

INTERETHNIC RELATIONS AND PEER VIOLENCE IN AUSTRIAN, ITALIAN
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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on interethnic relations and interethnic peer violence in selected Austrian, Italian and Slovenian primary and secondary schools. Based on quantitative and qualitative research conducted by an international research consortium for the project "Children's Voices: Exploring Interethnic Violence and Children's Rights in the School Environment", the authors observe that interethnic peer violence is largely not recognised as an issue of concern. Furthermore, ethnicity per se is only rarely a decisive factor instigating peer violence. The results of the study indicate that peer violence in the school environment should be analysed using an intersectional approach, focussing together on ethnicity/race, gender, socioeconomic class and sexual orientation.

Keywords: interethnic relations, interethnic peer violence, schools

VIOLENZA INTERETNICA E VIOLENZA TRA PARI NELLE SCUOLE IN AUSTRIA,
ITALIA E SLOVENIA

SINTESI

L'articolo è incentrato sullo studio delle relazioni e della violenza interetnica tra i giovani in alcune scuole elementari e superiori in Austria, Italia e Slovenia. Basandosi sulla ricerca internazionale, quantitativa e qualitativa nell'ambito del progetto "Children's Voices: Exploring Interethnic Violence and Children's Rights in the School Environment", gli autori osservano come la violenza interetnica tra i giovani non sia considerata un elemento rilevante. Infatti l'appartenenza etnica, di per se, è solo raramente il fattore decisivo che causa eventuali episodi di violenza. I risultati della ricerca hanno posto in evidenza come lo studio dei comportamenti violenti in ambito scolastico necessiti di un approccio più integrato che prenda in considerazione elementi relativi all'appartenenza etnica e razziale, il sesso, la classe socio-economica e l'orientamento sessuale.

Parole chiave: relazioni interetniche, violenza interetnica tra i giovani, scuole

INTRODUCTION

Peer violence in schools has caught the attention of scholars and policy makers in Europe relatively recently, only in the last decade. The specific issue of interethnic peer violence in the school environment, however, remains largely an under-researched phenomenon. This article draws on results of the international research project “Children’s Voices: Exploring Interethnic Violence and Children’s Rights in the School Environment”, conducted in five European Union member states: Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (England). The project represents one of the rare studies focussed on interethnic violence in schools. The project aimed to address the following issues: (1) multiculturalism and interethnic relations in the school environment and (2) pupils’ experiences of peer violence related to ethnic, cultural and/or religious differences. Although the research was primarily explorative and, due to the specific sampling – described below in the methodology section – the data cannot be generalised, it provides an important insight into interethnic violence in schools through the perspectives of children, school staff and experts dealing with ethnicity and peer violence issues. The article has the following structure: a section on the methodology used, followed by a discussion of ethnic diversity and interethnic relations in local communities and in the school environment. Then pupils’ perceptions of the degree of understanding, tolerance and respect for ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in their communities are presented, followed by a section on (personal) experiences with interethnic violence in schools. Because ethnicity is only one factor that can lead to violent behaviour among peers, the importance of an intersectional approach to understanding the peer violence is discussed.

METHODOLOGY

The “Children’s Voices” international research project was conducted in Austria, Cyprus, Italy, Slovenia and the United Kingdom (England). We chose to focus on Austria, Italy and Slovenia because of their regional proximity as well as better comparability of their immigration flows and ethnic composition. Surveys were conducted in 2011. The research methodology combined quantitative and qualitative approaches using a sequential QUAN (quantitative) → QUAL (qualitative) mixed-methods design (Ivankova, 2013). Figure 1 shows the study design in detail.

The first stage was quantitative and examined the issue of interethnic relations in the school environment with a self-administered survey in the form of a standardised questionnaire, surveying schoolchildren in primary school, aged 10 to 11, and in secondary schools, aged 16 to 17. The questionnaire aimed to cover pupils’ views on ethnicity, equality, perceptions and experiences of interethnic violence, and so on; it was adapted slightly in some countries in line with specific national characteristics. The survey was conducted in school classrooms. A total of 767 pupils participated in the study in Slovenia, 715 in Austria, and 714 in Italy.¹ The quantitative results were subsequently used, as described by Ivankova (2013), to determine development of qualitative data collection protocols and shape the qualitative research sub-questions.

In the second stage, qualitative research was conducted in the form of focus groups with two sets of five to six schoolchildren and two semi-structured interviews with school staff (headmasters, teachers, school counsellors) in each school. Additional insights into interethnic relations in the school environment were gained

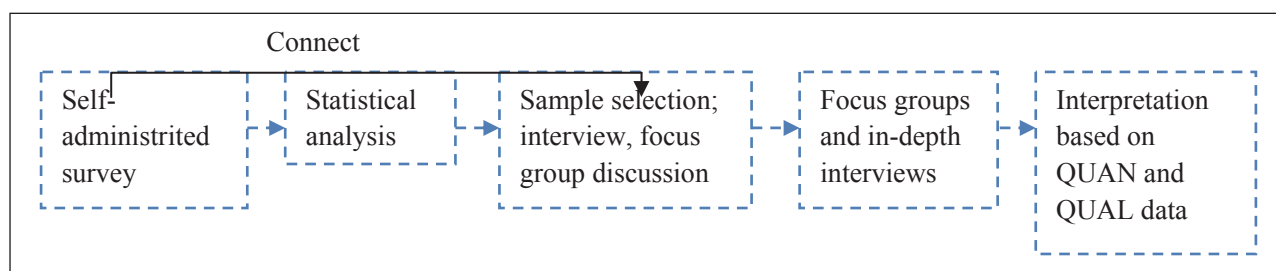


Figure 1: Study design
Slika 1: Načrt raziskave

¹ In Austria, schools from the regions of Vienna, Upper Austria, Salzburg and Carinthia were included in the sample. The first three regions have the highest percentages of pupils whose everyday language is other than German, with Vienna having the highest proportion of such students – about 40 per cent of pupils in Vienna have an everyday language other than German. The fourth region, Carinthia, was chosen because Slovenians – one the largest autochthon ethnic groups in Austria – live there (Sauer and Ajanović, 2012). The Italian regions chosen for the survey were Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Emilia-Romagna, Veneto and the autonomous province of Trento. These regions have an above-average percentage of pupils without Italian citizenship, ranging from 10 per cent to 14 per cent. In the sample of the included schools, between 10 per cent and 50 per cent or more of pupils in the class were foreign students (Delli Zotti *et al.*, 2012). The quantitative research in Slovenia took place in four locations: Ljubljana, Jesenice, Primorska and Prekmurje. The regions selected all have ethnically mixed populations. In each region, about one-third of pupils included in the sample were of non-Slovenian ethnic background (Medarić *et al.*, 2012).

through interviews with experts in the field of interethnic relations and peer violence from governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). We present the findings of the qualitative study in Austria (conducted in two primary and two secondary schools in Vienna), Italy (conducted in two primary and two secondary schools in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia and Veneto regions) and Slovenia (conducted in two primary and two secondary schools in Jesenice).

The sample used in the quantitative stage was not representative of the pupil population in each country. A non-probable sampling was used to meet theoretical prerequisites specified by the project. The schools were selected according to specific criteria in the project description, in particular that they be located in multicultural regions, chosen according to:

- closeness of the border,
- urbanity of the area (highly urban areas), and
- “attractiveness” of the region for migrants.

Given this mode of sampling, any direct comparisons among data from the three different countries should be done with extreme care. When such comparisons are made, the results need to be treated with caution and as indicative of trends that exist in each national setting.

Research partners entered the data into a previously established national sample database, which were later joined to form a common database. As the country samples were not representative (they consisted of four regional schools in each country), they were not directly comparable. Therefore, the partners agreed on a country-by-country analysis instead of performing an analysis of the whole sample. Within each country sample, the Cramer coefficient was used as a measure of association. With the Cramer’s V coefficient we can determine the strength of relationship between variables with 2 x 2 or more rows and columns where statistical significance has been confirmed using Chi-square.

The chosen schools were located in multicultural regions and were characterised by an above-average degree of ethnic diversity and a greater interest in the subject of interethnic violence. This selection could have had an effect on the incidence of interethnic violence, representing a higher degree of interethnic violence than if schools located in more ethnically homogeneous environments were included.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Putnam (2007, 141–142) discusses two contrasting theoretical perspectives of the impact of immigration and ethnic diversity on social connections and civic attitudes in local communities/neighbourhoods: the contact theory and the conflict theory. According to the contact theory, isolation breeds unfounded negative beliefs, stereotypes and mistrust towards “others”. By contrast, diversity may serve to improve interethnic relations, as

prejudices can be overcome and intercultural understanding can be enhanced if groups mingle and interact. The reasoning behind this perspective is that ‘as we have more contact with people unlike us, we overcome initial barriers of ignorance and hesitation and come to trust them more’. This line of reasoning stems from the intergroup theory, originated by Allport (1954) and more recently extended by Pettigrew (1998). However, intergroup interaction generates such positive outcomes only if it occurs (1) on the basis of equality, (2) in settings of common experiences and common objectives and (3) on a frequent, lasting and intensive basis (Allport, 1954; Gurin et al., 2004). If these conditions are not met, interethnic contact can instead produce the very opposite of tolerance and ethnic equality. That sort of polarisation lies at the core of the conflict theory, which postulates that (ethnic) diversity fosters “out-group” distrust and “in-group” solidarity. In other words, the more we are brought into physical proximity with people of a different ethnicity, the less we trust them. Conflict theory thus suggests that interaction between different ethnic groups will result in tension, conflict and hostility, foremost because of competition for scarce resources and access to public goods. In the conflict theory perspective, the relative size of the minority group or groups is of utmost importance. The larger the size of the minority group(s), the more members of the dominant group will feel threatened, the tighter will be their in-group bonding and the more prejudiced they will become towards the minority group(s). Blalock (1967) argues that this polarisation occurs because a growing share of minority group(s) in the population increases the competition over scarce resources among groups and gives minority group(s) more opportunities to mobilise socially and politically and therefore challenge the privileges of the dominant group.

While these perspectives of contact and conflict are presented as alternative and contrasting explanations, it seems more realistic to anticipate that both processes will operate simultaneously in most local communities. Therefore, for some individuals, direct contact will reduce stereotypes and mistrust towards members of ethnic groups, while for others, the appearance of (new) ethnic groups in a local community/neighbourhood will lead to avoidance of social contact and the development, or exacerbation, of existing stereotypes and out-group mistrust.

According to the assessments of the interviewees in Austria and Slovenia, interethnic relations in general have improved. However, in both countries, the older generations were recognised as less tolerant.

I think that for a certain period expressing national affiliation to other [non-Slovenian] nations was undesired. This is also shown by reports on human development and other reports but after 1999 the level of intolerance is decreasing, while

still remaining towards the Roma people. /.../ Co-existence has become a value, being different is a right. Consequently, people declare their difference. (Expert, Slovenia).

I think that it [the situation] got better. People see that we migrants also work hard and also are integrated. I personally did not experience any racist incidents but sometimes you hear elderly people talking. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

You can hear older people talking badly about migrants; they complain when you talk in another language in the tram and you can hear [them insulting someone by calling him/her 'gipsy']. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

Our generation is used to the multiculturalism in Vienna and I don't feel bothered by it. But elderly people sometimes make racist comments in the supermarket or the tram. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

These old mums ain't [tolerant towards immigrants]. (Secondary school pupil, Slovenia).

Recently, I think it's getting better, but this is a rural, actually suburban environment. So it seems that some of these stereotypes are still present. Err, now in practice, ... hmmm ... maybe with these parents, older ones, that actually, when there are some problems that we solve, there's more of it present than with younger generations, who are basically connected in a different way. (School counsellor, Slovenia).

In Italy, however, in recent years a shift towards intolerance of immigrants and ethnic minorities has been observed in public discourse, leading to increased racism and xenophobic violence. The 2011 Human Rights Watch report² stated that "in a country that has seen a dramatic increase in immigration, particularly over the past 10 years, a political discourse that links immigrants and Roma and Sinti (many of whom are Italian citizens) to crime has helped to create and perpetuate an environment of intolerance". Media reporting on immigrants and ethnic minorities in Italy often portrays them in a negative light, and the impact of such reporting on the public perception of those communities is causing increased concern among representatives of NGOs as well as media observers.

I remember when they reported the news of that Romanian who had killed a man piercing him in the eye with the tip of an umbrella in Rome, a hell of a conflict raged. The kids at school were all against the Romanian kids and I still remember the aggression, remember my Romanian friend. She was on the bus with her baby in her arms, the

phone rang and she started the conversation in her language. At that point all people on the bus attacked her with insults and pulled her off the bus. (Expert, Italy).

I often go with my mom to a park and once I heard children arguing because there was this kid who called another kid inferior because he had come from a different country and said that he could not stay there: You cannot play with me because you're not part of my group, and it went on so for half an hour until my mom separated them because she was a bit sick of seeing that scene. The targeted child had tried to stand before starting to cry. (Primary school pupil, Italy).

The processes of "othering" and creating hierarchies of "foreigners" were also observed in Austria and Slovenia. Othering has been conceptualised by Said in his influential book *Orientalism*, where he writes: "The development and maintenance of every culture requires the existence of another different and competing alter ego. The construction of identity...whether Orient or Occident, France or Britain... involves establishing opposites and otherness whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from us" (1995, 332). Constructing otherness requires categorisation. The construction of "us" and "them" is not possible without characterisation meant to differentiate and separate. In defining "ourselves" in opposition to a constructed "other", we perform a process of classification through the use of binary oppositions, such as normal/abnormal, civilised/uncivilised, clean/unclean. We do not merely assign people to categories; we assign values to those categories. Furthermore, a "chain" of "others" is also established, in which hierarchies of more and less tolerable or likable "others" are constructed³.

In Slovenia and Italy, an evident differentiation between the nationalities from the southern and eastern parts of Europe (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Romania, Serbia, etc.) and the western and northern parts of Europe can be observed.

Otherwise I believe there is a difference. That those who come from the west are more respected than those from the south. (Secondary school pupil, Slovenia).

People, just because they come from Eastern Europe – Albanians, Serbs, Romanians – are considered more dangerous than, let's say, the Chinese. (Secondary school pupil, Italy).

People think that all Serbs and Albanians are dangerous people walking armed with knives, but

2 Human Rights Watch (2011): *Everyday Intolerance: Racist and Xenophobic Violence in Italy*. New York: Human Rights Watch. Available at: <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2011/03/20/everyday-intolerance-0> (30. 5. 2013).

3 For more on intergroup discrimination and the issue of hierarchy of more or less acceptable »others«, see Medarić (2009) and Sedmak (2004).

also [some] Italians are like this. Unfortunately, only foreigners are seen as bad people. (Secondary school pupil, Italy).

Ethnic stereotypes are still rooted in the majority ethnic group and transmitted to the young. Focus group discussions revealed that members of the majority were more positive towards those nations that they considered to be civilised, clean and developed. In their opinion, western and northern nations “are more civilised” and the differentiation between nations is a consequence of “not being equal” (Primary school pupil, Slovenia). A Macedonian girl explained the reason for differentiation:

“Because countries like France and England are more developed than Macedonia or Bosnia” (Primary school pupil, Slovenia).

At the bottom end of the chain of othering are Roma, who unquestionably remain the most marginalised and vilified minority group in Austria, Italy and Slovenia. The majority live in extreme poverty, many in appalling conditions in either authorised or unauthorised settlements. Extreme prejudice against the Roma is widespread among the rest of the population, and anti-Roma sentiments are common in political discourse, the media and in everyday conversations that reach also into the classrooms.

Yes, Roma pupils often also hide their ethnic background because they know that they will be insulted. (Teacher, Austria).

A similar situation was pointed out in Slovenia. An 11-year-old girl of Roma ethnic background initially declared herself as Croat, but later in the focus group discussion about prejudices explained that others think Roma “smell and should go to school for students with special needs”. Hiding the Roma ethnic background can be understood as a practical consequence of multiple prejudices related to Roma.

A few years ago, when we had a consultation on the status of Roma in Slovenia and Austria, there was a representative of the NGO Society of Allies for Soft Landing from Krško who told us that a kid once asked her if some cream exists which you could use so that others couldn't see you are Roma. (Expert, Slovenia).

ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE SCHOOL

The impact of ethnic diversity in the micro-environment, as at the school or classroom level, can be quite different from that of diversity at the neighbourhood, city or national level. Interaction among children of

different ethnicities cannot be avoided in the micro environment of the classroom/school, where the children mingle on a daily basis, are equal in status (at least nominally) and share the same school experience (Kokkonen et al., 2008, in Janmaat, 2010). Thus, we might expect the contact theory perspective to receive much support from micro-level studies in educational settings.

Pupils included in the research in Austria, Italy and Slovenia estimate interethnic relations in school as largely positive. According to our interviewees, ethnic diversity does not represent a problem and is well accepted in most cases. Pupils mostly pointed out that what really matters is the personality of an individual, not his/her ethnicity, race or religion.

It [ethnicity] does not matter. (Primary school pupil, Slovenia).

The colour of the skin doesn't count as well. What counts is how one is within. The colour of the skin doesn't count anyway, even if one is a foreigner he is always a person. (Primary school pupil, Italy).

Of course everyone has his or her cultural background which is present in his/her opinion/attitude but this never was a problem for us. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

Based on the discussions with the pupils, it seems that most of the time they feel comfortable in their (multicultural) school environment. Some pointed out positive things like getting to know different people, learning about different food or cultural customs, as well as learning the everyday languages of their friends in school.

Yes, also because we have contact with different people. (Secondary school pupil, Slovenia).

And they have different habits from which we can learn and we should not differentiate them...that in fact they are equal. (Secondary school pupil, Slovenia).

I like that we see different food and learn languages. What I don't like is that pupils insult each other in other languages. (Primary school pupil, Austria).

The perception of pupils in the schools we visited was in general one of equal treatment and respect – pupils mainly perceive the school environment as positive and inclusive. In general, the ethnicity of pupils does not influence the attitude of school staff towards them. According to the findings of the Italian research team, teachers, except in some rare cases, work constantly to strengthen the concept of “equality in diversity”.

It's not possible to treat everyone the same. But if teachers don't treat us the same then it's not because of our nationality. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

Because teachers all treat the Slovenian pupils and pupils of other nationalities equally! (Primary school pupil, Slovenia).

However, individual cases of discriminatory grading, unequal treatment or racist comments were mentioned in all three countries.

Yes, we have a professor who does not accept them [non-Slovenian students] and this is evident...When it comes to giving grades, he is not objective, in cases when essays are graded, etc. (Secondary school pupil, Slovenia).

One teacher makes strange comments, like that one girl does not get enough sunlight because she wears a headscarf and that this is not good for her development. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

I have experienced it personally: a teacher gave me a D and an Austrian student got a C although we had the same number of points in the test. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

In interviews, some school staff mentioned that some parents also feel their children are being treated unfairly on the basis of their nationality. In one Slovenian primary school, the counsellor mentioned a case where, at the beginning of a project to keep records on talented students, two parents felt that their children were being discriminated against on the basis of their nationality, as their daughters had not been identified as “talented students”.

The research findings show that schools in all three countries can be perceived as “protected spaces” where pupils generally feel safe and the teachers or the school policy as such can ensure that tolerance and respect for diversity function better than in society as a whole.

If we compare racism in our society and in schools, then in schools it is hardly a problem. (Teacher, Austria).

I have never experienced interethnic violence in our school. This happens more often outside. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

Yes, because in school these guys [the bullies] behave quite well while when they go out they turn into beasts. (Primary school pupil, Italy).

No [there is no interethnic violence in the school], because there are teachers and parents who watch them ... and then because they know they must behave in a different way. (Primary school pupil, Italy).

Even though interethnic relations in schools seem to be largely positive, it would be misguided to assume that interethnic peer violence does not exist, as we will discuss below.

ETHNIC BACKGROUND AND TOLERANCE

Views on multiculturalism and ethnic minorities'/immigrants' rights can be a useful indicator of current and future social stability and levels of community cohesion and integration. A group of normative statements was presented to the pupils, who expressed their level of agreement with each (with average values on the Likert scale, from 1 – strongly disagree – to 5 – strongly agree). The first two statements clearly tap into the notion of migrant assimilation and cultural adaptation, while the last three statements indicate respect for and positive acceptance of cultural difference.

The highest general level of agreement with the statement

“Children who come to Italy/Slovenia/Austria from other countries should give up their language and culture”

was found in Slovenia (2.02; in Italy 1.80 and in Austria 1.94). The statement

“Children who come to Italy/Slovenia/Austria from other countries should follow the country language and culture”

obtained the highest level of agreement in Austria (3.60; in Slovenia 3.21 and in Italy 3.03). For the statements expressing respect for ethnic diversity and positive acceptance of cultural difference, the results are the following. The statement

“People who come to Italy/Slovenia/Austria from other countries should have the right to follow the customs of their countries”

obtained the highest level of agreement in Austria (3.95; in Slovenia 3.88 and in Italy 3.58). Similarly, the level of agreement with the statement

“I like the fact that there are people of different ethnic backgrounds in the country where I live”

was the highest in Austria (3.96; in Slovenia 3.84 and in Italy 3.74). The statement

4 Asking children to declare their ethnic identification is a sensitive issue that we have been aware of since the very beginning of the project. Furthermore, younger pupils in particular encountered difficulties when answering this question, since they sometimes didn't understand the concept itself. Additionally, difficulties arose in cases when children came from ethnically mixed marriages. Therefore, for the purpose of the study we introduced the following categories: dominant ethnicity (children of Austrian, Italian and Slovenian ethnicity), other ethnicities (children with various migratory backgrounds and children belonging to ethnic minority groups) and mixed ethnicity (children born to ethnically mixed marriages).

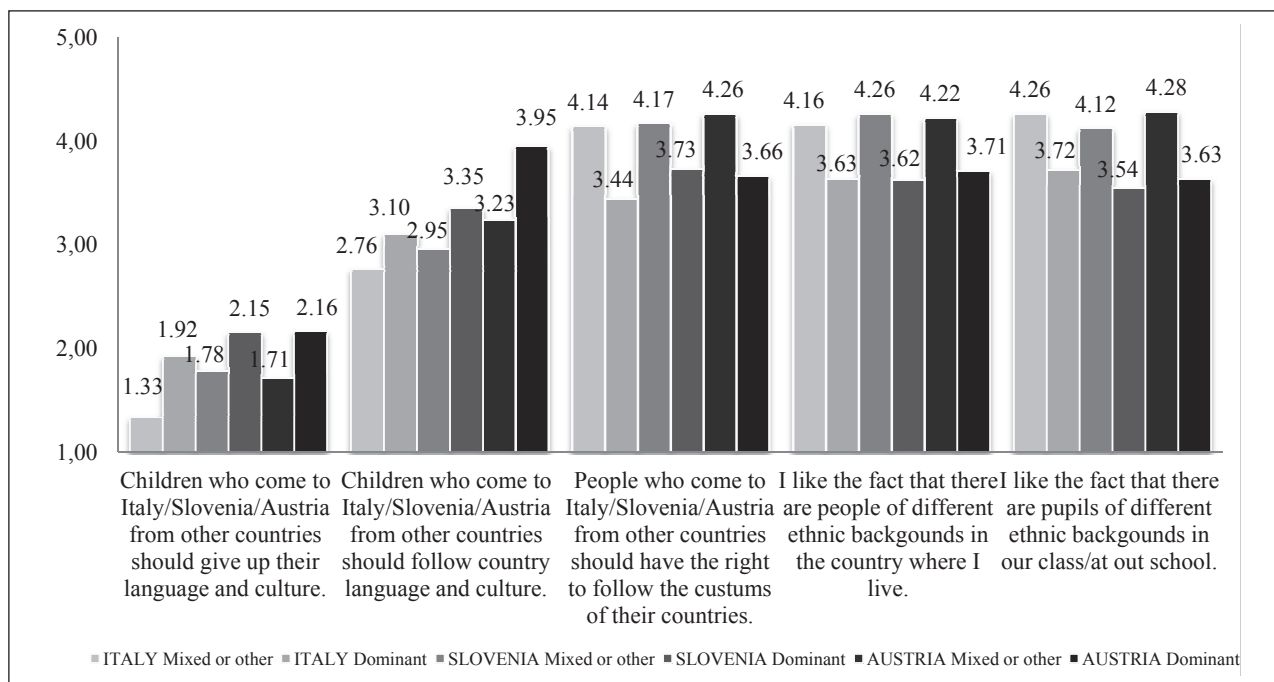


Figure 2: Average levels of agreement with normative statements by ethnicity
Slika 2: Povprečne stopnje strinjanja z normativnimi izjavami glede na etničnost

“I like the fact that there are pupils of other ethnic backgrounds in our class/at our school”

that there are pupils of other ethnic backgrounds in our class/at our school.”

received the highest level of agreement in Austria (3.95; in Italy 3.83 and in Slovenia 3.74).

INTERETHNIC VIOLENCE AMONG PEERS

When taking into account the ethnicity⁴ of the respondents, apparent differences in the answers can be observed between pupils of dominant (Austrian, Italian and Slovenian) ethnicity and pupils of other and mixed ethnicities. As Figure 2 clearly shows, pupils of non-dominant (other or mixed) ethnicities express a higher level of disagreement with statements emphasising migrant assimilation and cultural adaptation.

For the purpose of the study, we defined interethnic peer violence as any type of violence among peers (physical, verbal, relational or cyber), happening on the basis of ethnicity, language, religion or culture of the individual or peer group. In compliance with our territorial focus, interethnic violence among peers encompasses violence of a pupil or pupils of Austrian/Italian/Slovenian ethnicity towards pupil or pupils of other/mixed ethnicities and vice versa.

“Children who come to Italy/Slovenia/Austria from other countries should give up their language and culture” and “Children who come to Italy/Slovenia/Austria from other countries should follow the new country’s language and culture”.

In analysing the prevalence of interethnic peer violence, our research focussed on two perspectives. The first perspective encompassed observations of pupils on the occurrence of six types of interethnic violence⁵ happening to other students. The second perspective focussed on personal experiences with the above-mentioned types of violence. Both perspectives include comparison of differences in observations and experiences according to the ethnicity of the pupils.

On the other hand, pupils of non-dominant ethnicities express a higher level of agreement with the statements

NOTICING INTERETHNIC VIOLENCE

“People who come to Italy/Slovenia/Austria from other countries should have the right to follow the customs of their countries”, “I like the fact that there are people of different ethnic backgrounds in the country where I live” and “I like the fact

Knowledge of the new country’s language is one of the key factors influencing inclusion of immigrant pu-

5 Namely, (1) rude physical behaviour; (2) teasing, name calling or insulting; (3) talking behind one’s back; (4) sending insulting messages by internet or mobile phone; (5) ignoring or avoiding contact; and (6) destroying personal property.

pils in peer groups. The degree of acceptance of peers of different ethnic backgrounds is reflected in attitudes towards pupils (of mixed or other ethnicities) who use their mother tongue in public or who do not speak the new language fluently. In focus group discussions pupils mentioned several times that they don't approve of talking in a language other than German/Italian/Slovenian in school, especially when a pupil's mother tongue is used for insulting others.

I think it is mean to insult someone in a language that the others do not understand. (Primary school pupil, Italy).

When we walk by a group of Serbian girls, for example, they talk behind our backs in Serbian and this is not nice. (Secondary school pupil, Austria).

Teasing others on the basis of their lack of language skills was most often noticed in Italy, where 12.9 per cent of pupils included in the sample often noticed teasing on the basis of poor language knowledge (it was noticed sometimes by 32.6 per cent of the pupils, once by 10.5 per cent and never by 28.2 per cent). In Slovenia, 32.2 per cent of pupils reported not noticing any teasing on this basis, while 11.5 per cent pupils noticed it once, 31.7 per cent sometimes and 9.0 per cent often. In Austria, more than half (53.4 per cent) of the pupils participating in the study did not notice any teasing on this basis, 7.7 per cent noticed it once, 18.6 per cent sometimes and 6.4 per cent often.

When talking about interethnic violence towards pupils of other ethnicities, the largest share of pupils in Austria, Italy and Slovenia noticed cases of pupils be-

ing teased, shunned or gossiped about because of their ethnic background. Of the three country samples, the Slovenian sample had the highest average proportion of pupils who had witnessed various types of interethnic violence. A total of 61.7 per cent of Slovenian pupils reported having noticed teasing, name calling and insults on the basis of ethnicity (compared to 58.5 per cent of Italian pupils and only 36.6 per cent of Austrian pupils); 56.2 per cent of Slovenian pupils had noticed talking behind pupils' backs (compared to 50.8 per cent of Italian pupils and 39.0 per cent of Austrian pupils); 58.2 per cent reported ignoring or avoiding (compared to 54.0 per cent of the Italian and 29.5 per cent of Austrian samples); 31.9 per cent reported hiding or destroying property (compared to 15.8 per cent of Italian pupils and 12.1 per cent of Austrian students); and 29.9 per cent noticed hitting or spitting (compared to 20.6 per cent of Italian pupils and 13.3 per cent of Austrian pupils). Finally, 28.7 per cent of the Slovenian students, 21.0 per cent of Italian students and 17.3 per cent of Austrian pupils included in the sample noticed cyber bullying of peers of other ethnicities (e.g. sending insulting messages via the Internet or mobile phone). Sending insulting messages or emails and insulting comments over the Internet seems to be the least widespread form of interethnic violence in Slovenia, while in Austria and Italy the least widespread forms of violence turned out to be rude physical behaviour towards other pupils and hiding or destroying their property.

As Figure 3 demonstrates, the percentage of students who noticed incidents of interethnic violence was higher among pupils of mixed or other ethnic origin for four out of five types of interethnic violence. Only in Italy

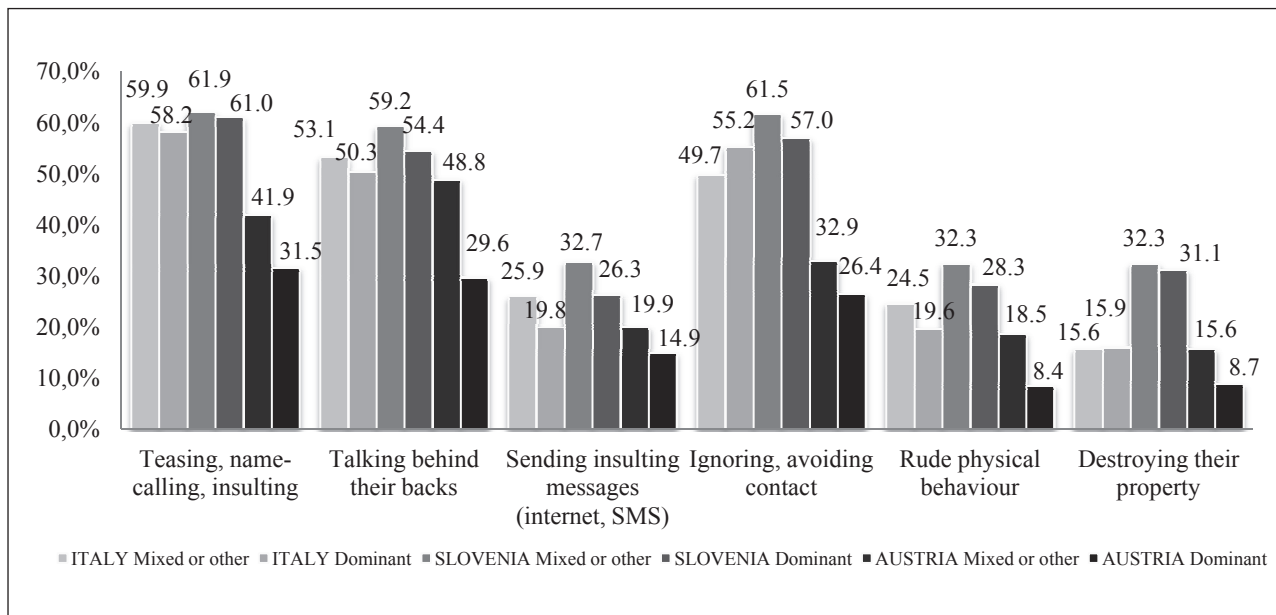


Figure 3: Respondents who noticed interethnic violence sometimes, often or very often (%) by ethnicity
 Slika 3: Odgovarjajoči, ki so opazili medetnično nasilje včasih, pogosto in zelo pogosto (%)

did members of the majority ethnic group report more frequently noticing two types of interethnic violence: ignoring or avoiding contact with pupils of other ethnic backgrounds and the destruction of property. Differences in observations according to the ethnicity of respondents are especially high in Austria, where average observations of the occurrence of interethnic violence are the lowest. Differences between pupils of Austrian ethnicity and those of mixed/other ethnicities range from 5.0 per cent (sending insulting messages via Internet or SMS) to 19.2 per cent (talking behind someone’s back). The data indicate that pupils of other or mixed ethnicities seem to be more sensitive to noticing interethnic violence among peers. The chi-square test confirmed statistical differences in observations of interethnic violence among pupils of non-dominant ethnicities:

- In all analysed countries, a significantly higher share of pupils of other or mixed ethnic background noticed cases of teasing others due to their poor language skills.
- In Italy and Austria, relatively more pupils of other ethnic background tend to notice habitual teasing, name calling or insulting others because of their ethnic background.
- In Italy and Austria, more pupils of other ethnic background tend to notice habitual rumour spreading than do pupils of dominant ethnicity.

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF INTERETHNIC VIOLENCE

In Italy and Austria, most pupils said they had personally experienced rumour spreading and having untruth-

ful things said about them behind their backs, while in the Slovenian sample the most prevalent forms of interethnic violence were teasing, name calling and insults. Interethnic violence is experienced by pupils of mixed or other ethnic origin as well as by pupils of Austrians/Italian/Slovenian ethnicity; however, the proportion of pupils with such personal experiences was found to be significantly higher among pupils of other and mixed ethnic backgrounds. In all analysed countries, significantly more pupils of other or mixed ethnic background experienced teasing, name calling or insults, talking behind their backs and being shunned by their classmates because of their ethnic background.

....He started to mess with me, because I'm Bosnian. Because I'm Serbian. Serbo-Bosnian. /.../ He said to me: 'Haha, you're a Bos...Srbo-Bosanc', and stuff, 'I hate you', and then he beat me up a bit and such. (Primary school pupil, Slovenia).

Once it happened while John and Julius were playing soccer, some older kids arrived and told them to go away and they said no and the kids began to beat them. They don't let us play and say that I'm just a Moroccan...that I don't have the same rights and that they are superior. (Primary school pupil, Italy).

[I don't like it when they make] fun out of different cultures, the food or they call me Pharaoh because I'm from Egypt or they call one pupil "nigger" or another "gypsy". (Primary school pupil, Austria).

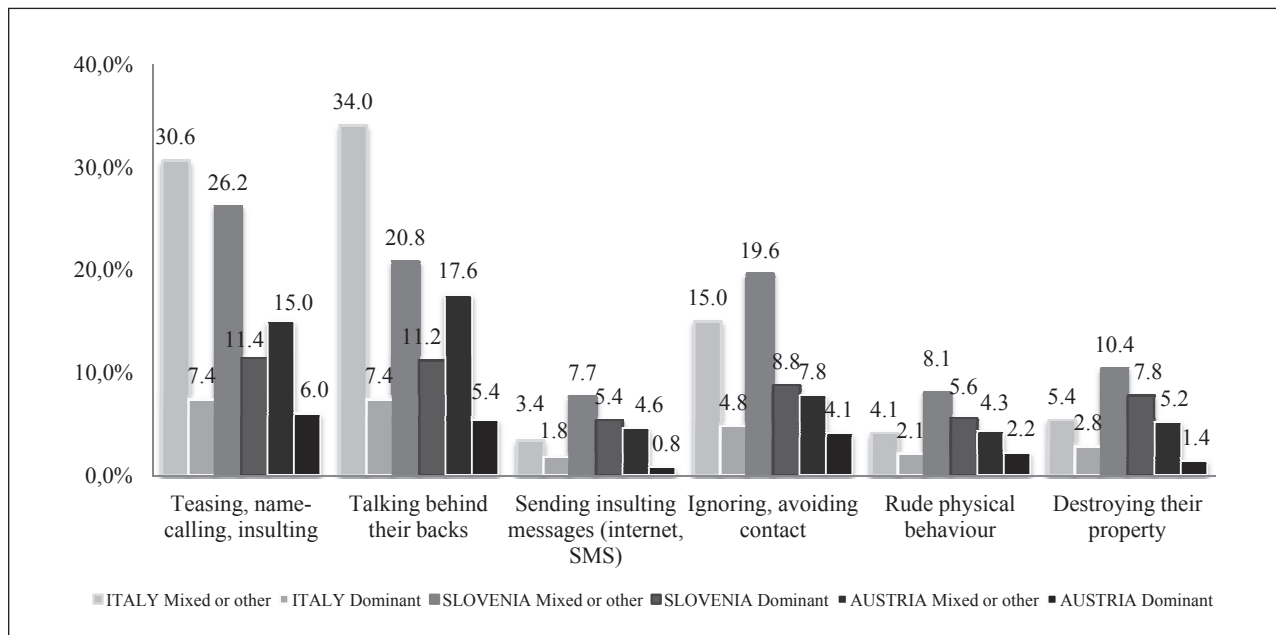


Figure 4: Respondents who experienced interethnic violence sometimes, often or very often (%) by ethnicity
 Slika 4: Odgovarjajoči, ki so izkusili medetnično nasilje včasih, pogosto in zelo pogosto (%) glede na etničnost

EVENTS STIMULATING INTERETHNIC VIOLENCE

According to our interviewees, ethnicity *per se* is only rarely the reason for the outburst of peer violence. However, it serves as an identifying characteristic, a reason for differentiating between “us” and “them” on the basis of ethnic stereotypes and prejudices. Interethnic (peer) violence may be encouraged by everyday or extreme events that raise the issue of ethnic identity. Sports events and media reports on crimes conducted by immigrants in particular serve as stimulators of interethnic tensions among peers that can escalate to violent acts.

Yes, but it can also occur when the Serbian team won and the Italian team lost the game. Then in class acts of violence, that weren't there before between the kids, are unleashed. (Teacher, Italy).

Another issue highlighted during the project is the legacy of interethnic conflicts in former Yugoslav republics. The violent dissolution of the former common state, which led to the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo, still resonates in the minds of the older generation (parents and relatives of pupils) and strongly affects the relationships among members of former Yugoslav nations and nationalities. Some youngsters feel these tensions as a heavy emotional burden imposed on them by their parents and they feel these issues are not theirs to bear.

I have recently had a case where a Kosovo Albanian girl and a Serbian girl had a problem and they have already had this conflict in their last school. But here the parents were responsible for the conflict – the parents even fought in school once. Here our influence comes to an end and only a social worker can help and go to the families. (Teacher, Austria).

When you mentioned old grudges...I resent my father. When I was little, we lived in [xy] street and he has such old grudges, because his par-

ents also had them. And I resent my parents very much, that they had such a bad relationship with others. For example, when we used to live in [xy] street, when I was in the first grade, my father went into a fight with an axe with a neighbour, who was a Serb. I resent that, because he has these old grudges. /.../ It is like if some German would come here and we'd say: 'You attacked us in the Second World War' /.../ I do not know why these old grudges are borne, if we are now a new generation. I don't know why... (Primary school pupil, Slovenia).

UNDERSTANDING PEER VIOLENCE – IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

The dynamics of peer violence are strongly related to various forms of social inequality. Therefore a focus on just one social category, such as ethnicity, is inadequate for understanding the social position of an individual, which is complex. Key social categories intertwine to influence social inequalities and the position of the individual in the peer group. Therefore the issue of peer violence should be analysed using an intersectional approach (Hrženjak and Humer, 2010; Peguero, 2012). The concept of intersectionality, introduced mainly by Collins and Crenshaw (in Anthias, 2013), considers the interlocking of several social categories that influence the social position of an individual in society and his/her predisposition to social inequalities. Initially, the concept of intersectionality primarily addressed three social categories – gender, socioeconomic class and race/ethnicity – but studies addressing peer violence in the last decade have introduced a fourth category: sexual orientation.⁶

Pointing to a sole reason for peer violence victimisation without considering other social categories as well as contextual and individual factors results⁷ in a simplified understanding of the issue. Instead, the inter-relationship of multiple factors is crucial for understanding the dynamics of peer violence.

6 In his article on youth victimisation at school, Peguero (2012) analysed the complexities and disparities associated with school bullying within four social categories that influence the increased vulnerability of youth to potential bullying at school: race and ethnicity, being an immigrant, gender and sexual orientation.

7 Among contextual and individual factors, age, cultural and family background, school success, personality, physical appearance, and school climate were stressed by experts and school staff as key determinants influencing peer violence dynamics:

- Age is an important factor when it comes to the experience of and the use of violence to solve or react to conflicts. The prevalence of (interethnic) violence is higher among younger pupils.
- Cultural background influences culturally specific tolerance of (physical) violence and socially acceptable response to insults, provocations, etc.
- A family history of violence influences tolerance towards violence.
- Differing from average success in school, in either a positive or negative way, may cause peer teasing or social exclusion of children who are above or below average successful.
- Personality influences position in peer hierarchies, with low self-esteem/shyness/introversion encouraging the potential for victimisation.
- Physical appearance not fitting into contemporary beauty ideals is another risk factor for peer violence.
- School climate (such as the presence of a security guard, availability of physical activities during breaks, class dynamics) influences the prevalence of peer violence in school.
- Addiction problems or illegal drug use are often related to violence among peers.

Often, the migration background is used as an explanation to simplify complex issues. But this often hides the real things, the problems and challenges that are there, instead of explaining them. And then these simplified attempts to explain something reproduce certain pictures and stereotypes. (Expert, Austria).

If the comparison would be made, it would be hard to say that children from ethnic minorities are more often victims of violence – we didn't find that. Violence occurs in many different dimensions. Ethnicity isn't the only one, it isn't crucial...It's about the circumstances, the combination of factors. (Expert, Slovenia).

The ethnic or migrant background of an individual does not adequately explain the position of a young individual in the peer group or in school. The study results suggest that peer violence in the school environment should be analysed intersectionally, with a focus on ethnicity/race, gender, socioeconomic class and sexual orientation. Now we will briefly consider how key social categories interact in the dynamics of peer violence.

Gender is recognised as one of the crucial social categories that influence experiences of peer violence, perceptions of it and reaction towards it, as well as influencing violent actions by pupils. It is therefore important to analyse peer violence through the lens of gender – being aware not only of gendered differences in the perceptions and practice of violence but also of the role of norms around the social construction of masculinity and femininity (Sauer and Ajanović, 2013).

Numerous studies confirm gender differences associated with different types of peer violence. While physical

violence is usually more often reported by boys, verbal and relational violence is more often reported by girls (Peguero, 2012, 405). These gender(ed) differences – the perception that physical violence is an issue related to boys and their expression of masculinity while verbal violence is the pervasive type of violence among girls – were found among children included in the research.

That's how it is with boys, they fight, and girls, girls are just insulting. (Primary school pupil, Slovenia).

When gender-related expectations around violent behaviour are violated – for example, in instances of physical violence among girls – these deviations from gender-acceptable behaviour result in the recognition of those who practice such behaviour as outsiders. Girls who break socially accepted norms around physical violence, which is supposed to be a “boy thing”, are seen as fitting into the context of the “other” ethnic group.

They [girls of other ethnic backgrounds] mainly fight because of dudes. (Secondary school pupil, Slovenia).

Our data on interethnic violence in the school environment confirmed gender differences in the experience of interethnic violence and in the reactions to it. In the three countries sampled:

- Girls experienced all types of interethnic violence less often than boys.
- A significantly higher share of boys than of girls said they bullied others because of their ethnic background.



Sl. 1: All different all equal, Thinkstock

Fig. 1: Vsi različni – vsi enaki, Thinkstock

- A significantly higher share of boys than of girls said they fight back when being treated badly by a bully. In Italy and Austria, a higher share of girls than of boys said they cry or run away when being bullied.
- A higher percentage of boys than of girls are prompt to help the victim of mistreatment, but they are also the ones who more often decide to do nothing and even join the ones who treat others badly. In all countries, girls are more likely than boys to tell an adult about the mistreatment of others and are more likely than boys to tell the bullies what they're doing is not right.

The socioeconomic position of the family of the (immigrant) pupil is another important factor that influences inclusion in peer groups. Socioeconomic status is decisive for immigrant students' interethnic friendships (Van Houte and Stevens, 2009, 217). The potential for exclusion from the peer group on the basis of lower socioeconomic status was recognised by experts and school staff who mentioned that youngsters from socioeconomically disadvantaged families are more likely to be bullied than others, which is in line with the findings of other studies in this area (e.g. Due et al., 2009). Poverty is one of the strongest indicators for social exclusion from the peer group.

Social stratification among students is very visible – those who are rich and those who are poor. Then, the violence and teasing may occur because of clothing, behaviour... (School counsellor, Slovenia).

Someone thinks that somebody is inferior to himself because he/she is sometimes not of the same race, does not speak the same language, does not profess the same religion or doesn't have the same economic opportunities or a wealthy family that pampers him/her and so on. (Primary school pupil, Italy).

Lower socioeconomic position or poverty not only stimulates the potential for victimisation but is also recognised as a factor that may encourage aggressive behaviour in order to gain status within schools and on the street (National Science Foundation, 2013).

Peer violence based on *sexual orientation* has become an important issue in education, educational psychology and psychology over the last two decades. Researchers confirm that lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth are at increased risk of bullying (Švab and Kuhar, 2008; Kopels and Paceley, 2012). Acceptance by peers is strongly related to conformance with hegemonic gender ideals. Inclusion of boys in the peer group depends on the congruence of their physical look and behaviour with the hegemonic ideals of masculinity and virility (Stoudt 2006, 273). Italian and Slovenian experts stressed that homophobia in the school environment is not rare.

Look, in my opinion homophobia is often present in cases of discrimination. We have been dealing with these cases since 2010 and it seems that this trend is still confirmed in the sense that in cases of homophobic bullying there is this component that is, also, a little more aggressive than the rest. We usually cope with boys, so there is also the typically more aggressive aspect of male behaviour...and, thus, since nowadays everything is based on the concept of virility and masculinity, it is evident that this trend gives rise to a very specific mode of behaviour... (Expert, Italy).
These homophobic insults come out. They are an everyday practice. (Expert, Slovenia).

Behaviour associated with gender expressions not fitting hetero-normative social expectations may encourage homophobic attitudes in the school environment. Episodes of violence connected with gender identity are quite frequent. In adolescence, the issue of gender identity is extremely important and very present in peer interactions, with those who differ from socially accepted expressions of masculinity or femininity exposed to the risk of peer violence.

He was a male chauvinist for sure and sometimes he teased a little girl who was in his group, telling her she was a tomboy, insulting her and saying that she was not part of our community because, although she was a female, she enjoyed playing male games. He told she was queer and abnormal. Since he has been saying this to her she has changed a bit: now she plays less with the boys and their toys. (Teacher, Italy).

The potential for victimisation increases based on the accumulation and intersection of circumstances that result in the individual's rejection by the peer group. Being immigrant or having a migrant background, by itself, may not determine the disposition for victimisation. What is crucial is the interplay of social categories (ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status and sexual orientation) and individual factors (family background, addiction problems, school success level, etc.), all of which influence the possibility of being victimised or becoming a bully.

DISCUSSION

At first glance, the research findings are relatively unified and even "optimistic" to a certain extent. Interethnic relations in schools are positively evaluated and cases of discrimination on the basis of ethnic background are rare. Moreover, it seems that schools in Austria, Italy and Slovenia often function as a "protected space" where peer violence is less prevalent in comparison to other, less supervised spaces where children

interact. From the participants' point of view, ethnicity is not recognised as a significant factor influencing peer violence in the school environment, although it would be misguided to assume that the phenomenon does not exist at all.

Although our interviewees assess the general social climate related to immigrants and interethnic relations in Austria and Slovenia as improved during the last period (while the situation in Italy has deteriorated), trends in EU countries overall paint a bleaker picture. Eurostat findings indicate a growing intolerance of EU member states towards immigration and strengthened support for the idea that the presence of people from other ethnic groups leads to insecurity (Eurostat 2010). Analysis of the attitudes of primary and secondary schoolchildren of the three neighbouring countries indicates the presence of a hierarchy of ethnic groups, with strong differentiation between nations from Northern or Western Europe on one side and Southern or Eastern Europe on the other side. As already confirmed in public opinion polls, the Roma are the most vilified ethnic group not only in Austria, Italy and Slovenia, but also in the wider EU context (Kirbiš *et al.*, 2012, 37). Roma and Sinti are the most marginalised and socially vulnerable ethnic groups – habitually the target of discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping – both in everyday life and in the school environment.

A review of opinions on equality and on the right to preserve one's own language, culture or religion, together with comparisons of the recognition and/or experience of interethnic violence, revealed differences between pupils of Austrian, Italian and Slovenian ethnicity and pupils of other or mixed ethnicities. Not surprisingly, pupils of non-dominant ethnicities (ethnicities other than Austrian, Italian and Slovenian) tended to value a multicultural environment to a higher degree than their Austrian, Italian and Slovenian schoolmates. Furthermore, pupils of non-dominant or mixed ethnicities tended to support the statement about immigrants' right to preserve their own languages, cultures and religions to a higher degree than did other pupils. Having a personal migrant and/or minority experience seems to promote a general positive attitude towards multiculturalism and interculturalism, a respect for diversity and awareness of minority rights. Pupils of other ethnicities are also more aware of interethnic violence and ethnic discrimination affecting their schoolmates. Study results show that they perceive various forms of discriminatory treatment and bullying more often than their classmates of dominant ethnicity. Finally, pupils of other or mixed ethnicities were more often found to be victims of interethnic violence than pupils of dominant ethnicities.

Teasing, name calling, using ethnic slurs and gossiping are the most prevalent types of interethnic violence. Because direct displays of peer violence in the school environment are more likely to be recognised by educators and are also treated more seriously (Strohmeier and Noam, 2012, 8), it is of extreme importance not to turn a blind eye towards "subtler" forms of violence. More efforts should be made, first, to encourage recognition of the above-mentioned acts as violent (younger pupils, especially, often do not recognise name calling and ostracism as a form of violence), and second, to encourage responsible individuals to actively respond to all types of violence, not only to evident cases of physical violence.

Peer violence in schools is influenced by the interplay of several factors. For educators and staff, an intersectional approach that recognises the inter-relationship of these factors in determining the risk for peer victimisation is key. An emphasis on the complexity of peer violence will discourage the tendency to focus primarily on one factor – such as ethnicity – which risks minimising other important components.

Nevertheless, the importance of ethnic background or immigrant status in peer relations in the school environment should not be overlooked. First, because of the evident hierarchies of "others" in the study countries; second, because it is easy to overestimate the safety of the school environment merely because it is safer than less supervised environments; and third, because of numerous and persistent stereotypes and prejudices related to "others" revealed by pupils in in-depth conversations. Pupils' impressions of the unimportance of ethnicity as a factor in peer violence may also be questioned given their perceptions of some subtler forms of violence as not having the status of "real" violence.

Although interethnic peer violence doesn't seem to be recognised as a burning issue in the study countries, the phenomenon should be constantly monitored, especially in light of the pessimistic predictions regarding the levels of tolerance towards ethnic and religious minorities (Eurostat, 2010). Attitudes towards "others" depend on the economic situation in the host countries (Bruß, 2005; Kirbiš *et al.*, 2012); in the current time of socioeconomic crisis, growing unemployment, lack of economic and social reforms and absence of equal opportunities, we may expect a growth of interethnic, inter-religious and overall intolerance (Žakelj and Kralj, 2012). For this reason, identification and analysis of both structural inequalities and various forms of interethnic violence, including presumably subtler manifestations of violence among children in everyday life, are of vital importance.

MEDETNIČNI ODNOSI IN VRSTNIŠKO NASILJE V AVSTRIJSKIH, ITALIJANSKIH IN SLOVENSkih ŠOLAH

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POVZETEK

Izhajajoč iz rezultatov raziskave Children's Voices: Exploring Interethnic Violence and Children's rights in the School Environment/Glasovi otrok: Preučevanje medetničnega nasilja in otrokovih pravic v šolskem okolju članek obravnava pojav medetničnega nasilja v osnovnih in srednjih šolah v Avstriji, Italiji in Sloveniji. Članek temelji na primerjavi rezultatov treh držav, ki jih ne povezuje zgolj geografska bližina, temveč tudi nekateri vidiki obravnave različnih etničnih skupin v prostoru kot npr. status narodnostnih manjšin, specifičen odnos do Romov kot najbolj depriviligirane etnične skupine ipd.

Prispevek temelji na analizi podatkov, pridobljenimi s kombinacijo metod kvantitativnega in kvalitativnega raziskovanja. Kvantitativna metoda raziskovanja je bila izvedena s pomočjo anketnega vprašalnika med osnovnošolci, starimi med 10 in 11 let, in srednješolci, starimi med 16 in 17 let. Omenjene podatke smo dopolnili z izvedbo pol-strukturiranih poglobljenih intervjujev z nacionalnimi eksperti, z intervjuji s šolskim osebjem ter fokusnimi skupinami med osnovnošolci in srednješolci. Osrednje teme so se nanašale na oceno medetničnih odnosov v družbenem in šolskem kontekstu, normativno sprejemanje enakosti in vrstnikov drugih etničnih skupin, vprašanje prisotnosti in izkušenj nasilja med vrstniki na podlagi etnične pripadnosti ipd.

Na splošno velja, da so otroci in mladostniki, vključeni v raziskavo, pozitivno ocenjevali multikulturalnost šolskega okolja in niso imeli vtisa, da etnična pripadnost sama po sebi vpliva na medvrstniško nasilje. Prav tako so, z izjemo Italije, ki v zadnjih letih doživlja izjemno hitro naraščanje števila imigrantov, udeleženci raziskave pozitivno vrednotili družbene spremembe v smeri večje strpnosti do priseljencev in sprejemanja kulturne raznolikosti. Kljub pozitivnim izhodiščem pa se je izkazalo dvoje. Prvič, sprejemanje »drugih« še vedno močno temelji na predsodkih in stereotipih, ki odražajo hierarhično pozicioniranje etničnih skupin. In drugič, medvrstniško nasilje v šolah (še posebej pa zunaj šole in na območjih z manj izrazitim nadzorom odraslih) temelji tudi na izpostavljanju etnične pripadnosti. Primerjava podatkov je pokazala, da so otroci drugih etničnih skupin ali mešane etnične pripadnosti bolj strpni in tolerantni, bolj zagovarjajo načela enakosti, pravice do rabe lastnega jezika, običajev, višje vrednotijo multikulturalnosti ipd., hkrati pa v primerjavi s tistimi, ki so se opredelili za Avstrijce/Italijane/Slovence, pogosteje izkusijo različne oblike medetničnega nasilja, med katerimi so najpogostejše subtilnejše oblike verbalnega ali odnosnega nasilja. Čeprav etnična pripadnost morda ni ključni dejavnik nasilja med vrstniki v šolah, je ena od ključnih družbenih kategorij, ki v intersekciji s socio-ekonomskim položajem, spolom, spolno usmerjenostjo in individualnimi dejavniki določa pre-dispozicijo za medvrstniško nasilje.

Ključne besede: medetnični odnosi, medetnično vrstniško nasilje, šole.

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