Role of Parental Acceptance or Rejection in Predicting Different Engagement of Children in Peer Violence

Anna Alajbeg¹, Nikolina Vrličak Davidović², Vesna Bilić³

¹Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Split, Teslina 6, Split.
²University Hospital Split, Croatia, Spinčićeva 1, Split.
³Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, Savska 77, Zagreb.

Abstract

Objectives
Aim of this paper is to examine the role of parental acceptance/rejection, family socioeconomic status and satisfaction with family in different types of children involvement in peer violence.

Methods
The study included 715 seventh and eighth grade students in the Republic of Croatia, being on average 13.22 years old (SD=0.664). Measuring instruments used were adapted Participant Role Questionnaire (PRQ) and Quality of Family Interaction Scale (KOBI).

Results
Most children perceive themselves as bystanders and defenders, then passive assistants, active assistants, victims, and the least in the role of bullies. Most respondents are satisfied with their family and perceive greater acceptance from their parents. Boys are more often bullies, assistants and bystanders, girls are more often defenders, but both genders are victims of violence equally frequent. Active assistants have higher SES, and bystanders lower. Mother's rejection is a significant predictor for the role of bully and passive assistant, and father's rejection for the role of active assistant. Lower family satisfaction is a significant predictor of the role of the victim.

Conclusion
The results obtained may have important implications in creating preventive programs.

Keywords: Peer violence; Parental acceptance / rejection; Family satisfaction; Socioeconomic status.

1. Introduction
Victimization and violent behavior towards peers are by no means something new, in fact, it can be said they have always existed in peer context. Primarily because of the growing trend of violent behavior, there has also been an increase in interest, but also concern of parents, teachers and scientists. Thanks to modern technology, violence has spread from school to virtual environments, and anonymity, which creates a false sense of power, contributed to increased childhood cruelty.

Peer violence is often defined as repeated, deliberate, negative, hostile action by one or more students of actual or perceived greater physical strength, or intellectual or social power, which causes the victim to suffer physical and / or
emotional pain and harm, and is helpless to defend himself or herself (Olweus, 1998; Bilić, 2013). This type of violence is widely categorized as either traditional (physical, verbal, relational, sexual) or electronic (offensive messages, electronic publishing, defamation, identity theft, sexting, etc.)

For a long time, peer violence was considered a binary relationship (victim - bully), but since the mid-90s of the 20th century, the dominant view is that it is a group phenomenon in which children have different roles (Salmivalli et al., 1996, Salmivalli, 2010). In other words, together with bullies who initiate and commit violence and thus endanger well-being or certain right of a victim, attention is also devoted to children who testify to such scenes and respond to them in different ways. They either stand with main actors or just observe the event indifferently.

Most children join bullies, with whom they share common positive attitudes toward violence (Hymel et al., 2005; Kowalski and Limber, 2007; Nickerson and Mele-Taylor, 2014). They are usually the same gender and age as bullies (Veenstra et al., 2010). Although they do not start the violence, they actively contribute to it because they help the bully and are therefore called assistants. Some of them help bullies by facilitating their actions (holding the victim), or either verbally (cheering, giving feedback, etc.) or non-verbally (applauding) support actions of bullies, which is why they are called active assistants (Olweus, 1998, Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli, 2010). Others, while they do support bullies and enjoy violent scenes, will not publicly show it (passive assistants). All these groups in some way become participants or contributors to this process. Contrary to them, the smallest number of children who testify to situations of peer violence help victims and are called defenders. They act prosocially in both real and virtual world, provide support to victims, seek ways or assistance to stop violence (Willard, 2007). Girls more often act in the role of defenders, while boys not so often (Thornberg and Jungert, 2013).

The third, most numerous group consists of non-involved bystanders who act indifferently, from a safe real or digital distance, without taking any stand or side, and observe what is happening (Bilić, 2013). Since they do not want to interfere, i.e. they do not want to help or intervene, they are also considered to be part of the problem (Willard, 2007). Since violent behavior is motivated by proving a certain status in a group, bystanders have a significant role to play. On the one hand, bullies have a need to demonstrate their power in front of an audience. It seems that to them the audience is indispensable, without it, it would not be a “performance”. On the other hand, the presence of audience increases suffering of victims, especially in cases of electronic violence where potentially unlimited audience is the reason for significantly greater suffering of the victims. Violence in both real and virtual world is considered to last longer if peers are present (Willard, 2007). So, even with their inaction, bystanders contribute to violence.

Although there is information from which kind of families bullies and victims come from, there is not enough information about which family factors determine or predict other roles of children in peer violence.

However, the greatest cause for concern should be consequences of violence left on children involved in it. Different studies confirm that children involved in peer violence have, in both childhood and adulthood, increased risk of psychosomatic difficulties, internalized (anxiety, depression, self-infliction, suicidal thoughts) and externalized problems and inclination to engage in various antisocial behavior (Gini and Pozzoli, 2009; Wang et al., 2011; Selkie et al., 2015; Wolke and Lerey, 2015). All this reflects on their school achievement (Olweus, 1998; Glew et al., 2005; Kowalski and Limber, 2013).

To better understand and evaluate which factors encourage children to engage in peer violence or prevent them from it, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological systems theory is becoming more frequently used (Hong and Espelage, 2012; Espelage et al., 2015; Swearer and Hymel, 2015). According to this theory, which provides a holistic view of peer violence, with the child's individual characteristics, his or her behavior is also affected by different environmental systems that interact with each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). First of all- family, but as they grow up, especially in adolescence, children consider peer relationships more important, so it is interesting to analyze the relationship between these two important contexts- parental and peer, within the macrosystems. Some authors believe that family has the biggest direct impact on involvement of children in violence (Hong and Espelage, 2012; DeVoocht et al., 2015).

2. Review of Literature

Through systematic review of published papers on parental behavior and peer victimization in the period 1970 to 2012, Lereya et al. (2013) conclude that positive parenting, characterized primarily by warm and friendly relationship between parents and children, is an important protective factor against peer victimization.

Lack of warmth, or perception of parental rejection, increases risk that children will develop behavioral problems, particularly externalized, and these factors may be predictors for involvement of children in violent behavior (Rohner et al., 2012; DeVoocht et al., 2015). But as Lerey et al. (2013) point out, negative parenting behavior is associated with moderate and increased risk for the role of victim. Lack of acceptance, closeness, support and love from parents are important reasons why children are not satisfied with their family (Olweus, 1998). In general, adolescents who are more satisfied with family relationships have more positive relationships with their peers (Deković and Meeus, 1997).
Research findings, irrespective of how SES variables are operationalized, suggest that material problems have a negative effect on parent–child interactions (Conger et al., 2010; Macuka, 2010; Blažeka Kokorić, 2011; Rohner et al., 2012). Parents who are burdened with material problems often show emotional coldness, hostility, and lack of understanding, which leads to children feeling rejected (Klarin and Derđa, 2014), while better socioeconomic status is associated with better parenting and positive mother–child relationship (Simić Šašić et al., 2011). On the other hand, SES is also connected to involvement of children in peer violence. Tippett and Wolke (2014) systematically examined studies on SES connection with peer violence and found that victims are more likely to come from low SES families but also that violent peer behavior is positively correlated with low SES and negatively correlated with high SES. Other authors found that bullies most often come from families with higher SES (Due et al., 2009).

As previously mentioned, research have so far often examined the relationship between parent rejection / acceptance, SES and family satisfaction with roles of bullies and victims of peer violence. However, less is known about how these variables affect other roles of children in peer violence (assistants, defendres and bystanders). The aim of this paper is to examine the role of parental acceptance / rejection, family socioeconomic status and satisfaction in different types of children involvement in peer violence.

The first aim is to determine intercorrelation of children roles in peer violence. We expect the following: there is a positive, statistically significant intercorrelation among roles of bullies, assistants, bystanders and victims, and negative, statistically significant intercorrelation between defender role and the aforementioned roles, except for the victim role.

The second aim is to identify correlation between family interactions and different roles of children in peer violence. We expect the following: there is a negative, statistically significant correlation between parental acceptance and family satisfaction with roles of bullies, assistants, bystanders and victims, and positive, statistically significant correlation with the role of defenders.

The last aim is to identify differences between the children role in peer violence in relation to family interactions and socioeconomic status of the family. We expect the following: children who with different involvement in peer violence have a statistically significantly different quality of family interactions and socioeconomic status of the family.

3. Methodology

This cross-sectional study involved 715 students from several primary schools in different regions in the Republic of Croatia. Data was collected during the three months period – from September till December in 2015. Data was collected in classrooms, using several different measuring instruments. All children were invited to participate and those, whose parents gave their consent, were included in the study. In addition to General Data Questionnaire containing questions about gender, school achievement and socioeconomic status of the family, the research also included: Adapted Participant Role Questionnaire (Connections between attitudes, group norms, and behaviors associated with bullying in schools, Salmivalli and Voeten, 2004).

The original questionnaire of different roles in peer violence consists of a total of 15 items and 5 sub-scales and measures different roles of children in traditional peer violence, except for the role of the victim. The questionnaire is originally intended for peer assessment, but for this paper, it was adapted for self-assessment and 15 more items were added: the role of victim scale was expanded by three items which measure the victim role in traditional violence (for example: I experienced being beaten) and two items that measure victim’s role in electronic violence (for example: I experienced being insulted and spreading rumors about me on social networks, forums, blogs, etc.); sub-scales that measure roles of a bully, an active assistant, a passive assistant, a defender and a bystander in traditional violence were expanded by two items relating to electronic violence (for example, for the role of a bully: I insult and spread untruth about others on social networks, forums, blogs, etc.).

The adapted questionnaire has a total of 30 items and six sub-scales (victim, bully, active assistant, passive assistant, defender and bystander). Respondents gave their answers on a three-point scale reflecting their agreement with the statements (1 = never, 2 = occasionally and 3 = often). Cronbach’s alpha in our sample is 0.708 for the whole scale and for the sub-scales as follows: role of a bully 0.721, role of an active assistant 0.721, role of a passive assistant 0.708, role of a defender 0.692, role of a bystander 0.6 and for the role of a victim 0.733.

The Quality of Family Interaction Scale (Vulić Prtorić, 2004) consists of 55 items and five sub-scales: sub-scale Satisfaction with own family consists of 11 items, and it examines how the respondent feels in his family (for example: My family goes on my nerves.), sub- scale Mother’s acceptance consists of 10 items, where “acceptance” means a closer relationship between child and a parent (for example, I can always confide in my mother.), sub- scale Father’s acceptance consists of 10 items (for example: I can always confide in my father.), sub- scale Mother’s rejection consists of 12 items, where “rejection” means that child has a less intimate relationship with the parent (for example: My mother often shouts at me.), sub- scale Father’s rejection consists of 12 items (for example: Sometimes I do not know what have I done wrong for my father to punish me).
On Likert scale (1 = not at all correct, 2 = mostly incorrect, 3 = not sure, 4 = mostly accurate and 5 = yes, completely correct) respondents answered to what extent they agree with the statements. Cronbach's Alpha for the sub-scale Satisfaction of own family on our sample is 0.866, for the sub-scale Mother’s acceptance is 0.878, for the sub-scale Father’s acceptance is 0.91, for the sub-scale Mother’s rejection and for the sub-scale Father’s rejection 0.888.

4. Data analysis

We ran statistical analysis using SPSS v17. Both univariate and multivariate analysis were performed as described later in text.

5. Results

The gender structure was balanced with 54% of girls (N = 386) and 46% of boys (N = 329). The proportion of respondents by grades is as follows: 51.7% (N = 370) in seventh grade and 48.3% (N = 345) in eighth grade. Average age of respondents was 13.22 years (SD = 0.664). For analysis purposes we assigned roles to each child if a child scored above 75. centile in the corresponding scale (table 1). The lowest number of children was dominantly associated with a bully role, whereas around 22% of them mostly engage in a role of a bystander and in the same frequency as a defender (table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics: Gender, Roles in bullying Scales, Socioeconomic status and School achievement, N=715

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Median</th>
<th>N m/f*</th>
<th>N** (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>1-2,6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>64/37</td>
<td>101 (14,1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active assistant</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78/54</td>
<td>132 (18,5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive assistant</td>
<td>1-2,6</td>
<td>1,2</td>
<td>85/65</td>
<td>150 (21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystander</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>1,8</td>
<td>85/78</td>
<td>163 (22,8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defender</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>61/100</td>
<td>161 (22,5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>1-3</td>
<td>1,4</td>
<td>54/67</td>
<td>121 (16,9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socioeconomic status</td>
<td>Very low</td>
<td>Below average</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Above average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>6 (8)</td>
<td>12 (1,7)</td>
<td>419 (58,6)</td>
<td>227 (31,7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School achievement</td>
<td>Insufficient</td>
<td>Sufficient</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N (%)</td>
<td>3 (0,4)</td>
<td>3 (0,4)</td>
<td>82 (11,5)</td>
<td>293 (41)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* N m/f – number of boys and girls within each role
More than half of the sample perceives their socioeconomic status as average while almost half of the sample had excellent school achievement during the overpassed school semester (table 1). Due to asymmetrical distributions, we are presenting nonparametric statistics in the tables. As it is visible in table 2, results on parental acceptance and family satisfaction are almost reaching the highest maximum while results on parental rejection go to another extreme with almost minimum scores.

** Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Family Variables, N=715 **

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>Median</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother's acceptance</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother's rejection</td>
<td>714</td>
<td>1-4.67</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's acceptance</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father's rejection</td>
<td>705</td>
<td>1-4.83</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family satisfaction</td>
<td>715</td>
<td>1.27-5</td>
<td>4.55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Role of a bully is positively associated with role of active assistant, passive assistant and a victim (table 3). Role of a defender on the other side negatively correlates with both assistant roles and a bully role as well as with the role of bystander. Bystander role is not associated with a bully role while it is positively associated with both assistant roles.

** Table 3. Spearman coefficients of correlation between roles in bullying **

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>__</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active assistant</td>
<td>,504**</td>
<td>__</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive assistant</td>
<td>,502**</td>
<td>,548**</td>
<td>__</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystander</td>
<td>,058</td>
<td>,193**</td>
<td>,216**</td>
<td>__</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defender</td>
<td>,175**</td>
<td>,145**</td>
<td>,203**</td>
<td>,326**</td>
<td>__</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>,231**</td>
<td>,185**</td>
<td>,192**</td>
<td>,001</td>
<td>.064</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p<0.005  
** p<0.001

All family variables have significant association with roles in bullying, apart from father acceptance which is correlated to role of passive assistant and a bully (table 4).
Table 4. Spearman coefficients of correlation between roles in bullying, socioeconomic status, school achievement and family variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>FS</th>
<th>MR</th>
<th>MA</th>
<th>FR</th>
<th>FA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bully</td>
<td>.118*</td>
<td>-.142**</td>
<td>-.170**</td>
<td>.268**</td>
<td>-.214**</td>
<td>.210**</td>
<td>-.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active assistant</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>-.253**</td>
<td>.292**</td>
<td>-.225**</td>
<td>.264**</td>
<td>-.118**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive assistant</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>-.066</td>
<td>-.231**</td>
<td>.342**</td>
<td>-.190**</td>
<td>.229**</td>
<td>-.073</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystander</td>
<td>-.054</td>
<td>.081*</td>
<td>-.236**</td>
<td>.201**</td>
<td>-.174**</td>
<td>.132**</td>
<td>-.077*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defender</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>.172**</td>
<td>-.157**</td>
<td>.179**</td>
<td>-.140**</td>
<td>.143**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim</td>
<td>-.073*</td>
<td>-.110**</td>
<td>-.234**</td>
<td>.200**</td>
<td>-.110**</td>
<td>.236**</td>
<td>-.178**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SES=socioeconomic status, SA=school achievement, FS=family satisfaction, MR=mother’s rejection, MA=mother’s acceptance, FR=father’s rejection, FA=father’s acceptance

* p<0.005
** p<0.001

Parental rejection is positively correlated with all roles apart from defender role which is negatively correlated with both mother’s and father’s rejection, and positively with parental acceptance. Bully, assistants and bystander roles are negatively associated with mother’s acceptance as well as with family satisfaction, and positively with mother’s and father’s rejection. Socioeconomic status is positively associated with bully role and negatively with a role of a victim while school achievement has a negative association with both variables and additionally correlates positively with bystander role. Victim has positive association with rejection variables and negative with acceptance, family satisfaction, socioeconomic status and school achievement.

Due to extreme asymmetry of distributions and binary dependent variable (often engaged in a role or not engaged in a role), we ran logistic regression analysis to predict whether a child will act in a particular role depending on their gender, socioeconomic status, school and family factors. We used following predictors in the model: gender, socioeconomic status, family satisfaction, mother’s acceptance, father’s acceptance, mother’s rejection and father’s rejection. We ran six different logistic regressions for six different roles related to bullying occurring (table 5).

Table 5. Result of logistic regression, N=704

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>School achievement</th>
<th>Mother’s acceptance</th>
<th>Mother’s rejection</th>
<th>Father’s acceptance</th>
<th>Father’s rejection</th>
<th>Family satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
<td>Exp(B) (95% CI)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bully (girls)</td>
<td>0.47** (0.29-0.77)</td>
<td>1.33 (0.96-1.83)</td>
<td>0.72* (0.53-0.96)</td>
<td>0.93 (0.57-1.53)</td>
<td>2.25** (1.33-3.79)</td>
<td>1.26 (0.86-1.85)</td>
<td>1.43 (0.92-2.22)</td>
<td>0.97 (0.58-1.63)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active assistant</td>
<td>0.57** (0.37-0.87)</td>
<td>1.55** (1.17-2.07)</td>
<td>1.02 (0.77-1.35)</td>
<td>0.87 (0.56-1.37)</td>
<td>1.48 (0.93-2.4)</td>
<td>1.38 (0.96-1.96)</td>
<td>1.66* (1.1-2.5)</td>
<td>0.68 (0.43-1.08)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Passive assistant | 0.58** (0.39-0.86) | 1.28 (0.97-1.68) | 0.82 (0.64-1.22) | 0.79-1.87) | 2.12** (1.36-3.32) | 1.11 (0.81-1.53) | 1.08 (0.74-0.59) | 0.67 (0.43-
Girls are by 53% less likely to engage in a role of a bully than boys. For one unit increase in school achievement there are 28% smaller chances that a child will engage in bullying behaviour. Out of family variables, only rejection of a mother appeared as significant predictor increasing the chances of a child to be engaged as a bully for more than two times for one unit increase in rejection scale. Father rejection predicts engagement in a role of active assistant increasing the chances by 66% for one unit increase on rejection scale. Engagement in an active assisting in bullying is also associated with socioeconomic status in terms of 55% of increase for one unit increase on a sociodemographic scale meaning that wealthy children are more prone to help a bully in their actions.

Again, girls are by 43% less likely to act like an active assistant than boys. The chances for girls in comparison to boys are the same as mentioned when discussing the role of passive assistant. Also, one unit increase in mother’s rejection scale doubles the chances of being a passive assistant whereas other predictors don’t appear to be significant. When discussing the role of a bystander we found gender and socioeconomic status to be significant predictors with girls again being less likely to just observe the occurring violence by 32% than boys. Regarding socioeconomic status, one unit increase on status scale implies 28% less chances to engage in a role of a bystander. Only gender showed to be significant predictor for the role of a defender with girls being by 45% more likely to defend the victims than boys.

Victims are on the other hand, equally often boys and girls. Family satisfaction appeared to be significant only for a role of a victim decreasing the chances of being a victim by 48% for one unit increase in satisfaction scale. School achievement significantly predicts being a victim by decreasing the chances to be a victim by 26% for one unit increase in achievement scale. Parental acceptance hasn’t shown its predictable power in any of the analysis.

### 6. Discussion

In this paper, roles of children in peer violence were considered as dimensions rather than as categories, because one child may be engaged in multiple roles in violence, for example, one time it can be engaged in the role of bully and in another situation as a victim.

Descriptive analysis showed that most children perceive themselves as bystanders and defenders, then as passive assistants, active assistants, victims, and at least as bullies, which can be explained by the fact that the research is based on the self-assessment of respondents, so it is possible for children to emphasize prosocial behavior and conceal inadequate and unacceptable behavior (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Zerillo, 2012). Similarly to family variables, most
respondents perceive greater acceptance by mother and father, rather than rejection. On the other hand, it is possible that the respondents are satisfied with their family, because they have good interaction with their parents, which also contributes to the positive behavior of children (Deković and Meeus, 1997). Positive correlation between roles of bully and assistant is quite understandable given that tendency towards violence is their common feature (Hymel et al., 2005; Kowalski and Limber, 2007; Nickerson and Mele–Taylor, 2014). The connection between roles of bystander and assistant can be explained by the fact that non-reaction in defending a victim contributes to indirect assistance to the bully to continue with the act of violence undisturbed (Willard, 2007). It is also interesting that the role of the victim is less, but still significantly correlated, to roles of bullies and assistants, indicating that children in roles of bullies and assistants often become victims of revenge (Mason, 2008; Smith et al., 2008), and vice versa (Unnever, 2005; Huitsing et al., 2012; Salmivalli, 2014). Role of defender is negatively correlated to roles of bullies, assistants and bystanders, and this result is logical because defenders are prone to prosocial behavior; bullies and assistants are hostile and immoral, and bystanders are indifferent (Othof et al., 2011; Camodeca et al. 2015). Correlation between roles of defender and victim has not been found, and this may be due to fact that defenders stand to defend the victim regardless of their relationship with him or her (Correia and Dalbert, 2008). It was also found that victims of peer violence come from families with poorer socioeconomic status of the family, which is why they may be exposed to pecking by peers (Tippett and Wolke, 2014), while bullies come from families with better socioeconomic status, so it is possible for them to have a more favorable material status which gives them a sense of power that they express by violent behavior towards peers because they want to be dominant (Due et al., 2009). Furthermore, correlation analysis showed that bullies and victims have poorer school achievements and bystanders better. This result can be interpreted by the fact that bullies are often subjected to criticism by teachers because of their inappropriate behavior, and they may be occupied with their family or social problems, while children in the role of victim may not concentrate on school work due to violence they suffer. It is also possible that they are exposed to mockery by peers due to bad grades (Olweus, 1998; Kowalski and Limber, 2013). Better school achievement of bystanders suggests that they probably do not want to compromise their status and reputation with parents and teachers, and it is also possible that they are afraid of their bad reactions (Lodge and Frydenberg, 2005). Regarding family interaction, it was found that all roles, except for the role of defender, are less satisfied with their family and are more likely to be rejected by mother and father rather than accepted, thereby fully confirming the hypothesis 2. Possible reasons why children prone to violence and those who experience violence are less satisfied with their family and are more likely to feel rejected by parents are lack of emotional warmth, insufficient and inadequate communication with their parents, and exposure to domestic violence and abuse by parents (Lereya et al., 2013; Klarin & Matešić, 2014). For the role of bystanders, dissatisfaction with family and greater perception of parents' rejection may be due to insufficient support and closeness with parents (Nickerson et al., 2008; Jakes and DeBord, 2010; Nikiforou et al., 2013; Lösel & Bender, 2014). Only children who act as defenders are more satisfied with their family and perceive greater acceptance from mother and father, which also indicates higher quality of family interaction, and which is probably reflected in higher level of empathy and self-confidence in the child (Deković and Meeus, 1997).

Logistic regression analysis showed that boys are more often bullies, active and passive assistants and bystanders, while girls are more often defenders. A possible explanation for this is that boys are more inclined to peer violence than girls because they have a greater desire for bragging and showing supremacy (Olweus, 1998), and are often praised for such behavior by their peers and others. Veenstra et al. (2010) state assistants are usually of the same gender and age as bullies are. Since boys are more likely to commit violence, they are also more likely to be exposed to observing violence among boys, so they engage in this role more often than girls. Girls are more often in the role of defenders, probably because they are more emotional and have a higher level of empathy and moral sensitivity than boys (Thorncberg and Jungert, 2013). Both genders are victims of peer violence equally frequent, and this may be because more forms of peer violence were observed, and if we made the analysis by certain types of violence, it is possible that gender differences may have been pronounced. Higher socioeconomic status of the family is a statistically significant predictor for the role of active assistant increasing the chances for acting in a role while at the same time it lowers the chances for acting in the role of a bystander. It is possible that better socioeconomic status of the active assistants’ families gives them a sense of power which they aggressively express toward peers, just like bullies do (Due et al., 2009), while to bystanders, lower socioeconomic status gives them a sense of insecurity, leads to lower self-esteem and probably fear of possible exposure to ridicule. As correlation analysis, logistic regression analysis also showed that bullies and victims have poorer school achievement, even with the control of other variables in the model, as we have already explained with lack of concentration and interest in school work in both roles, because of either perpetrating violence or experiencing victimization.

Regarding parental acceptance / rejection, roles of bully and passive assistant have shown to be statistically significantly predicted by mother’s rejection and the role of active assistant by father’s rejection. We can conclude that negative relationship of mother and child, emotional coldness and neglect, inappropriate punishment, improper accusation, and inadequate communication reflect on child experiencing rejection from their mother, and the child then shows such behavior to peers (Georgiou, 2008; Nikiforou et al., 2013; Rigby, 2013). Closeness to father is no less important than closeness to mother, however, while growing up, the role of the father becomes more important, especially in boys adopting their sex role. Father can, by his inappropriate behavior, give a child a bad example, so the child behaves...
according to the father's model of interaction with peers, because according to Bandura’s model theory (1969), a child learns new or modifies previously learned behavior by observing reaction patterns of a role-model. A role-model is a person to whom a child is emotionally strongly attached, loves and respects him/her, and in childhood the most common role-model is a parent. It should be emphasized that the variables of acceptance by parents have not shown as significant predictors, suggesting that negative educational styles are crucial in predicting peer violence - or, more simply, it is important to what extent the parent is bad, but not the extent to which he is good for his child. It has been established that victims are less satisfied with their family, and this may be due to the disagreements or open quarrels of adult family members in the presence of the child, poor communication between parents (Olweus, 1998; Klarin and Đerđa, 2014), which causes the child to withdraw, becomes abject and insecure in itself, and thus becomes a target of bullies because they recognize its weakness (Spriggs et al., 2007, Moore et al., 2012). Since children engage in peer violence differently and are also significantly different in quality of family interactions and in socioeconomic status of the family, the hypothesis 3 is therefore fully confirmed and accepted.

Results of this paper emphasize a need to educate parents about the importance of providing support and attention to their children, non-abusive methods of education because the behavior that children observe in family, they apply in their interaction with peers. Given that boys are more inclined to commit, assist to and observe violence, it is necessary to develop empathy and moral sensitivity in them. It is also necessary to educate teachers to adequately provide assistance and support and to point out that school grades should not be used as blackmail or discipline methods, as poor grades may be both cause and effect of peer violence, in either committing or experiencing. Teachers and parents should also point to appreciation of diversity and tolerance for children, given that family SES is a statistically significant predictor of the role of active assistant and bystander.

A big shortcoming of the conducted research is precisely its correlative design that does not allow us to make causal conclusions. However, the advantage of this paper is that the research analyzes different roles of children in peer violence (victims, bullies, active and passive assistants, defenders and bystanders), considering family interactions (acceptance and rejection by mother and father, family satisfaction) and some sociodemographic factors, and so far, there has only been a few such studies. This way, some individual characteristics and the community in which the child lives are included, in attempt to better understand different types of children involvement in peer violence.

This study was conducted on a representative sample of seventh and eighth grade students from urban and rural areas. Previous research has shown that violence is most frequent in exactly that age; however, it would be desirable to conduct research among younger children and high school students, in order to monitor frequency of different forms of peer violence as well as in different roles. Since logistic regression analysis of family interactions is not statistically significant in predicting the role of defender and bystander, it is necessary to examine effects of some other individual and contextual factors in trying to explain this role, which is a recommendation for further research.

7. Conclusion

Results of this paper lead to conclusion that parental rejection is a statistically significant predictor for the role of bully and active and passive assistant, while lower satisfaction with family is a predictor for the role of victim. Boys are more inclined to commit, assist to and observe violence. Girls are more often defenders, while both genders are victims of peer violence equally frequent. Family SES is a statistically significant predictor for the role of active assistant and bystander. Poor school achievement is a statistically significant predictor of the role of victim and bully. Finally, we conclude that obtained results may have important implications in creating school preventive programs with the aim of reducing and preventing peer violence.

References


Understanding ecological factors associated with bullying across the elementary to middle school transition in the United States. Violence and victims, 30(3), 470-487.

Bullying and victimization at school: The role of mothers. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 78 (1), 109-125.


Bullying, psychosocial adjustment, and academic performance in elementary school. Archives of pediatrics & adolescent medicine, 159(11), 1026-1031.

A review of research on bullying and peer victimization in school: An ecological system analysis. Aggression and violent behavior, 17(4), 311-322.

“Must be me” or “It could be them?” The impact of the social network position of bullies and victims on victims’ adjustment. Social Networks, 34(4), 379-386.


Ruditeljsko ponašanje i problemi u ponašanju kod adolescenata. Ljetopis socijalnog rada, 21(2), 243-262.

Vršnjačko nasilje među adolescentima u kontekstu ruditeljskog ponašanja. Hrvatska revija za rehabilitacijska istraživanja, 50(1), 81-92.


Aggressive, delinquent, and violent outcomes of school bullying: Do family and individual factors have a protective function?. Journal of school violence, 13(1), 59-79.

Osobine i kontekstualne odrednice ruditeljskog ponašanja. Suvremena psihologija, 13(1), 63-80.


Attachment and empathy as predictors of roles as defenders or outsiders in bullying interactions. Journal of school psychology, 46(6), 687-703.


Attachment to parents and peers as a parameter of bullying and victimization. Journal of criminalology, 1, 1-9.

Cyberbullying as strategic behavior: Relations with desired and acquired dominance in the peer group. Journal of School psychology, 49(3), 339-359.

Nasilje među djecemi u školci: Što znamo i što možemo učiniti. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

Bullying in schools and its relation to parenting and family life. Family matters, (92), 61.