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## **SERBIAN MEDIA ON PEER VIOLENCE**

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**Abstract.** This paper contributes to a better perception of the phenomenology of peer violence, but also to the perception of the role, scope, significance and characteristics of media reporting on peer violence. Presented are the most recent cases of peer violence from the last two months of 2017 – November and December – and the first five months of 2018. Attitudes, analyses, comments and interviews with experts are also used from previous years – 2010 to 2018. The main characteristics of the multi-annual media approach to this topic are the regularity of case reporting, as well as the research for causes, and consequently, possible solutions to the challenges. The media draws attention to the dangers of this social phenomena, which must not go unnoticed, such as the phenomenon of peer group violence, the similarities and analogies with adult violence, the minimization of violence by schools, and the often supporting role of the violent children's parents. Despite changes that may indicate the increased complexity and seriousness of the phenomenon of peer violence, we believe that these are not of such a nature that they should be met by more severe sanctions, largely due to the fact that the existing preventive possibilities have not yet been exhausted.

**Key words:** peer violence, media reporting, school violence, group violence, parents of abusers, analogy with adult violence, anti-school culture.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of peer violence is analysed in this paper through the lens of media reportages, especially on school violence. Due to the limited dimension of this paper, only the latest examples of peer violence from the last two months of 2017 (November and December) are presented in detail, along with those from the first five months of 2018. Attitudes, analyses, comments and interviews with experts are also used, although these are from previous years, from 2010 to 2018. The methodological approach also comprises criminological, sociological and legal literature, but, wherever possible, theoretical sources are deliberately replaced by media reports. This not only outlines the phenomenology of peer violence, but also the depiction of the role, scope, significance and characteristics of media reporting on peer violence.

Characterized by a multi-year media approach to this topic is the regularity of case monitoring, the permanent media efforts in searching for causes, and consequently, the possible solutions to the challenges. The media also acts as a “whistle blower”, because it draws attention to negative and dangerous social phenomena that cannot go unnoticed, such as, for example, the phenomenon of peer group violence, its similarities and analogies

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with adult violence, the minimization of violence by schools, and the often violent role of the parents of violent children.

## DEFINITION AND FREQUENCY

Peer violence is a form of physical or psychological violence involving minors, as offenders and as victims, and belongs to the domain of what is called “the violence of everyday life”. It is becoming more and more present in today's society, with the media reporting that violence against children is becoming more ruthless, being almost impossible to avoid in schools, sports events, playgrounds, computer game shops. This raises the first open question: Is there really a general increase of peer violence, or is it just more frequent reporting of violent incidents due to an increase in awareness of the need to combat violence? (Tanjug, 2012)

The latest information, evidenced by responses presented in the media, is corroborated by the research data. A media survey found, in a sample of 600 students in five Belgrade schools in 2017, one in four primary school pupils do not feel secure at school, one-fifth of students undergo daily insults or ridiculing, and one-third want revenge on those who hurt them (Đurić, 2017). Perhaps the required response to the frequency of peer violence is still somewhere between the view that conflicts between and among children, in the struggle for their place under the sun, have always existed, but today, under the influence of the overall atmosphere of society, these have progressed both in quantity and in brutality; for example, today, instead of fists, bottles, chains and baseball bats are used (Vuković, 2012).

## SCHOOL VIOLENCE

It is important to point out that it was only after the media reports on various cases of maltreatment of students that the public in Serbia came to realize that some schools are overwhelmed by threats and violence, as if some minor perpetrators cannot be stopped by anything in their undertaking of violent acts. According to media reports, peer violence is on the rise in some schools, while in others peer violence has reduced in the near past compared to recent years, but, as the media recounts, the excesses are increasingly brutal:

*An example of a juvenile perpetrator known earlier from his violent behaviour:* Nova Varos, seventeen-year-old Đ.M., a pupil of the third grade of “Pivo Karamatijevic” grammar school in Nova Varoš, was badly injured after a fight with the graduate of this school, A.A., December 14 (Rovčanin, 2017). Seventeen-year old Đ.M., was badly injured after a fight with the graduate of this school, A.A. The violent act occurred during a long break in the afternoon shift. On that occasion, Đ.M. received a brain injury, and after first aid, he was initially transported to the local health centre, and, later on, accompanied by a doctor, to the hospital in Užice for further treatment. The students clashed during a break between the classes. A.A. hit Đ.M. with his fists in the head several times. After this, he fell to the concrete. The entire case was reported to the police. A.A. was previously known to the police in the city under Zlatar mountain, who filed several misdemeanour charges for violating public order and peace against him.

The media also acts as a “whistle blower”, that is, it has a social role as an informer to the public. In recent years, media has established a system of reporting on all serious cases of peer violence from across Serbia. From the media, we find that frequent cases of continuous violence of a group of children over one child are frequent (Talović, 2012: 14).

Stronger ones abuse the weaker, students of senior classes often take away personal items, snacks, and so on, from the younger pupils, while mistreating them, verbally and physically.

*An example of abuse carried out by a group of elderly pupils over younger ones: Ivanjica, Older students tortured first grade pupils in elementary school "Milinko Kušić", December 6 (Bojović, 2017).*

One case of peer violence was reported in the elementary school "Milinko Kušić" in Ivanjica, where the older students tortured several first-grade students, and is currently being investigated. Both the school and the police have taken all the necessary actions. One parent, who wished to remain anonymous, claimed that a group of older pupils from the seventh and eighth grades tortured several seven-year-old boys in various ways. They brought them into the toilet, turned off the lights so that they could not be recorded by the camera, held them by their arms and tied them up, sticking tape over their mouths, or holding their fists on their mouths so they would not scream. Then they stripped their trousers and pants, and took photos of them naked, demanding money, and threatening them. The children kept silent for days, and only when one of them complained to their parents did the whole story begin to unravel. One parent added that the children were in fear for days, and were unable to go to the toilet or leave the classrooms during a break.

In similar situations, the school climate has a prevailing feeling of insecurity. The greater the feeling of insecurity, the greater the chances of the occurrence of violence. Repeated violence and multi-victimization have an impact on the victim's attitude toward school. The media highlights the fact (Tanjug, 2011) that 60 percent of students believe that their school has not taken preventive activities, or measures aimed at reducing, fighting against and eradicating violence, or at least, they have not been informed about them. About 70 percent of respondents say their school does not have a team to protect against violence, abuse and neglect, or do not to know if such a team exists. When asked who, and how, children, in the event of violence, can address for protection, almost half of the respondents gave answers "no-one, no way, no one will listen, the school has nothing to do with it." The measures taken are assessed as untimely, inadequate, only with the purpose of minimizing and covering up violence rather than protecting pupils against it.

With an increasing number of victims, the feeling of insecurity is intensified, violence is perceived more frequently, and the general attitude of students towards school worsens. Individual repulsion spreads in some school environments, transforming over time into an antisocial culture. It is therefore important that recent, severe cases of peer violence, such as the murder of a sixteen-year-old in Pančevo and the group rape of a fourteen-year-old girl at the Institute for the Education of Children and Youth in Belgrade are nevertheless pursued independently of the school environment.

*An example of the worst form of peer violence - murder: Pančevo, Boy stabbed with a knife in Pančevo, and although emergency aid arrived on the scene in a timely manner, he died, December 7 (Tanjug, 2017).*

In the settlement Nova Misa in Pančevo, a boy passed away as a result of injuries sustained from a knife, the Belgrade media reported. A representative of the first aid service told media that they had received a call from the clinic in Pančevo on Tuesday, that help was needed for a boy lying in front of a sports centre. According to unofficial information, the boy was killed after a fight near the Mladost sports centre in the Pančevo neighbourhood, reports media. Ivan Adamov (16) was brutally killed in a contracted fight in Pančevo. He was murdered by N.

S. (17). The motive for the fight was allegedly a debt of 1,000 dinars (less than a 9 Euros) that the victim owed. Both participants were previously known to Pančevo police.

*An example of the worst form of peer violence - rape:* Belgrade, Two of the residents of the Institute for the Education of Children and Youth in Belgrade were arrested after they heavily injured the colon and genitals of the 14-year old M.C., also a resident of the institution, (Blic, 2017).

The juvenile J.M. (17) and his adult friend Bosko A. (18) were arrested. They are suspected of, on 26<sup>th</sup> November, entering the room in which M.C. slept, with J. M. taking a broom that stood next to the door and pushing the broomstick into the girl's genital area, over her underwear, in the vagina and anal opening. The pain woke the girl, who tried to resist them and told them to stop and leave the room. The attacking boys became angered, and pushed broomstick harder, and the girl cried and begged them to stop. Finally, they left the room. The girl immediately complained to her friends and educators, and she was helped and transported to the hospital, where the doctors concluded that she had severe colon and genital injuries. Miodrag Tasić, Director of the Institute for the Education of Children and Youth briefly informed the media: "We took measures prescribed by law, informed the ministry, the police, the prosecution"

## **THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA**

In reporting on peer violence, the media also have the role of breaking the wall of silence, built on fear and mistrust. Both the children who suffer violence and their parents are reluctant to report incidents to teachers or inspectors, because they fear worse consequences in the form of continuing victimization and because they do not have confidence in institutional solutions to the problem. Schools, as a practice, cover up incidents with an intention of ignoring or minimizing them, thereby avoiding their own responsibility. For this purpose, it is most often stated that the incident occurred outside the school's premises and/or hours, so that the school cannot be held accountable. Violent incidents are often minimalized (injuries are due to rough play, jostling on the stairways or sports injuries), school fights have 'always existed' and are just a 'normal' part of growing up, finding one's place in a pecking order, and gaining the popularity and respect of peers. It's not uncommon to blame the victims for teasing or hurting other students. One such case is the media report on the injuries inflicted with a metal rod by students in Sopot, indicating that the victim is the one who caused it. It is also visible that the school did not report the event, and attempted to minimize the problem.

*Example of blaming the victim and minimizing the incident:* Sopot, Boy received minor injuries with a metal rod, in an incident at the Kosmaj Mechanical Engineering School, February 28 (B.B., 2017).

A pupil of the first grade of the Kosmaj Mechanical Engineering School in Sopot, was injured by a metal rod, Director of the school Živorad Oketić confirmed to "Novosti". He pointed out that in the coming days he will determine what actually happened, because there are multiple versions of events. According to the director, the incident occurred in the afternoon shift. It is unclear whether the conflict between the students occurred during the sport class, as pupils reported, or whether the incident occurred in the gym after school hours, according to the teachers. The Director said that one pupil hit another with a metal rod, which they had taken off the heating grids. He immediately drove the injured child to the

doctor, where the doctors found minor injuries. After the injured boy said that he was fine, he went to the bus station and he and his friend went home. According to one story, the boy who was injured had waved a bar and teased others, but it remains to be understood exactly what happened. According to the Director, it is understood that he is a boy who attended a special elementary school program because of his behavioural problems. The director added that the injured boy knows how to tease other children, but that certainly does not justify what happened, and what could have led to more serious consequences. This incident, as the media learned unofficially, was not reported to the Secretariat for Education and Child Care, nor to the relevant school administration.

Only the other, the victimized side, as well as the opinion of the experts, are heard from the media. A lack of reports, and attempts to conceal violence, result in repetitions and escalations of violence. Violence is most often concealed in its initial stage, which is problematic, because it is at this stage that prevention is generally most successful (Mršević, 2017). Thus it is learned that school fights, even those that arose spontaneously, and especially scheduled fights, should in no way be considered a regular and normal part of growing up.

*An example of a previously scheduled fight:* Belgrade, P.K. (14), a pupil of the eighth grade, was wounded not far from the "Vladimir Rolovic" elementary school in Petlovo Brdo. The identified attacker N.P. (14), was also from the eighth grade, December 15 (Novaković, 2017).

One in a series of peer violence events occurred in December 2017, in the immediate vicinity of the Elementary School "Vladimir Rolovic" at Petlovo Brdo in Rakovica. A pupil of the eighth grade, N.P. (14), was stabbed in the back by P.K., the same age, after the previously scheduled fight. The injured boy was transferred to medical care at the Military Medical Academy and he is in a stable condition. According to the first information, the fight between the two minors took place around 13:00 in the forest, known locally as "Borići", approximately 1500 metres from the school grounds. Apparently, the boys had a fight earlier, in order to measure strength, and had been provoked by one of the students. N.P. constantly teased P.K. – who is a quiet and good boy – another teenager told reporters. The two of them did not associate with one another after school hours, and they are not even from the same school department. As was unofficially revealed, the boys were in opposite shifts, and at the agreed time, one of them left school, while the other came from home. At that moment they started a fight. The provoked P.K. turned to N.P. and without mercy he began to strike him. When he saw that he had proven his strength, he decided to stop the fight. He turned away from N.P., but at that moment, N.P. jumped on him, pulled out a knife and stabbed him two times in his back.

## **ANALOGIES WITH VIOLENCE BETWEEN ADULTS**

It is interesting that the media perceive a similarity to adult violence in peer violence. For example, one of the characteristics of peer violence is the disproportionate power seen in almost all cases, similar to most cases of adult violence. In order to have a violent perpetrator, a victim, and bullying, it is necessary that the perpetrator is stronger than the victim, for example, he is a little, but sufficiently, older, physically stronger, richer, more popular, from a larger social group. Forming a violent group is a special way of achieving

social and physical supremacy over victims of peer violence, who are, as a rule, individuals, most often isolated from others.

*Example of peer group violence:* Arandjelovac, Physical violence against a girl from the Technical School Mile Nikolić from Arandjelovac by peers, November 8 (Ljutić & Caranović, 2017).

A female pupil of the Technical School "Mile Nikolić" in Arandjelovac was attacked by school friends of both sexes. Horrifying footage has been shared on social media, showing boys hitting the girl in the classroom. When she tried to protect herself with her hands, she was ordered to drop them. None of the students, who, judging by the noise, were in a full classroom, reacted. Disturbing footage posted on Facebook shows that boys hit, with all their force, a girl sitting in a classroom. The High Court in Kragujevac ended two proceedings against juveniles who participated in these peer violence incidents, which occurred in two high schools in Arandjelovac in 2015 and 2017, and sentenced them to measures of intensified supervision. The higher court issued an educational measure of increased supervision for all juvenile persons who participated in this peer violence incident against a school friend of B.N. in the Technical School "Mile Nikolić" in Arandjelovac. Svetlana Simovic, spokeswoman for the High Court, told Beta agency that the measure of intensified supervision was imposed to minors V.S., V.K. and R.D. This measure will last for at least six months, and for a maximum of two years. A juvenile judge will periodically obtain reports from the guardianship authority or the Centre for Social Work, and only a judge can decide to terminate the educational supervision measure.

*Example of a group attack:* Niš, a pupil of the third grade of the high school "9th of May", P.R., received head injuries when he was beaten by two pupils of the Technical High School, L.D. and A.J., 14 December during a chemistry class in the afternoon shift at about 18:00. (Janačković, 2017).

According to the director of the gymnasium Nebojša Lekic, the attackers were restrained by a chemistry teacher, a janitor and a parent of a first-grade pupil, an off-duty military officer who had come to look at his child's grades. The beaten pupil was transported by an ambulance to the Clinical Centre in Niš, where his wound was sewn on his head and two scratches on the face and neck were treated. Two pupils of the Technical High School came to the chemistry cabinet during the fifth class and looked for, it would appear, a friend from football. Neither the victim nor the other pupils knew them. However, when the chemistry professor told them that there was a class in progress, they should not disturb it, and should leave immediately, they obeyed. But the later-attacked pupil also told them the same thing. The director of the school told 'Blic' that presumably, they were upset by the support of the professor, and they returned after a few minutes with bats found in the vicinity of the school, entered the chemistry cabinet and started hitting pupils. The director added that during the incident, glass was broken, and other school equipment was damaged. These were big, strong boys who, according to professors, were also drunk. The police were commended for their quick reaction, arriving in just two minutes, and video surveillance recorded everything. Most likely, this school, even though one of the most peaceful, still has to be additionally protected, possibly by a private security agency. The director has been against this, because it is an extra burden and an expense for the parents' pocket, but protection against such bullies from the street is necessary. In

the opinion of the director of the grammar school, video surveillance and a teacher acting as a porter were insufficient.

The threat of violence is constantly present in peer violence, and as a rule, it is not a one-off. The repeated violation of the victim is certain, and violence is not limited to a single event, which makes it similar to domestic violence. Also, similar to domestic violence, peer violence rarely stops by itself, for example, because the abuser themselves decide to stop. Violence ceases when it is confronted by an obstacle, when a person or something opposes the abuser, and when this obstacle is strong enough to prevent further violence.

Anxiety, as a type of long-lasting, deep-seated, ever-present fear has been observed among victims of peer violence, as well as victims of domestic violence, violence in penitentiary institutions and street violence. Violent children, as well as the adult abusers, are 'fed' by the fear of the victims, their ego 'grows' as more people become fearful, and such instilled fear is long-lasting. Both minor and the adult abusers calculate that the victim of violence, who is terrified, will not dare tell others about it. Due to the existence of such a situation, the abuser believes that they can continue to commit violence against the same victim, without fear that they will be detected and punished. The increase of fear in the victims of abuse is also contributed to by the belief that they are alone. The problem is often that nobody really believes the children who are victims (as well as the many adult victims of violence of adult abusers), and when everybody pretends to not notice anything, nobody is guilty when a problem arises (Vuković, 2012: 20.10).

## **VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE**

Violence often occurs in front of a school, in the school yard, dressing room or sports ground. About 20 percent of these attacks occur in classrooms and the same proportion in school halls, as a survey conducted in Novi Sad showed. Apart from the place of violent acts, victims of peer violence become victimized because of their weakness and/or 'otherness' (Galović, 2012: 10). These are the two basic categories of victim, and some others a mixture, i.e. some victims, according to some of their characteristics, fall victim due to their weaknesses, but some others are victims due to their otherness. Accordingly, the peer violence of juvenile offenders against underage victims does not differ from almost all types of adult violence toward adult victims. A similar statement also could be read in the regular annual report of the Protector of Citizens, where it is stated that particularly vulnerable groups of children are those children who are sick, children who are victims of violence and sexual abuse, and children who live and work in the street. Otherwise, out of the total number of complaints received by the Protector of Citizens from the field of child rights, one third refers to violence against children, including peer violence. The problem of peer violence is not recognized in time, because it is ignored in spite of the first signals of violence, and only reacted to when the problem escalates. All actors within the system must be involved and react properly at the first instance of manifestation of any form of violence. Only if everyone responds in time can we expect that we will reduce the incidence of violence among children (Tanjug, 2015).

The weakness of the victim can arise from their physical constitution, but also from their social circumstances. Typical casualties, due to their weakness arising from social circumstances, for example, are children who enter a new school environment, where friendly groups and allegiances have already been formed, where the roles are already divided, in short, where relations of hierarchy, solidarity and support are already established. Shy and under-developed children are often targeted by the perpetrator, and

the perpetrators who are prone to committing acts of violence consider them "weak and cowardly". Victims of peer violence, who become victims due to their weakness, are children who have previous or present traumas, meaning these children are more vulnerable, withdrawn, and avoid associating with other pupils. These traumas include, for example, a traumatic traffic accident, a serious illness, the loss of a family member, or the transfer of a child from one family unit to another (for example, to a grandmother due to parental divorce). Contemporary problems might be, for example, domestic violence against a child or a mother, situations of social vulnerability and social risks (housing and material problems of parents), criminality, drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution of one or both parents. Contrary to the wrong, yet widespread, belief that (mostly male) children who are exposed to domestic violence will most likely become violent towards their peers, the situation is just the opposite. Namely, traumatization by violence disarms them, destroys dignity and awareness of the right to protection and against violence, which in turn undermines the normal defence capabilities. Exposure to any form of previous violence, including incidents of family and peer violence, in fact leads to long-term and polyvalent victimization, or, in short, "once a victim, always a victim" (Mršević, 2013).

A different child, who does not behave like other peers, and falls short of the standard of behaviour established within the peer group, also tends to frequently become a victim of violence. There are also very frequent cases of children with some physical disability (unusually small, tall, thin, or overweight). Belonging to a different religion from the majority school environment, especially a religious affiliation that the perpetrators perceive as inferior, may also be the cause of maltreatment, assault and physical violence. The children of certain minority ethnicities are also exposed to peer violence, e.g. the attackers commonly target Roma children. The reason for the violence against them is mainly prejudice. Children who have special abilities, who are different to their surroundings, are exposed to violence because they are talented or gifted for something their average peers are not, for example, for sports, music, mathematics. Children of real or presumed minority sexual orientation (masculine girls and effeminate boys) are also targeted

Besides 'otherness', yet another cause of peer violence is above-average wealth or poverty. Children who do not fit into the environment, by the criterion of the small amount of material goods they have at their disposal, are those that, for example, obviously wear hand-me-down clothes of older brothers and sisters, last year's shoes, do not have mobile phones (or own a type of phone that is obsolete), cannot pay for excursions, and the like. In the case of wealthy children, the cause of bullying is mainly jealousy. This is why children are often warned not to carry expensive things, such jewellery, so as not to become a target (Preradović, Ristović, 2012).

Children who in various ways irritate others also fall into this category of those who, due to their otherness, become possible targets of peer violence. This is sometimes only a slight difference, e.g. only the way some children talk, for example. Especially exposed to peer violence are the so-called hyperactive children, who also irritate their peers and teaching staff, who are usually inclined to claim that the victims are actually the real perpetrators, as they themselves initiate conflicts in which they 'get what they deserved'. Examples of such an irritating behaviour include bothering others, making noise, lack of self-control, frequent provocation of disorder, disturbing others, fierce bursts of over-exuberance and impulsiveness (Čimburović, 2011: 135).

## **RESPONSIBILITY OF THE PARENTS**

Parents are largely responsible for the abusive behaviour of their children; they

educate children in violence, and often the children learn from them to be abusers, and commonly the problem is they are, in fact, both spoiled and overprotected children (Milivojević, 2011). Analysis of violence through social networks provides evidence that the abusers are usually seemingly good and obedient children who do not usually make trouble (Galović, 2012: 10).

*Example of abuse on social networks:* Zrenjanin, A girl, S.F., and her twin brother abused ten-year Isidora, physically and mentally, March 24 (Đokić & Stanić, 2018).

Abuse on social networks, death threats and physical attacks are only a part of the torture that 10-year-old Isidora survived from her peers from the school section, and besides her, two more girls left the school. The girl formed a group on Viber called "We hate Isidora Z", in which they called her a fool and threatened to make her play Blue Whale (a suicide game) until she died. Viber violence grew into physical violence. Shortly thereafter, during a school short break, four boys beat one pupil, when one of those who were beating up the boy, separated from the group, jumped up and struck Isidora in the stomach and the lungs with all his strength. The beaten boy and Isidora reported everything to the teacher, but she failed to even inform their parents. Concerned, Isidora's parents wanted to meet the twins' parents and asked the school to arrange a meeting for them to solve the problem that arose among children. The director advised Isidora's mother "to stop over-mothering" and did not organize a meeting. They asked for help from the Team for Fighting Violence within the school, and reported incidents to the police, but Isidora only got a school psychologist's justification, allowing her to miss school for two weeks because of a fear that someone would hurt her, said the mother of the abused girl. Conclusion: The school minimized the problem. Last year, at the beginning of December, representatives of the Provincial Education Inspection found that the parent of I.Ž., on the occasion of their complaints and appeals, was often met with misunderstanding and minimization of problems from the authorities in the school. The Inspection found that the school did not apply all the available resources to resolve the conflict situation in the section.

This case opens the next question about the parents of violent children. Parents actually contribute to the creation of violent children when they uncritically observe their behaviour, or even encourage it (Vlahović, 2011), so that abusers develop a tendency toward such behaviour in the lowest grades. There are parents who even openly oppose school rules and teachers' decisions, but only when their child is concerned, while expecting those rules to apply when it comes to another child. The answer to the question as to how it is impossible to stop the children who bully and maltreat their peers is mostly found in the support of their parents, who are powerful enough to force the school not to apply sanctions against their violent children. As psychologists, pedagogues and sociologists explain, when the school attempts to react and prevent violence in time, some parents "do not want to allow anybody to confront their children", and are ready to blame everyone except their children. Juvenile abusers thus 'practice' their future violent model of behaviour, which they will continue when they grow up. That's why it must be suppressed in time, to prevent later, long-lasting, and much more difficult consequences.

## **MEDIA ANALYSIS**

One of the positive characteristics of media reporting on peer violence is the investment of significant efforts to find answers to the causes, often with the help of

interviewed experts. For example, although it is noted that violent behaviour has always existed, now this answer is no longer adequate, says N1 television's psychologist and psychotherapist, Nevena Čalovska Hercog (Đurić, 2017). She thinks that when we live in continuous violence, society slowly slides towards normalizing it, even that which happens among children. "Young people, as we know, always mirror something that happens on a broader scale in society and they are especially quick to easily adopt bad behaviour patterns, especially if on the other hand they are not motivated toward better and functional, socially desirable forms of behaviour. Although it is observed as part of a current trend, it is also something that has continuously existed as a problem", says Čalovska Hercog. Psychotherapist Marko Brakovic says that the social values practically no longer exist. "Because the old ones are no longer functioning, while there are no new ones, in this situation the family loses its sense and primacy. And the children are left alone. Nobody teaches them anything. Parents usually have to work two, three jobs to survive, they come home tired, they do not have money to pay for childcare, and children are left to themselves. They do not have boundaries – they are only looking out for themselves. No one determines the boundaries or only determines them in a brutal manner, and therefore we have an increase in violence" (Đurić, 2017).

The causes of peer violence should be sought in the personality of the perpetrators, but also in social situations; problems in families, schools, specific to mainly suburban environments, which leads to a mixture in the causes of peer violence (Gedošević, 2017). Particularly sensitive environments are those that hover between rural and urban areas, such as suburban settlements, edge-of-city apartment blocks, pseudo-settlements, etc. These are forms of spaces or urban disorder with (dis)functional characteristics. In these new, often unfinished settlements, in the peripheral zones or suburbs, the street culture gains a special significance. The street is an everyday place of information exchange and self-expression, an informal gathering of "societies from corners", which, through violence, attempt to overcome the experience of non-inclusion, loneliness, various states of social helplessness and isolation, but also places to "become faces" (Matijević, 2015).

A set of causes leading to every kind of violence, including peer violence, is always very complicated. Rarely does anyone accept responsibility. Parents shift responsibility to the school, school to parents, and both to the media, or the micro-social environment in which children exist, and even the whole society and the crisis in which it is embroiled (Mićević, 2016). But, for the safety of pupils in schools, it is very important to tightly connect all systems, especially schools and families, said Biljana Lajovic from the Ministry of Education (Tanjung, 2017). On many sides there are indications that aggression occurs at every step, hate speech is ubiquitous, and it is difficult to find any TV show or film where communication is at conducted in a non-violent, tolerant, peaceful manner.

## CONCLUSION

We should not accept the belief, usually formed under the influence of the tabloid type of media, that control is insufficient, that institutions are powerless, that the legal system is ineffective, and that the problem of peer violence can be solved only by introduction of stricter sanctions. Increasing repression is never the most effective means of combating socially negative phenomena and it usually does little more than contribute to the intensification of the general repressive, conflicting social climate. Before being issued with sanctions, it should be noted that peer violence is the fruit of learned aggressiveness, rather than a phenomenon in and of itself. Serbia recently received a recommendation from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on the prohibition of corporal punishment. In spite of the awareness that beating children violates their human rights and jeopardizes

their human dignity, in reality, there is still a large (estimated) proportion of 40 percent of children in Serbia who are subject to such penalties (Jovanović, 2018). And as each stick has another end, the beaten children will return violence and the cycle of aggression will be completed in an endless cycle of violence in the family, school and society.

Despite the changes that may indicate an increased complexity and seriousness in the phenomenon of peer violence, we consider that these are not of such a character that the application of more severe sanctions is required, because the existing preventive possibilities have not yet been exhausted (Mijatović, 2011: 13). Namely, it is necessary to invest much more energy and effort in the implementation of the existing by-laws, the Special Protocol on the Protection of Children against Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Educational Institutions and the Rulebook on the Protocol of 2010. Control cameras, school policemen, and engagement of private security contribute to improved security in schools. Programs such as UNICEF's "School without Violence", "Be a Man", "No Excuses", "and Stop Violence", although they are conducted occasionally and sporadically, provide visible impacts, and efforts should be intensified to implement them regularly.

The strategy of combating this type, as well as any other type of violence, should not be formed under the influence of some of the most drastic and most difficult individual cases (Djordjevic, 2012). It is dangerous to refer to the demands of "a large number of citizens dissatisfied with too mild criminal policies" when deciding on the legalization of stricter sanctions. Through this text, based on media reports on peer violence, we may provide arguments in support of recommendations for adoption of a new law, the establishment of a child rights ombudsman and a monitoring system that will replace corporal sanctions, as a traditional form of upbringing in Serbia, but with new methods (Jovanović, 2018).

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