribution to the recognition of this problem and serve as a starting point for talking to the child about what he wanted to express (indirect interviews) (Bilić 2011).

However, one has to keep in mind that the problem of peer violence is present in almost all countries of the world. Therefore, it exists in highly developed countries, which did not have the past as our country. For that reason, the social context should not be overestimated although it is one of the systems important for the development of each individual (having in mind that not all individuals growing up in that context become bullies, victims or bullies/victims). In addition to necessary changes and influence at all social levels (individual, peer, family and school), there should an attempt to contribute to increased number of protective facts through adequate preventive and response activities aimed at decreasing peer violence. Although various authors determine and define violence in different ways, it is still possible to identify many common features in such definitions, which is done by some authors.

Cui & Liu (2018) investigated three types of child abuse including physical violence, emotional violence and neglect as well as behavioural problems in childhood. In their meta-analysis they reviewed findings of 42 studies conducted in 98,749 children in continental China. They concluded that there is no adequate protection to prevent child abuse and that relevant agencies in continental China have to work on the establishment of an efficient system of child protection in order to prevent violence against children.

Children who are victims of peer violence suffer from distress and the negative consequences of such actions; while for bullies, violence is a means of reinforcing an unsuitable model for solving their own problems. Therefore, we all have to make an effort to prevent violence, to recognize and handle this violence in its early stages, to protect victims and find suitable treatment for bullies. School counselors are the first to whom victims of peer violence usually go for help. It is therefore very important that school counselors obtain suitable knowledge on how to act in the case of peer violence. In the process of preventing and reducing the level of violence it is necessary to include all the people involved in the educational process (Javornik-Krečič et al. 2013).

In order to provide best protection for young people it is important to understand the prevalence of abuse via cyber and traditional violence behaviour in adolescents. Modecki et al. concluded that traditional abuse was twice as much frequent than cyber bullying (Modecki et al. 2014).

CONCLUSION

Studies conducted worldwide and in the States of the former Yugoslavia indicate that peer violence is spreading and it is getting epidemic proportions. The statistics is showing devastating data. Almost every fourth child, who was exposed to violence, has seriously suffered and if the problem is not recognized in time, serious mental problems may occur.

Although there have been many years since the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina and at the territory of the former Yugoslavia, consequences of war trauma with the impact of all negative effects as a result of the war and poor socio-economic situation are still present and lead to an increase in peer violence, which is more pronounced than in the developed countries, where there was no war.

Society, parents, teachers, school curricula, living conditions, mutual disrespect, lack of the culture of dialogue and general culture of communication, media and many other things have influenced increased violence in the society reflecting on schools as well.

On the other hand, the atmosphere of support, understanding, mutual respect between students and teachers,

environment responsive to violence will contribute to decreased level of violence in schools. If there is weak control of students' behaviour and inadequate response to every case of violence in schools, many incidents will remain unnoticed thus making violence an "acceptable" way of behaviour.

It is necessary to see and respond to peer violence on time and take every claim of the child seriously, because timely reaction prevents the child who experienced violence to become a retaliator or bully.

Early education on techniques of non-violent communication, forms of violence, way of its expressing and its effects on the victims, bullies and observers of violence, is very important. Therefore, it is important to report violence and to know who to report to, as well as the duties of relevant institutions.

In addition to the education of children, it is important to train parents on how to recognise symptoms of violence and how to talk to their child.

Since peer violence has become a global problem of the entire society it is also important to educate all members of the society, from politicians, police, pedagogues, teachers, healthcare staff, and social workers.

The Protocol on the Response to Peer Violence in Schools needs to be promoted and amended. Schools should be continuously promoting rules of behaviour at school and in class in order to improve school environment to reduce forms of socially unacceptable behaviour. Schools should be strengthening their capacities in order to be able to provide timely individual support to children at risk of becoming violent and to children victims of violence. Prevention needs to be a part of school programs or a part of the curriculum in order to ensure systematic and continuous course of action of all participants in the education process.

Contribution of individual authors:

Edin Bjelošević: conception and design of the manuscript, collecting data and literature searches, analyses and interpretation of data, manuscript preparation and writing the paper; and gave final approval of the version to be submitted.

Sonja Bjelošević: made substantial contributions to conception and design, participated in revising the manuscript and gave final approval of the version to be submitted.

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