

Causes of Unsafety in School according to Adolescents of Upper Secondary Schools in Prizren

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Abstract:

This study examines the extent of student victimization in secondary schools and the causes of absence as the cause for unsafety in secondary schools in Prizren. This study involved 1050 student participants. The mean age of students reported in this study was $M=15$ years ($SD = 1.8$). Out of 1050 participants, 13.2% or 139 children were under age 18, 13.1% or 138 were age 17, 13. The study shows that victimization is a complex phenomenon, and there are needs for more research especially in different cultures.

9% or 146 were age 16, 17.5% or 184 participants were age 15, 20.2 % or 212 were age 14, 15% or 157 were age 13, and 7% or 74 students were age 12. The participants were selected through multistage cluster sampling. The school victimization was assessed with Victimization Scale which has been translated and validated into the Albanian language.

School related factors have been a major target of this study, because this field has never been studied in Kosovo, and in addition there are quite contradictory data from previous studies in other cultures.

Key words: absence, victimization, adolescents, school, unsafety

Introduction

Nowadays, more and more emphasis is placed on respecting the rights of the individual, regardless their gender, race, religion,

disability, and their right to education without suffering from the feeling of unsafety or the exercise of violence. From the social perspective, any form of acts of violence in school environments affects physical, social and emotional wellbeing of children.

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 victimization. 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 1980's and in 1990's (Astor & Meyer, 2001, Astor et al, 2002).

School violence includes any behaviour aimed at inflicting physical and/or emotional harm to a person or their school belongings. Victimization 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 victimization 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 et al 1999), vandalism, corporal punishment by teachers or other staff (Benbenishty et al 2002), violence against the staff (Benbenishty et al 2000), rape, crimes of passion and murder (Anderson et al 2001).

The school climate is represented by the relationship between the children and the school staff. If children experience communication which is characterized by the feelings of caring, respect closeness and cooperation, they tend to be engaged, cooperative and comfortable in the school environment. This way, they become agents of fight against violence in school. Otherwise, they feel humiliated and uncomfortable, and they are not willing to cooperate with the school. The school should make sure all students are informed about disciplinary procedures and should not apply them randomly and unequally. Cantor et al (2001) reported that low disorder schools were characterized by several important characteristics, including strong principals, school staff viewing themselves as working as a team, active involvement of teachers in maintaining order inside and outside the classroom, and generally positive relationships among staff and students. In contrast, high disorder schools lacked a clear approach to discipline, did not convey expectations to students well, and demonstrated poor communication between teachers and administrators.

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 involved 1050 student participants. The author of the study administered the instrument in the school facilities. For the participation of the students in the study permission was obtained in advance from their homeroom teacher. Students responded voluntarily. The mean age of students reported in this study was $M = 15$ years ($SD = 1.8$). Out of 1050 participants, 13.2% or 139 children were under age 18, 13.1% or 138 were age 17, 13.9% or 146 were age 16, 17.5% or 184 participants were age 15, 20.2 % or 212 were age 14, 15% or 157 were age 13, and 7% or 74 students were age 12. Victimization was measured on a Victimization Scale. It consists of ten questions rated by 0 (never) up to 6 (more than 6 times). The more points they gathered on the questionnaire, the more victimized the students were. The second standard deviation was used to identify children with high victimization. The Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α) was used as the index of internal consistency of the questionnaire. The Internal Consistency for the Victimization rate was $\alpha = .78$ and no differences were found across gender - (boys $\alpha = .79$) and (girls $\alpha = .77$).

Instruments

A demographic questionnaire has been developed for the propose of this survey. The original questionnaire "My Life in School Checklist" from Arora & 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 coefficient (α) was used as the index of internal consistency of the survey. (Cronbach $\alpha = .80$). The numbers of responses and the respective percentages have been calculated in order to evaluate the distribution of safety indicators according to all students.

Chi-square test was used to find the significant statistical 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

The results show that 75.1% (N = 789) reported not to have had any unsafety caused absences during the last school year, while 24.9% (N = 261) reported to have had absences because they felt unsafe at school or on the way to school. Chi square shows no significant gender differences in the distribution of percentages of absences from school during the last school year as a consequence of fear ($\chi^2 (1) = 1.2, p = .286$). Within the total number of students who gave an affirmative response to this question there are no gender based differences. The results within the gender show that 76.6% (N = 425) of girls responded "No" and 23.4% (N = 130) of interviewed girls reported absences from school because of unsafety, while 73.5 % (N = 364) of boys responded "No" and 26.5% (N = 131) of interviewed boys reported absences for the same reason.

In addition, significant differences were found in the distribution of unsafety caused absences based on the place of residence ($\chi^2 (1) = 5.1, p = .02$). Within the total number of students who gave an affirmative response, there are more students from the town who reported unsafety caused absences during the last school year 77.8% (N = 200) than those from the villages, who make up 22.2% (N = 57).

The results within the place of residence show that 76.6% (N = 656) of students who live in the town responded “No” and 23.4% (N = 200) of students who live in the town reported unsafety caused absences from school. While 68.7% (N = 125) of the students who live in the villages reported no absences and 31.3% (N = 57) of them responded “Yes”.

The results show that a total of 19% of students who live in the town have had unsafety caused absences, and so did 5.4% of students who live in the villages.

Table 1

Have you had absences during the last school year because you felt unsafe at school or on your way to school?

		<i>Your family lives in</i>		
		<i>Town</i>	<i>Village</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Yes</i>	<i>N</i>	200	57	257
	<i>% in rows</i>	77.8%	22.2%	100.0%
	<i>% in column</i>	23.4%	31.3%	24.8%
	<i>% of total</i>	19.3%	5.5%	24.8%
<i>No</i>	<i>N</i>	656	125	781
	<i>% in rows</i>	84.0%	16.0%	100.0%
	<i>% in column</i>	76.6%	68.7%	75.2%
	<i>% of total</i>	63.2%	12.0%	75.2%

The results in Table 1 show that students who had absences from school because of unsafety reported differences in the mean income; students who had absences had lower mean of income (M = 299 Euro, SD= 310) in comparison to those who did not have absences (M = 400.1 Euro, SD = 352). Significant differences were found in the number of family members, with students who had absences coming from families with a higher number of members than those who had no absences. In addition, students who had absences come from classes with a lower number of excellent students and a higher number of low performing students.

Table 2 The distribution of percentages of students who had absences because they felt unsafe at school or on their way to school, with regard to the cause of absences.

Causes of absences during the last school year because of unsafety.	% & Nr.
Other children threatened me or hit me on my way to school	1% (12)
Adults threatened me or hit me on my way to school	1.7% (21)
There are gangs on my way to school	3.6%(44)
Children in the school regularly make fun of me	1.5%(19)
Children in the school regularly threatened me	1.3%(16)
I was afraid that this student in the school would hit me	2.8%(34)
A teacher in the school called me stupid, lazy or other names	3.4%(42)
A teacher in the school threatened me	1.5%(19)
I was afraid that this teacher in the school would beat me up	1.3% (16)
There are gangs in the school or in the proximity of the school	1.9%(24)
Other students at school make sexual comments about me	0.9% (11)
Other students at school attempt to sexually harass me	1%(12)
A teacher at the school makes sexual comments about me	1.3% (16)
A teacher at the school attempts to sexually harass me	1.0% (12)

Table 3. The Mean and the Standard Deviation for unsafety caused absences with some variables of the study

Unsafety caused absences	Child age in years	Number of family members	Income	Number of low performing students in students in your class			
				Number of excellent students in your class	Number of low performing students in your class	Number of low performing students in your class	Number of low performing students in your class
No	MA (SD) 15.1(1.7)	5.5(1.5)	400.1(352.2)	30.5(7.1)	8.6(4.6)	8.8(6.5)	
Yes	MA (SD) 14.9(2.1)	5.9(2.1)	299.8(310.4)	29.8(5.2)	7.3(3.7)	10.8(7.9)	
	F(1) = 1.9, NS	F(1) = 8.2, p = .004	F(1) = 11.7, p = .001	F(1) = 1.9, NS	F(1) = 13.4, p = .001	F(1) = 14.1, p = .001	

Table 3 on the values *sometimes* or *often*, shows that the events that occurred most often in the school environment, as reported by students, were “the use of offensive words” 47.4% (N = 483); “students pushing each other” 45.8% (N = 467); “ridiculed behind the back” 44.5% (N = 454). The lowest reported were the following events: “tearing of clothes” 5.6% (N = 57) of students experienced this, followed by 6.8% (N = 69) of students

who reported to have been “spat at”. 14.9% (N = 153) of students reported to have been threatened in the school environment and 14.2% (N = 144) of students reported to have experienced being taken their money by other students.

Discussion

The results of this study show that no correlation was found between the measures taken by the school against violent acts and the victimization. (Zaykowski & Gunter, 2012) also found that victimization was not correlated to school climate indicators in a group of secondary school students. Those results can be explained by the fact that our schools might not be transparent and consistent with the measures they take against violent children, and secondly Kosovo does not have enough psychologists for all students, since even in the towns where there are psychologists the numbers are insufficient for them to be effective in preventing victimization. The role of the psychologist would be important in creating a climate of safety in schools, improving school-student relations and particularly in dealing professionally with the cases of victimization. In addition, our schools do not have clear victimization prevention plans and are more focused on administrative measures, which according to this study proved to be inefficient in preventing School related factors were an important object of this study, since this field has never been studied before in Kosovo, and there is quite a lot of contradictory data from previous studies in other cultures. This study found no correlation between bullying and the number of students in the class, but an interesting finding is that victimization was found to be more related to smaller classes, since the correlation between the number of students and victimization was found to be negative. O'Moore et al. (1997) in his study in Ireland found the same tendency. The correlation of victimization and students' place of residence has been studied by many authors, however their

findings were mixed. This study found that children who lived in towns were more likely to be absent because of the feeling of unsafety, and at the same time showed a higher mean of the reported victimization rate.

The study has identified that the police is not an appropriate measure for preventing victimization and violence in the school. Certainly, this study does not dismiss the importance of police, security or fence in the schools covered by this study, but the students did not consider those measures effective in reducing the rate of victimization.

Conclusions of the Study

This study gives more arguments that the field of school violence and particularly student victimization is a phenomenon which is often covered by normal behaviors of adolescents caused by their hormones. Student victimization should be seen in its continuity as a phenomenon by addressing not only physical and psychological wellbeing of students, but by also addressing the stances of the school management, the measures schools take against violence and at the same time the teachers' approach to punishment. In particular, studies should continue examining the influence of gender, different cultural groups, socio-economic factors and the types of programs in the schools.

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