

SCHOOL VIOLENCE AND STUDENT WELL-BEING IN SERBIA

Summary of research findings



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*All terms used in the text
in the masculine grammatical gender include
the masculine and feminine genders of the
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Preface

How? Many questions rose in recent years in response to the attempts of the education system to improve its preventive and educational work amid the influx of news coming from the educational system and portraying school violence as dominant, thereby referring to primarily peer violence, violence against teachers, and teacher violence against students. Despite all the protocols, training, and other measures the Ministry of Education prescribed and implemented, the public formed an opinion based on the media reporting that “the education system generates violence.” We knew that portrayal of the fact that violence is exhibited in the interaction between children at school is a consequence of school naturally being the place where children spent most of their day, and not because the school itself generates violence, understanding also that each child has their own habits and values that they bring from their families. Nonetheless, the school had a responsibility to improve its preventive measures and to consistently act in situations of all types of violence, whenever they happen.

The May 2023 tragedies shocked and left us taken aback over the brutality of two young men, one who was a juvenile and the other who had just turned eighteen. Nineteen persons died, most of whom were children and youth, with many others injured in tragedies which did not have their prehistory or an indication that they could have occurred, one taking place in a school and the other amid a holiday mood where the youth only wanted to be happy. All of us had questions and a need to restore a sense of control over what was happening in the various roles that life has assigned to us or that we have chosen ourselves: the parental, upbringing role, the role of those who need to continuously improve their knowledge in a constantly changing world, the role of those who create and promote the new so called social values and... I could go on and on...

WHY? There were many examples of peer violence in which we recognised dysfunctional families with clear signs of parental incompetence and violent behaviour in the family, although this was not so clearly recognised in the above-mentioned examples. There was no educational or economic deprivation in the family, which, according to the prevailing theory and stereotypes, is often a trigger for violence...

The young lives of future composers, poets, artists, doctors, lawyers, professors, future mothers and fathers have been lost... Their parents will feel pain their entire lives and will not live to be grandparents through their children. There is no answer to this question – Why?

We have recognised that the goal of the Ministry of Education, which continuously takes care of prevention and wellbeing of children, is to return the feeling of safety and predictability. Besides the psychological support provided to everyone affected by the tragedies, children, teachers, and parents of deceased children, it was important to ensure systemic support for the future and to provide answers to questions.

Immediately after the tragic events in May, the Ministry of Education once again began reviewing the already prepared amendments to legal acts and by-laws in the area of protection from violence. By listening to the proposals of all representatives of the competent institutions, civil society organisations and all members of the Council for the Prevention of Peer Violence, the Law on the Fundamentals of the Education System was amended and adopted in November 2023. The key changes related to the improvement of procedures of acting in situations of violence and other risky situations that may occur in a school environment. The amendments to by-laws, which regulate in more detail the steps of action for school employees in the area of prevention and intervention, were adopted in 2024. The Rulebook on the Protocol for Acting in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect clarified more precisely the dilemmas that existed in practice and explained in more detail in which complex situations of violence and/or risky situations can employees remove a student from immediate educational activities, while including other mechanisms in supporting the child and family and preventing endangerment of the child's right to education. In the same Rulebook we have also defined, for the first time, the procedures for acting within the education system in crisis situations. Another by-law, the Rulebook on Socially Useful or Humanitarian Work in Educational Institutions, sought to further strengthen the role of employees in creating an accepting and supportive environment through planning and implementing socially useful and humanitarian work within the annual plans for the prevention of school violence and achieving competencies for democratic culture among students with an aim of fostering tolerance, critical thinking, but also empathy, understanding of diversity etc.

The Ministry knew it was necessary to pause at some point and take a look at where we were standing and in which direction we needed to go after all the events that had shaken the education system. That moment of pausing and observing *Where are we now?* and *Where are we going?* was marked by the implementation of the national research within the project of "Prevent Bullying and Peer Violence in Schools", which included students, parents, teachers, professional associates, and principals of primary and secondary schools across our country. Its methodology reflects the complexity and sensitivity of the peer violence phenomenon. For the first time in the last ten years, we have research in the area of protection from violence on a representative sample that included nearly 5,200 respondents from 77 primary and secondary schools, using a complex methodological approach. The scales and questionnaires used in the research aimed to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of peer violence, its potential causes and the correlation between suffering and perpetrating violence, to define key areas in the education system that need to be improved in order to create a safe and supportive school environment, to understand the specific characteristics of the dynam-

ics of cyberbullying, which was further emphasised in this research, as well as to understand the forms of violence in the interaction between students and school employees. In addition, through this research, we intended to gain insight into the forms of violence to which students are exposed and to identify protective and risk factors, as well as define specific practical recommendations and clear guidelines for creating educational policies for the purpose of improving the comprehensive system of protecting children from violence.

Having in mind the sensitivity of the moment for the education system in which the support was provided, and the importance of the results of this research, we owe immense gratitude to our colleagues from the Council of Europe and the expert team who worked on developing the methodology, implementing the research, and defining practical recommendations for the further development of the education system in the area of protection from violence. We would also like to thank the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany for acknowledging the importance of this challenge and to the Federal Republic of Germany for the donation that enabled the Council of Europe to implement this project, along with Serbian researchers, experts, and the Ministry of Education.

I would like to thank you all for the trust, commitment, and support we have received through the results and recommendations guiding our future work in the process of restoring trust in our collective capacity to overcome challenges and crises.

We believe that the research results will be important not only to the education system and education policy makers, but also to the professional public, practitioners, parents, the media, and the general public in creating a common value system that will be the foundation of a safe and supportive environment for all children and society as a whole. Because children are the most important!

**Prof. Snežana Vuković, PhD,
Assistant Minister,
Ministry of Education,
Republic of Serbia**

Deciding which policies to introduce requires evidence-based research that involves all stakeholders. This is especially important in the education sector, which includes numerous actors, from ministry officials to teachers and students.

This is precisely the aim of the project “Prevent Bullying and Peer Violence in Schools” in Serbia and the most comprehensive National Survey on Peer Violence and Student Well-Being. Prompted by the tragic school shooting in Belgrade in May 2023, this research was prepared by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Ministry of Education. The project is funded by Germany.

The research includes interviews with around 5.000 participants and explores school violence from different perspectives – including school employees, students and their parents – which sometimes differ. The specific characteristics of gender-based violence and cyberbullying are also explored. Regarding the latter, a strong correlation has been established between online and offline victimisation.

Based on this research, the project has prepared Recommendations for creating educational policies and plans for decision-makers to further enhance the safe school environment. In order to achieve this goal, the recommendations are divided into short, medium, and long term for decision-makers and schools, ensuring both immediate and sustainable changes.

Besides aligning the recommendations with national and institutional policies to promote a safe and inclusive environment, the recommendations have also been adapted to respond to the Council of Europe Education Strategy “Learners First” 2024-2030. The three pillars of the Strategy call for the renewal of the democratic mission of education, the promotion of social inclusion, and the responsible adoption of digital innovations – all three as prerequisites for the safe school environment.

Unfortunately, violence and bullying in schools are present in all European countries. That is why the Council of Europe Education Department, through its intergovernmental programme, is also developing a toolkit for a democratic and inclusive school culture with a special resource entitled “Prevent Bullying and Peer Violence in Schools”. This resource is expected to be published at the end of 2025.

We hope this National Survey will pave the way for increased dialogue between students, parents, and teachers about bullying and peer violence in schools, as well as ways to work together in combating them.

**Sarah Keating,
Head of Division,
Education Department,
Council of Europe,
Strasbourg**

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We would also like to thank all our colleagues in primary and secondary schools, whose dedicated work, cooperation, and contribution made this research possible.

1. About the research

INTRODUCTION

The research on school violence and student well-being in Serbia was conducted within the framework of the project *Prevent bullying and Peer Violence in Schools*, implemented by the Council of Europe in co-operation with the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, with financial support from Germany. The aim of the project is to prevent school violence by supporting education policymakers, institutions, and experts in the implementation of the existing educational policy framework and developing the knowledge and professional competencies of education system employees. The research was designed to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon of school violence from the perspectives of students, parents/legal guardians, and school staff, and to identify key areas of school life in which intervention is necessary to establish a safe school environment.

The SeConS Development Initiative Group, which was entrusted with the research implementation, assembled a team of experts for the organisation of the research, data analysis, and report writing: Prof. Dragan Popadić (team coordinator), PhD, Prof. Zoran Pavlović, PhD, Prof. Dobrinka Kuzmanović, PhD, Prof. Dalibor Petrović, PhD, Prof. Marija Babović, PhD, and Prof. Oliver Tošković, PhD.¹

Expert support during the development of the questionnaire and preparation of research conditions was provided by employees from the Ministry of Education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Some of the research questions this research aimed to answer included:

- ▶ How many students are involved in violent interactions at school (with other students or with teachers), and which forms of violence are the most prevalent?
- ▶ How do students, teachers, and parents respond in situations involving violent interactions?
- ▶ What personal, family, or school-related characteristics are associated with involvement in violent interactions?

1 A detailed report on the research, including the instruments used, is published in the book "School Violence and Student Well-Being in Serbia".

- ▶ What are the opinions of students, parents, and school staff regarding the causes of school violence, the ways to address it, and the measures taken by schools?

SAMPLE

The research was carried out on a representative sample of 49 primary and 29 secondary schools in Serbia (excluding Kosovo), involving three groups of respondents: 1,916 **students** (1,018 students in the 5th and 7th grades of primary school and 898 students in the 1st and 3rd grades of secondary school), 1,207 **parents/legal guardians** of students, and 2,009 **school employees**, including teachers, school principals, and professional associates. In 914 cases, it was possible (using a shared code) to match student questionnaires with those completed by parents, enabling the connection and comparison of student and parent responses.

RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

The research was conducted between 25 November and 13 December 2024. Participants completed the questionnaires online: students filled them out in groups in computer classrooms with the assistance of trained facilitators, while school employees and parents were sent a link to the questionnaire. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous for all participants.

2. Everyday life in family and school

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE OF FAMILIES

- ▶ The structural characteristics of the families in which students grow up indicate relatively good and stable living conditions. The majority of students (85%) live with both parents, suggesting the predominance of a traditional nuclear family structure. Half of the students have a sibling, while around 19% are only children. Fourteen percent of students live in single-parent households, most commonly with their mother (11%) rather than their father (3%). Approximately one in ten students lives in extended households, that is, with members other than parents or siblings.
- ▶ The material well-being of most families is assessed as favourable, by both parents and children. About two thirds of parents (64%) state that they can afford more expensive items, indicating a solid economic standing, while only 10% of families face more serious financial difficulties. Students rate their family's financial situation with an average score of 7 on a scale from 1 to 10. Half of the students give a score of 7 or 8, while 12% assess their situation with the highest scores (9 or 10), and 16% give below-average scores (between 1 and 5). Although there is some alignment between the assessments given by parents and children, the assessments are not entirely consistent.
- ▶ Health and developmental difficulties are present among some students, and the recognition of these difficulties varies depending on whether the information is provided by children or parents. According to the students, about one in five (21%) experiences some form of difficulty (chronic illness, disability, sensory impairment, difficulties with mobility, speech, or learning). A smaller percentage of parents (15%) report that their children have some of these issues. The most commonly reported difficulties by children include learning difficulties (8%), sensory impairments (6%), chronic illnesses (3%), and disability and/or mobility issues (0.6%).

PARENTING STYLE AND EDUCATIONAL GOALS

- ▶ The way parents raise their children plays a key role in their social, emotional, and cognitive development, which makes studying different parenting styles

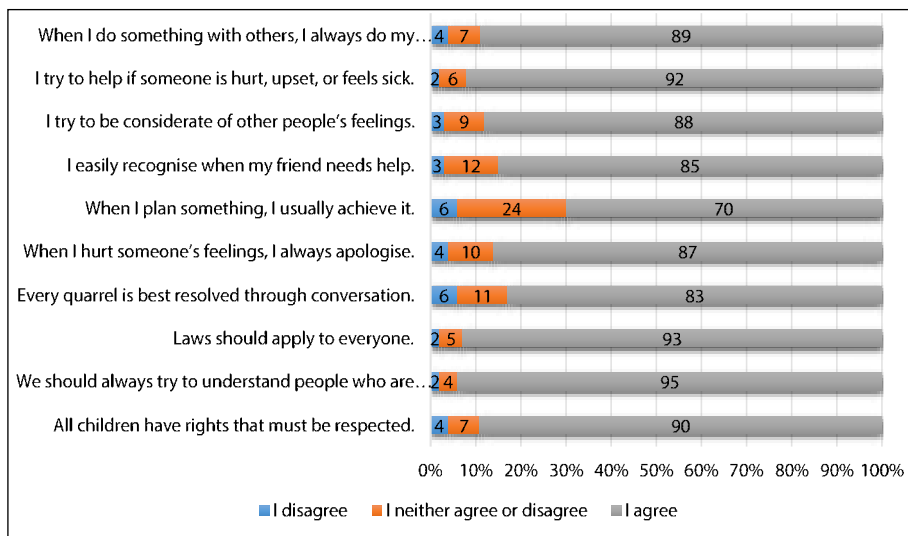
highly important for understanding family dynamics and child well-being. In most families, a parenting style that combines warmth and discipline prevails, and this is confirmed by both parents and children. According to the parents, the authoritative parenting style – a combination of warmth, support, and clear rules – is present in 80% of families. Children's responses paint a slightly different picture. One in two children (58%) says that both parents show love and understanding, while also setting boundaries. Mothers are somewhat more often associated with the authoritative style (78%) than fathers (70%). One in ten children (10%) reports that both parents follow a permissive style, i.e. providing support without setting limits. The authoritarian style, characterized by strict rules and punishment, occurs rarely, while the least common is the neglectful style – characterised by a lack of parental interest in the child. Only 4% of children report that one or both parents demonstrate such behaviour, almost exclusively in relation to the father.

- ▶ Parenting styles are also reflected in the values and traits that children are expected to learn within the family. What parents consider important in this regard indicates that they are oriented towards raising empathetic, independent, and communicative individuals. The highest importance is placed on open communication with children (average rating 4.7 on a scale of 1 to 5). This is followed by helping others (4.4), striving to succeed in life (4.4), obedience to parents (4.4), selflessness (4.4), and independence (4.2).
- ▶ Most parents reject gender-stereotypical beliefs and practices in parenting, for example, the belief that girls are inherently more emotional (57% of parents disagree with this) or that girls require more protection than boys (79% disagree). This critical attitude towards gender stereotypes is particularly evident among parents with higher levels of education.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN

- ▶ Socio-emotional competences are a key aspect of students' overall development, as they determine their ability to understand themselves and others, build quality relationships, and make responsible decisions. According to the students' self-assessments, the majority demonstrate high levels of prosocial attitudes and communication competence, indicating mature emotional and social development. Only a small number of students (3–8%) rejected the statements used to assess their prosocial attitudes and communication skills (Chart 1). Each of the statements was accepted by at least 70% of students.
- ▶ Prosocial values and communication competence were somewhat more prominent among girls and high-achieving students, as well as those who were better integrated into the school environment and perceived it as safer.
- ▶ Another highly important indicator of students' overall psychosocial functioning is their subjective well-being. Students generally report a high level of satisfaction with various aspects of their lives, which is a key indicator of overall psychosocial well-being. This expressed satisfaction relates to their current

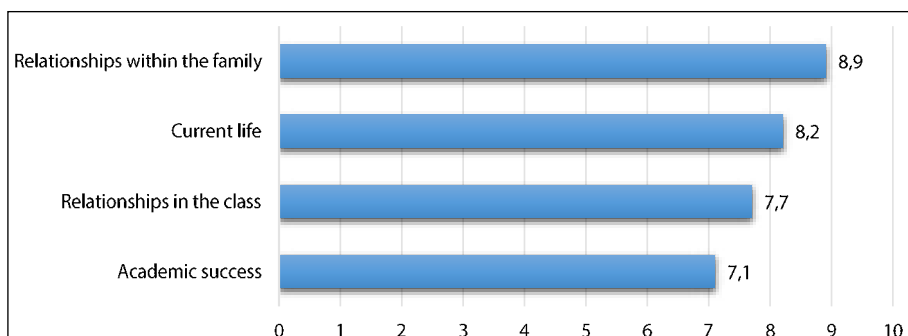
Chart 1. Prosocial values and communication competence of students (%)



life, academic achievement, family relationships, and relationships within their class group (Chart 2).

- Certain groups of students show higher levels of life satisfaction, indicating a link between well-being and various personal and social factors. Greater satisfaction is observed among younger students, girls, those with better academic performance, and those from families with better material well-being. Students who are better socially integrated into their school community, perceive their school environment as safer, and demonstrate stronger prosocial attitudes and higher communication competence also report greater life satisfaction.

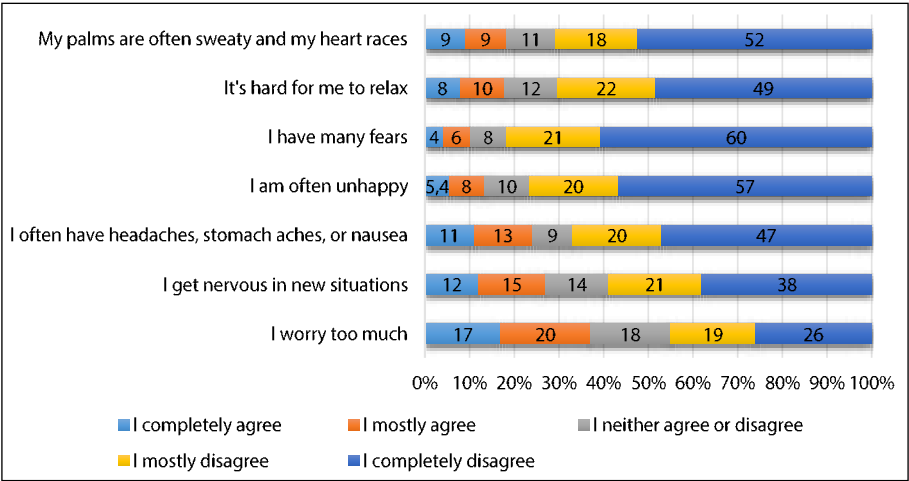
Chart 2: Students' satisfaction with various aspects of life (average ratings)



- Despite the overall reported satisfaction, a significant number of students face emotional difficulties, particularly girls in older age groups. While a quarter of

students (28%) report having none of the emotional problems assessed, the study indicates that many students are nonetheless affected by various forms of emotional distress (Chart 3). For example, one third (37%) of students report worrying a lot, and one quarter (23%) report frequently experiencing headaches, stomach aches, or nausea.

Chart 3: Severity of emotional difficulties in students (%)



- ▶ Emotional difficulties are more frequent among certain groups of students, highlighting the importance of context in their emergence. These difficulties are more common among students with developmental or learning difficulties, those who are less integrated into the school community, who perceive the school environment as unsafe, and who view their relationships with teachers as negative. They are also more frequently reported by students attending urban schools. Parenting style also plays an important role. The lowest levels of emotional difficulties are found among students who assess both parents’ parenting style as authoritative, while the highest levels are found among those who perceive one parent as disinterested in them.
- ▶ A strong negative correlation exists between life satisfaction and the presence of emotional difficulties among students. Students who are more satisfied with their lives are less likely to report emotional difficulties, while those with lower levels of satisfaction tend to experience such issues more frequently. Subjective well-being and emotional difficulties represent two sides of the same coin when it comes to students’ mental health.

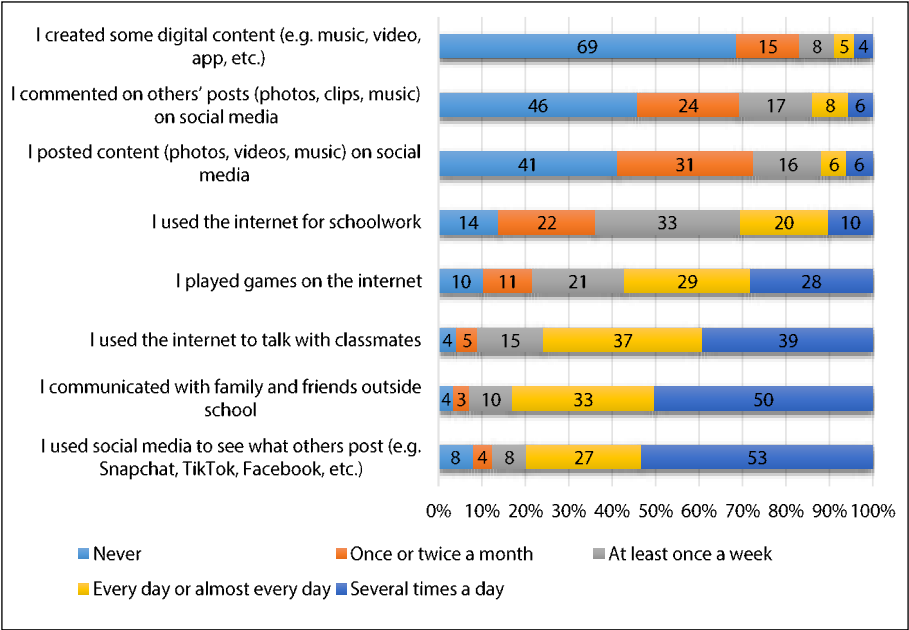
TIME SPENT ONLINE AND INTERNET ACTIVITIES

- ▶ The internet and online communication represent a significant part of students’ daily lives. Online communication alone accounts for between 5 and 6 hours of their daily activities. On school days, most students spend between 1 and 3 hours online (36%). A quarter (29%) use the internet for four to five

hours a day, while approximately one in ten (11%) spend six to seven hours online. Thirteen percent are online for more than seven hours per day. In other words, a little over half (53%) spend more than 3 hours a day on the internet.

- ▶ Differences in the amount of time spent online depend on students’ age and sex. On average, older students spend more time online than younger ones. Among younger students, boys are more frequent internet users, whereas among older students girls use it more.
- ▶ Social media is a multifunctional medium through which students connect and stay informed daily. Almost all students (99%) use at least one social media platform every day. On average, each student has about four social media accounts, with this number increasing with age. The most commonly used platforms are TikTok (73%), YouTube (71%), and Instagram (66%). Younger students more often use YouTube and Viber, while Instagram and TikTok are more popular among older students.
- ▶ Although the internet serves various purposes, students primarily use it to maintain communication. The most common online activity is communicating with family and friends – 50% of students do this several times a day, and 39% communicate with school peers just as frequently. A quarter of students (28%) play games online several times a day, and a similar proportion (29%) do so every or nearly every day. The internet is used far less frequently for schoolwork, social media or creating digital content (Chart 4).

Chart 4: Frequency of different internet activities (%)



- ▶ Students of different ages and sexes use the internet in different ways. Older students are more likely to use the internet for all listed activities, except for gaming (which is more common among younger students), and for creating digital

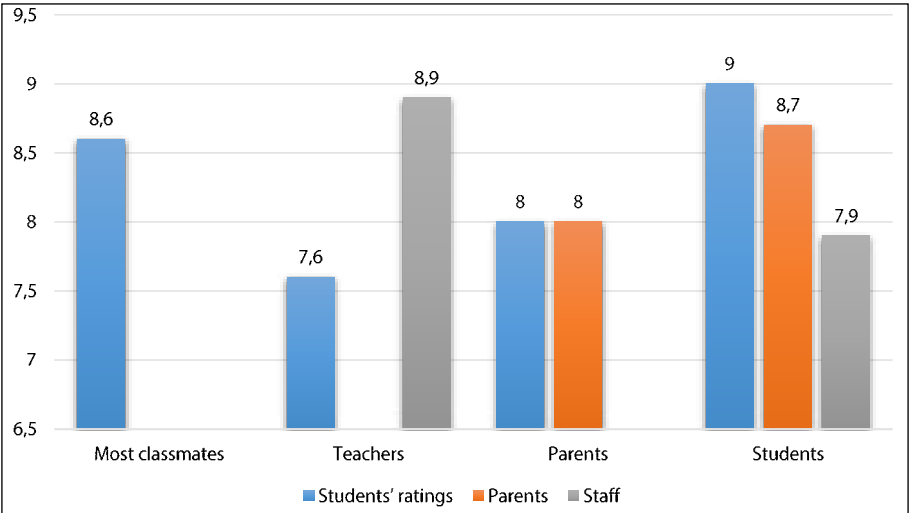
content, where there are no significant differences. Girls use the internet more for social media and school-related tasks, while boys are more focused on gaming.

- ▶ The use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools is gradually becoming part of students' everyday lives, primarily for information retrieval. Almost two thirds of students use AI tools, at least occasionally, to find information, and one third use them frequently. Nearly half of the students (42%) use AI for completing homework, of whom 17% do so regularly. The use of AI for creating or editing images and videos is significantly less common.
- ▶ Students' interest in using AI tools in education depends on their age and academic performance. Secondary school students use AI more frequently for finding information and doing homework than primary school students. Students with higher academic achievement are also more likely to use these tools for informational purposes compared to those with lower performance.

DIGITAL SKILLS

- ▶ Well-developed digital skills are increasingly important for successful functioning in today's educational and social context. Students have a very high opinion of their own digital skills. They rate them on average at 9 on a scale from 0 to 10. This self-assessment is higher than the assessments they give for the digital skills of their classmates, parents, or teachers (Chart 5), suggesting a tendency to perceive themselves as more digitally skilled than those in their immediate social environment.

Chart 5: Assessment of digital skills
by the three respondent groups (average values)



- ▶ Both parents and teachers give high, although somewhat more moderate, evaluations of their own digital skills. Their self-assessments are also optimistic (just below 9 on average for teachers and 8 for parents), which is very close to

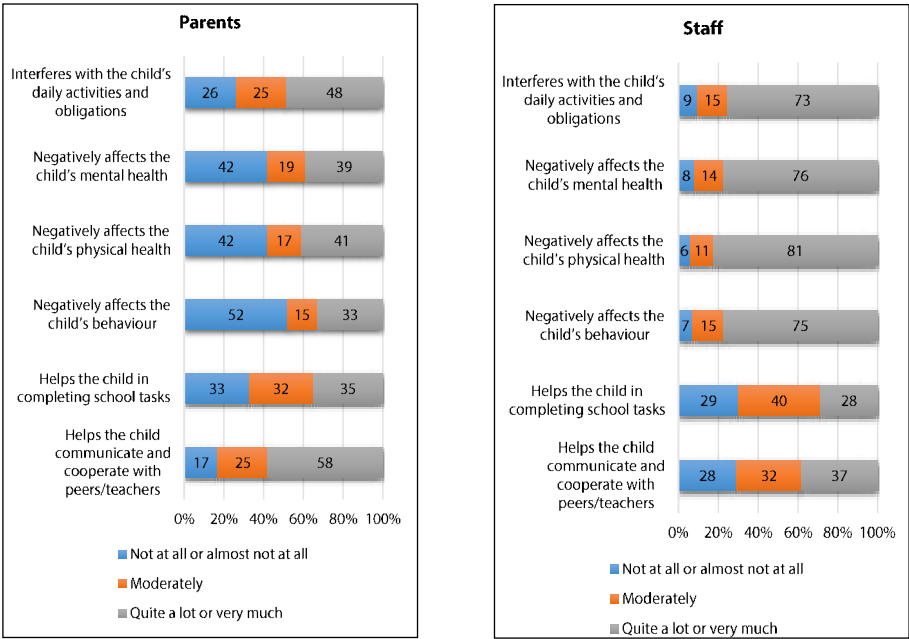
the scores the students give themselves. A notable pattern emerges in these assessments: students tend to underestimate the digital skills of others, especially adults; teachers underestimate students' skills; and parents underestimate their own. It is worth noting that children's assessments of their parents' digital skills are identical to the parents' self-assessments (8).

- ▶ Self-assessments of digital skills vary based on demographic and socio-economic factors. Among students, higher self-ratings are observed among boys, high-achievers, and those from better-off families. Among parents, those who are better educated and more materially secure tend to have a more positive view of their own digital skills. Among school staff, the positivity of self-assessed digital skills declines with age, years of service, and the number of years spent in the same position.

ADULTS' OPINION ON THE EFFECTS OF INTERNET USE

- ▶ The impact of the internet on children is a topic of great interest and concern, with various stakeholders – parents and school staff – often holding differing views that reflect both generational differences and diverse perspectives on children's development, health, and education. Parents tend to have ambivalent views regarding the internet's impact on children, but the negative aspects are strongly emphasised. More than half of the parents believe the internet has at least a moderately negative effect on children's mental health (58%) and physical health (58%), and interferes with their daily activities (88%) (Chart 6).

Chart 6: Opinions of parents and school staff on the impact of digital devices on children

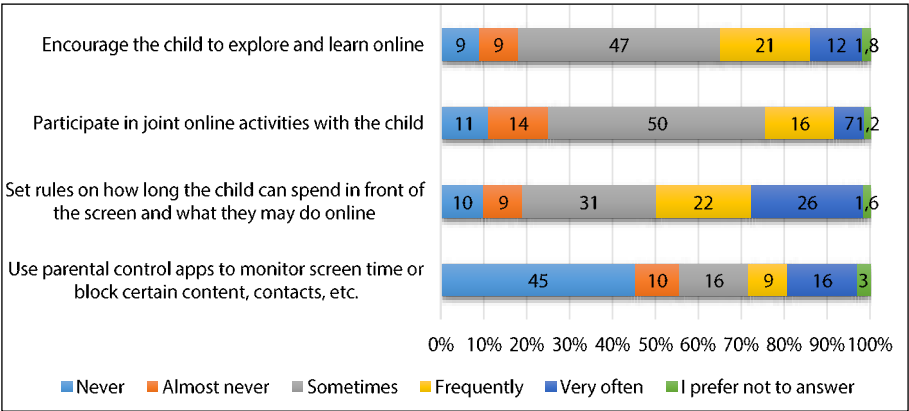


- ▶ At the same time, parents also recognise the positive aspects of the internet on children’s lives, particularly in the social and educational contexts. The majority of parents (59%) believe that the internet significantly facilitates peer communication, while two thirds (67%) believe it (moderately or significantly) helps children with schoolwork.
- ▶ Parents’ perceptions of the internet’s effects are also influenced by their children’s age and assessment of their digital abilities. Parents who rate their children’s digital skills more positively are more likely to highlight the benefits of the internet, such as easier communication and learning. Parents of younger children are more inclined to emphasise its negative effects than those of older children.
- ▶ School staff, however, hold significantly more negative views about the impact of technology on students. The vast majority of school staff believe that technology has a fairly or highly harmful impact on students’ physical health (81%) and mental health (76%), as well as their behaviour and daily activities (75%). These views are more negative across all dimensions than those expressed by parents (Chart 6).

PARENTAL MEDIATION OF ONLINE ACTIVITIES

- ▶ Despite the parental concern that was expressed, children often communicate with their parents about their online activities. According to the parents, more than three quarters of children initiated a conversation in the past year about what they do on the internet. Based on the children’s own responses, they are more open in communicating with their mothers and younger parents.
- ▶ The parental role in children’s internet use is twofold. On the one hand, there are restrictions. Control of internet activity is mostly based on setting rules for its use, while technical tools are rarely used by parents. The majority of parents (55%) do not use or hardly ever use applications to monitor time spent online (Chart 7). Similarly, half of the parents (48%) often or very often set rules about how long their children can spend online and what they are allowed to do there. Parents of younger children are significantly more likely to apply such rules than parents of older students.

Chart 7: Parental mediation of children’s internet use (%)

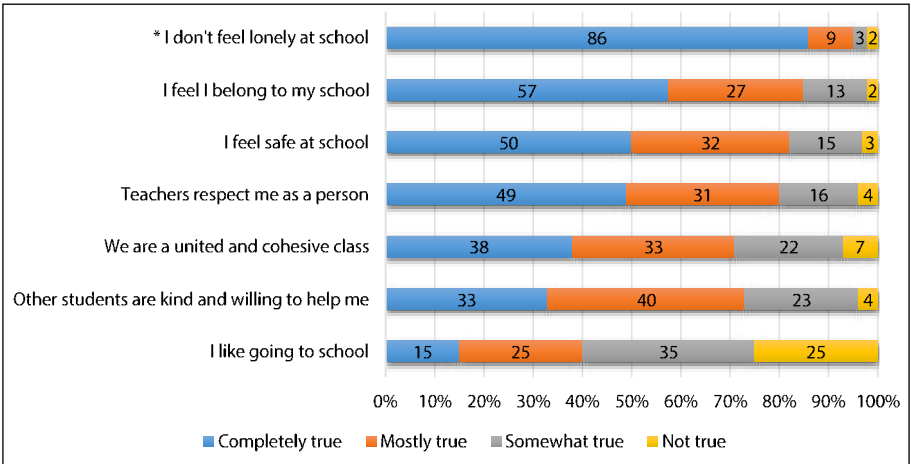


- ▶ On the other hand, parents often actively encourage the exploratory use of the internet and participate in joint online activities. More than 80% of parents at least occasionally encourage their children to use the internet for research purposes, and nearly three quarters take part in joint online activities with their children at least occasionally. These practices are more common among parents with higher levels of education and better material status.

STUDENTS’ ATTITUDE TOWARDS SCHOOL

- ▶ Students’ attitudes towards school are a key indicator of their emotional well-being, motivation to learn, and the quality of their educational experience. As such, they are crucial for understanding their daily functioning and development. The majority of students have a positive perception of the school environment and their relationships within it. Students largely report feeling safe at school, having a sense of belonging, feeling respected by teachers, perceiving other students as kind and helpful, and viewing their class as a harmonious group (Chart 8).

Chart 8: Students’ attitude towards school (%)



- ▶ Friendships and social support at school represent an important resource for children. As many as 94% of students report having at least two good friends at school, and feelings of loneliness are extremely rare among them. This indicates strong social connectedness within the school environment.
- ▶ Despite the overall positive atmosphere, emotional attachment to school tends to decline with age. Although most students view the school atmosphere positively, only 40% say they genuinely enjoy going to school. This percentage decreases as children grow older – from 58% in the 5th grade of primary school to just 24% in the 3rd grade of secondary school.
- ▶ Another important indicator of students’ relationship with school is their participation in various educational and cultural activities organised by the

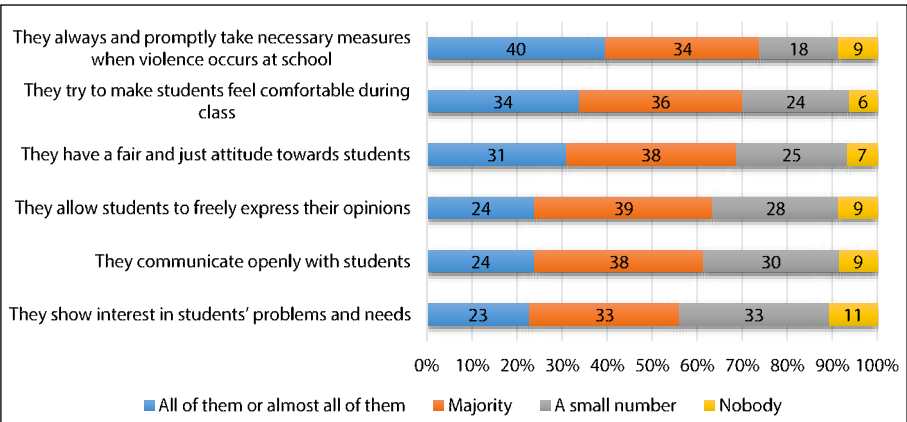
school. A large number of students take part in these. When asked about participating in activities such as workshops, museum visits, or theatre trips, 64% said they had been involved, 22% said they had not, and 13% believed the school had not organised such activities at all. Participation is more common among younger students, higher-achieving students, and those who are better integrated into the school community.

- ▶ However, there is a clear gap between parents’ and students’ perceptions of school. Although 61% of parents report that their children really enjoy going to school, 67% of parents whose children say the opposite still believe they like school – indicating a significant difference in perception.
- ▶ Overall, parents are highly satisfied with their children’s academic progress and social lives. Three quarters of parents (74%) express great satisfaction with their children’s academic achievement, while 83% are satisfied with their peer relationships.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS, PARENTS, AND SCHOOL STAFF

- ▶ An important indicator of school life quality and atmosphere is the nature of relationships within the school community. Students rate their teachers’ behaviour towards them very positively. Most students believe that teachers respond promptly to incidents of violence, strive to create a pleasant classroom atmosphere, treat students fairly and justly, communicate openly and allow freedom of expression, and show interest in students’ needs and problems (Chart 9). Between half (56%) and three quarters (74%) of students report these positive aspects of teacher behaviour.

Chart 9. Perceived attitude of teachers towards students (%)

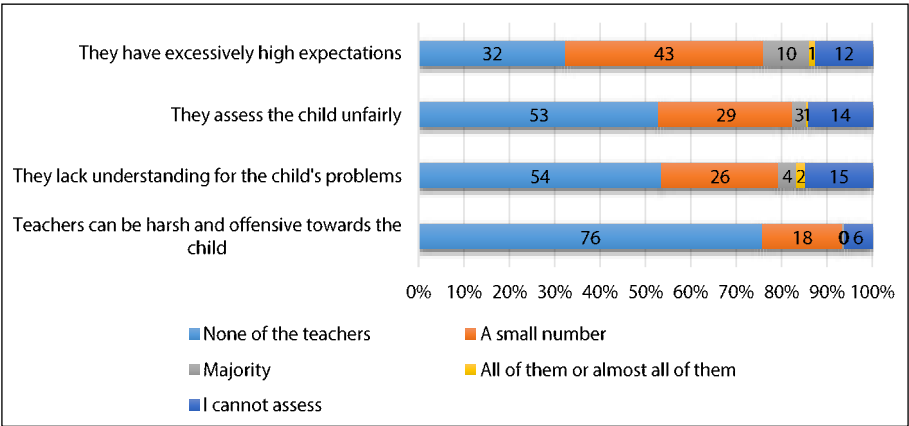


- ▶ While most students believe that teachers treat them positively, a significant number feel that only a few or even none of their teachers do so. Approx-

imately one in ten students report that none of their teachers demonstrate these traits, and express deep dissatisfaction with them.

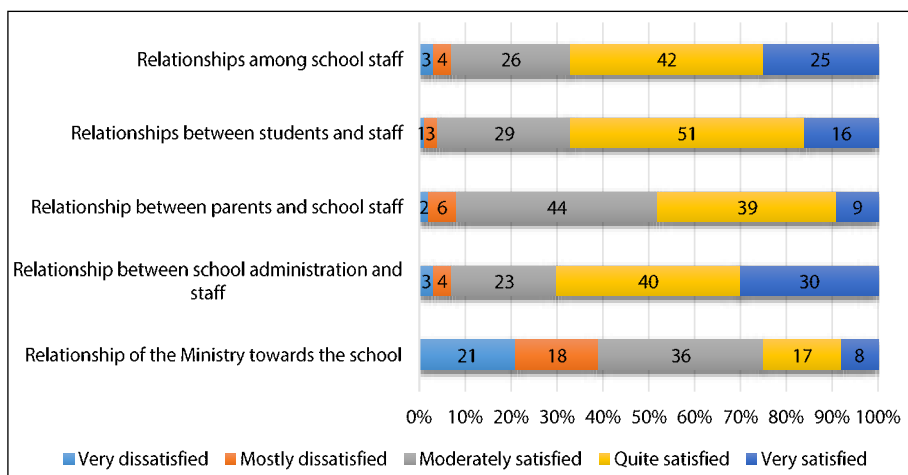
- ▶ Younger students, higher-performing students, those who feel safer at school, and those more integrated into the school community tend to assess teacher-student relationships more positively.
- ▶ Parents are also generally satisfied with the way teachers treat their children. Most state that teachers are not harsh (76%), do not show a lack of understanding (54%), and do not grade unfairly (53%) (Chart 10). The greatest issue parents identify in communication with teachers is the perception that teacher expectations are often unrealistic.

Chart 10: Parents' evaluation of a problem in child-teacher communication (%)



- ▶ Parents' own relationships with teachers and school counsellors are also generally positive. Most parents (85%) assess their relationship with the class teacher as very good, while ratings of relationships with other teachers (56%) and professional staff (55%) are slightly lower but still mostly positive.
- ▶ There is a strong correlation between parent and student assessments of the school climate. In schools where parents rate teacher relationships positively, and where they believe their children have a good relationship with the school and with teachers, students also tend to provide more positive assessments of the school atmosphere, safety, and teacher behaviour. This indicates that parents and students share a common perception of the school climate, which may serve as a foundation for improved cooperation within the school.
- ▶ School staff, for their part, are generally satisfied with their relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. Around 70% report being satisfied with their relationships with students, fellow staff, and school leadership, while half express satisfaction with their relationships with parents (Chart 11).

Chart 11. Staff satisfaction with relationships
between different actors (%)



- There is a significant link between teachers' relationships with students and students' emotional well-being. Schools where teachers have better relationships with students tend to have more positive assessments of student well-being. This suggests that teachers' attitudes and their relationships with students play a key role in shaping a positive or negative school climate.
- In contrast to parental perspectives, school staff's assessments of the school climate show weaker alignment with those of students. This discrepancy may reflect differing perspectives on school atmosphere and relationships, and also highlights the need for improved communication and alignment between staff and students.
- A major problem identified by staff relates to a perceived lack of mutual respect between students and adults – seen as a serious issue in many schools. While the majority of staff (62%) believe students show disrespect towards adults, only 25% recognise similar behaviour from adults towards students. One in four teachers and nearly one in three school directors and professional staff express concern that some of their colleagues occasionally or frequently fail to show sufficient respect towards students.
- An additional concern is that, according to school staff, some parents behave aggressively towards school personnel. Almost three quarters of school staff (72%) express concern about aggressive behaviour from parents. Although most believe that there are few such parents, more than one in ten staff members (12%) claim that there are quite a lot of them. This issue is more common in larger schools than in smaller ones.
- However, there is significant variation among staff within individual schools in their assessments of these issues. In only 11 of the 78 schools was there high agreement among the staff, where 80% or more of staff gave the same assessment (e.g. that few parents behave aggressively). Only one school had

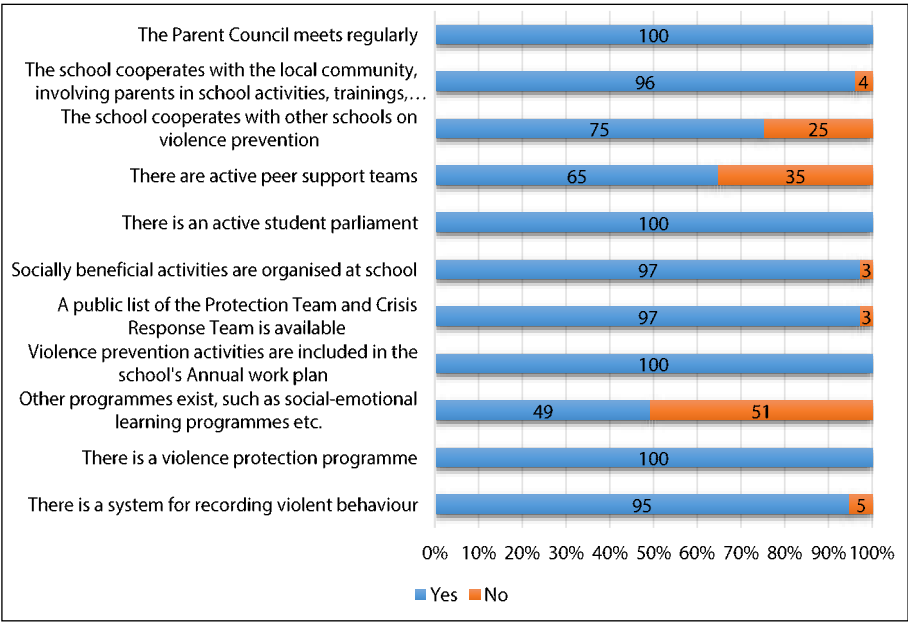
all surveyed staff share the same opinion. But the most telling finding is that in three quarters of schools (74%) staff members from the same school gave very different assessments – ranging from claims that there are no violent parents at all to claims that there are many.

SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT SAFETY

- ▶ A sense of safety within the school environment is essential for the healthy psychosocial development of students, their ability to learn, build relationships, and participate in school life without fear or pressure. Most students report feeling safe in their school environment. The majority state that there are no students in their school who bully others (78%), and that they have not seen anyone bring weapons to school (83%) or offering drugs to students (87%).
- ▶ However, some students have encountered following risk situations: just over one in five students (22%) reports that there are one or more violent groups in their school that bully others. This problem is more common in primary schools, where 27% of students express such concern, compared to 16% in secondary schools.
- ▶ Seventeen percent of students report seeing dangerous items such as knives or weapons at school. This issue is more prominent in urban areas, where 18% of students say they have witnessed such situations, compared to 12% in rural areas.
- ▶ Another significant problem perceived by students is the availability of drugs at school. Seventeen percent of students have heard of someone offering drugs either in or near their school. Again, there is a notable difference between urban and rural areas: in urban areas, 14% of students report witnessing such cases, while in rural areas this figure is lower, at 8%. In addition, the problem is more frequently reported by secondary school students (18%) than primary school students (8%).
- ▶ Students are more likely to feel safe when they are well-integrated into the school community and do not have developmental or learning difficulties. Students attending schools in rural areas or smaller schools also tend to feel safer. Reports of insecurity are more frequent in schools with a higher number of students experiencing emotional difficulties and where teacher-student relationships are weaker.
- ▶ Measures to prevent violence and ensure cooperation with parents and the local community are mandatory in all schools. All schools have an active student parliament, include violence prevention activities in the Annual Work Plan, have a protection programme in place, and hold regular meetings of the Parents' Council (Chart 12). However, some schools lack cooperation with the local community or parent involvement in school activities, civic engagement, and the documentation of violent behaviour. A minority of schools do not cooperate with other schools on violence prevention, and some do not have an active peer support team. In most schools, social-emotional learning programmes are not implemented isolated, rather, the majority of schools carry

out nearly all the mandatory violence prevention activities. In 30% of schools, all planned safety and violence prevention measures are in place.

Chart 12. School safety-related activities (%)



- Schools themselves are also focused on ensuring a safe environment for students. Teacher supervision is provided in all schools (100%), and schoolyards and surrounding areas are illuminated in 99% of schools. Only a small number of schools, around one in seven (14%), lack video surveillance or a fenced schoolyard. Around a quarter of schools (24%) do not have a system to control access to school buildings or a designated school police officer (29%). The majority of schools (83%) do not employ private security staff. However, all schools have at least three of these safety indicators in place, and 13% of schools meet all the safety criteria.

RULES ON THE USE OF DIGITAL DEVICES IN SCHOOL

- The use of mobile phones in school is an important factor in maintaining a safe school environment. Rules regarding mobile phone use in schools are generally strict. Staff in most schools report that mobile phone use is prohibited during lessons unless explicitly permitted by the teacher. This view is shared by 29% of staff. A similar proportion of students (34%) report the same. Additionally, 29% of staff state that rules are strict both during lessons and breaks (a view shared by 26% of students). One fifth of school staff (22%) and one fifth of students (20%) state that the ban on mobile phone use applies only during lessons, while a negligible percentage of both students and staff

report that there are no rules on mobile phone use in their school, or that they are not aware of such rules.

- ▶ However, there is a significant degree of disagreement among staff within the same school regarding these rules. In only one school do more than 90% of staff agree that phone use is prohibited during lessons. In eight schools, 80% or more of staff share the same view, but in five schools, all available response options were selected by different staff members, indicating considerable differences in perception with regard to the use of mobile phones. A similar situation is observed among students. In just six schools do more than 80% of students report that a single rule applies, and only one school has 100% agreement among students. In more than half of schools (43 schools, or 54%), at least one student selected four or more of the response options, including the claim that no rules exist at all (in two schools, students selected every available option).

3. School violence

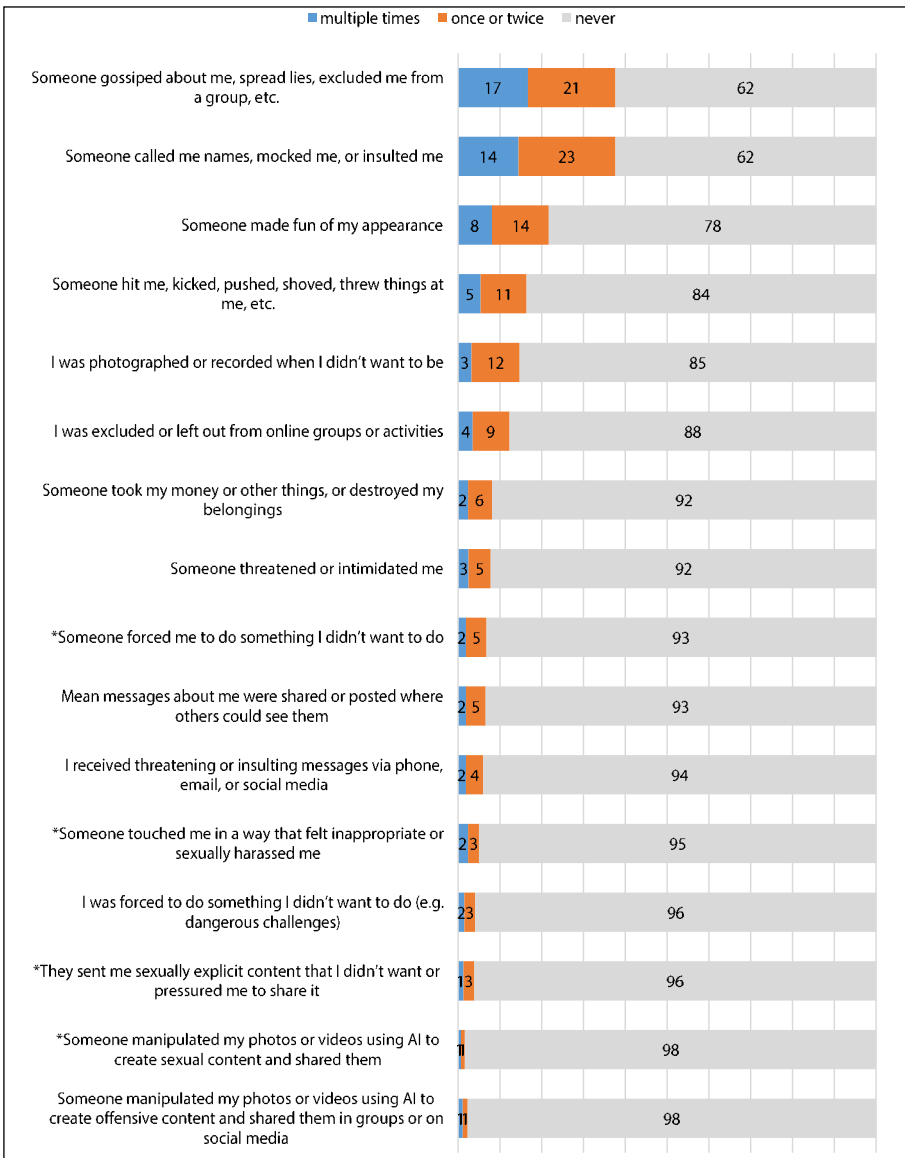
PREVALENCE OF PEER VIOLENCE

- ▶ School staff, students, and their parents all recognise a broad spectrum of peer violence occurring in schools, including both physical and psychological forms.
- ▶ According to all three categories of school staff (principals, teachers, and counsellors), verbal violence is the most common form of peer violence: only 7% report it is not present in their school, while 80% state that it occurs occasionally or rarely, and 13% believe it happens daily.
- ▶ More than three quarters of staff believe that students occasionally engage in physical violence against their peers, one quarter report it happens frequently, while half report fights between groups of students within the school, and one quarter report fights with students from other schools.
- ▶ The most common forms of digital violence identified by staff include taking photos or videos without consent (reported by 77% of staff), excluding students from online platforms (71%), and sending offensive or threatening messages (69%). A smaller number of staff (around 20%) report instances of using generative AI as a tool for abuse.
- ▶ Verbal and physical violence are more frequently reported by staff in primary schools, whereas sexual harassment and fights with students from other schools are more often reported in secondary schools.
- ▶ Almost half of the staff consider the problem of violence to be the same (29%) or less severe (16%) than in previous years, while one quarter (26%) believe the situation has worsened.
- ▶ More than half of the parents (57%) believe that violence is a greater problem now than a few years ago, while only a small number (6%) feel that violence has decreased.

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES OF EXPOSURE TO PEER VIOLENCE

- ▶ Students' personal experiences of various forms of victimisation were assessed by asking them to indicate whether – and how frequently – they had experienced any of 16 forms of offline and online violence from a given list during the previous three months (since the beginning of the school year). The youngest students were given a reduced list of 12 forms of violence. The frequency of individual forms of victimisation is presented in Chart 13.

Chart 13. Exposure to individual forms of violence (%)



Note: Items marked with an asterisk were not included in the questionnaire for the youngest age group. The formulations were taken from the questionnaire for boys.

- Students' responses indicate a relatively high prevalence of peer violence in schools. Sixty percent reported experiencing at least one form of violence in the past three months. Fifty-six percent experienced offline violence, 28% experienced online violence, and 24% experienced both. There was a strong positive correlation between the extent of offline and online victimisation ($\rho = .51$): the more offline violence a student experienced, the more likely they were to experience online violence, and vice versa.

- ▶ The most common form of victimisation was verbal abuse. Nearly every second student reported experiencing at least one form of verbal violence (insults, threats, mockery, or online threats). Forty percent experienced social exclusion, either offline or online (e.g. gossiping or being excluded from social media groups), and 16% reported experiencing physical violence.
- ▶ The most frequent types of digital violence included being photographed without consent (reported by 15% of students) and being excluded from online groups (13%).
- ▶ One in ten students experienced some form of gender-based violence (violence targeted at a person due to their gender, sex, or sexual orientation). Both boys and girls were equally affected.
- ▶ Sexual harassment was reported slightly more often by boys than girls. The most frequently reported incident involved unwanted touching that was perceived as sexual harassment. Other forms, such as receiving unsolicited messages of a sexual nature or the misuse of images or videos edited with AI, were less commonly reported.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF VIOLENT INTERACTIONS

- ▶ Violence most often occurs in situations with minimal adult supervision and when children are not engaged in structured school activities – for example, outside the school premises or in classrooms when a teacher is not present.
- ▶ Students were more often exposed to violence from peers of the same gender. Incidents involving only students of the opposite gender were least common.
- ▶ Violence most frequently occurs within the same class group and among students of the same age.
- ▶ The most commonly cited reasons for being targeted by violence include physical appearance, followed by opinions and beliefs (more often reported by girls and older students), clothing, and grades (Chart 16). More than one quarter of students (26%) believe they were targeted because of how they dress, their hairstyle, or their behaviour. These findings support the notion of peer intolerance towards anything perceived as deviating from social norms, a trait typical of adolescence. Less commonly cited reasons include ethnic or religious background, poverty, disability, and same-sex attraction. One in ten students (with no difference between boys and girls) who experienced some form of sexual harassment believes that their same-sex sexual orientation was the reason.

VICTIMISATION THROUGHOUT SCHOOLING TO DATE

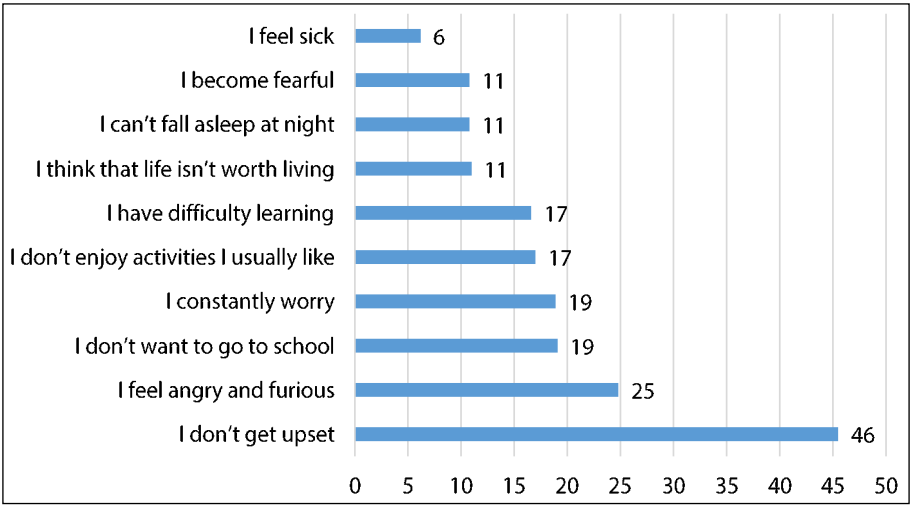
- ▶ Among all students, 27% of them say that, in the course of their schooling, they have been exposed to verbal or physical violence at least once by another student, 12% report having been exposed to online peer violence, and 17% say that they have been bullied by the same student or group of students for a long time. In total, 34% of students reported having experienced at least one of these three forms of peer violence throughout their schooling.

- ▶ Among those who stated they had not experienced violence in the last three months, 15% reported having experienced it at some point during their schooling, but around half of those who reported having experienced some form of violence in the last three months now said that they had not been subjected to violence during their schooling. This suggests that students may interpret the notion of “having been exposed to violence” differently, applying it only to more extreme forms of violence, possibly because they do not wish to perceive themselves as victims or because many forms of violence have become normalised as a part of everyday peer interaction.

CONSEQUENCES OF EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

- ▶ Nearly half of the students say they are not upset by the violence they experienced. These responses may indicate that most violent interactions are not of high intensity, but also that children tend to trivialise violence when it is normalised within the peer group and they do not perceive any realistic way to counter it.
- ▶ However, the consequences that students do recognise in themselves can be serious. The most common immediate response is anger, which, while reactive, can also be functional. In addition to this, some students report longer-lasting effects, such as somatisation and dysfunctional behaviour (Chart 14).

Chart 14: Delayed students’ reactions to peer violence (%)



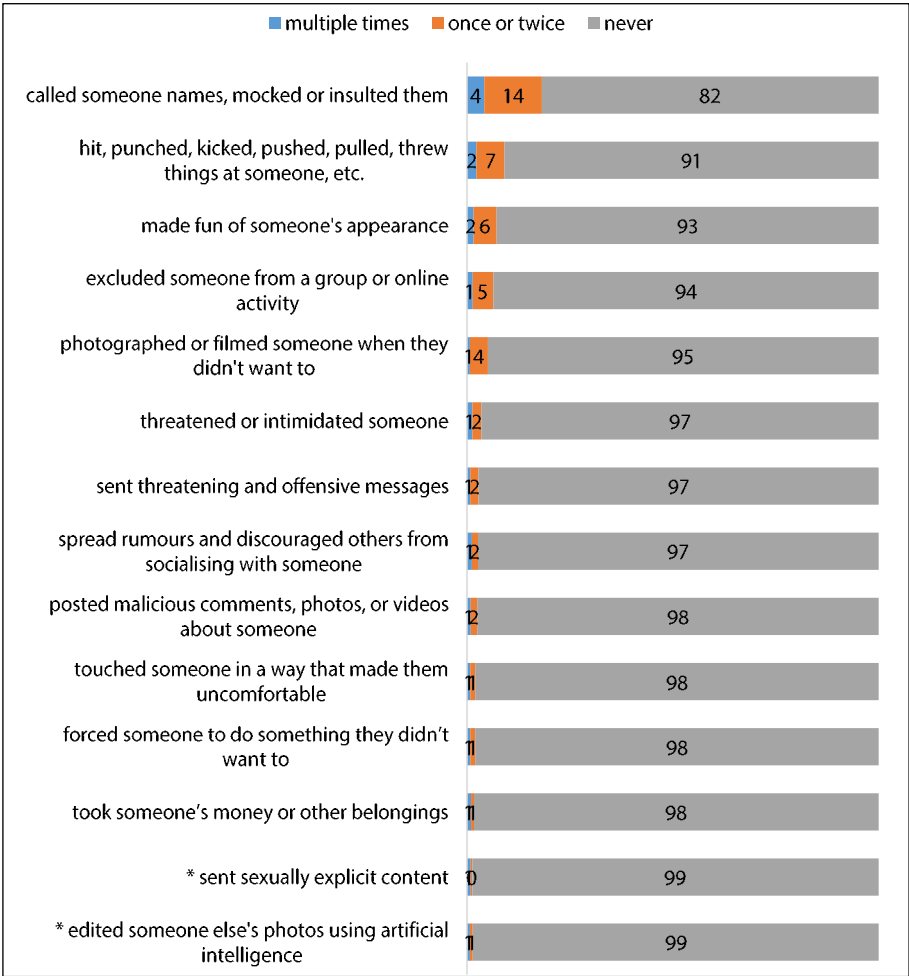
- ▶ Girls report more negative consequences than boys, as do children from families with lower material status. The number of negative consequences is positively correlated with the frequency of victimisation.
- ▶ The number of consequences is significantly and positively correlated with emotional difficulties, lack of integration into the school community, dissat-

isfaction, sense of insecurity, and perceptions of teachers’ negative attitudes towards students. While many students appear to downplay the significance of violent experiences, the link between such experiences and emotional and social difficulties points to their deeper and often underestimated seriousness.

VIOLENT STUDENT BEHAVIOUR

- In addition to reporting their exposure to peer violence, students were also asked whether they themselves had engaged in any form of violence, offline or online, by indicating, from a list of 14 behaviours, whether they had behaved in any of these ways since the beginning of the school year, and, if so, how often. The frequency of individual forms of violence is shown in Chart 15.

Chart 15: Frequency of individual forms of violence (%)



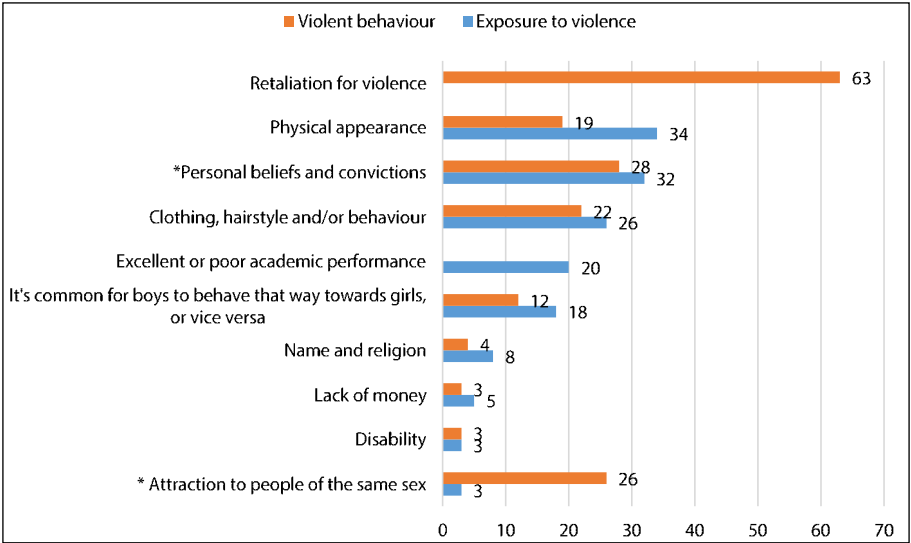
Notes: Items marked with an asterisk were not included in the list for 5th-grade primary students. The formulations were taken from the questionnaire for boys.

- ▶ Half as many students reported engaging in violence as those who reported being victims of violence. 28% of students indicated that they had been violent towards another student at least once. Sixteen percent had engaged in offline violence, 4% in online violence, and 8% had done both. A strong positive correlation was found between offline and online violence.
- ▶ The most common form of violence was verbal. One in five students said they had been verbally abusive (insulting, threatening, mocking, or sending threats online), and one in ten admitted to physical violence.
- ▶ A small percentage of students reported committing some form of sexual harassment, with more boys than girls among the perpetrators. One in five of these students cited the victim's same-sex sexual orientation as the reason for the harassment.
- ▶ Six percent of students reported involvement in intimate partner violence, and in one third of those cases, this included physical violence.
- ▶ Students who engage in digital violence are often also victims of it themselves, and this overlap is especially evident among the youngest students.

REASONS FOR VIOLENT BEHAVIOUR

- ▶ The reasons students gave for their violent behaviour suggest that violence is most often not motivated by any immutable characteristics of the victim, but rather as a reaction to another student's behaviour or to views perceived as unacceptable (Chart 16).

Chart 16. Reasons for peer victimisation and violent behaviour (%)



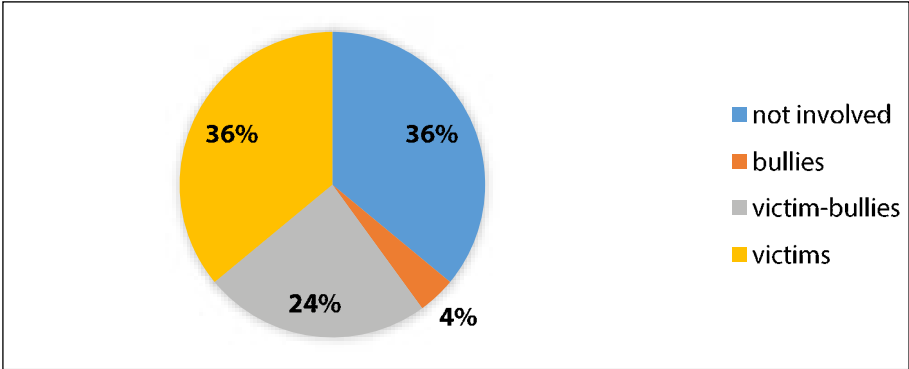
Note: Responses marked with an asterisk were not provided to the youngest students.

- ▶ Students rarely report having behaved violently towards other children because of their ethnic or religious background, financial status, or disability. Violence more frequently occurred in response to differing views or beliefs, particularly when those differences were expressed through appearance or behaviour.
- ▶ The most common reason for violent behaviour was retaliation –responding to another student’s behaviour that was perceived as provocative or as previous violence, thus continuing an already initiated violent interaction. Nearly two thirds of students (63%) stated they behaved violently because they had previously been victims of similar behaviour themselves.
- ▶ A significant proportion of students (26%) reported having acted violently toward individuals they knew or assumed were attracted to people of the same sex. This reason was more frequently reported by boys (32%) than girls (17%).
- ▶ These findings indicate that students’ violent behaviour is often not rooted in pre-existing prejudice toward specific groups, but rather emerges from the dynamics of peer relationships, reactions to differences in behaviour and appearance, and responses to prior humiliation or assault.

ROLES IN A VIOLENT INTERACTION

- ▶ When students’ roles in violent interactions are analysed over time, it becomes evident that the commonly accepted and stereotypical image of two distinct groups – on the one hand, children who are victims of violence and, on the other, children who act violently towards them – is inaccurate. A considerable number of students have experienced both victimisation and perpetration of violence themselves.
- ▶ Approximately one third of students were not involved in violent interactions (i.e. they were neither victims nor perpetrators). A similar percentage experienced violence but did not engage in it. Only 4% of students reported having been violent without having been victimised themselves. One quarter of students fall into the category of children who have both suffered violence from peers and engaged in violent behaviour towards others (Chart 17).

Chart 17: Roles in violent interactions (%)



- ▶ There is substantial overlap between the roles of victim and perpetrator: 40% of children who experienced violence are also perpetrators (60% of children experienced violence, and 24% – which is 40% of those who experienced violence – also engaged in violent behavior toward others). Moreover, as many as 86% of those who perpetrated violence had been victims of violence themselves (28% of students engaged in violent behavior, and 24% – which is 86% of them – were also victims).
- ▶ Students who are both victims and perpetrators often have a history of prolonged exposure to violence, dating back to earlier periods of schooling. This group is also more likely than others to report being victims of teacher violence, as well as exhibiting violent behaviour towards teachers.
- ▶ Among students in the victim-perpetrator group, feelings of insecurity and poor integration into the school community are the most pronounced. These students are least likely to rely on peer support and report having the fewest friends at school. Children with learning or developmental difficulties are more commonly represented in this group.

CORRELATES OF VIOLENT INTERACTION

- ▶ Younger students and those with developmental or learning difficulties were more frequently exposed to violence than others. Victimization was not associated with sex, academic achievement, material status, urban/rural setting, or school size.
- ▶ Children whose parents practise an authoritative parenting style were least likely to be victimised, while those from families with authoritarian or neglectful parenting styles were significantly more likely to be exposed to violence.
- ▶ Victimization was also associated with parental dissatisfaction with their child's academic performance, their peer and teacher relationships, and their approach to school obligations.
- ▶ There was no correlation between victimisation and parental education, parenting goals, frequency of attending parent-teacher meetings, satisfaction with teachers, class teachers or school counsellors, or the degree to which the child shares their emotions and problems with their parents.
- ▶ Boys were more likely than girls to engage in physical and verbal violence, but only in offline contexts (32% towards 17%). In online settings, no sex differences were observed (14% towards 10%).
- ▶ Violent behaviour was not associated with age, academic achievement, urban/rural setting, or school size. The lowest percentage of violent students was found among children whose parents have an authoritative parenting style, while the highest percentage of violent students was among those whose parents exhibit a neglectful or authoritarian style of parenting.
- ▶ The frequency of perpetration was positively correlated with the frequency of victimisation: children who were more often violent had also more often

been exposed to violence themselves. This indicates shared risk factors, such as emotional regulation issues, underdeveloped social skills, negative behaviour models, or family environment, which contribute to children becoming caught in cycles of violent interactions that increase the likelihood of being both a victim and a perpetrator.

- ▶ While the association between victimisation/perpetration and various socio-demographic variables was neither strong nor systematic, there was a very strong correlation between victimisation/perpetration and all psychological factors examined: more emotional difficulties, stronger feelings of insecurity, perception of poor teacher-student relationships, weaker integration into the school community, greater dissatisfaction, less pronounced prosocial values, and lower communication competence.

PERCEPTION OF THE CHILD'S INVOLVEMENT IN A VIOLENT INTERACTION

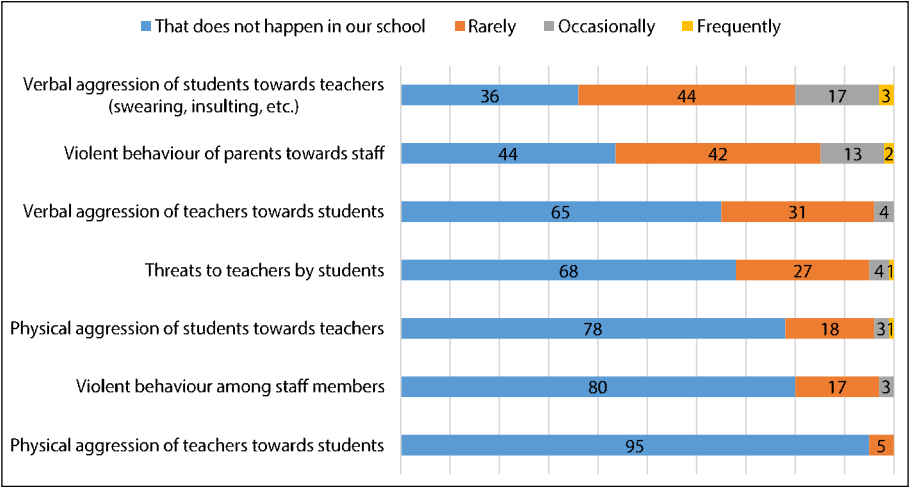
- ▶ Although parents play an important role in recognising and responding to peer violence, their perception and awareness are often limited or insufficient. Parents reported fewer cases of their children being victimised or violent than the children themselves did. They were more frequently aware of cases where their children were victims than of instances where their children were perpetrators.
- ▶ The number of parents reporting that their children experienced violence since the beginning of the school year is relatively small. The most commonly reported types of violence (as told to parents) are verbal, social, and physical violence by peers. Only 5% of parents stated that their children had complained about violence from a teacher. According to the parents, since the beginning of the school year, approximately every second child (44%) has experienced at least one form of violence.
- ▶ Parents are rarely aware of their own child's violent behaviour towards others – according to their reports, only 6% of children had engaged in violence at least once since the beginning of the school year. Digital violence is also very rarely mentioned.
- ▶ Parents who reported that their children had more frequently been victims of violence were also more likely to report that their children engaged in violent behaviour. This once again confirms the link between victimisation and perpetration among children.

VIOLENT INTERACTIONS INVOLVING ADULTS

- ▶ According to staff, the most frequent form of violence involving adults is verbal aggression by students towards teachers, and this is reported by two thirds of school employees. More than half also report that parents exhibit violent behaviour towards staff (Chart 18).

- ▶ One fifth of staff report that students show physical aggression towards teachers, and 5% of them said that students, although rarely, were exposed to physical aggression by teachers (Chart 18).

Chart 18: Staff assessments of the frequency of different forms of violence involving adults (%)



- ▶ Both staff and parents point to the issue of parental aggression towards teachers. In over half of schools, staff have at least occasionally encountered this form of violence, while in only 38% of schools was this issue not observed. Such conflicts are more common in schools with higher levels of other forms of violence.
- ▶ According to staff estimates, verbal violence by students towards teachers, verbal violence by teachers towards students, and violent behaviour among staff are more prevalent in secondary schools than in primary schools.
- ▶ Over the course of their education, just under one in five students has experienced some form of violence from a teacher, most often verbal aggression (18%), and less frequently physical violence (3%) or digital harassment (1%).
- ▶ In the past three months, 11% of students report having experienced verbal aggression by a teacher (insults, ridicule), 2% physical violence, and a total of 12% report having experienced at least one of these two forms. In only 20% of schools did no students report a teacher acting violently towards them, and in 58% of schools no students reported having been violent towards a teacher.
- ▶ Students more frequently exposed to violence by teachers (in the past three months) include those in larger schools and older students. Complaints about violence by teachers were significantly more common among students who were less integrated into peer groups, felt less safe, experienced more emotional difficulties, reported lower levels of satisfaction, suffered more negative consequences from peer violence, and had a more negative perception of teachers’ attitudes towards students.

- ▶ Victimisation by teachers was not significantly associated with students' sex, academic performance, material status, prosocial attitudes, or communication competence.
- ▶ Complaints of teacher violence were more frequently made by children who themselves had been violent towards others, as well as by those who reported being victims of peer violence.
- ▶ Parents are largely unaware of the violence their children experience from teachers: as many as 86% of parents of children who report verbal violence by teachers claim that no such incidents occurred. Of the 12 students who stated that a teacher physically harmed them, only one parent was aware of the incident. More than half (55%) of parents whose children experienced teacher violence report that there are no teachers who are rude or insulting to their children.
- ▶ On the other hand, 2% of students report having insulted or threatened a teacher, and the same percentage report having physically assaulted a teacher. In total, 3% of students exhibited at least one form of violence towards teachers.
- ▶ Students who acted violently towards teachers are more likely to be children with behavioural difficulties and those who have already engaged in violence towards other students.
- ▶ As mentioned, 12% of students reported experiencing either verbal or physical violence from teachers since the beginning of the school year, while 3% admitted to engaging in some form of violence toward teachers. Since 1% of students were involved in violent interactions with teachers in both roles, this means that approximately one in seven students (13.4%) has been involved in a violent interaction with a teacher since the beginning of the school year—most often as the one experiencing violence.
- ▶ One in four students reports that, since the start of the school year, a student from their class has shouted at or insulted a teacher, and a smaller number (5%) state that a fellow student physically assaulted a teacher.

COMPARISON OF STUDENT, PARENT, AND TEACHER ASSESSMENTS OF SCHOOL VIOLENCE

- ▶ The perceptions of students, parents, and school staff regarding violence overlap to a certain extent, but there are also significant differences in how each group recognises and interprets violence in the school environment.
- ▶ Student and parent assessments are the most aligned — the more students in a school report experiencing violence, the more parents confirm that their child has been a victim of the same form of violence. The correlations between these assessments are moderate to high, indicating a shared understanding and experience of the problem.

- ▶ The data also show some level of alignment between student and staff assessments, but this is weaker and mostly limited to direct interaction-based violence — verbal, physical, and social. For other forms, such as digital violence, mocking, or sexual harassment, this alignment is absent. It is likely that students are less inclined to report certain forms of violence to teachers, and that school staff do not have a clear insight into what is happening in the virtual space.
- ▶ The weakest correlation is between the assessments of parents and staff, which may point to communication barriers and a lack of complete information. In other words, the assessments of parents and staff are based on entirely different sources of information.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SCHOOLS IN FORMS OF VIOLENT INTERACTION AND SCHOOL-LEVEL PREDICTORS OF VIOLENCE

- ▶ The frequency and types of violent behaviour in schools vary significantly between educational institutions, indicating the role of specific school environment characteristics in the occurrence of violence.
- ▶ In some schools, no students report having been victims of violence, while in others, all students report such experiences (Chart 19). In more than 80% of schools, over half of the students had been exposed to some form of violence. In most schools (over 90%), fewer than half of students report having behaved violently themselves, although there are still significant variations — from 0% to 75% (Chart 20).

Chart 19: Percentage of students per school who have experienced some form of violence

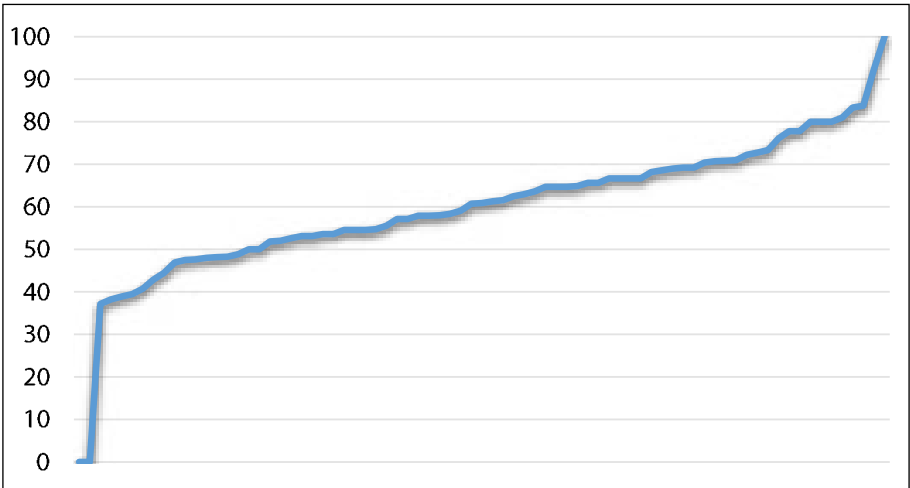
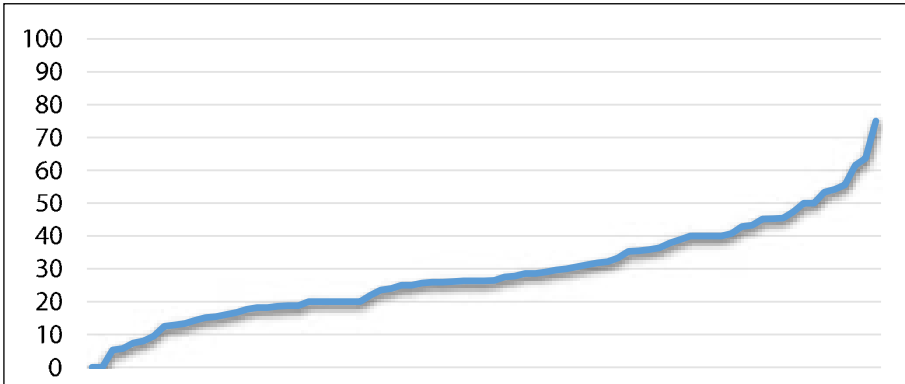


Chart 20: Percentage of students per school who have engaged in violent behaviour



- ▶ In many schools, a considerable number of students did not exhibit any form of violent behaviour, especially in cases involving theft or property damage (in two thirds of schools, there was no such behaviour). In the worst-case scenario, up to 60% of students in one school had behaved violently. Digital violence shows less variation between schools than in-person violent interactions, which may suggest a smaller role of the school environment in this domain or reflect the specific nature of the medium itself.
- ▶ Schools with a higher number of students who have been victims of violence generally also have a higher number of students who engage in violent behaviour, indicating shared risk factors or the presence of cyclical forms of violence.
- ▶ Different forms of violence are interconnected – in schools where one form of violent behaviour is more frequent, others also tend to occur more often, with the exception of sexual harassment, which shows a weaker correlation.
- ▶ Although some factors, such as the type of school (primary or secondary school), number of support staff, and certain structural features, have a limited influence on the frequency of violence, the overall correlation between school characteristics and the prevalence of violence is generally weak. School safety measures did not show a significant correlation with the frequency of violence.
- ▶ Students in primary schools report being victims of violence more often than those in secondary schools. Schools with a higher teacher-to-student ratio have a lower percentage of victimised students. Similarly, in schools with more teachers and support staff per student, violent behaviour occurs less frequently.
- ▶ The perception of insecurity in school emerged as an important risk factor — in schools that students perceive as unsafe, both victimisation and violent behaviour are more prevalent.

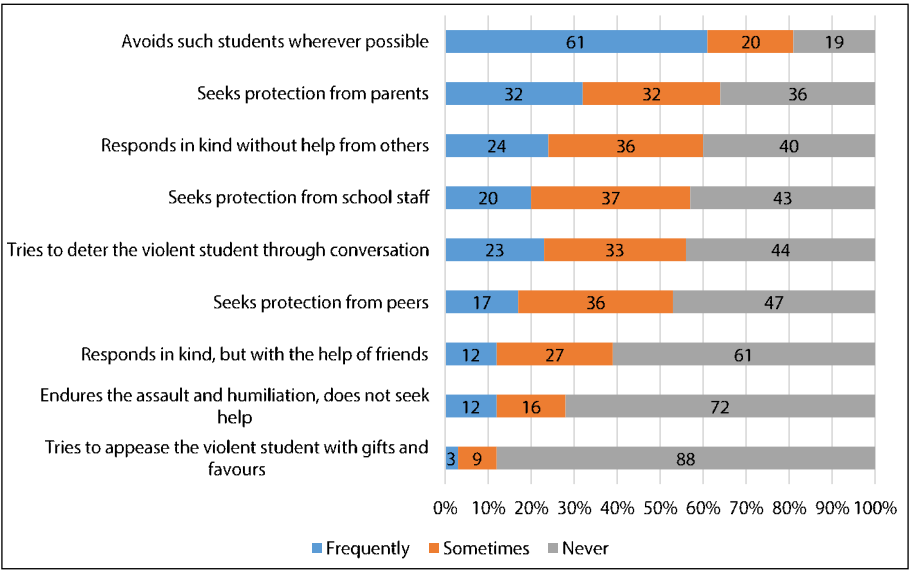
- ▶ Negative student assessments of school climate (especially regarding safety) are associated with higher levels of violent behaviour, such as verbal abuse and ridicule, as well as various forms of digital violence. In schools where students are less integrated into the school community, there are more instances of both offline and online violence.
- ▶ Forms of violence in schools are interrelated. In schools with pronounced peer violence, other types of conflict are also more likely to be present, such as violence by teachers against students or by parents against school staff. Poor relationships between certain groups within the school community often extend to other intergroup dynamics.

4. Responding to violence

STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO PEER VIOLENCE

- ▶ Students who personally experienced peer violence in offline interactions responded in various ways, which can be assessed as more or less constructive (Chart 21). The most common reaction – avoiding peers who behave violently (61% of students do so often, 20% sometimes), may be an adaptive short-term strategy, but in the long term it does not contribute to resolving the problem. The most desirable form of response from the perspective of adults – seeking protection from school staff and parents – is chosen by nearly three quarters of students.

Chart 21. Students' response to peer violence (%)



- ▶ A significant percentage of students react to violent behaviour from peers by retaliating in kind, either alone (60%) or with the help of other students (39%). Such responses not only fail to stop the violence, but also increase the risk of its escalation. Those most at risk are likely the students who react to peer violence by passively enduring and adapting to it.

- ▶ While nearly half (47%) of those personally affected never seek support from their peers, only one in ten students in the sample (including those who have not experienced peer violence) believe that their peers would not help them if they were exposed to violence in the school context.
- ▶ The way in which students respond to offline peer violence is associated with several sociodemographic and psychological characteristics, although these correlations are neither strong nor consistent. Seeking help from parents is slightly more common among younger children, girls, more academically successful students, those with a more positive attitude towards school and teachers, and those with better communication and prosocial skills. An authoritarian parenting style and lower satisfaction with family relationships negatively correlate with students' willingness to seek help from parents in cases of peer violence. Younger students, those who evaluate teacher-student relations more positively, and those with a generally more positive attitude towards school more often turn to school staff for help.
- ▶ Students exposed to peer violence in face-to-face interactions are more likely to try to appease violent peers with gifts or favours or talking to them and are just as likely as other students to seek protection from parents, staff, and peers. On the other hand, students who exhibit violent behaviour, as well as those who are both perpetrators and victims, are less likely to seek help from parents or to avoid violent peers but are more likely to say they respond to violence with violence, either alone or with the support of friends.
- ▶ In situations involving digital violence, the most common response, both among younger students (12%) and older ones (18%), is to block the person exhibiting violent behaviour. All other types of responses are less frequently reported. Only 6% of students who experienced digital violence stopped using the internet for a while or deleted distressing messages. An extremely small percentage of students report violence via social media or online platforms (3%) or through helplines and toll-free numbers (1%). It is assumed that in most cases, the digital violence experienced was not perceived by students as seriously threatening.
- ▶ Almost two thirds of students took no action when they encountered violent or sexual videos involving their school peers. The most common response was to inform the individuals appearing in the videos (43%), followed by reporting to parents (31%), school staff (28%), or via a website (12%). Primary school students were more likely to inform the affected person, whereas secondary school students were more likely to ignore such content.

STUDENTS SEEKING HELP FROM SCHOOL STAFF

- ▶ Among students who experienced violence by peers or school staff during their schooling, just over a third (39%) sought help from school staff. The largest proportion of students (20%) sought help from staff, parents, and peers. Almost twice as few (13%) turned to staff and parents, while 3% sought help from staff and peers. Only 5% of students sought help exclusively from school

staff. This may indicate a relatively low level of trust in school staff as the sole source of support in situations involving violence.

- ▶ On the other hand, the vast majority of school staff (more than 90%) report that students have approached them for help due to exposure to violence in the school context, while fewer than 10% of staff, in both primary and secondary schools, report that this has never happened. School support staff and school principals are more likely to report that students come to them for help than teaching staff.

STAFF RESPONSE TO STUDENTS' REQUESTS FOR HELP

- ▶ Numerous studies show that the way in which teachers respond to school violence is one of the key factors in its prevention and reduction. Nevertheless, the data indicate that students' experiences of communication with staff are not always positive – around one fifth state that school staff made no attempt to help them or tried but failed. Conversely, one in five students say that staff were very helpful.
- ▶ Reports of greater support from staff come from younger students and those attending smaller schools, as well as children with more pronounced prosocial attitudes and stronger communication skills, more satisfied students, those with fewer emotional difficulties and who are better integrated into the school community. This finding suggests that students' perception of support from staff is significantly linked to their own personal and social resources. It also indicates the need to develop mechanisms to ensure consistent support for students who are emotionally vulnerable, socially isolated, or have less developed communication skills.
- ▶ Students who have behaved violently towards peers receive less support from staff when they themselves are exposed to violence. More than half (53%) report that no one from the school spoke to them about their violent behaviour; one third of students say they were spoken to once or twice, and 14% several times (more often girls and students with lower academic achievement). This may indicate a selective approach to support, i.e. a tendency among staff to downplay the need to protect students identified as violent. On the other hand, students' violent behaviour may also be a response to the absence of support, perceived staff indifference, or a lack of willingness to get involved in resolving their problems.
- ▶ From the parents' perspective, teachers respond consistently to incidents of student violence in the school context – three quarters of parents believe this applies to most or all teachers.
- ▶ When asked directly how they act when they witness violence among students, 88% of staff state that they always try to intervene, 10% intervene whenever they can, while 2% expect those responsible for such matters to identify and resolve the issue. A slightly smaller percentage of teachers and

school support staff report that they always try to intervene when they witness violence involving students and school staff.

- ▶ Teachers, who comprise 90% of the school staff sample, typically respond in multiple ways when students approach them for help due to exposure to violence. The majority of teachers (63%) state that they consult with school support staff. Half report that they address the issue during form period or speak individually with the student and their parents. Slightly more than one third of teachers (39%) try to resolve the situation by explaining to the students why such behaviour is unacceptable and asking them to reconcile.
- ▶ School staff rate their own skills in addressing violent pupil behaviour (such as knowledge of intervention procedures, providing support to students who are victims of violence, and responding constructively in situations involving violent behaviour, etc.) very highly, with an average score – above 9 on a ten-point scale. Nevertheless, they express a need for further improvement in these skills. The majority of school principals (85%) in primary and (73%) in secondary schools, along with more than half of support staff and half of teachers, are willing to attend additional training to improve their ability to respond to violence in schools.
- ▶ According to staff responses, **students who display violent behaviour receive less support** than those who are exposed to such behaviour. Measures taken at school level are primarily aimed at protecting students who are victims of violence. However, support for students who behave violently is also of great importance, since violent behaviour often stems from unresolved emotional or social problems, a lack of social skills, or previous exposure to violence.

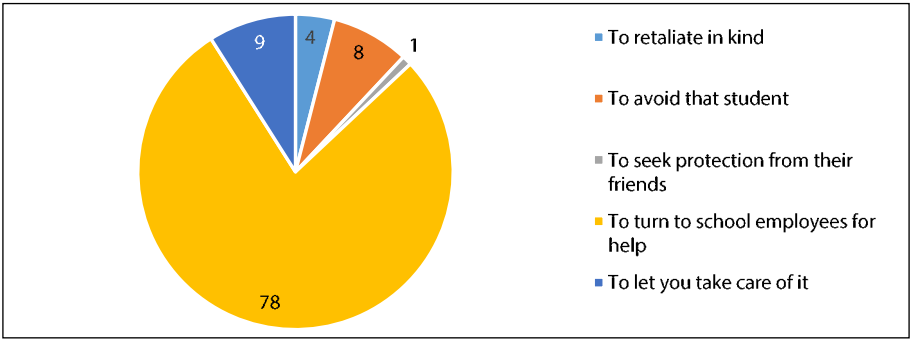
PARENTAL RESPONSE TO THEIR CHILD'S EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE

- ▶ Among children who experienced violence, almost half (46%) report that their parents informed the school. This response is more frequently reported by girls and older students. On the other hand, children who admitted to having been violent towards peers were less likely to report that their parents contacted the school in cases where they themselves were victims of violence.
- ▶ Nearly two thirds of school staff (60%) state that, during this and the previous school year, they were not approached even once by a parent whose child had been exposed to violence. One third say this happened once or twice, and fewer than one in ten (8%) report that it happened more than twice. The younger the child, the more often parents reach out.
- ▶ Although, according to the **Rulebook on the Protocol of Action in Institutions in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect**, schools are obliged to promptly inform and actively involve parents in the process of addressing the problem if their children are involved in a violent interaction, whether as a victim or as a perpetrator, and parents are likewise required to cooperate with the school

in such situations, half of the parents of children who were exposed to peer violence report that the school did not inform them in a timely manner, while only one in three parents was involved in developing a protection plan.

- ▶ If their children were exposed to violence, three quarters of parents (77%) would advise them to **seek help from school staff** (Chart 22). This advice is more often given by parents who are more satisfied with their child's approach to schoolwork and who report fewer problems communicating with teachers. Surprisingly, parents do not appear to recognise their children's peers as a source of support, almost none of the parents would advise their children to seek help from classmates if exposed to peer violence. In contrast, the vast majority of children believe that their peers would help them if they were subjected to violence.

Chart 22. Parental advice in the event of a child being exposed to peer violence (%)

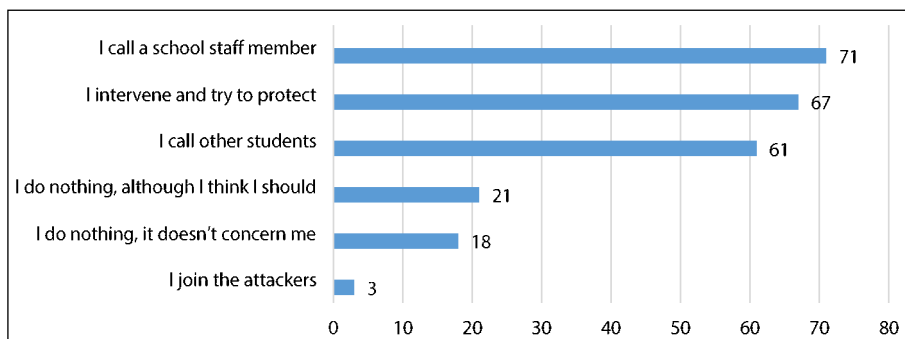


- ▶ Just as the school staff do, parents also rate their own problem-solving skills highly in situations where their children are involved in violent interactions (whether as a victim, perpetrator or witness). The majority of parents assessed these skills with a rating of 4 or 5 on a five-point scale – 70% in the case of face-to-face violence and 50% in the context of online interactions.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES WHEN WITNESSING VIOLENCE

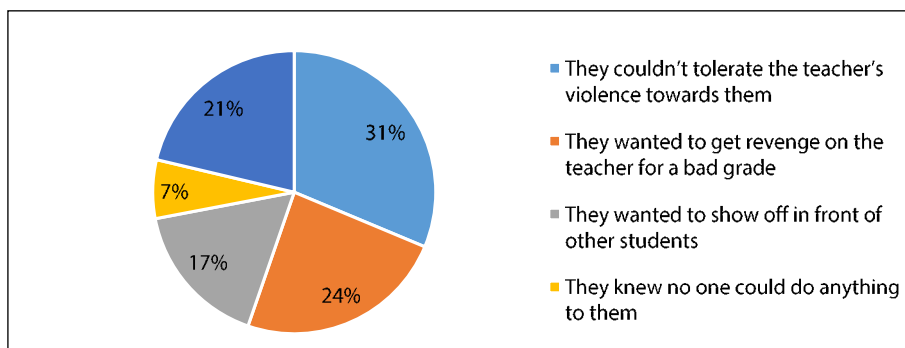
- ▶ As in situations where they themselves are victims of peer violence, students also respond in different ways when witnessing violence (Chart 23). Most try to help the victim – either independently (67%), with the support of school staff (71%), or with the help of other students (61%). However, one fifth of students remain passive: some because they feel it does not concern them, and others despite believing they should react. In the sample, 8% of students report never being willing to help a peer in distress. These children do not differ from their peers in sociodemographic characteristics but do differ in significantly lower levels of integration into the school community, less pronounced prosocial attitudes, and more limited communication competencies. Although small in number, this group of students requires special attention with regard to schools' violence prevention activities.

Chart 23: Students' response when witnessing peer violence (%)



- ▶ When witnessing violence, younger students, girls, students attending schools in rural areas, and those with better academic achievement are more likely to call on staff for help. In contrast, students who have previously experienced or perpetrated violence are less likely to help their peers in this way. Students who display violent behaviour are more often passive observers or join in with the perpetrators.
- ▶ One in four students report that since the start of the school year, a classmate has shouted at or insulted a teacher, while 5% state that there have been cases of physical assault against teachers in their class. When asked why students are violent towards teachers, two thirds say they are not aware of such incidents. Among those who are aware, almost one third (31%) interpret this behaviour as a response to violence by the teacher, while slightly fewer (24%) believe it is an act of revenge for receiving a poor grade. One fifth of students attribute such behaviour towards teachers to personal problems and poor self-control (Chart 24).

Chart 24: Reasons for students' violent behaviour towards teachers (%)



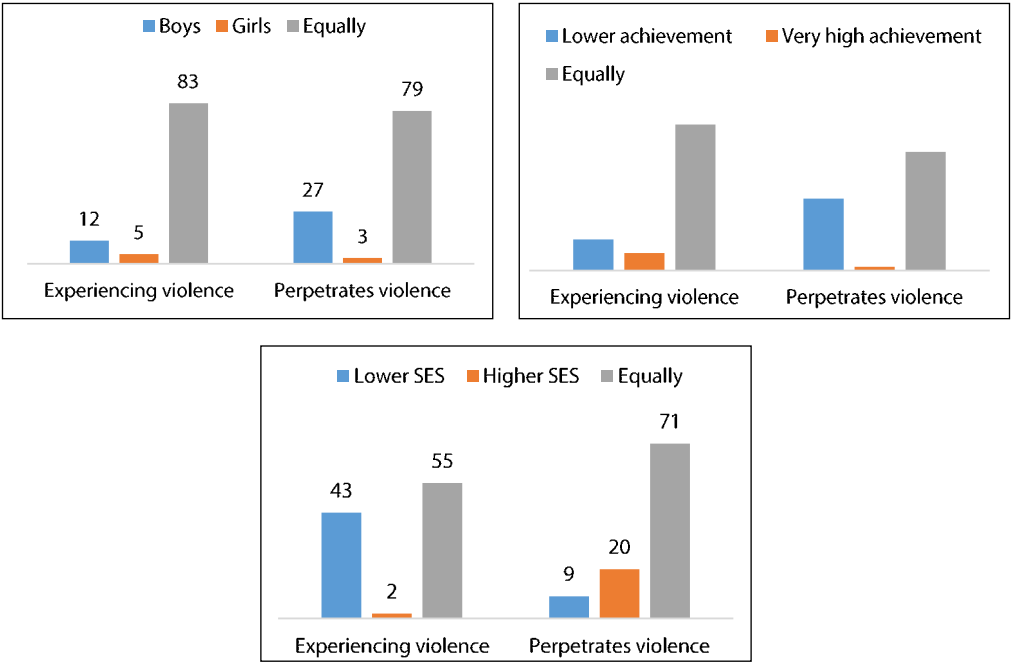
CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILDREN SUFFERING AND PERPETRATING VIOLENCE

- ▶ School staff, especially teachers, who spend the most time with students, and support staff, who are directly involved in addressing violence-related issues – represent an important source of information on the characteristics of children

who experience or display violent behaviour. According to the majority of staff, involvement in violent interactions, regardless of the pupil's role, is not linked to sex, socio-economic status (SES), or academic performance (Chart 25).

- ▶ Most staff (83%) believe that both girls and boys are equally exposed to peer violence. Slightly fewer, though still a majority (70%), consider both sexes equally likely to display violent behaviour. However, twice as many staff believe boys are more prone to violent behaviour (27%) compared to girls (12%).
- ▶ Three quarters of staff believe that both students with poor and with excellent academic achievement are equally exposed to violence. Almost two thirds (61%) believe both groups are equally likely to display violent behaviour. A significantly higher percentage of staff think that students with lower academic performance are more prone to violence (37%) compared to high-achieving students (2%).

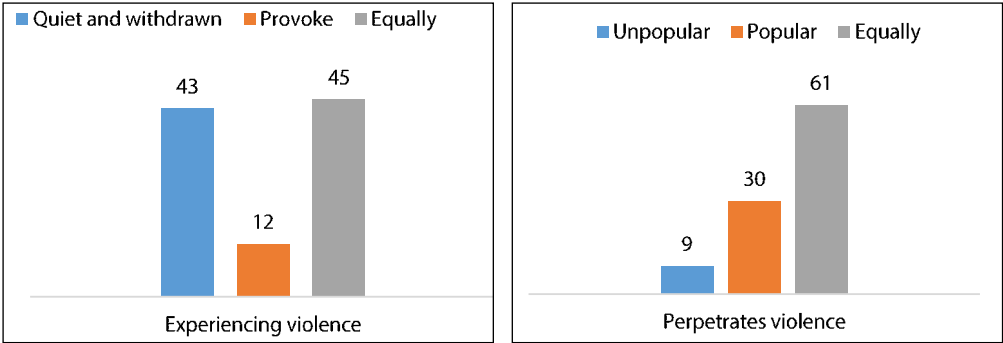
Chart 25: Staff perceptions of differences in exposure to and perpetration of violence based on sex, academic performance, and SES (%)



- ▶ Staff opinions are divided regarding the SES of children exposed to peer violence: just over half (55%) believe children from both poorer and wealthier families are equally vulnerable to violence, while 43% believe violence more frequently affects children from lower SES backgrounds. On the other hand, the majority of staff (71%) consider children from both high and low SES groups equally likely to engage in violent behaviour. Almost no staff believe that high-SES children are more often victims than low-SES children, but twice as many staff believe that children from high-SES backgrounds are more violent than those from low-SES backgrounds, compared to the reverse.

- ▶ According to nearly half of school staff (45%), victims of peer violence include both quiet, withdrawn children and those who provoke others. Still, almost as many (43%) believe that quiet and withdrawn children are more often targeted. While almost two thirds of staff (61%) believe that both popular and unpopular students are equally likely to display violent behaviour, one third (30%) suggest that violence is more common among students who are popular within their peer group (Chart 26).

Chart 26: Staff perceptions of the role of personality traits in victimisation and social status in the perpetration of violence (%)



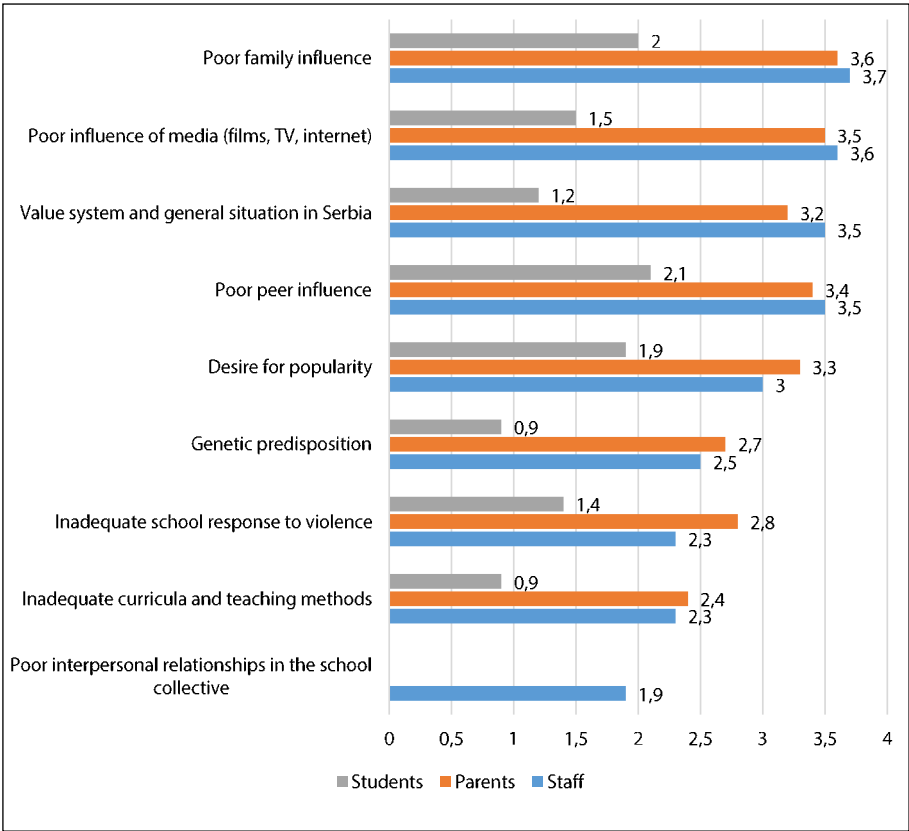
CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

- ▶ Beliefs about the causes of violent behaviour among students are highly relevant to the analysis of violence in schools, particularly in the case of adults, as they shape educational practices and responses to violence. All three groups—students, parents, and school staff—assessed the extent to which various factors at the individual, school, and societal levels influence violent student behaviour in schools. Adults rated all the listed factors as more or less significant, with average scores ranging from 2.3 to 3.7 on a four-point scale (Chart 27). This finding points to a recognized complexity of the phenomenon of violence, which arises from the interplay of various interrelated factors.
- ▶ Between two-thirds and three-quarters of adults believe that the family, peers, media, value systems, and the general societal situation are the main causes of violent behaviour among students. The influence of family environment and media is particularly emphasized: as many as 94% of school staff report that these factors contribute, to a greater or lesser extent, to peer violence.
- ▶ On the other hand, school-related factors are far less frequently recognized as important causes. Only one in ten school employees identifies curricula, teaching methods, and interpersonal relationships in school as highly significant factors contributing to student violence. Just one in five school staff members believes that an inadequate school response to peer violence plays an important role in its occurrence. Nearly two-thirds of school employees do not recognize a substantial link between teaching content and methods and the occurrence of violent behaviour, and only one-third

associate violence with the quality of teaching and instructional approaches. However, numerous studies indicate that teaching and assessment methods have a significant influence on the occurrence of peer violence, highlighting the need to consider school-related factors more seriously in preventive strategies.

- ▶ From the parents’ perspective as well, school-level factors play a less significant role in explaining violent student behaviour in schools. The genetic predispositions of the child are more often perceived by parents as an important cause of violence than inadequate curricula and teaching methods. The importance assigned to these causes does not vary significantly with parents’ characteristics, except that parents with higher levels of education attribute more importance to the role of the family, the value system, the general societal situation, and the school’s inadequate response to violence.
- ▶ As clearly shown in the above chart, students consider the listed factors to be less significant causes of violence than adults do (average scores ranging from 0.9 to 2.1). The most significant factor, cited by 45% of students, is peer influ-

Chart 27: Perceptions of students, parents, and school staff about the causes of peer violence (average scores)



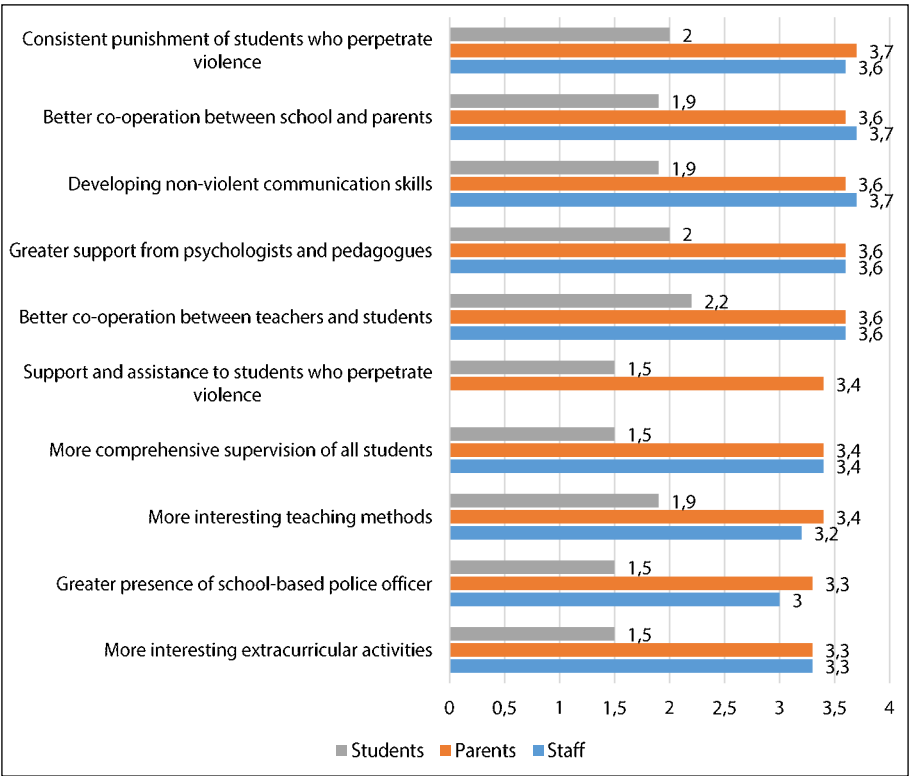
Note: the last statement was not included in the questionnaire for students and parents.

ence, followed by family influence (39%) and the desire for popularity (38%). Students are less inclined to view school and the broader social system as key causes of violence. All the listed factors are considered more important by older students and those with better academic performance, while girls attach more importance to the influence of family, peers, and the media.

EFFECTIVENESS OF DIFFERENT MEASURES TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE

- School staff, parents, and students assessed the effectiveness of various measures to combat violent behaviour among students (Chart 28). Staff and parent assessments largely aligned. All the proposed measures were rated as fairly or highly effective (average scores ranging from 3 to 3.7 on a four-point scale). In contrast, students rated these measures as significantly less effective (average scores between 1.2 and 2.2).

Chart 28: Opinions of students, parents and staff on the effectiveness of various anti-violence measures (average scores)



- As shown in the chart above, the average ratings of the effectiveness of individual measures differ only slightly; however, the differences become more apparent when analysing the percentage of staff and parents who consider

specific measures to be *highly effective*. According to the adults, the most effective measure is the consistent punishment of students who exhibit violent behaviour – approximately three quarters of both staff and parents rated this as highly effective. In contrast, measures such as introducing more engaging extracurricular activities and using more engaging teaching methods were considered least effective – only about 40% of staff and roughly half of the parents rated them as highly effective.

- ▶ Adults' beliefs about the causes of students' violent behaviour are correlated with their perception of the effectiveness of different measures to combat violence. Specifically, staff and parents who view the proposed causes of violence as significant also tend to have greater confidence in the effectiveness of (almost) all the proposed measures, and vice versa. For example, those who consider genetic predisposition to be an important cause of violence are more likely to view restrictive measures as effective, such as stricter punishment, increased supervision, and the greater presence of school police officers.
- ▶ From the students' perspective, all the proposed measures are considered to be of low or moderate effectiveness. Students tend to favour measures that involve collaboration among various stakeholders within the school environment, as well as consistent punishment for violent behaviour. Older students attach greater importance to improved cooperation between teachers and students, the development of non-violent communication, and the consistent punishment of violent students. Students with better academic performance consider the most effective measures to be as follows: better cooperation between teachers and students, greater support from school psychologists and pedagogues, consistent punishment, and increased support for students who exhibit violent behaviour.

SCHOOL RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE

- ▶ According to the Rulebook on the Protocol of Action in Institutions in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect (hereafter, the Protocol), the ideal school response to violence includes a series of activities and measures aimed at stopping the violence, ensuring the safety of all participants in the violent interaction, reducing the risk of recurrence, mitigating consequences, and monitoring the effectiveness of the measures taken. Although this Protocol requires every school to establish a Protection Team and to post a list of its members in a visible place, more than half of the students (53%) are unsure whether such a team exists in their school, one in ten (9%) claim that it does not exist, while just over one third (38%) report that a Protection Team does exist in their school. In none of the surveyed schools were all students aware of the existence of this team — within any given school, a maximum of 75% of students claimed the team existed, and more than half of students said this only in 18 schools (23%). Students from rural areas, smaller schools, and those who do not exhibit violent behaviour are more often informed about the existence of the Protection Team.

- ▶ Just over one fifth of staff (22%) are members of the Protection Team, more than two thirds are not members but know who the members are, while one in ten school staff do not know who the team members are. More information about Protection Team members is held by those with more professional experience and longer tenure at their current post, as well as by class teachers.
- ▶ More than a quarter of parents (28%) are unaware of the existence of a Protection Team in the school; 40% know the team exists but are not informed about its activities, while one third of parents (32%) have some knowledge of the team's activities.
- ▶ Almost all staff in the sample believe that their school responds appropriately when students are exposed to peer violence. However, responses are more often lacking when the violence is perpetrated by staff against students.
- ▶ Between half and three quarters of school staff believe that only a small number of parents are willing to cooperate with the school in implementing violence prevention programmes. According to staff, the older the children are, the less interested and cooperative the parents are. However, significantly more parents are willing to become involved when their children are a victim of violence.
- ▶ According to school staff, the most serious obstacles to implementing the protocol for handling violence include the unwillingness of parents to cooperate with the school (59%) and difficulties in working with the social welfare system (45%). More than a quarter of staff (28%) report that the school occasionally or often faces difficulties in cooperating with the healthcare system, around one fifth cite problems with the Ministry of the Interior, and a similar proportion say that their colleagues are unwilling to become involved in resolving issues related to school violence. Finally, the smallest percentage of staff (9% occasionally and 5% often) cite the poor cooperation and inefficiency of Protection Team members as obstacles to protocol implementation. Parents are divided in their assessment of how these institutions function, though few parents offer such assessments, as most have not had any need to cooperate with them.
- ▶ Approximately half of school staff believe that the national digital platform "Čuvam te" significantly contributes to timely responses to school violence and the implementation of preventive measures. Between one-fifth and one-quarter of staff members think that the platform contributes little or not at all to improving prevention and response to violence. The platform is viewed more positively by those who have greater confidence in the school's capacity to reduce violence, as well as by those who are generally more satisfied with the relationships among relevant stakeholders within and outside the school. Approximately half of parents were unable to assess the usefulness of the "Čuvam te" platform, but among those who use it, the majority believe it contributes to quicker responses to violence, improves preventive efforts, and provides valuable educational content for parents.

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