
Detection of risk factors and prevention of violent behavior in the education system

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Abstract

Schools should be defined as social institutions that deal with education and the upbringing of children, places where these goals are achieved in a safe and secure environment. However, in the past ten years, schools have become stages for displaying different forms of violence, which have become increasingly common, and more serious in terms of analyzing the consequences. The purpose of this study is to indicate the risk factors which are the foundation of violent means of behavior of an adolescent, and which could be recognized before the externalization of violent behavior patterns in school environments. This study analyses the significance of individual personality characteristics, family dynamics and social interactions during the period of the formation of a personality while maturing, by comparing the results of the studies we have had so far, in order to find a method to determine the risk factors which are more probable to, relatively early in life of a person, indicate the greater probability for manifesting different forms of antisocial behavior in the social environment. This study signalizes the significance of educating family members and raising the level of professional awareness of school workers, as well as of those employed in other structures of social community for the sake of recognizing early signs that school children may be liable to committing violent acts, with the aim of making preventive intervention multisectoral, timely and effective.

Key words: school violence, risk factors, protective factors, prevention

Detection of risk factors and prevention of violent behavior in the education system

Introduction

Violence is a complex social phenomenon that requires the attention of experts from various profiles, institutions, families, and schools. Educational institutions should represent a safe place for every child and employee. However, modern societies bring with them numerous problems, among which are various forms of violent behavior in educational institutions. Violence in schools appears more and more common in the most diverse forms and represents any form of verbal or non-verbal behavior done once or repeatedly that has the effect of actually or potentially endangering the health, development, and dignity of the personality of a child/student or adult/employee. Violence and abuse can occur in the form of physical, psychological (emotional), sexual, social, and/or digital.

According to the special protocol for the protection of children and students from violence, abuse, and neglect in educational institutions (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, 2007), the system is obliged to provide all children, who are an integral part of it, with safe and optimal conditions for a smooth stay and education, as well as to protect them from all forms of violence, abuse, and neglect. Any of the aforementioned forms of violence constitutes a violation of one of the child's basic rights stated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1989, which is the right to life, survival, and development.

According to the current legislation and by-laws of the Republic of Serbia, the rights of children and students in the Republic of Serbia are exercised in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, ratified international agreements, the Criminal Code ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 85/05, 88/05 - correction, 107/05 - correction, 72/09, 111/09, 121/12, 104/13, 108/14, 94/16 and 35/19), the Law on Juvenile Criminal Offenders and Criminal Legal Protection of

Juveniles ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 85/05), the Criminal Procedure Code ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 72/11, 101/11, 121/12, 32/13, 45/13, 55/14, 35/19, 27/21 – US and 62/21 – US), the Law on Misdemeanors ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 65/13, 13/16 i 98/16 – US, 91/190 – other law, 91/19 i 112/22), the Family Law ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 18/05, 72/11 – other law, and 6/15), the Law on General Administrative Procedure ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 18/16 i 95/18 - authentic interpretation and 2/23 - US), the Law on Prohibition of Discrimination ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 22/09 and 52/21), the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 94/16 and 10/23 – other law), the Law on Special Measures for the Prevention of Criminal Offenses Against Sexual Freedom against Minors ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 32/13), the Law on the Basics of the Education and Training System ("Official Gazette of the RS", no. 88/17, 27/18 – other law, 10/19, 6/20, 129/21 and 92/23), the Law on pupil and student standards ("Official Gazette of the", no. 18/17, 55/13, 27/18 – other law and 10/19 – other law) and other regulations regulating the rights of children and students, as well as relevant international acts ratified by the Republic of Serbia, which regulate the rights of children and students.

In addition to the legal acts regulating matters related to violence and protection from violence in the educational system, we are increasingly witnessing the tragic consequences of violent forms of behavior in modern practice, the media, and everyday life. Laws, certainly, regulate the domain of consequences, activating them in situations where violence occurs. Nevertheless, in order to prevent the factors that lead to the consequences, it is necessary to take timely, preventive action as a primary measure to prevent violence in schools.

The special protocol for protecting children and students from violence defines prevention measures and intervention measures, which include structured and precisely defined activities aimed at creating a safe environment for students' lives and work, as well as interventions in situations where manifestations of violence occur. Precisely defined prevention measures include the creation and nurturing of a climate of acceptance, tolerance, and respect; inclusion of all interest groups

(children, students, teachers, professional associates, administrative and other staff, directors, parents, guardians, and the local community) in the adoption and development of prevention programs; raising the level of awareness and increasing the sensitivity of everyone involved in the life and work of the institution to recognize violence, abuse, and neglect; defining procedures and methods for protection against violence and responding in situations of violence; informing everyone involved in the life and work of the institution about the procedures and methods for protection against violence and reacting in situations of violence and improving the competences of teaching and non-teaching staff, children, students, parents, guardians, and the local community for noticing and solving problems of violence, abuse, and neglect. The analysis of the aforementioned activities concludes that, in addition to these activities, all actors participating in the educational system, starting with the child and continuing through the family, teachers, and experts in the field of social protection and mental health protection, should engage in continuous multisectoral action to detect and recognize individual warning signs and risk factors for potential violent offenders. This implies that educated participants in the process of violence prevention at the level of educational institutions work to recognize problematic behaviors and activities of potential juvenile perpetrators of violence so that, after the initial screening, they are provided with adequate support and help in solving the observed problems. To apply this prevention principle, it is first necessary to educate all structures that are part of the educational system directly or indirectly (teachers, pedagogues, psychologists, and parents).

Methodology

By analyzing and comparing the results of research carried out in our country and around the world in the past two decades, the topic of which is juvenile violence in educational institutions, we tried to define the concept of violence prevention in schools in relation to risk factors and protective factors, as well as to try to determine so-called early warning signs that could indicate potential minor perpetrators of violence in the school environment. We compared studies using similar

methodological approaches to gain a more precise overview of the issues addressed in this paper, aiming to minimize diversity and error. Special emphasis was placed on studies that dealt with revealing the personality characteristics of juvenile perpetrators of violence in schools, as well as those that used narrowly specifically constructed and standardized assessment questionnaires adapted to the school-age population. The assessment aimed to answer the question of which variables, based on the results of the applied tests, are more likely to predict the possibility of displaying maladaptive forms of behavior with signs of aggression. This methodological approach indicated the possibility that, through certain specific variables, a set of "precursors" for the violent behavior of a certain minor person can be defined which is similar to the process of profiling an unknown perpetrator. This approach brings the field of analyzing the characteristics of potential juvenile offenders closer to the criminal analysis of a perpetrator's personality in forensics. A prerequisite for such analyses is certainly a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of criminal behavior.

The origin of violent behavior

The assessment of different forms of human behavior, especially maladaptive ones, begins with the analysis of possible causes for a certain behavioral pattern. It bears similarities to the violent behavior patterns that emerge during puberty and adolescence. Each person is an individual for themselves and, as such, is a unique experiment in nature. Their biological predispositions, early experiences in the family environment and later in the wider social context, and the influence of environmental factors (peer groups, authorities, media content) play a key role in the formation of personality attitudes, ways of thinking, and attitudes towards themselves and others.

There are a number of attempts to explain the nature of aggressive or violent behaviour. We can classify these attempts into several groups:

1. Theories about the biological basis of aggressiveness
2. Frustration theory of aggressiveness

3. Theories of aggressiveness as an outcome of social learning
4. Theories of social information processing
5. Theory of "mind" (cognitivist)
6. Theories about violence as a group phenomenon
7. Ecological (systemic) approach
8. Concept of risk and protective factors
9. Concept of resilience

Orpinas and Horne's initial research on violent behavior sought an explanation within the framework of aggressiveness theories (Orpinas & Horne, 2006). However, no single theory has provided a satisfactory explanation of this complex phenomenon. Recently, attention has been focused on the so-called integrative models of aggressive behavior, primarily Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to this model, it is easier to categorize potential risk factors in the occurrence of violence and analyze their interrelationships. This approach could be labeled as a broader theoretical approach, akin to a meta-theory, from which more specific theoretical approaches emerge. According to Kurt Lewin and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, each person develops five ecological systems: the biosystem, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. Activities, roles, and relationships with other people within life contexts determine the individual's development in such a way that broader contexts (school, state, etc.) cause changes in the person's macrosystem, which in turn leads to a change in behavior. According to this theoretical approach, violence does not occur in isolation. This phenomenon is encouraged and/or inhibited by complex connections between the individual, family, peer group, school, community, and culture, as international and our researchers emphasize in their research (Espelage & Swearer, 2010; Kon, 1991; Popadić, 2009). The described model, based on additional analyses by the mentioned authors, views the social context as a multi-layered ecological structure with complex interactions and strong interdependence, ultimately influencing an individual's development. The effects of different factors at different levels, in combination, increase the

probability of an individual exhibiting violent behavior. This is about the factors of the external environment that have a direct and indirect effect and act in combination with individual, psychological, and biological characteristics of the personality in the period of early childhood.

Forms of juvenile violence in schools

There are different forms and characteristics of interpersonal violence in the real and virtual world (Merđović, Vuđović, 2022). School violence is a generic term that encompasses numerous maladaptive forms of behavior such as assault (with or without a weapon), threats of force, bomb threats, sexual assault, bullying or intimidation, arson, extortion, theft, and gang activity (Furlong, 2000). Initially a criminal justice problem, school violence has become a global social and health problem. The term "school violence" came into widespread use in the early 1990s to describe violent and aggressive acts on US school campuses (Debarbieuk, 2003; Jewkes, 2001; Finkelhor, 2005). In terms of the scope of its consequences, frequency of occurrence, or qualitative characteristics, violence in schools has not abated or decreased since then. We are still seeking adequate methods to solve this continuous, global problem. According to research, between 3 and 27% of schoolchildren commit violence and between 9 and 32% suffer from it, making it a worrisome phenomenon and a significant social problem (Stassen Berger, 2007; Sušac, Rimac & Ajduković, 2016). According to most researchers, there are five main modalities of violence within the educational system: verbal, social, physical, sexual violence, and so-called *bullying*, i.e., mistreatment or agonizing, which contains some of the elements of the previous four types of violent patterns of behavior at school.

According to numerous authors, verbal violence is one of the most common forms of violence because it can have an immediate impact, often in front of an audience, with very little effort on the perpetrator's part. One can direct name-calling, insulting, threatening, and unpleasant remarks at one or more individuals, aiming to create vulnerable groups of people. Sexual orientation, ethnicity, and learning disabilities are important for those who want to gain power at the expense of others.

Physical violence encompasses not only physical acts such as hitting and kicking, but also indirect forms such as taking property, damaging property, or destroying school supplies, all aimed at incapacitating an individual; in other words, there is a physical manifestation of violence, but it does not necessarily result in physical pain. Such forms of violence encompass extortion (a tactic in which the threat of violence compels the victim to surrender money or property), as well as the use of physical violence or intimidating gestures and body language. When a disagreement between students escalates into a fight, we rarely refer to it as violence because there is no intention to cause harm. By all means, there is an intention to hurt the other party, and individuals may feel pain, but such an interaction differs from violence because of the equal social power of those who fought.

Social violence is defined as intentional exclusion from social groups or intimidation within a group. Similar to other types of violence, social violence can occur directly, resulting in the victim's exclusion, or indirectly, occurring without the victim's presence. The victim doesn't experience it until they learn about it or attempt to join the group and face rejection.

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defines sexual violence in schools as any attempted or realized sexual act or sexual contact, followed by abuse without contact, where the victim either does not consent, is unable to consent, or refuses to consent (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2002). Research identifies several characteristics of juvenile perpetrators of this form of violence, including antisocial behavior, a general tendency towards aggressive behavior, the use of psychoactive substances, poor quality relationships with parents, exposure to parental violence, inadequate parenting practices and styles, and a lack of support within the primary family. Peer group members often express a close association with delinquent or violent peers. Some narrowly specific risk factors for committing sexual violence include irrational beliefs, such as myths about rape, the attitude that "the victim is to blame" and that they "asked for it," deviant sexual fantasies, and perceived peer support for

such an act. The second group of potential risk factors, according to DeGue and Massetti, are the factors of the organization of the educational institution: the aloofness of the school, inadequate organization of work, lack of control mechanisms of the school system, and the availability of psychoactive substances in the environment (DeGue&Massetti GM, 2013).

Bullying or agonizing is defined as the systematic abuse of power by peers through repeated aggressive behavior or intentional injury. It involves a power imbalance between the victim and the bully. It can take the form of direct bullying, which includes physical and verbal acts of aggression such as hitting, stealing, or calling names, or indirect bullying, which is characterized by the victim's social exclusion and the spreading of rumors about him. Children who bullied others, those who were bullied, and those who were both bullied and were bullies had significant, almost identical health problems, including psychosomatic disorders and mental health problems (depression, suicide attempts, anxiety, hyperactivity, substance abuse, and disorders in nutrition).

Permanent "use" of social networks (Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020a), as well as the absence of a security culture, contributed to the emergence of specific forms of digital violence, including Internet pedophilia (Bjelajac & Filipović, 2020b). A specific form of bullying in schools today is increasingly common digital bullying (cyberbullying), which is defined as "deliberate and repeated harm to another person" that manifests itself in the form of threats, harassment, ridicule, and exclusion of a person on social networks and in the virtual environment. This form of bullying also includes sexual harassment of minors and sharing their personal content via networks or outside of them (explicit photos, intimate videos, etc.). Research shows that the consequences of digital victimization are more pronounced compared to traditional victimization and that they lead to depression, anxiety, social isolation, reduced self-confidence and self-esteem, physical health disorders, and the emergence of suicidal ideas and intentions (Schrock et al., 2011; Giumetti&Kowalski, 2016).

Risk factors of violent behavior of minors

According to Greenberg, risk factors for certain behaviors are scientifically defined characteristics or determinants for which there is evidence of a strong causal relationship with a particular problem (Greenberg, 2013). These factors, according to research from the nineties of the last century in the field of criminology, can have a direct impact on the individual experience of an individual or remodel the links between the risk of violent behavior and the manifestations of such behavior (Zingraff et al., 1993). This means that certain biological and psychological personality traits identified in the population of young children can increase their vulnerability to negative environmental influences during development and cause various forms of non-adaptive behavior styles, including violence during puberty and adolescence.

Numerous factors contribute to the emergence and strengthening of violent patterns of behavior among children and young people. We can divide factors that influence the manifestation of violence into internal and external categories. Internal factors pertain to the individual's personality, encompassing inherited and acquired traits (psychophysical personality characteristics), while external factors encompass the social environment (family, school, and peer group). The existence of these factors and the causes of violent behavior, among other things, should be sought both in the child's personality as well as in the conditions of life in the family, family-interpersonal relationships, (mis)understanding of parents and children, as well as between children, in the educational procedures and attitudes of parents.

According to Romano et al., factors related to a child's functioning at school include problems and frustrations stemming from lower grades, misunderstandings with teachers, punishments for tardiness and non-attendance, misunderstandings with peers, and violence stemming from the need to feel strong, "big", significant, due to a lack of empathy, an overly strong desire to prove, as well as in society as a whole due to economic-political, social, and moral crises,

wars, unemployment, and disruption of the value system (Romano et al., 2005) All the factors mentioned in complex interrelationships increase the risk of the possible expression of violent patterns of behavior under certain circumstances, as well as in cases where one of the factors becomes a "trigger" in terms of intensity.

Research on the topic of manifestations of violence in the school-age population indicates two possible trajectories of the onset of violence. The first would imply sequences of escalating behaviors in the preschool period, such as early aggressiveness, defiance, and non-compliance with norms and rules of behavior. According to the study's results, such children are more likely to exhibit various forms of maladaptive and even criminal behavior in the later stages of their lives. The second, more common trajectory of violence suggests that the first signs of violent behavior emerge between the ages of 13 and 14, peaking between 16 and 18 (Satcher, 2001). Whether or not a certain young person in the period of his development, before and during the period of puberty and adolescence, will have a tendency to display violent forms of behavior will depend on the complex constellation of risk and protective factors that are part of the personality's life history.

As we have already stated, numerous studies indicate the existence of various risk factors underlying maladaptive, violent, and even antisocial forms of behavior. We can group all these factors based on their occurrence during childhood, and whether they are individual personality characteristics or the result of external environmental factors. According to Bjelajac, each person has his own developmental path, the characteristics of which can be identified relatively early. The developmental perspective is actually a path on which numerous risk factors can be observed, which in a certain period of a person's life can lead to the triggering of violence and even antisociality (Bjelajac, 2023).

One of the classifications, accepted in the world's professional circles, distinguishes three groups of developmental risk factors for the emergence of behavioral problems during the period of puberty and adolescence (Justicia et al. 2006):

1. Individual/psychological
2. Family
3. Risk factors related to school and peer group

The role of psychological risk factors as predisposing factors in the emergence of various forms of maladaptive behavior is evident. These factors include personality characteristics, comorbid psychiatric conditions, value systems and attitudes, affective components, and motivation. The mutual interaction of psychological factors can consequently lead to problematic behaviors.

Individual and psychological risk factors for violent behavior during puberty and adolescence include characteristics and patterns such as poor conflict management skills, manifestations of anger, a poor repertoire of social skills, the availability of weapons, experiences of humiliation or rejection, patterns of threats or abuse of others, experiences of abuse or neglect (physical, emotional, or sexual), social isolation, and learning difficulties.

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between gender and aggressiveness, as well as violence in the peer population. The results of studies indicate that boys in the preschool period are more prone to aggressive behavior than girls (Keenan & Shaw, 1997). We assume that cultural factors and gender-related temperamental characteristics play a role in this. Furthermore, boys have a higher prevalence of conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder than girls. According to Lahey et al., the symptoms of conduct disorder in early childhood are more pronounced in boys, which manifest themselves in the form of inflicting physical injuries on other children (Lahey et al., 2000).

According to current diagnostic criteria, the main characteristic of the oppositional defiant disorder is a repetitive pattern of irritable behavior with elements of anger, quarrelsome or defiant behavior, and/or vindictiveness (DSM V). It is crucial to conduct a thorough psychological and psychiatric evaluation and long-term observation of children suspected of having oppositional defiant disorder, to avert potential significant outbursts in school and the wider social environment, and to mitigate the consequences of these behaviors.

When we talk about risk factors, we certainly have to refer to the primary family, which represents the environment in which the child grows up, forming his way of thinking, reacting, building moral and other attitudes, and adopting patterns of desirable and undesirable behaviors. Parents undoubtedly have the greatest influence on children, especially in the early stages of their development. In addition to the security it provides to the child, the family can also be a generator of risk factors determined by the structure, characteristics, and interactions within it. Among the risk factors related to the primary family, the most frequently mentioned are poor financial status of the family, maladjusted activities of the parents, ineffective parenting styles, absence or reduced supervision and parental control, absence of emotional support, and inconsistent discipline. Some of these factors are static, while others are dynamic. A criminal history, parental mental health issues, and early childhood abuse and neglect are examples of static risk factors, whereas appropriate prevention and treatment programs can modify dynamic risk factors (inadequate parental behavior, domestic violence, and parental addiction). Exposure to a greater number of the listed risk factors places the family in the high-risk category. Criminological studies emphasize the importance of the primary family as a key etiological factor in the origin and development of antisocial behavior in children and adolescents (Bjelajac, 2023). We should certainly not overlook the importance of parenting styles and practices, which represent parental patterns of behavior and ways in which parents and guardians communicate with their children. We can classify some parenting styles and practices as risk factors because they appear to contribute to delinquency. An authoritarian style of upbringing, based on the child's negative feelings in the form of resistance and fear, can, in the case of child disobedience, lead to problematic child behavior not only in puberty but also in later periods of life. In a permissive upbringing style, the child has low social responsibility and apparent independence, as a result of which he can easily fall under the influence of different, often delinquent, peer groups. An avoidant or neglectful parenting style, which fails to provide the child with adequate warmth and control, can lead to the child

feeling insecure, unloved, and lonely within the family. Children can transfer their negative and frustrating emotions to the school environment, causing them to feel alienated and unable to react emotionally with their peers, potentially leading to antisocial behavior.

Parental supervision, or the degree to which the child receives supervision, discipline, and direction, is a significant dimension of parental style. Children of parents who do not establish clear boundaries in relation to violent behavior towards peers and adults (permissive parents) will increase the child's aggression and thus the risk of later violent behavior. According to Olweus, if the child does not receive punishment for their aggressive behaviors, they tend to integrate these aggressive reactions into their repertoire, as they fail to adopt the mechanisms that inhibit aggression. With their attitudes, a permissive and tolerant parent can influence a child's increased aggressiveness (Olweus, 1980). Under the supervision of the parents, who respect the pre-set rules in the family, it is possible to prevent certain risks for the child and expose him to inadequate, frustrating, or even aggressive content, all while respecting his independence.

No less important factor that can increase the level of a child's violent forms of behavior is the physical punishment of the child and the violent emotional outbursts of the parents. According to one of the studies, children who behave violently towards their peers at school grew up in families where parents tend to be violent towards each other or towards children. Such families explain the violent behavior of children and adolescents as learned behavior (Baldry, 2003). In addition to child abuse, witnessing violence in the family is also a risk factor for the manifestation of aggressive behavior and, thus, violence among peers.

The turbulent and sensitive period of growing up and schooling presents numerous challenges, including a qualitatively new form of socialization, building relationships with authorities, and interacting with peers, all of which significantly impact a minor's personality development. Peer relationships are unique and specific, and they can be a source of both joy and frustration. Peer rejection during puberty and adolescence can significantly impact a child's sensitive, immature

personality, particularly during this period when peers' influence surpasses that of the family. The reasons for rejection are various and numerous. Studies reveal that children who face rejection from their peers often experience elevated anxiety, feelings of loneliness, depression symptoms, substance abuse, aggressive behavior, decreased academic performance, and even school dropout. Young people in puberty and adolescents seem to use specific cognitive strategies to deal with everyday challenges, and their brain structures continue to mature during the transition to adulthood. Considering the importance of peer relations in this period, the negative consequences of rejection by peers can be numerous and very intense. Peer group rejection typically signals an individual's "unworthiness," with the group's influence on self-evaluation peaking between the ages of 13 and 17. It often happens that a student, rejected by his peers, starts socializing with antisocial peers who have gone through similar experiences of rejection. Such interactions and relationships can be potentially risky due to the "association" and aggravation of feelings of injury, which can consequently lead to the manifestation of aggression aimed at "punishing" and taking revenge on the peer group that rejected and excluded them as unworthy.

Among the most significant risk factors in the context of the school environment are aggressive forms of behavior in classes, experiences of peer rejection, association with deviant peers, destruction of material goods, and vandalism. If the response of teachers, school pedagogues, and psychologists to such forms of behavior is ineffective, with an inadequate, unstructured atmosphere in classes and in the school environment, the probability of maladaptive and even violent forms will be higher.

The twenty-first century and the modern era is an era of high-tech development, that has brought numerous benefits to mankind. However, these technological advancements have also resulted in the alienation and dehumanization of man. People have become consumers of digital technologies, passively absorbing the content offered to them. Uncritical consumption of media "products" overflowing with aggressive, explicit, and immoral content on a

subconscious or subliminal level leads to changes in certain attitudes, especially "liberation" of one's own behavior and established moral norms, which in today's society are, to say the least, "loosened." When analyzing the harmful effects of such content on the adult population, we cannot help but wonder what such content is doing to the population of school and preschool children. Television, newspapers, and the Internet have become an inexhaustible source of the most diverse, uncensored content that is available to everyone, from preschool children to the geriatric population. At every step, we see the consequences of the media's destructive influence. Under the influence of media manipulation, modern man has reshaped himself. Children have become "uncritical devourers of Internet content," active participants in the "virtual gamer community," and "followers of influencers" whose work is not subject to censorship or whose censorship in the virtual world is superficial and formal.

Protective factors

Any research that examines the risk factors of a phenomenon or problem seeks to identify counterbalances, i.e., specific factors that could have an opposite effect to the risk factor. When it comes to violent behavior, the focus is on identifying influences that model the relationship between the risk factors for violent behavior and its initial manifestation. These influences are referred to as protective factors.

The observation that children who grew up in high-risk conditions or experienced stressful or traumatic events did not develop behavioral disorders or show mental health problems in adulthood, due to the presence of certain individual characteristics and/or environmental support, led to the emergence of research on protective factors almost by accident. The study of these characteristics of children and young people (the so-called characteristics of psychological invulnerability) led to a new concept: the concept of resistance, that is, resilience, and its meaning in risk-protection relations. Protective factors represent individual characteristics and certain socioeconomic and cultural factors that help protect children from the likelihood of engaging in criminal behavior in the future

(Bašić, 2009). Previously, people believed that protective factors meant the absence of risk or something conceptually distinct from risk. In subsequent stages of research, these factors marked the opposite pole of the continuum in relation to risk factors.

Modern views on protective factors imply that they are characteristics or conditions that interact with risk factors to reduce their impact on violent behavior. These are variables that strengthen resistance and prevent the occurrence of a certain problem (Marković, 2020). Some of the most significant variables found in the literature are:

- Individual factors: female gender, higher IQ, resilience, positive temperament, healthy beliefs, prosocial orientation, ability to adapt and recover from stressful situations, social problem-solving skills, self-discipline;
- Peer factors: positive peer group, problem-solving skills, communication skills, positive conflict resolution skills, positive self-image, taking responsibility for one's own behavior, empathy and sensitivity towards others, prosocial peer groups;
- Family factors: the positive role of adults as role models, positive communication with the family, involvement of parents in the lives of young people, clear rules and consequences within the family and school, strong connection with parents, agreement with the family, supportive family climate, i.e., family support (Merdović, Počuča, Dragojlović, 2024; Merdović, Vujović, 2021);
- School factors: connection with school, supportive school environment, participation in school activities, successful inclusion in school, individual school achievement, strong emphasis on school achievement at the school level;
- Community/environmental factors: connection with the community, positive and clear norms and values in the community, successful preventive policy, absence of weapons, and armed conflicts.

Mutual interaction of risk factors and protective factors

Risk and protective factors have a cumulative effect. The presence of a large number of risk factors in an individual's development environment inevitably increases the probability of violent forms of behavior occurrence and repetition. In contrast, the presence of a greater number of protective factors reduces the probability (Kretman et al., 2009). However, the direction of social development depends on the number and type of risk and protective factors, as well as their interrelationship. Risk and protective factors do not act in isolation from each other; rather, there is a kind of dynamic interaction between them. The theory outlines at least three models that explain the mutual interactions between these factors:

1. Complementary model, according to which risk factors are combined, additionally reinforcing mutual influences. In general, it can be said that multiple risk factors reinforce each other.
2. The stimulus or protective model describes a relationship in which stress that is not too severe, as a risk factor, increases competence. The protective model thus explains that protective factors modulate or stop the effects of risk factors.
3. The causal model assumes causal chains that help understand risk and protective mechanisms. One event triggers several others and creates a chain that leads to negative outcomes. That chain is of a reciprocal nature (e.g., reciprocal interactions between a child and a parent).

Rather than drawing a definitive conclusion, we can only emphasize that a multitude of factors serve as risk factors for the occurrence of violence. The research findings indicate a whole series of factors that can contribute to the appearance of violent behavior in an individual. The list of risk factors for violent behavior is not exhaustive, as it only includes those identified in previous research. Some research studies have identified certain factors as risk factors, while others dispute this. Certain factors, such as family dysfunctionality, clearly represent risk factors, while others, such as the student's gender, age, and school size, are less certain. It is important to point out that not all risk factors

will contribute to the occurrence of violent behavior in every individual case. Researches confirm that not all children exposed to these factors become bullies, but that in addition to the risk factors in the environment in which the child grows up, protective factors act to reduce the likelihood of violence. In fact, it is the specific interaction between protective and risk factors that determines, in a specific case, whether violence will occur or not. For these reasons, the concept of protective factors and risk factors is primarily probabilistic in nature. This concept indicates the probability of violence occurring in individuals exposed to their cooperation.

Prevention of violence in the educational system

The term "prevention of violence in schools" refers to taking all necessary measures and activities to suppress peer violence or prevent its recurrence. Jerković explains the difference between primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention (2010). The goal of primary prevention would be to prevent the appearance of violent forms of behavior; secondary prevention measures would prevent the further progression of problems that lead to violence; and tertiary prevention activities would mitigate the consequences of violence that already exists among children. We can group various and numerous measures against school violence according to the target groups they aim at. Goldstein, one of the most famous authors of violence prevention programs, gave an overview of the measures taken in the United States of America in the early 1990s. He registered 137 different interventions, which he classified into nine groups: interventions aimed at the student, teacher, school program, school administration, physical school environment, parents, security, community, and state. The school district typically sets rules for school discipline, which include varying levels of punishment and few rewards in the procedure (Goldstein, 1992). Failure to comply with the stipulated rules, as well as the inconsistency of teachers and other school employees, leaves enough room for students to display various types of violent behavior. The school cannot directly influence the solution to social problems, but it can and must be involved in solving the problems that society

reflects. The advantage of the institutions of the educational system in the process of prevention is the possibility of simultaneous action on a large number of children, as well as the possibility of rapid education of educational workers for preventive action (Jerković, 2010). The school has the capacity to impact a significant number of children simultaneously. One of the important indicators of the successful implementation of preventive measures at the school level is the creation of an atmosphere of mutual respect, cooperative relations, a sense of appreciation and respect for peers and teachers, and work on strengthening self-confidence and self-esteem.

It has been found that the primary prevention program for school violence works best when it includes outside education, supervision, and support (Mihic & Bašić, 2008), along with the principle of zero tolerance for corrupt practices (Bjelajac, 2008 & Bjelajac, 2015). This means that only those preventive programs that are systematic and structured, conceived of as joint multisectoral action and consistent implementation of pre-defined activities, combined with education, supervision, and support for all program participants, aimed at early interventions that reduce the likelihood of individual violence manifestations, can provide satisfactory results.

The term primary prevention of violence among minors refers to a variety of preventive activities based on universal strategies, the aim of which is to educate and inform children and adults at all levels, from the family through the school to society as a whole. Educators trained in primary prevention interventions provide teenagers, parents, and school teachers with information about child development, as well as various risk factors that underlie violent forms of behavior in relation to certain developmental stages of minors (preschool age, elementary school, and high school). Education and information cover individual, family, and social risk factors. One of the most commonly used activities in primary prevention involves promoting and strengthening students' individual strengths, skills, attitudes, and knowledge through group education during regular school hours. This is achieved by showcasing educational materials through presentations, or by utilizing mass media and digital technology. According to the majority of

previous studies dealing with resilience, one of the most important protective factors is the existence of nurturing, supportive relationships with significant adults in the environment. Directing resources to youth support programs, as well as adult education, creates conditions for a safer upbringing of young people and provides necessary information to adults, sensitizing them to the importance of developing a culture of caring for the school population.

Students with a noticeable increased risk of violence are the target of secondary prevention activities. Among the most prominent predictors of the perpetration of violence are prior involvement in violence, history of violence, and experience of victimization. Naturally, we should also focus on the use of psychoactive substances and beliefs that contradict the community's moral values, like the conviction that it's acceptable to destroy material possessions while intoxicated, and the association with a group of delinquent peers. Young people who experienced physical or sexual abuse in the family or close environment, grew up in dysfunctional primary families, and had parents who were addicts also belong to this category, with an increased risk of exhibiting aggressive forms of behavior. Students with mental disorders, impulsivity, and alcohol abuse should also receive attention (Swahn & Sullivent, 2008).

Tertiary prevention measures are defined as activities undertaken in situations where violence has already occurred, and the focus is on minors who have already been involved in violence. In our country, we rarely apply defined programs to treat maladaptive patterns of behavior, except in cases of extreme forms of violence, where the law mandates the involvement of police, prosecutor's office, and judiciary institutions.

Optimum growing-up conditions are one of the most important prerequisites for the successful prevention of dysfunctional forms of behavior in children and adolescents (Turbin et al., 2006). Therefore, we should organize preventive activities to guide parents, teachers, and other important adults who participate in the education of children and young people. A healthy and stable family plays a big role in growing up, and parents model children's behavior to a significant

extent through their personal example. We must minimize stressful events in the family and school environment, and equip young people with the necessary skills to overcome them. Adults should be sensitive to the needs of children, but at the same time decisive enough to oppose the negative behavior of children and young people. A safe environment, as well as a lot of understanding and support, contribute to preventing the occurrence of violent behavior during the development of children and adolescents.

Discussion

Bearing in mind the fact that every day we witness numerous news regarding violent forms of behavior in the environment, where the perpetrators are getting younger and the forms of violent behavior are extreme, there is a need to approach this complex problem with continuous, structured, and multisectoral activities. By promoting proactive preventive measures within the framework of primary prevention, which would be strategically defined and continuously implemented, it would be possible to influence the reduction of the frequency of violence in schools. In that context, profiling as a form of early screening in the juvenile population would be one of the most important primary prevention tools and a protective factor for juvenile violence. With regular psychological screenings at the level of the student population and mapping of individuals at increased risk, it would be possible to respond in a timely manner in order to provide assistance to potential perpetrators of violence before violence occurs.

Continuous education programs for students, parents, and teaching staff would raise awareness of possible forms and consequences of violent behavior, as well as reactivity to early warning signs among potential perpetrators of violence within the educational system.

If we go back just one year, we can't help but look back at the two mass murders that took place in Serbia in the space of 24 hours. In one of them, on May 3, 2023, the criminally irresponsible perpetrator K.K., a student in the seventh grade of a reputable elementary school in Belgrade, killed nine minors and one adult with

his father's firearm. The very next day, a 21-year-old U.B. killed eight and injured 14 people in Mladenovac with a firearm that also belonged to the perpetrator's father.

The mass murder of students by minor K.K. took place on the school premises in the early hours of the morning. After killing the school guard and the students, the killer departed the classroom and the school yard, dialed the police, and identified himself as a "psychopath who requires calmness." On that occasion, he put down his weapon and raised his hands above his head.

According to information from print and electronic media, minor K.K. comes from a "respectable" Belgrade family. He is the older of two children, born from a married union of academically educated parents. Unverified reports suggest that when he was under eight years old, his parents "took him to a speech therapist due to a crisis of consciousness." The speech therapist then recommended a visit to a psychiatrist (during the initial examination, the speech therapist allegedly recommended further work with the child. However, the parents later took him to a private psychiatrist, who confirmed the child's well-being). Neither the teacher nor the class teacher stated during the testimony in the civil proceedings that they noticed "major behavioral outbursts" (he was a cultured child, who completed school assignments successfully, not overly sociable). Yet, there are allegations that he had an "arrogant attitude" in relation to his peers, that he did not enter into conflicts, but that he "liked to judge" in the conflicts of his peers, as well as that he was "competitive." One of the significant findings is the allegation from the perpetrator's teacher that "he spent more time with her than with his parents." Some of the behavioral descriptions could indicate a lack of empathy and social isolation in relation to the peer group, as well as weaker adaptive capacities. Reaction to rejection (change of class because he was not invited to a birthday party) speaks in favor of reduced frustration tolerance and potential impulsivity. Data from numerous extracurricular activities may suggest that the boy was subjected to excessive pressure from his parents and their personal ambitions, which were then "transposed" into his behavior. Parental control and

excessive demands on the one hand, coupled with the absence of adequate support and tacit approval of using the Internet in longer time intervals on the other hand, speak of the "double messages" he was exposed to in the primary family. Additionally, the minor had access to legal firearms and received training from his father at the shooting range. Simultaneously, an examination of his internet usage history revealed his exposure to a variety of violent games and documentaries (such as the TV series called "Criminal Minds", the video game Valorant, and documentaries about mass murders).

According to public police reports, a teenager, who was less than fourteen years old, had been planning a murder for a month. He had prepared a "killing list," calmly went to school, fired a firearm, and killed a security guard. He then killed three girls in the school corridor. After that, he went to his class and shot his history teacher, followed by his friends and classmates.

He showed no remorse for the massacre after the crime, leading to his placement in the Clinic of Neurology and Psychiatry for Children and Youth, where he has remained for over a year. Criminal and civil proceedings are underway against the boy's parents, who remain unresolved. The school's responsible individuals have not publicly announced their involvement in this case, nor have they assumed any responsibility for the institution's role within the educational system.

We can assume certain risk factors for the minor K.K.'s execution of the massacre with a certain probability based on the available data.

- Assumed (possible) personal factors:
 - Narcissism
 - Lack of empathy
 - Asociality
 - Reduced frustration tolerance
 - Suspected neurological/psychological problems ("crises of consciousness")
 - Weak coping skills

- The tendency to "run away" from reality into the "virtual" world
- Obsession with violence and death
- Family factors:
 - Pressure from parents, with high standards (and expectations)
 - Lack of parental warmth
 - Authoritarian parenting style
 - Exposure to the model of parenting that created anger in K.K. that he could not express
 - Availability of firearms
- Social factors (school):
 - The experience of being rejected by a peer group
 - Social isolation
 - Suspected depression
 - Competitiveness with consequent frustration
 - Personal experience of "injustice" (the so-called "corrector" of injustice)

As for the massacre in Mladenovac, the perpetrator was an adult, but with reduced capacities for adaptation, as indicated by the feeling of not belonging to the environment in which he lived and a history of delinquent behavior (arrested on several occasions: theft, assault on an official, possession of weapons). In earlier periods, he showed aggression and cruelty towards animals.

In both cases, it was the family, but also the social environment, in the first case, the school; in the second, the surroundings, i.e., the environment. The lack of reaction from those responsible (primarily parents), as well as those in charge (schools and police), created an atmosphere of fear and insecurity among students and parents. That is why it is necessary to work on creating and raising a safety culture in all segments of society, primarily in educational institutions, with the goal of creating a safe atmosphere in schools.

Although the results of research that dealt with the topic of mass murders and shootings in schools in previous years indicate that there is no classic, clearly defined profile of a mass murderer, as well as a defined combination of risk factors for this extreme form of violence, it should be pointed out that "isolated" certain common denominators.

Ten key common denominators in school mass killings, according to Voskuilet al. (2002):

1. Incidents of targeted school violence were rarely sudden, impulsive acts.
2. Before most incidents, other people knew about the attacker's idea and/or attack plan.
3. Most attackers did not directly threaten their "targets" before executing their attack.
4. There is no accurate or "useful profile" of students who have committed mass murders in school.
5. Before the incident, most of the attackers exhibited some of the behaviors that caused concern to others or indicated the need for help.
6. Most attackers had difficulty coping with significant losses or personal setbacks. Moreover, many have considered or attempted suicide.
7. Many attackers felt mistreated, persecuted, or hurt by others before the attack.
8. Prior to the attack, the majority of attackers had access to and used weapons.
9. In many cases, other students were involved in some capacity.
10. Most incidents involving firearms in schools end in a different way, rather than with a police reaction (suicide of the perpetrator and the like).

The things listed above only show how important primary prevention and early screening are for finding some of the early

"warning" signs, like behavior that makes the potential perpetrator worried, problems, big losses and personal failures, suicidal thoughts, and information about possible past experiences of being abused or rejected by peers.

Assessing a potential threat, primarily by analyzing activities, communications, and specific circumstances that could indicate an individual's intention to carry out an attack and their engagement in planning and preparation is undoubtedly one of the most important measures of primary prevention. Fein defined six principles on which threat assessment is based (Fein et al., 2006). During assessments, it is crucial to focus on both students who pose a threat (having the plan to harm someone) and those who represent a threat (participating in behaviors that suggest intent or plan the attack). The analysis process entails identifying any major losses or perceived failures that the student may be struggling with, as well as a mandatory check to see if the student has access to weapons or firearms.

Six principles of potential threat assessment:

- Violence directed at planned targets is the end result of an understandable, often observable process of thinking and behavior.
- It results from the interaction between the individual, the situation, the environment, and the "target."
- An exploratory, skeptical, and inquisitive mindset is key to a successful threat assessment.
- Effective threat assessment relies on facts, not characteristics or "persons."
- The risk assessment process should use an integrated, systemic approach.
- In the threat assessment process, the central question is whether the student poses a threat, not whether the student threatened.

Conclusion

A sense of security, a safe environment, and modern schools where the process of education and upbringing takes place without fear of a possible escalation of aggression are the needs of every student, parent, and teacher. Regrettably, we observe that the current system fails to meet the demands and needs of contemporary society, failing to adapt to swifter and more significant changes such as the relativization of behavior, the lowering of behavioral standards, the imposition of questionable and distorted moral values in the media, and the exposure to uncensored digital content. The imbalance between society's real needs and the current measures taken by the system has consequences that can be tragic for probably the most sensitive population in society: children in the primary educational system and adolescents. Last year's massacres in our country confirm this. Therefore, it is necessary to educate and strengthen all actors involved in the implementation of primary prevention measures at all levels: from family, through school, to society as a whole, with the aim of recognizing and reducing the effects of risk factors that are the basis of the violent behavior of minors.

We wonder if the psychological-pedagogical service of the elementary school, which also serves as the competent center for social work in another case, could have prevented the mass massacres perpetrated by thirteen-year-old K.K. and twenty-one-year-old U.B. through early screening and psychological profiling. Although we cannot answer this question at the moment, in the future we can work on more effective responses from the entire community to these types of threats.

The mass murders that took place last year were a difficult experience for all of us: parents, educators, competent institutions, and society as a whole. Moreover, we should learn an important lesson from these events, ensuring that in the future, all actors involved in primary prevention receive education and training to respond promptly and within their authority, thereby averting the potential consequences of violence in educational institutions.

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Detekcija faktora rizika i prevencija nasilničkog ponašnja u sistemu obrazovanja

Snežana Đorđević

Specijalna bolnica za psihijatrijske bolesti „Kovin“, Kovin

Sažetak

Škole bi trebalo da predstavljaju društvene, vaspitno obrazovne institucije, čiji je cilj vaspitanje i obrazovanje dece u bezbednim i sigurnim uslovima. Međutim, u proteklih deset godina školske sredine postale su pozornice za manifestaciju različitih oblika nasilja, koja su sve učestalija, ali i ozbiljnija u pogledu posledica. Cilj ovog rada je da ukaže na faktore rizika koji leže u osnovi nasilnih oblika ponašanja maloletnog pojedinca, koji bi mogli biti prepoznati pre nego što dođe do eksternalizacije nasilnih obrazaca u školskom okruženju. U radu je analiziran značaj individualnih karakteristika ličnosti, porodične dinamike i socijalnih interakcija u formiranju ličnosti tokom sazrevanja, komparacijom rezultata dosadašnjih studija, sa ciljem da se dođe do determinacije onih faktora rizika koji sa većom verovatnoćom, relativno rano u životu ličnosti mogu ukazati na veću verovatnoću ispoljavanja različitih formi antisocijalnog ponašanja u okruženju. Rad ukazuje na značaj edukacije članova porodice i podizanje nivoa profesionalne svesti zaposlenih u školama, ali i drugim strukturama društvene zajednice u domenu prepoznavanja ranih znakova nasilničkih sklonosti kod školske dece, sa ciljem da preventivno delovanje bude multisektorsko, pravovremeno i efikasno.

Ključne reči: nasilje u školama, faktori rizika, protektivni faktori, prevencija