Gender differences in the evaluation of school safety indicators according to adolescents in higher secondary schools in Prizren

Shpresa Zaplluzha*a and Mimoza Shahinib

*aFaculty of Education, University of Prizren, Prizren, Kosovo; bDardania College, Priština, Kosovo

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This study investigated the differences in the evaluation of school safety indicators according to adolescents in higher secondary schools in Prizren city. The sample consisted of 1050 subjects/students within an MA = 15 years (SD = 1.8). Gender distribution among the students was 52.9% female students and 47.1% male students. The participants were selected through multistage cluster sampling. To evaluate student’s perceptions of school safety indicators, the survey was translated and validated into the Albanian language. The results of our research showed a relatively high value in some of the elements that reflect the safety in the school. In most of them, our results showed that boys are more at risk of being threatened in the school environment than girls.

Keywords: adolescent; school; safety indicators; gender

Introduction

School violence has emerged as a topic of public interest in Kosovo in the recent years, especially following the events of February–March 2014, when five acts of extreme violence with fatal outcome occurred in a school environment. Although these events had a significant media coverage and at the same time greater attention of policy-making bodies, the data on this phenomenon in Kosovo are rather scarce and insufficient for understanding its nature in our culture and context. Considering that the school is an environment in which children should be educated, the phenomenon of violence in schools should be explored in the current political-economic-social context of the country. School violence is a very concerning phenomenon. In the recent years, a common perception has emerged that violence has become more widespread in the society, including the education system (KIPRED, 2013).

The recent decades have seen the proliferation of literature on violence, the impact of the social context and the dynamics of the victimisation. Certainly, most of this literature is focused on domestic violence, community violence and less so on school violence. School violence was given special focus and began to be considered separate from the literature on violence in general only in the late 1980s and in 1990s (Astor, Benbenishty, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002; Astor & Meyer, 2001).

School violence includes any behaviour aimed at inflicting physical and/or emotional harm to a person or their school belongings. Victimisation at school refers to a student reporting the use of violence against him/her at school. This definition includes, but is not limited to behaviours such as victimisation of students and teachers or students and...
teachers who commit acts of physical violence, use weapons or other life threatening means, sexual harassment, Internet bullying, injuries, threats, thefts and damaging of school belongings (student’s personal things for use at school) and social violence (humiliation, exclusion, grouping).

During the last 30 years, the concept of school violence has included physical and psychological harm, and property damage, as well as blackmail, verbal threat and humiliation (Olweus, 1993; Olweus, Limber, & Mihalic, 1999), vandalism, corporal punishment by teachers or other staff (Benbenishty, Astor, Zeira, & Vinokur, 2002), violence against the staff (Benbenishty, Zeira, & Astor, 2000), rape, crimes of passion and murder (Anderson & Bushman, 2001).

Gender differences in school bullying among children and adolescents have been subject of a considerable number of studies. The literature confirms that boys are involved in physical bullying more than girls (Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Kumpulainen et al., 1998; Nansel et al., 2001; Whitney & Smith, 1993), and that both genders are equally involved in verbal bullying. Nevertheless, gender differences exist in the way they bully each other within the gender. Boys are usually bullied by boys, while girls are bullied equally by both genders (Nansel et al., 2001; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Researchers in Norway, Japan, England and Australia have extensively studied school bullying, but have paid little attention to other types of violence at school (Olweus, 1993; Rigby, 1996; Smith, Jarman, & Osborn, 1999; Smith & Sharp, 1994). Other studies have included only some aspects of school violence, such as for instance risky behaviours among youth (Harel et al., 1994). Adolescents have historically had higher incidence of crime and victimisation, and male adolescents are disproportionately more inclined to and responsible for crime and violence than female adolescents, while female adolescents are most often bullied by other females. This trend is reflected in Jenson and Howard (1999) and Espelage and Swearer (2004).

The study of bullying or violent behaviours at school is an important factor for school policies and for interventions aimed at improving school safety; however, the way children perceive violence may influence its reporting or their attitude towards this phenomenon. Their perception of the school safety may serve as the key factor in promoting or fighting violent behaviours.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

This study included 1050 subjects/students. Gender distribution among the children was 52.9% or 555 female students and 47.1% or 495 male students. In the chi-square test, no important differences were reported in the distribution of the percentages of gender representation in this study ($\chi^2(1) = 3.42, p = 0.064$). Mean age of students was $MA = 15$ years ($SD = 1.8$). For the participation of the students in the study permission was obtained in advance from their homeroom teacher. Students responded voluntarily (Table 1).

Table 1. Student’s gender characteristics.

| Gender | Valid Nr. | %     |
|--------|-----------|-------|
| Female | 555       | 52.9  |
| Male   | 495       | 47.1  |
**Instruments**

A demographic questionnaire has been developed for the propose of this survey. The original questionnaire, ‘My Life in School Checklist’ from Arora and Thompson (1987), has been translated and adapted for our culture and context. Our survey consisted of a total of 15 indicators, which students responded to with options ‘never’, ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’. The author of the study administered the instrument in the school facilities.

**Data analyses**

The Cronbach’s $\alpha$ was used as the index of internal consistency of the survey (Cronbach’ $a = 0.80$). The numbers of responses and the respective percentages have been calculated in order to evaluate the distribution of safety indicators according to all students and their gender. Chi-square test was used to find the significant statistical gender differences. A specific child code for the identification of information was used. The statistical package used in the present study is SPSS Ver. 19.0.

**Results**

**School safety indicators**

Table 2 shows that the most frequent event reported by students to have occurred in the school environment was ‘the use of offensive words’ 47.4% or 483 students; ‘pushing among students’ 45.8% or 467 students; ‘ridiculed behind the back’ 44.5% or 454 students. The least reported were the following acts ‘torn clothing’ 5.6% or 57 students who experienced this, followed by ‘spat at’ 6.8% or 69 students. Students reported that 14.9% or 153 students were threatened in the school environment and 14.2% or 144 students were taken away their money by other students.

Table 3 shows the results of experiencing events that have caused the feeling of unsafety in the school environment according to gender. The analysis shows that boys have experienced the following acts: threatened ($\chi^2(2) = 13.2, p = 0.001; M > F$), slapped (not significant), pinched ($\chi^2(2) = 11.7, p = 0.001$), kicked ($\chi^2(2) = 12.3, p = 0.001; M > F$), written bad words on clothing ($\chi^2(2) = 17.2, p = 0.001; M > F$), called offensive names ($\chi^2(2) = 5.2, p = 0.020; M > F$), torn books or notebooks (not significant), while girls reported the acts such as pushing (not significant), taken away personal belongings (not significant), spat at (not significant), taken away food ($\chi^2(2) = 14.1, p = 0.001; F > M$), taken away money (not significant) and ridiculed behind back (not significant).

**Discussion**

Because of its increase in the recent years and its link to psycho-social and physical problems in the school environment, the study of school violence has been deemed very important. The increase of violence has in general become more visible in the recent years (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002). However, it is worth noting that the violence occurring in the schools varies in different places, and its forms also vary in different places, because of the influence of the political-economic-social context on this phenomenon. In this context, teachers play a crucial role in implementing school violence prevention programmes (Dake, Price, & Telljohann, 2003; Yoon, 2004).

Results of our research show a relatively high value in some of the elements that reflect the safety in the school, such as ‘ridiculed behind the back’, ‘called offensive names’, ‘torn
Table 2. Safety indicators according to all students.

| Safety Indicator                                | Never | Sometimes | Often |
|------------------------------------------------|-------|-----------|-------|
| Threatened                                     | 871   | 151       | 2     |
| Sometimes                                      | 151   | 447       | 20    |
| Often                                          | 2     | 2         | 0.2   |
| Pushed                                         | 553   | 447       | 20    |
| Sometimes                                      | 151   | 447       | 20    |
| Often                                          | 2     | 0.2       | 0.2   |
| Slapped                                        | 896   | 122       | 3     |
| Sometimes                                      | 896   | 122       | 3     |
| Often                                          | 8     | 0.3       | 0.3   |
| Pinched                                        | 724   | 275       | 18    |
| Sometimes                                      | 724   | 275       | 18    |
| Often                                          | 18    | 1.8       | 1.8   |
| Kicked                                         | 895   | 108       | 8     |
| Sometimes                                      | 895   | 108       | 8     |
| Often                                          | 8     | 0.8       | 0.8   |
| Taken away your belongings                     | 579   | 409       | 25    |
| Sometimes                                      | 579   | 409       | 25    |
| Often                                          | 25    | 2.5       | 2.5   |
| Written bad words on your clothing             | 864   | 147       | 9     |
| Sometimes                                      | 864   | 147       | 9     |
| Often                                          | 9     | 0.9       | 0.9   |
| spat at                                        | 948   | 68        | 1     |
| Sometimes                                      | 948   | 68        | 1     |
| Often                                          | 1     | 0.1       | 0.1   |
| Taken away your food                           | 888   | 118       | 6     |
| Sometimes                                      | 888   | 118       | 6     |
| Often                                          | 6     | 0.6       | 0.6   |
| Torn your school books or notebooks             | 660   | 337       | 18    |
| Sometimes                                      | 660   | 337       | 18    |
| Often                                          | 18    | 1.8       | 1.8   |
| Torn your clothes                              | 961   | 54        | 3     |
| Sometimes                                      | 961   | 54        | 3     |
| Often                                          | 3     | 0.3       | 0.3   |
| Taken your money                               | 873   | 137       | 7     |
| Sometimes                                      | 873   | 137       | 7     |
| Often                                          | 7     | 0.7       | 0.7   |
| Taken your phone or other things               | 813   | 194       | 10    |
| Sometimes                                      | 813   | 194       | 10    |
| Often                                          | 10    | 1.0       | 1.0   |
| Called you offensive names                     | 535   | 441       | 42    |
| Sometimes                                      | 535   | 441       | 42    |
| Often                                          | 42    | 4.1       | 4.1   |
| Ridiculed behind your back or in front of your friends | 567   | 454       | 0     |
| Sometimes                                      | 567   | 454       | 0     |
| Often                                          | 0     | 0.0       | 0.0   |
Table 3. Safety indicators by student gender.

| Indicator                                      | Female            | Male            |
|------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|
|                                                | \(N\) | %  | \(N\) | %  |
| Threatened                                     |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 476   | 46.5 | 395   | 38.6 |
| Sometimes                                      | 60    | 5.9  | 91    | 8.9  |
| Often                                          | 2     | 0.2  | 0     | 0.0  |
| Pushed                                         |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 286   | 28.0 | 267   | 26.2 |
| Sometimes                                      | 238   | 23.3 | 209   | 20.5 |
| Often                                          | 10    | 1.0  | 10    | 1.0  |
| Slapped                                        |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 479   | 46.9 | 417   | 40.8 |
| Sometimes                                      | 58    | 5.7  | 64    | 6.3  |
| Often                                          | 1     | 0.1  | 2     | 0.2  |
| Pinched                                        |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 404   | 39.7 | 320   | 31.5 |
| Sometimes                                      | 122   | 12.0 | 153   | 15.0 |
| Often                                          | 7     | 0.7  | 11    | 1.1  |
| Kicked                                         |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 487   | 48.2 | 408   | 40.4 |
| Sometimes                                      | 40    | 4.0  | 68    | 6.7  |
| Often                                          | 3     | 0.3  | 5     | 0.5  |
| Taken away your belongings                     |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 302   | 29.8 | 277   | 27.3 |
| Sometimes                                      | 220   | 21.7 | 189   | 18.7 |
| Often                                          | 12    | 1.2  | 13    | 1.3  |
| Written bad words on your clothing             |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 477   | 46.8 | 387   | 37.9 |
| Sometimes                                      | 54    | 5.3  | 93    | 9.1  |
| Often                                          | 5     | 0.5  | 4     | 0.4  |
| Spat at                                        |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 493   | 48.5 | 455   | 44.7 |
| Sometimes                                      | 41    | 4.0  | 27    | 2.7  |
| Often                                          | 1     | 0.1  | 0     | 0.0  |
| Taken away your food                           |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 445   | 44.0 | 443   | 43.8 |
| Sometimes                                      | 79    | 7.8  | 39    | 3.9  |
| Often                                          | 5     | 0.5  | 1     | 0.1  |
| Torn your school books or notebooks            |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 360   | 35.5 | 300   | 29.6 |
| Sometimes                                      | 161   | 15.9 | 176   | 17.3 |
| Often                                          | 12    | 1.2  | 6     | 0.6  |
| Torn your clothes                              |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 511   | 50.2 | 450   | 44.2 |
| Sometimes                                      | 23    | 2.3  | 31    | 3.0  |
| Often                                          | 3     | 0.3  | 0     | 0.0  |
| Taken your money                               |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 454   | 44.6 | 419   | 41.2 |
| Sometimes                                      | 80    | 7.9  | 57    | 5.6  |
| Often                                          | 3     | 0.3  | 4     | 0.4  |
| Taken your phone or other things               |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 423   | 41.6 | 390   | 38.3 |
| Sometimes                                      | 106   | 10.4 | 88    | 8.7  |
| Often                                          | 5     | 0.5  | 5     | 0.5  |
| Called you offensive names                     |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 298   | 29.3 | 237   | 23.3 |
| Sometimes                                      | 216   | 21.2 | 225   | 22.1 |
| Often                                          | 19    | 1.9  | 23    | 2.3  |
| Ridiculed behind your back or in front of your friends |       |    |       |    |
| Never                                          | 294   | 28.8 | 273   | 26.7 |
| Sometimes                                      | 242   | 23.7 | 212   | 20.8 |
| Often                                          | 0     | 0.0  | 0     | 0.0  |
books or notebooks’, ‘taken away personal belongings’, ‘pinched’ and ‘pushed’. All other indicators on the safety questionnaire had lower values. Our results are in consistency with studies from O’Moore, Kirkham, and Smith (1997), Whitney and Smith (1993) and Wolke and Stanford (1999) when they found that direct bullying was more prevalent in boys than in girls, and ‘Called you offensive names’ the most popular harassment.

The differences between boys and girls are mostly ‘in favour’ of boys, who according to the analysis have experienced those acts more often than girls. Boys experienced more of the following acts: ‘threatened’, ‘pinched’, ‘written bad words on clothing’ and ‘called offensive names’. On the other side, girls experienced more often the act ‘taken away food’. The gender differences on all other indicators in the questionnaire are not significant.

Our results are in line with other studies, according to which boys are more at risk of being threatened in the school environment (Dinkes, Kemp, Baum, & Snyder, 2009), and this is the reason they might feel less safe than girls. With regard to gender correlation, the results were mixed, since there have been studies which have not reported such correlation. Some researchers defend the hypothesis that girls may feel unable to protect themselves from bullying and thus perceive the school as an unsafe environment (Meyer, 2008).

Our results are important, first, to further the investigation of victimisation and school violence in our country in order to improve violence preventions and, second, is important to improved knowledge about the relation between gender specific violence and victimisation. As cited by Sundaram, Helweg-Larsen, Laursen, and Bjerregaard (2004), it is essential that gender specific consequence to be included in school prevention programmes.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors
I completed my under graduate and graduate at Faculty of Pedagogue. On 2011 I registered for doctorate at UET (European University of Tirana – Albania) Tirana with mentor Prof. Dr. Milika Dhamo on theme “Adolescents victimization and factors of insecurity at Secondary Schools in Prizren”. I have participated in a few international and national conference and scientific publications.

Mimoza Shahini, Head of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, University Clinical Center of Kosova and a lecturer at Dardania College.

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