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BYSTANDER BEHAVIORS IN BULLYING INCIDENTS: A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY IN BELGRADE SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Abstract: This paper presents the results of a cross-sectional study on bystander behaviors in bullying incidents conducted in the 2020/2021 school year based on a survey of 1,526 students in grades 2nd to 4th at 19 secondary schools in Belgrade. The research objectives included examination of types of bystander behaviors, their distribution within the bystander population and the association with bystanders' sex and grade. The results show that slightly more than one-third of students noticed bullying incidents in their school, with approximately equal numbers of bystanders exhibiting passive and defending behaviors. Each group included slightly less than half of the total number of bystanders. Within the groups, an uneven distribution of specific reactions was found. Almost 90% of those exhibiting passive behavior did nothing because they felt it was none of their business. Of those exhibiting defending behavior, about 40% reported the incident to a teacher or someone else, while the remaining 60% tried to help in other ways. Bystander behaviors were associated with bystanders' sex-boys were more likely to exhibit passive and pro-bully behaviors, while girls were more likely to exhibit defending behavior, especially reporting the incident. The study found no association between bystander behaviors and bystanders' grade. The results point to the need to encourage bystanders to report bullying incidents to a teacher.

Keywords: *school violence, bullying, bullying roles, bystander behaviors, secondary schools.*

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** The study presented here was conducted as a part of the author's PhD dissertation.

Introduction

Bullying, a particular form of school violence (Olweus, 1996), has serious and long-term consequences for students, both bullies and victims, and the school community in general. Bullying has a negative impact on students' academic performance (Hysing et al., 2021; Laith & Vaillancourt, 2022; Silva et al., 2020) and is associated with students' internalizing (Hysing et al., 2021; Serafini et al., 2023) and externalizing behavior problems (Hysing et al., 2021; Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019; Tang et al., 2023). In addition, bullying affects the entire school community by creating an environment of fear and intimidation (Olweus, Limber, Mihalic, 1999). The prevalence rates of school bullying vary widely across different studies, partly due to differences in the measurement and/or operationalization of the bullying construct (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). A meta-analysis of 80 individual studies from different regions of the world (Modecki et al., 2014) with a sample of students aged 12–18 years, estimated bullying prevalence of 35% (both perpetration and victimization). Large-scale research conducted in 144 countries in all world regions indicates that 32% of school-age students (11–15 years) are victims of bullying (UNESCO, 2019). As for Serbia, studies on bullying in primary school showed that 24–25% of students experienced bullying victimization (Pejovic Milovancevic et al., 2007; Popadić et al., 2014), while 10.7% of them exhibited bullying perpetration (Popadić et al., 2014). In secondary schools in Vojvodina, an autonomous province in Serbia, 4.9% of students experienced the violence as victims several times, and 1.16% of students frequently (Kodžopeljić et al., 2010). On the other hand, in secondary schools in the capital of Serbia, Belgrade, 34% of students participated in bullying (both perpetration and victimization), which is slightly higher than the global average (32%), but significantly higher than European average (25%) (Grmuša, 2023a). Furthermore, the bullying prevalence rates among primary and secondary school students are 17.7% for boys and 10.4% for girls (Stankovic et al., 2022).

Bullying is a phenomenon based on a specific social relationship that takes place within a peer group. Consequently, bullying can be seen as a relationship between individuals who have different participant roles determined by a tendency to react in a certain way in a number of incidents. Two extreme participant roles that students can take in this relationship are the bully and the victim. Between these two extremes, students can also be in the role of bully-victim, as well as in the role of bystander (Olweus, 1993; Salmivalli et al., 1996).

Bystanders are a special type of bullying participant role. This type refers to students who are not directly involved in bullying incidents (Padgett & Notar, 2013), but watch and witness (Ybarra & Kimberly, 2004) or hear, i.e., indirectly know about them (Polanin, Espelage, Pigott, 2012). Bullying often takes place in a situation where several members of a peer group are present, and observational studies have shown

that peers were present in 80–85% of bullying incidents (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Craig, Pepler, Atlas, 2000; Hawkins, Pepler, Craig, 2001).

Bystander Behaviors

Theoretical Framework. There are two models and two conceptual frameworks used by scholars to understand bystander behavior. According to the first model, the Bystander intervention model, bystander behavior is a complex decision-making process in which someone reacts or does not react when witnessing a victimization. This model includes five-stage decision making, which consists of being informed of an incident, interpreting the incident as an emergency, taking responsibility for intervening, knowing how to intervene, and implementing the decision to intervene (Latane & Darley, 1970). Within the second model, the Social-cognitive model, bystander behavior is caused by interdependent relationship between individual and contextual (social) factors (Bandura, 1986), more specifically by the characteristics of the bystander, the school environment, and the behavior of the bystander (Kim, 2014). The first conceptual framework, the Group process framework, explains bystander behaviors as a result of the effects of peer group factors, i.e., characteristics of social groups to which students belong (Salmivalli, 2010). In this context, a distinction is made between two levels. The first one is the peer level, which is formed voluntarily and includes friends and cliques. The second level is the classroom level, which is involuntary because the school administration assigns students to classes. The classroom characteristics can influence group processes and bullying. For example, in classrooms where defending behavior is likely to occur have a lower risk of bullying for vulnerable students (Karna et al., 2010). Group involvement in bullying is seen as having different roles in the process driven by different emotions, attitudes and motivations, while individual student characteristics interact with environmental factors such as classroom norms. Placing bullying in a group context helps to better understand the individuals' motivations for bullying, the lack of support for the victims, the persistence of bullying, and the adaptation of victims in different contexts. Finally, a group perspective is helpful in developing effective approaches to bullying prevention and intervention (Salmivalli, 2010). The second conceptual framework, the Bystander motivation framework, explains bystander behaviors as an outcome of a number of individual factors (interpretation of harm in a violent situation, emotional reactions, social evaluation, moral evaluation, and intervention self-efficacy) (Thornberg et al., 2012).

The reactions of bystanders in bullying incidents play an important role in the continuation or termination of bullying at school (Salmivalli, 1999). Students who witness bullying make a large group of seemingly “noninvolved” peers who may have either worsening or weakening effects of the bullying behavior (Salmivalli, Voeten, Poskiparta, 2011). Accordingly, bystander roles are usually categorized into four types. The first type are assistants-bystanders who eagerly join in when someone has

started bullying and who act as assistants to the bully. The second type are reinforcers-bystanders who do not actively attack the victim, but whose behavior (observing the violence with interest and providing an audience for the bully, making fun of the victim, etc.) gives bullies positive feedback and encourages their aggressive actions. The third type are outsiders-bystanders who see violence but think it is none of their business and do nothing, or who are afraid when they see violence and run away without doing anything. A common characteristic of these three types of bystanders is that their reactions encourage bullying and allow it to continue (Álvarez-García, Thornberg, Suárez-García, 2021; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli et al., 2011). Both assistants and reinforcers encourage bullying by siding with the bully and could therefore be referred to as pro-bully bystanders (Nocentini, Menesini, Salmivalli, 2013). On the other hand, outsiders, who remain passive or neutral, are referred to as passive bystanders (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013; Thornberg et al., 2017). In contrast to the first three types, the bystanders of the fourth type discourage the bullying behavior through their actions. These bystanders try to stop the bullying verbally or physically or to report the incident to adults, usually teachers. As they are supportive, comfort the victim and actively try to get others to stop the bullying, they are often referred to as defenders (Álvarez-García et al., 2021; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Salmivalli et al., 2011; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013; Thornberg et al., 2017).

In research, bystanders were originally categorized into fixed roles (Salmivalli et al., 1996). However, later studies have found that these roles may vary within and between bullying incidents and depend on the social context. During a particular bullying incident, a student may defend the victim or remain passive, while in another incident they may reinforce the bully. Therefore, bystander roles can be considered as fluid (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2019; Sjögren et al., 2021). In this context, it is more appropriate to look for types of bystander behavior than to limit oneself to fixed roles. Given the characteristics of the presented roles, bystanders may exhibit the following three types of behavior, namely: 1) passive behavior-avoiding the bullying incidents; 2) defending behavior-participating on the side of the victim; and 3) pro-bully behavior-direct or indirect participation on the side of the bully. Bystander behaviors in bullying situations are important in the context of bullying prevention and intervention efforts. Research has found that bystanders who exhibit defending behavior have a positive impact on reducing bullying prevalence, while the opposite is true for bystanders who exhibit passive and pro-bully behaviors-they contribute to increasing the bullying prevalence (Nocentini et al., 2013; Salmivalli et al., 2011; Thornberg & Wänström, 2018).

Previous Research

Regarding bystander behavior in specific bullying incidents, observational studies have shown that students exhibited defending behavior in only 25% of incidents (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Hawkins et al., 2001) and spent most of the time passively watching (54%) or actively joining the bullies (21%) (Craig & Pepler, 1997; O'Connell et al., 1999). In addition, according to some survey studies 46% of students (Kodžopeljić et al., 2010) and even 55% of students (Eijigu & Teketel, 2021) chose to remain passive when witnessing bullying incidents. Furthermore, about 7–14% of students actively joined the bullies (Goossens et al., 2016). Studies based on student self-reports have shown contradictory results regarding defending behavior. Some studies have shown that two-thirds of students exhibited defending behavior the last time they witnessed bullying incidents (Lambe et al., 2017), but others have shown that only about one third of students exhibiting such behavior (Eijigu & Teketel, 2021; Oh & Hazler, 2009).

As for the individual characteristics of bystanders, students with high defender self-efficacy (Pöyhönen, Juvonen, Salmivalli, 2012; Sjögren et al., 2021) and with empathy (Jenkins et al., 2014; Nickerson et al., 2015; Nickerson, Mele, Princiotta, 2008) are more likely to exhibit defending behavior, while students with high moral disengagement (Barchia & Bussey, 2011; Sjögren et al., 2021) and low defender self-efficacy (Sjögren et al., 2021) are more likely to exhibit passive behavior.

In terms of demographic variables, sex and grade of the students have been found to be predictors of bystander behaviors. Regarding to sex differences, previous research has shown that defending behavior was more common in girls – they were more likely to intervene on behalf of victims and report bullying incidents to adults, which has been confirmed in nearly three decades of research practice (Cui & To, 2020; Espelage, Green, Polanin, 2012; Jenkins & Nickerson 2019; Nickerson, Aloe, Swearer, 2015; Werth, 2013). On the other hand, previous research has shown that pro-bully behavior (Mulvey et al., 2018; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Sjögren et al., 2021) and passive behavior (Pfetsch et al., 2011; Pozzoli & Gini, 2013; Trach et al., 2010) were more common in boys than in girls. In addition, previous research has shown that the rates of passive and pro-bully behaviors increased with grade. As for grade of the students as a predictor, the results are not so consistent. Younger students were more likely to exhibit defending behavior by intervening directly, helping the victim, or reporting the incident to an adult (Campbell et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2019; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2013; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Sjögren et al., 2021; Trach et al., 2010) while older students, especially boys, were more likely to actively join the bully than younger boys (O'Connell et al., 1999). However, among middle and highschool students statistically significant association between bystander behaviors and grade of the students was not found (Bauman et al., 2020; Lambe et al., 2017; Saarento et al., 2015).

Current Study

Considering the prevalence rates mentioned above, it can be concluded that bullying is a serious problem in the education system in Serbia. Although there are studies on bullying prevalence in Serbia, with geographical scope that covers the entire country (Pejovic Milovancevic et al., 2007; Popadić et al., 2014; Stankovic et al., 2022), some of its regions (Grmuša, 2023a; Kodžopeljić et al., 2010; Petrović & Bazić, 2012; Popović-Čitić, Djurić, Cvetković, 2011) or even individual municipalities (Kisić-Tepavčević et al., 2020), there is a lack of studies focused on bystander behaviors in bullying incidents in schools. Previous studies were limited to primary school and focused on bystander behaviors in the incidents of physical violence (Popadić et al., 2014), included a small sample of students within one school (Stojančev & Starčević, 2020), or were focused on the differences in the frequency of different types of bystander behaviors in primary and secondary schools in Vojvodina (Kodžopeljić et al., 2010). With the intention of contributing to extension of knowledge about bystander behaviors in bullying incidents in Serbian schools, especially the distribution of different types of behavior within the bystander population and the association with bystanders' sex and grade, the subject of this study includes bystander behaviors in secondary schools in Belgrade. Accordingly, the following three research questions were posed: (1) What types of bystander behaviors exist in Belgrade secondary schools; (2) How are these types distributed within the bystander population; and (3) Are bystander behaviors statistically significantly associated with the characteristics of students, such as their sex and grade?

Based on the three most common elements of the definition of bullying incorporated since Olweus' (1993: 9) research, namely intent, repetition, and power imbalance, for the purposes of this study bullying was defined as all incidents in which a stronger student intentionally inflicts physical injury or pain on a weaker student, endangers physical or mental health, causes a feeling of fear or humiliation, or causes loss or damage to personal property, and frequently repeats these actions, live or online. As for bystanders, according to good research practice (Kubiszewski et al., 2018; Yun, 2019), the term used in this study referred to all students who noticed bullying incidents in their school.

Method

Participants. This study is based on the data from 1,526 students (2nd to 4th grade, i.e., students aged approximately 16–18 years) in 19 secondary schools in Belgrade, namely 13 schools in central municipalities and 6 in suburban ones, of which 7 were grammar schools and 12 were vocational schools. The study used the multistage random sampling method, with schools stratified by municipality type and the area of work. The sample consisted of 53.8% girls and 43.1% boys. Approximately

one third (31.5%) were in the 2nd grade, one third (30.9%) in the 3rd grade and one third (37.6%) in the 4th grade.

Procedure. This study was part of a larger study that aimed to examine characteristics of bullying in secondary schools in Belgrade. The author collected research data during the 2020/2021 school year, based on student surveys, and students gave answers related to their experiences during the previous 2019/2020 school year. Students completed the survey anonymously during a school lesson. The survey was not conducted during the first or last lesson of the school day. A special instrument was developed for the survey – the Bullying Questionnaire for Secondary School Students (the Questionnaire). The abovementioned definition of bullying was given at the beginning of the Questionnaire so that students could read it before answering the questions. The Questionnaire contained one question on bystander behaviors in bullying incidents. Within the scope of this question, students could choose from a list of specific reactions they actually had when they noticed bullying incidents, and not possible or desired reactions. The list was designed on the basis of the model used in the study on school violence within the program “School without Violence–Towards a Safe and Enabling Environment for Children” (Popadić et al., 2014), and contained six specific reactions (Table 1).

Analytic Techniques. The data were analyzed using the SPSS 20.0. The Chi-squared test was used to determine the statistical significance of the association between bystander behaviors and the sex and grade of the students. The statistical significance was determined at the probability level of .05.

Results

Of the total number of students surveyed, 1,488 answered the question on bystander behaviors in bullying incidents – 521 (35%) students noticed bullying incidents, while 967 (65%) students did not.

As shown in Table 1, almost half of the bystanders did nothing: 201 (38.6%) because they felt it was none of their business, and 38 (7.3%) because they were afraid of the bully. A fifth of bystanders reported the bullying incident to someone: 87 (16.7%) to a teacher and 18 (3.4%) to someone else, and 148 (28.4%) of the bystanders tried to help the victim in other ways. Among the bystanders there were 29 (5.6%) who joined the bully.

Table 1. Types and frequency of bystander behaviors

	N	%
I joined the bully	29	5.6
I did nothing because it was none of my business	201	38.6
I tried to help in other ways	148	28.4
I reported the bullying incident to a teacher	87	16.7
I did nothing because I was afraid of the bully	38	7.3
I reported the bullying incident to someone else	18	3.4

The results of the Chi-squared test showed that the bystander behaviors were statistically significantly associated with the sex of the students (Table 2). Among the boys, there were more bystanders who did nothing: about half did nothing because they felt it was none of their business, and nearly one in ten did nothing because they were afraid of the bully. A third of the girls did nothing because they felt it was none of their business, and one in 20 because they were afraid of the bully. Girls were significantly more likely to report the bullying incident to a teacher – almost three times more likely than boys. In addition, girls were more likely to try to help in other ways, either verbally or physically. On the other hand, there were more bystanders among the boys who joined the bully.

Table 2. Bystander behaviors according to the sex of the students

	Sex				Chi-squared test
	Boys		Girls		
	N	%	N	%	
I joined the bully	20	8.97	9	3.14	$\chi^2=40.545$ df=5 p<.001
I did nothing because it was none of my business	108	48.43	88	30.66	
I tried to help in other ways	51	22.87	93	32.40	
I reported the bullying incident to a teacher	20	8.97	66	23.00	
I did nothing because I was afraid of the bully	20	8.97	18	6.27	
I reported the bullying incident to someone else	4	1.79	13	4.53	

As can be seen in Table 3, no statistically significant association was found between bystander behaviors and the grade of the students.

Table 3. Bystander behaviors according to the grade of the students

	Grade						Chi-squared test
	2nd		3rd		4th		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
I joined the bully	8	5.2	11	6.1	10	5.4	$\chi^2=10.119$ df=10 p<.430
I did nothing because it was none of my business	69	44.5	58	32.0	74	40.0	
I tried to help in other ways	39	25.2	53	29.3	56	30.3	
I reported the bullying incident to a teacher	28	18.1	34	18.8	25	13.5	
I did nothing because I was afraid of the bully	8	5.2	16	8.8	14	7.6	
I reported the bullying incident to someone else	3	1.9	9	5.0	6	3.2	

Discussion

This study showed that slightly more than a third of students noticed bullying incidents in their school. In terms of bystander behaviors, this study showed that almost half of the bystanders did nothing when bullying incidents occurred, i.e., they exhibited passive behavior. Previous research suggests that this is a common situation in schools, as about half of bystanders exhibit passive behavior (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Eijigu & Teketel, 2021; Oh & Hazler, 2009; Kodžopeljić et al., 2010). In addition, this study showed that passive behavior is more common in boys than girls, which is also consistent with previous research (Pfetsch et al., 2011; Pozzoli & Gini, 2013; Trach et al., 2010).

As far as the defending behavior is concerned, the results of this study are different compared to the previous research. The rate of defending behavior found in this study (slightly less than a half of bystanders) was higher than the rates found in some studies in which a quarter (Craig & Pepler, 1997; Hawkins et al., 2001) or one-third (Eijigu & Teketel, 2021; Oh & Hazler, 2009) of bystanders exhibited defending behavior. However, some studies found higher rates than in Belgrade, with two-thirds of bystanders exhibited defending behavior (Lambe et al., 2017). This study found a statistically significant association between defending behavior and the bystanders' sex. Defending behavior was more common in girls – they were more likely to intervene on behalf of victims and report bullying incidents to adults, which has been confirmed in nearly three decades of research practise (Cui & To, 2020; Espelage, Green, Polanin, 2012; Jenkins & Nickerson 2019; Nickerson, Aloe, Swearer, 2015; Werth, 2013).

In terms of the pro-bully behavior, the rate found in this study (just over one in twenty) was lower compared to previous research with rates of around 7–14% of bystanders actively joining the bullies (Goossens et al., 2006; Kodžopeljić et al., 2010; Pouwels et al., 2016). This study showed that pro-bully behavior was more common in boys than in girls, which is also consistent with the results of previous research (Mulvey et al., 2018; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Sjögren et al., 2021). The literature discusses the possible causes of these differences and researchers mostly argue that the differences are due to the higher level of prosocial behavior in girls on the one hand and the tendency of boys to use aggressive strategies in interactions with peers on the other (Salmivalli et al., 1996; Trach et al., 2010). It is known that bullying and other aggressive behaviors of boys in early adolescence are often accepted and condoned by the peer group (Rodkin & Hodges, 2003), so boys may be less motivated to see this as a problem or to intervene (Jenkins & Nickerson, 2019). In addition, girls have been shown to display higher moral sensitivity and empathy (e.g., recognizing the harm of bullying and empathizing with victims) than boys when bullying incidents occur (Jenkins et al., 2014; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). In this context, some longitudinal studies indicated that girls' empathic concern remains stable and their perspective-taking increases during adolescence, whereas boys' empathic concern and perspective-taking decreases from early to mid-adolescence and increases again thereafter (Van de Graaff et al., 2013).

The comparison of rates of bystander behaviors with other studies should be considered a relatively rough estimate. Obstacles to a more accurate comparison arise from differences that may result from the specifics of the research methodology and the instruments themselves. Whereas previous survey studies allowed students the opportunity to choose several possible reactions in bullying incidents, in this study students could choose only one reaction. In addition, some studies examined possible or desired behaviors rather than those that were actually exhibited. Furthermore, the differences found may be due to the fact that, as some authors suggest, during the transition from middle childhood to adolescence, direct bullying (e.g. physical bullying) is less common, while indirect forms of bullying increase, which may be partly explained by developmental changes related to aspects such as group functioning and the acquisition of social skills during this period (Bjärehed et al., 2019). For this reason, indirect forms of bullying, which are more common, become less visible to observers at high school age.

This study has found no statistically significant association between bystander behaviors and bystanders' grade. This is consistent with some studies that found that among middle and highschool students, grade or age was not an exact predictor (Bauman et al., 2020; Lambe et al., 2017). On the other hand, some previous studies found that the rates of passive and pro-bully behaviors increased with age. Younger students are more likely to take positive action by directly intervening, helping the victim, or reporting the incident to an adult (Campbell et al., 2020; Ma et al., 2019; Lindstrom Johnson et al., 2013; Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Sjögren et al., 2021; Trach et al., 2010). In addition, older students, particularly boys, are more likely to actively

join the bully than younger boys (O'Connell et al., 1999). In the literature, these differences are usually explained within the framework of Social dominance model. According to the model, during the transition to secondary school, social dominance hierarchies that have existed throughout primary school are reconfigured and reestablished very quickly (Juvonen & Graham, 2014; Meter & Card, 2015). On the other hand, older adolescents may be more familiar with the consequences of intervening in bullying, which also leads to a more selective approach to defense (Meter & Card, 2015). In addition, how one appears to peers and whether one maintains close friendships becomes more important to adolescents over time (Brown, 1990), especially during the secondary school years (Pozzoli, Gini, Vieno, 2012), suggesting that defending behavior may become less indiscriminate (i.e., defending anyone who is bullied) and more selective (i.e., standing up only for close friends) (Waasdorp et al., 2022).

Conclusion

Summarizing the results, the following three conclusions can be drawn with regard to the research questions posed. First, there are approximately equal numbers of bystanders who exhibit passive behavior and bystanders who exhibit defending behavior, and each group includes slightly less than half of the total number of students who noticed bullying incidents. Second, there is an uneven distribution of specific bystander reactions within these groups. Among bystanders who exhibit passive behavior, almost 90% are those who did nothing because they felt it was none of their business. On the other hand, among bystanders who exhibit defensive behavior, only about 40% report the incident to a teacher or someone else, while the remaining 60% try to help in some other way. Third, boys are more likely to exhibit passive and pro-bully behavior, while girls are more likely to exhibit defending behavior, especially reporting the incident to a teacher.

These conclusions lead to the most important implication of this study, and that is the need to encourage bystanders to report bullying incidents, first and foremost to a teacher. This is particularly important for three reasons. First, teachers play a key role in the model for prevention and intervention of all forms of violence in schools in the education system of Serbia (Grmuša, 2023c). Second, the number of bullying victims who report the incidents is not large. In schools abroad, this number ranges from 20% to slightly more than 50% (Blomqvist et al., 2019; Matuschka et al., 2021; Thomas et al., 2017; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). In Serbia, it is between 30% and 50% in primary schools (Popadić et al., 2014), while it is slightly below 50% in secondary schools (Grmuša, 2023b). Third, teachers are not always able to recognize a specific event as a bullying incident (Wachs et al., 2019). Therefore, encouraging bystanders to report a bullying incident makes bullying visible to teachers who can and are obliged to help. Although it is necessary to encourage all students to report bullying incidents, the results of this

study indicate that it is necessary to pay special attention to boys in this context. In view of the results of research to date, this goal could be achieved through action in two areas. The first area is strengthening teacher support, as supportive student-teacher relationships are positively associated with defending behavior and negatively associated with pro-bully behavior (Cui & To, 2020; Jungert, Piroddi, Thornberg, 2016; Konishi et al., 2021) and reduce differences between boys and girls in terms of exhibiting the defending behavior (Eliot et al., 2010). The second area includes defending self-efficacy, which is found to be positively associated with defending behavior and negatively associated with passive behavior in both boys and girls (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the participants in this study were selected only from secondary schools and only from Belgrade, so the results cannot be generalized to the entire student population in Serbia. Second, the data collected were self-reported by students as part of a cross-sectional design, so any matter regarding longitudinal association between bystander behaviors and student demographic characteristics, such as sex and grade could not be examined. Future research could therefore address these limitations if based on a longitudinal design, as data collected over time could show how bystander behaviors change in different school contexts and whether the association between bystander behaviors and sex and grade changes. Third, due to the model used to design the question on bullying behavior in the Questionnaire, it was not possible in this study to distinguish between assistants and reinforcers within pro-bully behavior. Including this distinction in future research would allow for a better understanding of the characteristics of pro-bully behavior. Specific actions added to the list of bystander reactions could be as follows: “I watched because it was funny and entertaining”, and “I laughed and cheered on the bully” (Álvarez-García et al., 2021).

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**ПОНАШАЊЕ ПОСМАТРАЧА У СЛУЧАЈЕВИМА ВРШЊАЧКОГ НАСИЉА:
СТУДИЈА ПРЕСЕКА У БЕОГРАДСКИМ СРЕДЊИМ ШКОЛАМА**

РЕЗИМЕ

У раду су представљени резултати студије пресека о понашању посматрача у случајевима вршњачког насиља која је спроведена у школској 2020/2021. години анкетирањем 1.526 ученика од 2. до 4. разреда у 19 средњих школа у Београду. Истраживачки циљеви су обухватили утврђивање врсте понашања посматрача, њихове дистрибуције у популацији посматрача и повезаности са полом и разредом посматрача. Резултати показују да је нешто више од једне трећине ученика приметило случај вршњачког насиља у својој школи. Приближно једнак број посматрача је испољио пасивно и одбрамбено понашање, а у свакој од тих група се нашло нешто мање од половине укупног броја посматрача. Унутар група је утврђена неравномерна дистрибуција конкретних реакција. Готово 90% оних који су испољили пасивно понашање нису учинили ништа јер су сматрали да их се случај не тиче. Међу онима који су испољили одбрамбено понашање, око 40% је пријавило случај наставнику или неком другом, док је преосталих 60% покушало да помогне на други начин. Утврђена је повезаност између понашања посматрача и њиховог пола – дечаци су чешће испољавали пасивно понашање и подржавали насилника, док су девојчице чешће показивале одбрамбено понашање, посебно када је реч о пријављивању случаја. Повезаност између понашања посматрача и њиховог разреда није утврђена. Резултати указују на потребу охрабривања посматрача да пријаве случај наставнику.

Кључне речи: *школско насиље, вршњачко насиље, улоге ученика у вршњачком насиљу, понашање посматрача, средње школе.*