



## Perceptions of preschool teachers and parents about the role of children observers in peer violence

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*Introduction.* Peer violence impacts the development of children who are victims of violence, but children who witness violence are also prone to experience consequences pertaining to their socio-emotional development. The state should provide dedicated support to intervention programmes in preschool institutions aimed at preventing and suppressing peer violence, which would focus on children who are witnesses, i.e., observers of violence. *Objectives.* This research was aimed at analysing the perceptions of preschool teachers and parents about the role of children observers in peer violence. *Methods.* The sample consisted of preschool teachers employed in preschool institutions in several cities in Serbia ( $n = 104$ ) and parents whose children attended preschools ( $n = 84$ ). For the purposes of the research, an adapted Likert-type scale was used, which assessed the role of children "observers" of peer violence and the possibilities of developing support programmes for children exposed to violence. The instrument was developed based on a pilot study on the role of children observers in bullying. *Results.* Research results showed that the perceptions of parents pertaining to the role of children observers in peer violence were statistically significantly different in relation to the opinions of preschool teachers. Parents believed that children who were observers of peer violence were not sufficiently involved in intervention programmes for the prevention and suppression of peer violence in preschool institutions. *Conclusion.* These findings have significant practical implications for the planning of initiatives in preschool institutions aimed at fostering a supportive environment in which children who witness peer violence would play a prominent role.

*Keywords:* peer violence, children observers, preschool teachers, parents

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## Introduction

Peer violence is influenced by a number of crucial elements, including declining social values, social stratification, low socioeconomic level of families, weakened societal resistance to different harmful occurrences, etc. Programme designs based on children's prosocial behaviour (Jevtić, 2017) should be developed in preschool institutions (Kojić & Markov, 2011). Fostering empathy, tolerance, generosity, and other such qualities in preschool children who observe peer violence would undoubtedly help to shift the balance of power between the bullied child and the bully (Popadić, 2009) because the observers of peer violence also have the ability to protect victimized children (Marković & Trifunović, 2017).

Traditional social roles can already be observed in preschool children, namely the roles of violence perpetrator, victim, aggressive victim and observer. There are some observable traits that lead to the child adopting the role of victim or abuser. The reaction of the educational group that does not directly participate in the act of violence significantly contributes to the dynamics of social interactions. In preschool children, the consequences of peer violence have long-lasting effects and reflect poorly on their psychosocial development (Glumbić & Žunić-Pavlović, 2008). Preschool is the most crucial developmental stage, and during this time, children acquire and practice skills like self-control, patience, and the ability to postpone the gratification of their needs; however, this is the period when they also start to exhibit negative behaviours (Waksclag et al., 2005, as cited in Žunić-Pavlović & Kovačević-Lepojević, 2011). The preschool teacher, expert associates in preschools and parents should note whether the development of self-control follows the desired course, in order to aid in the suppression of problematic behaviours and prevention of peer violence. Manifestation of externalizing behavioural problems (aggression, destructiveness, etc.) may be related to peer violence (Gašić-Pavišić, 2004). When discussing pedagogical preventive support interventions related to the suppression of violent behaviour in preschool, it is necessary to include children observers, families, well-trained preschool teachers and expert associates, etc. Peer aggression could be prevented and suppressed by the cooperative and synergistic effect of these factors, and all children would get a chance to grow and develop in a supportive social and emotional environment, to which they unquestionably have a right (Kojić & Markov, 2011).

In addition to violence perpetrators and victims, there are several types of observers of peer violence a) those who join the perpetrator; b) supporters – who provide support but refuse to participate; c) passive supporters – they enjoy the violence but do not demonstrate open support; d) uninvolved observers, potential protectors – do not approve of the violence but fail to do anything about it; and e) protectors (Olweus et al., 1999, as cited in Plut & Popović, 2007; Sesar, 2011). At preschool age, children encounter violence among peers outside

the family environment for the first time. In preschools, they enter a peer group wherein they engage in social interactions and activities in which, as recent studies have shown, preschool children are becoming increasingly violent (Kraljić Babić & Vejmelka, 2015).

Preschool violence has unique characteristics that require deliberate treatment and prevention steps. Even a low level of exposure to community violence increases the risk of children behaving more aggressively (Bradshaw et al., 2009). It is crucial to stress that, in the circle of violence, children are not just the victims, i.e., the vulnerable ones, or the attackers, i.e., the ones that initiate violence and aggression, but also witnesses – observers. This is the third group of children who indirectly participate in a violent act. They sometimes help and encourage the person who initiated the abuse. They may even join the bullies out of fear in order to protect themselves. Children who witness violence are insecure and frightened, and they are likely to submit to the bully in order to feel safer. They fear that they may potentially become victims in the future, so even though they may sympathize with the victims of bullying, they are also displeased that they are unable to help. Violence creates an atmosphere of fear in which children may become insecure. Bullying is like a theatre performance. There is always a stage on which the victim and the bully take centre place, and there is also an audience (Buljan-Flander, 2003, as cited in Zrilić, 2006). Victims and observers of violence largely believe that school allows aggression, and that teachers and peers will do nothing to stop the violence, which discourages them from seeking help (Pečjak & Pirc, 2017). The results of one study showed that there are significant differences in the perception of violence among adolescents (Skočajić & Stojanović, 2019). Behaviour that can be classified as violence under social and legal norms, they view more as “friendly teasing” in which the roles of the bully and the victim are often interchangeable. Other factors that contribute to this situation include the lack of faith in school authorities, the idea that bullies will not be punished, etc.

A comprehensive approach to peer violence in which children observers would also play a role, and the outcome of which would be the establishment of a supportive atmosphere in the educational group, would contribute to breaking the cycle of peer violence (Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2013). According to a survey conducted in Australian primary and secondary schools on a sample of 400 students who were shown videos depicting violence and asked to react as observers, about 50% of respondents said they would directly assist the victims of violence, while a small percentage said they would report the violent incidents to teachers or assist the perpetrator of violence (Rigby & Johnson, 2005). Such findings should encourage experts to develop new strategies that would include violence observers in intervention programmes for the prevention and suppression of peer violence as important participants in this process. These strategies could then be included into a wide range of preventive

and intervention initiatives and activities aimed at stopping peer aggression (Marković, 2017; Pavlović & Žunić-Pavlović, 2008).

### Research Aim

The main aim of the research was to analyse the views of preschool teachers and parents on the role of children observers in peer violence and to determine whether the perceptions of preschool teachers and parents differ when it comes to general issues related to peer violence, the behaviour of children observers during peer violence in preschools, and the role of preschool teachers and family members in programmes aimed at preventing and suppressing peer violence.

## Methods

### Sample

The sample of respondents consisted of preschool teachers ( $n = 104$ ) employed in seven preschool institutions in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, and parents of preschool children ( $n = 84$ ) whose children attended preschool during the 2018/19 school year. The total number of female respondents was 178 (94.7%), while 10 respondents (5.3%) were male. Demographic information of preschool teachers and parents is presented in Table 1 and Table 2, which refer to gender, age, length of service, place of employment or place of preschool attended by children.

**Table 1**

*General data on the respondents – Preschool teachers*

Variable	Group	<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	7	6.7
	Female	97	93.3
Age	25-35 yrs.	27	25.9
	36-45 yrs.	45	43.3
	45-56 yrs.	32	30.8
Place of employment	Belgrade	16	15.4
	Kikinda	39	37.5
	Novi Bečej	10	9.6
	Novi Sad	4	3.9
	Pančevo	24	23.1
	Zrenjanin	11	10.5
Work experience	2-10 yrs.	22	21.2
	11-25 yrs.	54	51.9
	26-35 yrs.	28	26.9

**Table 2***General data on respondents – Parents*

Variable	Group	<i>N</i>	%
Gender	Male	3	3.6
	Female	81	96.4
Age	25-35 yrs.	46	54.8
	36-40 yrs.	30	35.7
	41-45 yrs.	8	9.5
Preschool institution attended by children	Belgrade	13	15.5
	Kikinda	36	42.9
	Novi Bečej	8	9.5
	Novi Sad	1	1.2
	Pančevo	21	25.0
	Zrenjanin	5	5.9
Employment	Employed	41	48.8
	Temporarily employed	27	32.1
	Unemployed	16	19.1

Children whose parents participated in the research were aged five to seven. The mean chronological age of preschool teachers was 40.05 years ( $SD = 7.05$ ), and their mean service length was 11.64 years ( $SD = 6.25$ ). The average age of the parents was 28.48 ( $SD = 4.75$ ).

**Instruments**

A five-point Likert-type assessment scale was created for the purposes of this research. The introduction to the instrument included pertinent demographic information about the respondents, including their location of residence, gender, age, and the preschool institution where they work.

The main part of the instrument consisted of three subtests: a) General Issues About the Role of Observers in Violence (GI) – which examined the general views of the respondents on the possibilities of including children observers in the prevention of peer violence; b) Behaviour of Children “Observers” During Peer Violence (BC) – which examined the behaviour of children who were bystanders, e.g. whether they reported violence to their parents or teachers, etc.; and c) Role of Preschool Teachers and Parents in Pedagogical Programmes Aimed at Preventing and Suppressing Violence in Preschool Institutions (RTEP) – which examined the participation of preschool teachers and parents in terms of planning initiatives in which children observers would become a significant resource in the suppression of peer violence. The scale included 34 statements, and respondents indicated their level of agreement by selecting one of the following choices: (1) Strongly disagree (2) Disagree (3) Neither agree nor disagree (4) Agree (5) Strongly agree. The version of

the questionnaire for parents was adjusted in the part that refers to the demographic information.

An open-ended interview was used in a pilot study on a sample of 19 preschool teachers before the final list of statements was drafted (Markov, 2019). The instrument used in this research showed good reliability and internal consistency in the analysed sample ( $\alpha = .82$ ,  $ICC = .79$ ).

### **Data and Statistical Processing**

The information gathered by the questionnaire was based on the applied model with three subscales, which was condensed so that average scores for each respondent could be calculated by adding up the responses to the items and calculating summary scores for the subscales. The following descriptive statistics were calculated: arithmetic mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum value – separately for the groups of preschool teachers and parents, for the variables defined as: a) General Issues (GI); b) Behaviour of Children (BC); and c) Role of Preschool Teachers, Expert Associates and Parents (RTEP). The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to determine whether the distribution of the defined variables was normal. The reliability and internal consistency of the applied questionnaire were checked by determining the Cronbach's alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ ) and intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC). The Mann-Whitney U test was used to analyse group differences because the data distributions for all three variables deviated considerably from a normal distribution. Eta ( $\eta^2$ ) was calculated to determine the magnitude of the effect.

The level of  $p \leq .05$  was used to determine the statistical significance of all applied tests. IBM SPSS 20.0, a statistical software, was used to process the data.

### **Results**

The platykurtic distribution of scale scores in the study variables in both groups of respondents who provided responses reflects the current heterogeneity of the component parts of attitudes (Table 3). This is particularly evident in the variables BC and RTEP for the group of preschool teachers, whereas it is apparent in the variable RTEP for the group of parents. With the exception of the variable BC for preschool teachers, there is a considerable deviation from the normal distribution in the distribution of scores in both subsamples of the variables under analysis (significance of the K-S test).

**Table 3**

*The basic statistics of scale scores for the variables, for preschool teachers and parents*

Group	Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Sk	Kk	K-S Z (p)
Teachers (n = 104)	GI	1.89	3.67	2.94	0.56	-0.87	-0.48	1.98 (.001)
	BC	2.87	3.75	3.13	0.62	0.08	-1.81	2.22 ( $< .001$ )
	RTEP	2.00	3.89	2.91	0.71	0.19	-1.56	2.35 ( $< .001$ )
Parents (n = 84)	GI	2.89	3.67	3.20	0.18	0.04	-0.32	1.49 (.024)
	BC	3.00	3.94	3.47	0.24	0.01	-0.39	1.04 (.230)
	RTEP	3.11	3.89	3.54	0.25	-0.38	-1.28	2.60 ( $< .001$ )

Note. GI – General Issues, BC – Behaviour of Children, RTEP – Role of Preschool Teachers, Expert Associates and Parents, K-S – Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z-statistic test

Testing the significance of differences between the views of preschool teachers and parents concerning the three defined variables was done by using the Mann–Whitney test (Table 4). A statistically significant difference in the level of significance of  $p = 0.01$  was found in all three variables. A large effect of differences was found in variables BC ( $\eta^2 = 17.6\%$ ) and RTEP ( $\eta^2 = 14.5\%$ ), while the group effect was smaller when it comes to variable GI ( $\eta^2 = 4.1\%$ ).

**Table 4**

*Results of the Mann-Whitney test comparing the scale scores of preschool teachers and parents*

Variables	Group	MR	Z	p	$\eta^2$
GI	Teachers	84.86	-2.74	.006	.041
	Parents	106.43			
BC	Teachers	74.09	-5.75	.001	.176
	Parents	119.77			
RTEP	Teachers	76.18	-5.21	.001	.145
	Parents	117.18			

Note. MR – mean rank; Z – value of Z; p – significance of Z;  $\eta^2$  – effect size; GI – General Issues; BC – Behaviour of Children; RTEP – Role of Preschool Teachers, Expert Associates and Parents

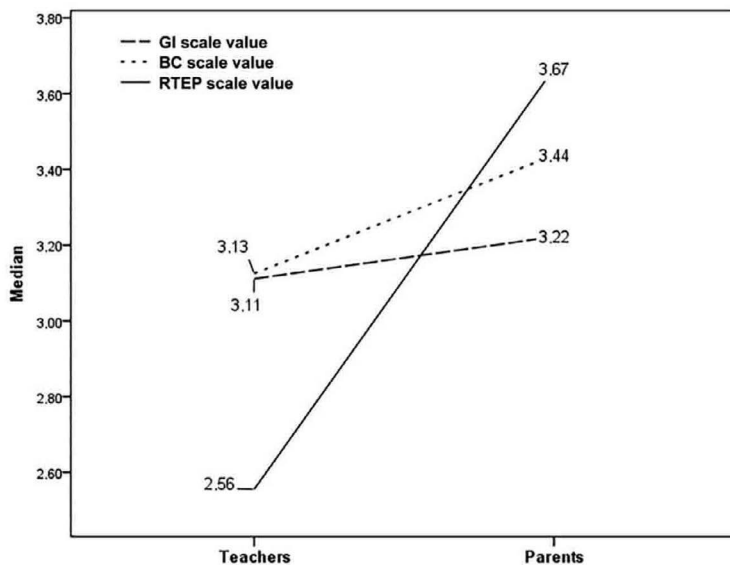
In the GI subtest, both groups of respondents agreed that children observers did not receive clear instructions on how to behave when they become involved in peer violence. There is no statistically significant difference in the views of preschool teachers and parents when it comes to the provision of clear

guidance on the options that are available to children in the prevention and suppression of peer violence ( $Z = 2.74, p > .05$ ). In this subtest, statistically significant differences were observed between parents and preschool teachers in the following claims: *Preschool teachers help develop the awareness of children that they can confront bullies* ( $Z = 5.44, p < .001$ ). Over 50% of parents did not express agreement with this claim. Also, over 50% of parents disagreed that *Preschool teachers encourage children to report violence* ( $Z = 5.18, p < .001$ ). The highest percentage of parents (54.3%) disagreed with the assertion that *Preschool teachers respond adequately to reported peer violence* ( $Z = 5.11, p < .001$ ).

In the BC subtest, statistically significant differences were found between parents and preschool teachers ( $Z = 5.75, p < .001$ ). In the RTEP subtest, the views of preschool teachers and parents demonstrated statistically significant differences ( $Z = 5.21, p < .001$ ). The majority of parents (58.1%) believe that preschool institutions fail to organize adequate training for preschool teachers and parents focusing on children observers as a possible resource for the suppression of peer violence. By analysing the results of this subtest, which examines the participation of preschool teachers and parents in the planning of initiatives in which children would be given a role of significant participants in the suppression of peer violence, preschool teachers believe that parents should inform them about every act of peer violence they learn about from their children.

### Figure 1

*Comparative review of the median values for preschool teachers and parents in the analysed variables*





The majority of preschool teachers (54.2%) believe that parents fail to respond adequately when their children complain about peers who are exposed to violence.

In comparison with preschool teachers, parents showed significantly higher median values and average ranks across all three variables (Figure 1).

## Discussion

The main aim of this paper was to investigate how preschool teachers and parents view the role of children observers in the prevention and suppression of peer violence in the educational group. The paper focused on the following issues: a) whether there are differences in the views of preschool teachers and parents when it comes to general issues related to the role and resources of violence observers as a factor of violence prevention/victim support (GI); b) how preschool teachers and parents view the behaviour of children – observers of peer violence (BC); c) whether educational practitioners and parents work on the development of intervention initiatives to combat peer violence that focus on children observers (RTEP).

The research results for all three subscales show that a much higher percentage of parents than preschool teachers perceive those children observers are insufficiently involved in programmes of peer violence prevention and suppression. Parents think that preschool teachers fail to recognise the roles that preschool children play in peer violence because they are insufficiently competent for this type of assessment and because the behaviour of children generally depends on family upbringing.

Also, the majority of parents (58.2%) believe that it is best for their children to stay away from situations in which other children are exposed to peer violence. Therefore, preschool institutions ought to cooperate with families (Fantuzzo et al., 2000) in involving children observers as a resource that has gone largely underused thus far in establishing a positive psychosocial atmosphere in the educational group, as indicated by the findings of countless studies (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014; Marković, 2017; Olweus, 1998; Velki & Ozdanovac, 2014). In contrast to preschool teachers, parents perceive that they are insufficiently included in programmes aimed at preventing and suppressing peer violence. Parents are of the opinion that preschool teachers do not have elaborate intervention programmes at their disposal, in which children observers would have a significant role, e.g., the role in which they would be able to provide assistance or support to a child who was a victim of violence. The role of assistant can be assigned to a child observer previously instructed on the provision of support to other children – victims of peer violence (Olweus, 1998), i.e., this role could resemble the role of peer counsellor/mentor (Salmivalli, 1999, as cited in Marković, 2017).

The findings of this research indicate that the support of other children can come from the ranks of children in the educational group who were previously instructed on the ways in which they can offer help and support to peers who experienced violence. Similar conclusions can be found in other studies as well (e.g., Marković, 2017; Olweus, 1998; Pečjak & Pirc, 2017). Adults can also serve as coordinators in the implementation of preventive interventions where efforts are being made to bolster the strengths of children helpers and highlight the importance of this group – which is the most numerous and able to provide support – with the right guidance in the fight against peer aggression. It is also feasible to involve an adult in this process, who would work with the child helper, and experience has shown that this tactic has beneficial results. Research by other authors has also pointed to comparable results (Marković, 2017; Olweus, 1998; Low & Van Ryzin, 2014).

Based on their expertise and professional skills, preschool teachers who participated in the research believe they can identify children who are “victims,” “bullies”, and “observers” of peer aggression. Additionally, they participated in countless training programmes aimed at acquiring competencies necessary for the suppression of peer violence. In accordance with the *Rulebook on the Continuous Professional Development and Career Promotion of School Teachers, Preschool Teachers and Expert Associates* (“Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia,” no. 109/21), preschool teachers are required to acquire professional competencies that apply to the field of peer violence, among other things. Furthermore, research demonstrates that preschool teachers are members of the team that aids in the prevention of both externalizing (which is consistent with the findings of the study by Opić & Jurcević-Lozancić, 2008) and internalizing problems in children, and in the context of the expert team, they are viewed as qualified to evaluate the role of children in peer violence.

The findings of our research demonstrate that preschool teachers believe that peer violence prevention and suppression programmes are implemented in preschool institutions. These programmes are based on improving the social climate in the educational group, which is consistent with the results of the study by Olweus (1998). Through play, theatrical performances, and stories about violence, preschool institutions encourage children to think about the distinct roles in peer violence and ways in which they can help and offer support to children who are exposed to violence.

According to some authors, preschool teachers should encourage pro-social behaviour, altruism, and tolerance in children whom they have observed to exhibit empathy in order to be able to protect victims of peer violence more efficiently (Cowie & Olafsson, 2000; Kojić & Markov, 2011; Menesini et al., 2003).

Children who observe peer violence have the capacity to stop the violence. Since children are a part of the peer group and have a more thorough

understanding of the frequency and severity of violence, they are more able to recognize peer violence than adults. Compared to adults, they have a considerably greater understanding of how peers interact. However, children observers, as perceived by the parents in our research, need the support of preschool teachers, which is often lacking. These findings are consistent with the results of a study conducted on a sample of 414 students, showing that the largest percentage of respondents believe that teachers rarely responded to allegations of peer aggression, which discouraged victims from reporting the abuse (Pečjak & Pirc, 2017; Skočajić & Stojanović, 2019).

Participants in this study, including both preschool teachers and parents, agree with the findings of other studies that children who are victims of peer aggression can be helped by children observers who are well-positioned in the educational group, pro-socially inclined, empathetic, and tolerant (Kojić & Markov, 2011; Markov, 2019). Studies reveal that while some of them are motivated to assist, they frequently resort to the preschool teacher to protect the child before going to their parents (Cowie & Jennifer, 2008; Kojić & Markov, 2011). According to parents, children should be taught that they can oppose bullies by banding together and making a concerted effort, which is consistent with the findings of the study conducted by Marković (2014). In line with the findings of the Nishina & Juvonen study (2005), parents believe that the majority of children who witness violent acts find their involvement to be extremely stressful and that it has a negative impact on their behaviour and development. On the other hand, preschool teachers have observed that children who witness peer aggression rapidly return to their regular preschool activities without consequences. Preschool teachers have noted that children acting as observers typically do not experience any inconvenience as a result of reporting peer violence. They continue behaving as usual after describing peer violence, they have acquired socio-emotional skills, they are responsible and empathetic, which is similar to the findings of Ahmed's study (2005), and they have a good reputation among their peers. The views of preschool teachers and parents are comparable when it comes to the types of observers of peer violence. In accordance with the findings of the study by O'Connell et al. (1999), they believe that some children who observe violence adopt the position of supporters, others are passive in seeing peer aggression, and some oppose bullies or report the violence. Parents believe that a small percentage of children will directly support the victim, which is in line with the research and the findings of the study by O'Connell et al. (1999), while preschool teachers believe that a higher percentage of children are willing to report violence or help a child who is a victim of violence.

In line with the findings of Ahmed's 2005 study, parents believe that their children experience shame when they witness peer violence. They also indicate a desire to do something in order to put an end to child violence. In

line with the findings of the Obermann study (2011, as cited in Bilić, 2013; Marković, 2017), parents believe that children who report violence to preschool teachers and expert associates are under stress and fear becoming victims of peer aggression themselves. Parents claim that they have observed externalizing behavioural problems in their children when they witnessed or needed to report peer violence, which is consistent with the findings of related research and the findings of the study by Buka et al. (2001). One of the keys to comprehending the issue of victimhood in peer violence is peer acceptance (Popović-Ćitić, 2012). Therefore, peer acceptance in preschool institutions and schools can be viewed as a protective factor. However, some studies revealed that the school setting was recognized as one where protective factors are least established and evident (Pavlović & Žunić-Pavlović, 2008). Therefore, preschool teachers and expert associates should strive to improve inter-children communication while at the same time encouraging tolerance, which will contribute to the development of a positive atmosphere in the educational group consistently with the findings of the study by Maksimović & Mančić (2013).

Both parents and preschool teachers feel that most children feel uncomfortable and do not want to be observers in peer violence, which is consistent with the results of the study by Twemlow et al. (2003). In accordance with the findings of the study by Vasiljević-Prodanović & Stojković (2011), preschool teachers feel that children observers who are socioemotionally competent can act as mediators in the process of reconciling the victims of peer violence and bullies. On the other hand, parents believe that preschool children cannot be mediators. Preschool teachers have observed that a smaller proportion of children are prepared to attempt to suppress peer violence by siding with their peers. Groups of children are often formed to protect the children who are unable to defend themselves, while bullies are avoided during preschool play, which is consistent with the results of the study by Porter & Smith-Adcock (2011). According to parents, preschool children should not attempt to resolve a situation like this on their own; instead, they should report peer violence to a preschool teacher or an adult, which is consistent with the findings of the study by Cowie & Jennifer (2008). Children observers should be the main focus of programmes for the prevention and suppression of peer violence in preschool settings, according to parents, because there is strength in numbers. Children who might otherwise engage in peer violence should be warned that observers among their peers will support the victim, tipping the scales of power in their favour, which is in line with the findings of a 2009 study by Popadić. The resources available to children observers should not be minimized but rather reoriented to become a strength that can suppress violence, which is consistent with the results of the study by Thompson et al. (2002). In accordance with the findings of the study by Vasiljević-Prodanović & Stojković (2011), parents feel that preschool children who are acting as observers lack the capacity to act as

mediators in peer violence, which is suggested as one of the possibilities for more effective suppression of peer violence.

The majority of parents are of the opinion that peer violence intervention programmes deployed in preschool settings do not have the desired impact. They contend that because preschool settings view externalizing behavioural issues as part of the developmental process, they fail to recognize peer aggression in a timely manner given the children's age. Expert associates do not instruct children observers on the appropriate behaviour when they witness peer violence. An exceedingly small minority of children typically have the courage to stand up to a bully, while the majority wish to help but refrain from doing so out of fear. Enough attention is given to this issue, which has significant ramifications for young observers. Parent observations suggest that preschool teachers and expert associates fail to take the behaviour of children observers seriously enough and these children are not encouraged to assist in the prevention of violence, which is consistent with the findings of the study by Olweus (1998). In line with the findings of Popadić's study (2009), parents believe that children observers who receive additional training can develop the skills necessary to listen to the victims of bullying and build a cordial relationship with them. Consistent with the results of the study by Hrnčić & Marčetić-Radunović (2018), emotional connections with peers who exhibit prosocial behaviour are positively assessed and may serve as one of the resources of the peer group that can be tapped into. In this regard, this study views children observers as a potential safeguard in the preschool setting, able to protect children who are victims of violence and bullying and encourage children to communicate with one other more effectively.

## Conclusion

Children – observers of peer violence have a plethora of roles, including the following: a) reporting peer violence to adults; b) standing by the victim by maintaining an environment of calm in the educational setting; c) developing the skills necessary to support children who are the victims of violence; and d) if they are consistently encouraged to act pro-socially, they will develop into responsible adults, prepared to respond correctly in a variety of violent situations. All of these elements enhance the supportive environment in the student group. Positive emotional climate among peers is one of the most crucial elements in the prevention and suppression of peer violence, according to several authors (Gašić-Pavišić, 2004; Maksimović & Mančić, 2013; Marković, 2017; Popadić, 2008; Reić Ercegovac, 2016).

Children observers often experience psychological pressure when they witness acts of peer violence. They should be encouraged to support the victim and to report the violence. Their pro-social behaviour and compassion should be consistently rewarded. All allegations of peer aggression made by children

observers should be carefully considered by preschool teachers and professional associates, thus encouraging children to respond to violence every time.

According to the results of the current study, parents are far more likely than preschool teachers to believe that children observers are not actively participating in programmes designed to prevent and stop peer violence. Parents believe that because preschool teachers lack the necessary skills for this type of evaluation, they are unable to identify the roles that preschool children play in peer aggression. Parents, in contrast to preschool teachers, feel left out of programmes for the prevention and suppression of peer violence, which are attended by preschool teachers and expert associates. Parents believe that preschool teachers do not have comprehensive intervention strategies involving child observers. Preschool institutions should cooperate with families in involving children who observe violence as a resource in creating a positive psychosocial environment in the educational setting.

This study strives to promote further investigations that will help put peer violence suppression and prevention initiatives into action. Practitioners should evaluate these initiatives and focus on introducing new elements in order to achieve a multi-layered effect in combating peer violence. The fact that parents are not involved in the educational process and have little pedagogical understanding is a limitation of this study since it prevents parents from learning about peer aggression directly. Typically, they learn this information from their children, who are acting as observers. It is customary in preschool settings that conflicts brought on by peer violence hardly ever involve parents of the children who were witnesses of the violent acts.

Given that there is strength in numbers, and that there are more witnesses of peer violence than direct participants, this research can be seen as a step forward in the involvement of children observers as a resource in the prevention of peer aggression despite its limitations, which include the small number of comparable studies in addition to the instrument already discussed.

Future studies may concentrate on the necessity of carefully thought-out interventions in which parents and preschool children work together from an early age to reinforce the idea that children should seek adult assistance when they encounter peer aggression. Children should be made aware by adults that there is strength in numbers and that by working together they can put an end to peer aggression.

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## Opazanja vaspitača i roditelja o ulozi dece posmatrača u vršnjačkom nasilju

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*Uvod:* Vršnjačko nasilje ostavlja najviše posledica na razvoj deteta koje je žrtva nasilništva, ali isto tako i deca posmatrači mogu imati posledice u oblasti socioemocionalnog razvoja. Interventnim programima u predškolskoj ustanovi koji imaju za cilj prevenciju i suzbijanje vršnjačkog nasilja, a u čijem su fokusu posmatrači, država treba da pruži snažnu podršku. *Cilj:* Istraživanje je imalo za cilj da se analiziraju opažanja vaspitača i roditelja o

ulozi dece posmatrača u vršnjačkom nasilju. *Metode:* Uzorak su činili vaspitači zaposleni u predškolskim ustanovama ( $n = 104$ ) i roditelji čija deca pohađaju vrtiće ( $n = 84$ ) u više gradova u Srbiji. Za potrebe istraživanja korišćena je prilagođena skala Likertovog tipa kojom se procenjuje uloga dece „posmatrača” u bulingu i mogućnosti razvijanja programa podrške vršnjacima koji su izloženi nasilništvu. Instrument je razvijen na osnovu pilot-istraživanja o ulozi dece posmatrača u bulingu. *Rezultati:* Rezultati istraživanja pokazali su da se opažanja roditelja u vezi sa ulogom dece u vršnjačkom nasilju statistički značajno razlikuju u odnosu na percepcije vaspitača. Roditelji smatraju da deca posmatrači vršnjačkog nasilja nisu dovoljno uključeni u interventne programe prevencije i suzbijanja vršnjačkog nasilja u predškolskim ustanovama. *Zaključak:* Ovi rezultati imaju značajne praktične implikacije, jer ukazuju kako da predškolske ustanove pokrenu programe koji su usmereni na stvaranje pozitivne klime u grupi u kojoj bi deca posmatrači vršnjačkog nasilja bili značajan faktor.

*Ključne reči:* vršnjačko nasilje, deca posmatrači, vaspitači, roditelji

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