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GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE PERCEPTION AMONG YOUTH IN NORTHERN KOSOVO

ABSTRACT: This paper presents the key findings of research conducted in October and November of 2019 among high school and university students from four municipalities in northern Kosovo (Leposavić, Zvečan, Zubin Potok, and Kosovska Mitrovica). Nine high schools and ten higher education institutions, with a total of 748 respondents, participated in the research. Given its intended focus, the research possesses both a *contextual* and *exploratory* character, with the perception of the prevalence and gender dimension of interpersonal violence at its core. The identification of quantitative characteristics of gender-based violence underscores the strength and significance of traditional, cultural, and historical influences related to gender socialisation and masculinity in family and partner relationships in northern Kosovo.

KEYWORDS: gender-based violence, youth, northern Kosovo

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1. Introduction

Until the 1960s, violence in schools, both globally and in the Balkans, was not recognized as a problem requiring special attention, research, or interventions. It was only in the late 1970s and early 1980s, following cases of severe physical violence, that it became evident that previously perceived “harmless” physical rivalries, minor scuffles, and displays of strength transcended mere childhood play and did not constitute integral aspects of development (Bergman, 1992; Rigby & Slee, 1993; Roberts, Klein & Fisher, 2003). Research shows that schools in Serbia are not immune to the upward trends in all forms of violence across all educational levels (Plut & Popadić, 2006; Popadić & Plut, 2007; Popadić, 2009; Popadić, Pavlović & Plut, 2013). Regarding types of violence among students, most authors agree on the existence of physical, verbal, and social/relational violence. In addition to these forms, Popadić (2009) distinguishes digital and sexual violence.

However, it is important to emphasise that both high school students (adolescents) and university students can become victims of various forms of violence within their local community. Beyond school-based (peer) violence, they may also witness, experience, but also perpetuate, violence in family settings, public spaces, nightlife venues, or intimate relationships. Each of these forms of violence has its gender dimension.

1.1. Gender-based violence: conceptual framework and previous research

Although it occurs among peers, gender-based violence among youth should not be equated with peer violence (Perić Prkosovački, Ileš & Trivanović, 2018). According to the study “Violence in primary schools in Serbia: Forms and prevalence,” the term peer violence refers to violent interactions among children of all ages that attend the same school; therefore, it includes all students as a group, not just chronological peers (Popadić & Plut, 2007). On the other hand, Spasić & Nikač (2013) define gender-based violence as the use of any form of violence (physical, psychological, sexual, etc.) against an individual based solely

on their gender. Research indicates that in over 80% of cases, the victims of violence are female, while the perpetrators are predominantly male. Violence serves as one of the tactics perpetrators employ to assert power and control over victims of the opposite sex (Perić Prkosovački et al., 2018).

According to research on the presence of gender-based violence in adolescent relationships conducted by the “Crvena linija” association in Novi Sad, youth perceive sexual violence as the most severe form of violence, followed by emotional manipulation, physical violence, and, at the end, psychological violence (Batić, 2015; Perić Prkosovački et al., 2018). Studies in Canada show that violence occurs in adolescent relationships in 12% to 20% of cases (Foshee, Benefield, McNaughton, Ennett, Chang, Hussong & Suchindran, 2013; Lichter & McCloskey, 2004). Additionally, a substantial portion of youth, around 50%, reported either having perpetrated or experienced violence from an intimate partner (Trbojević, 2016). Each year, 25% of adolescents experience intimate partner violence (including physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual forms). According to a comparative study by Makin-Byrd & Bierman, 10% of high school students in the United States experienced physical violence from a partner in 2012 (Makin-Byrd & Bierman, 2013; Trbojević, 2016).

In Serbia, the first study on gender-based violence in primary and secondary schools was conducted in 2013. The study was conducted by the Center for Gender and Policy Studies at the Faculty of Political Sciences³ to determine the prevalence of gender-based violence and propose best prevention and intervention practices in cases of the studied forms of violence. This study is distinctive not only in its scope but also in its examination of experiences of gender-based violence and attitudes toward both gender roles and gender-based violence; it is the first extensive research in Serbia to investigate the prevalence and frequency of various forms of gender-based and sexual violence in schools on

³<http://www.fpn.bg.ac.rs/2014/06/06/predstavljeni-rezultati-istrazivanja-%E2%80%9Erodno-zasnovano-nasilje%E2%80%9C-centra-za-studije-roda-i-politike/>, accessed 15/07/2023

a large scale⁴. The sample included students from the fourth grade of primary school to the fourth grade of high school, as well as teaching staff, and school psychologists and pedagogues (approximately 25,000 participants). In total, 69% of elementary school students and as many as 74% of high school students reported experiencing at least one form of gender-based violence since the start of the school year. According to the cited study, 48% of fourth-grade elementary school girls reported experiencing some form of gender-based violence; this percentage was found to increase with age and it reaches 85% in the eighth grade (Ćeriman, Duhaček N., Perišić, Bogdanović, & Duhaček, D., 2015: 8–9). Based on the data obtained from young males and females, perpetrators in the majority of studied forms of gender-based violence are predominantly young males / boys (targeting both other peers and young females / girls).

The findings of these studies, along with the socio-historical, cultural, and traditional heritage, and the sociological context of the northern Kosovo region, provide both social and scientific justification for examining these issues among young people and adolescents.

The findings of these studies, along with the socio-historical, cultural, and traditional context of northern Kosovo, provide the social and scientific rationale for conducting this research among youth and adolescents.

2. Research on youth perception of gender-based violence

2.1. Contextual framework of the research

The northern Kosovo region includes multiple municipalities (Kosovska Mitrovica, Zvečan, Leposavić, and Zubin Potok), which, although interconnected, all possess unique characteristics. Culturological context and social dynamics vary between rural and urban communities and influence both behavioural patterns of youth and their informed-

⁴<http://www.fpn.bg.ac.rs/2014/06/06/predstavljani-rezultati-istrazivanja-%E2%80%9Erodno-zasnovano-nasilje%E2%80%9C-centra-za-studije-roda-i-politike/>, accessed 15/07/2023

ness on gender-based violence. In terms of social interactions among youth, Zubin Potok is somewhat territorially isolated and closed-off, it consists of one small urban area and several rural ones. Attitudes towards acceptable behaviour among youth in all aspects of life, including relationships affected by gender-based violence, are “conserved,” i.e., less influenced by global trends. Kosovska Mitrovica, an entirely urban area with higher education institutions that draw a substantial number of young people from both the local population and beyond, presents a stark contrast. Social interactions and mutual influences among diverse microcultural systems are notably more intense there. Zvečan is connected to Kosovska Mitrovica through its urban zone, while its rural parts exhibit characteristics typical of other rural areas in the region. Leposavić is an urban centre with higher education institutions alongside expansive rural areas, thus it is a composite of typical attributes found across communities in this region.⁵

2.2. Methodological approach

Although fundamentally quantitative, this research also displays elements of *contextual* and *exploratory* approaches, which is in line with its intended focus. However, this is the first study among high school and university students in northern Kosovo to fundamentally focus on their perception and understanding of the incidence and gender dimension of interpersonal violence. Identifying the quantitative characteristics of this phenomenon can serve as an indicator of the strength and significance of traditional, cultural, and historical influences related to gender socialisation and masculinity in familial and partnership relations in northern Kosovo, which was the primary hypothesis of the study. Field research and data collection were conducted in secondary schools and higher education institutions in the municipalities in northern Kosovo during October and November of 2019.

⁵ https://sh.wikipedia.org/wiki/Severno_Kosovo accessed 15/07/2023

2.2.1. Structure and characteristics of the sample

According to data from relevant institutions in northern Kosovo, approximately 9,200 students were enrolled in higher education institutions and 2,548 students attended secondary schools during the 2019-2020 academic/school year. The sample was stratified based on two criteria: age groups (15–18 and 19–24) and type of educational institution (secondary school vs. higher education institution).

A total of 748 participants took part in the study, comprising 420 females (56.3%) and 326 males (43.6%). The majority of participants were from Kosovska Mitrovica, which accounted for 39.3% of the sample (see Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of participants in relation to sociodemographic variables

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percentage | Total |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|-------|
| Municipality | Leposavić | 181 | 24.2 | 748 |
| | Zubin Potok | 157 | 21.0 | |
| | Kosovska Mitrovica | 294 | 39.3 | |
| | Zvečan | 116 | 15.5 | |
| Sex | Male | 326 | 43.6 | 746 |
| | Female | 420 | 56.3 | |
| Age group | 15–18 | 278 | 37.2 | 748 |
| | 19–24 | 458 | 61.6 | |
| | 25 and over | 12 | 1.6 | |
| Education | Secondary school | 278 | 37.2 | 748 |
| | Post-secondary school, university | 470 | 62.8 | |
| Partnership status | Single | 420 | 56.7 | 741 |
| | In a relationship / seeing someone | 289 | 39.0 | |
| | Married | 27 | 3.6 | |
| | Divorced | 2 | 0.3 | |
| | Widowed | 3 | 0.4 | |

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----|------|-----|
| Living situation | With parents | 637 | 85.8 | 742 |
| | Alone | 42 | 5.7 | |
| | With a partner | 35 | 4.7 | |
| | With a friend/colleague | 22 | 3.0 | |
| | With grandparents | 6 | .8 | |
| Current accommodation | Own property | 539 | 79.4 | 679 |
| | Renting from private landlords | 99 | 14.6 | |
| | Boarding home | 41 | 6.0 | |
| Place of residence | City/town | 423 | 60.6 | 698 |
| | Countryside | 275 | 39.4 | |

3. Results: analysis of key findings

3.1. Violence – defining and understanding the terminology

To define and understand the term *violence*, respondents were given several options to gauge their perceptions. The results revealed that the majority associated violence with physical aggression (94.9%), followed by sexual abuse (coercion into sexual acts) (87.7%), and verbal threats (68.8%) (see Table 2). A similar percentage of respondents associated violence with controlling freedom of movement, as well as with employing insults and swearing, preventing communication and socialisation with others, and, subsequently, restricting movement. Approximately 30% of respondents were able to recognise the so-called control tactics (neglecting, insulting, restricting freedom of movement, preventing communication and socialisation, and monitoring mobile phones and online interactions) as forms of violence. Notably, 23.8% of respondents were uncertain about the concept of violence and did not select any of the provided options.

Table 2 . What is violence, in your opinion? (N = 667)

| Form | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| Physical aggression (hitting, beating) | 633 | 94.9 |
| Verbal threats (with the use of offensive language) | 459 | 68.8 |
| Sexual abuse (coercion into sexual acts) | 585 | 87.7 |
| Destruction of property | 245 | 36.7 |
| Neglect / lack of care and attention | 155 | 23.2 |
| Insults, swearing | 251 | 37.6 |
| Restriction of movement | 241 | 36.1 |
| Movement monitoring / surveillance | 257 | 38.5 |
| Preventing communication and socialising | 245 | 36.7 |
| Monitoring mobile phones and online communication | 185 | 27.7 |
| Withholding allowance, unpaid work | 120 | 18.0 |
| I do not know. | 159 | 23.8 |

3.2. Experiences of violence

Nearly one-third of respondents reported experiencing violence primarily in schools or public spaces (such as on the street), whereas a significantly smaller proportion reported experiencing violence at home. The most frequently reported form of violence is verbal violence, followed by physical violence (occurring with equal frequency in public spaces and schools, and to a lesser extent at home). Psychological violence is most commonly reported in the school environment, followed by public spaces such as streets. Respondents provided the least amount of information about sexual violence; however, they primarily associate it with the school environment and streets (see Chart 1).

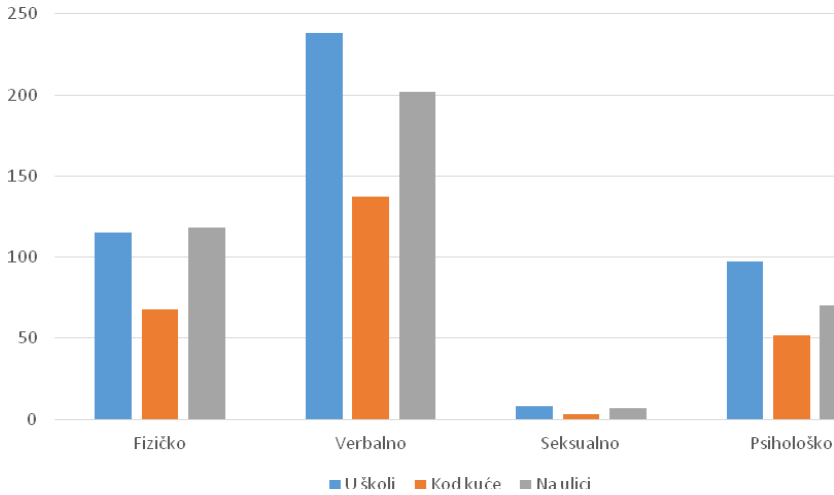


Chart 1. Data on experiences of violence (N = 664)

3.2.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of respondents and experiences of violence

Sex of respondents. The findings indicate that male respondents most frequently experienced physical violence on the streets (reported by one-third of them), followed by experiences in school (27.9%), while verbal abuse was predominantly reported on the streets (40.1%). Eleven respondents reported experiences of sexual violence occurring on the streets (?), there were six reported experiences in school, and three reported experiences at home. Experiences of psychological violence were most commonly reported in school (43%), followed by the streets.

Female respondents, as victims, have somewhat fewer experiences with violence. Among the 375 female respondents, 97 (26%) experienced some form of physical violence (most frequently at home and then at school). Verbal abuse was reported by 283 respondents, (predominantly occurring on the street or in school). Two female respondents reported experiencing sexual violence in school, while six reported experiences of sexual violence on the street (?). Psychological violence against females was most prevalent in school (reported by one-third of the female respondents) (see Table 3).

There is a statistically significant difference in the experiences of physical violence in school ($\chi^2(1) = 38.94$, $p < .001$), where males reported significantly higher incidences, and on the street ($\chi^2(1) = 77.08$, $p < .001$). It is also noteworthy that females experience physical and psychological violence at home at a significantly higher rate compared to other forms of violence. Across the entire sample, the most prevalent form of violence reported is verbal abuse (574 cases or 87%), followed by physical violence (45%), psychological violence (218 cases or 33%), and sexual violence (28 cases or 5%).

Tabela 3. Data on experiences of violence in relation to sex

| Violence form | Location | Males (N = 287) | | Females (N = 375) | | Statistical significance | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|------|-------------------|------|--------------------------|-------|
| | | N | % | N | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| Physical | School | 80 | 27.9 | 35 | 9.3 | 38.94 | <.001 |
| | Home | 30 | 10.5 | 38 | 10.1 | 0.02 | .89 |
| | Street | 94 | 32.8 | 24 | 6.4 | 77.08 | <.001 |
| Verbal | School | 109 | 38.0 | 128 | 34.1 | 1.05 | .31 |
| | Home | 63 | 22.0 | 74 | 19.7 | 0.51 | .47 |
| | Street | 115 | 40.1 | 85 | 22.7 | 23.35 | <.001 |
| Sexual | School | 6 | 2.1 | 2 | 0.5 | 3.30 | .07 |
| | Home | 3 | 1.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 3.94 | .047 |
| | Street | 11 | 3.8 | 6 | 1.6 | 3.24 | .07 |
| Psychological | School | 43 | 15.0 | 53 | 14.1 | 0.09 | .76 |
| | Home | 21 | 7.3 | 31 | 8.3 | 0.20 | .65 |
| | Street | 37 | 12.9 | 33 | 8.8 | 2.88 | .09 |

Age of respondents. High school students most frequently experienced physical, verbal, and psychological violence at school, followed by incidents on the streets, nine respondents reported experiencing sexual violence on the streets, four in school, and one at home (total of 14 respondents). The most prevalent form of violence was verbal (80% of respondents), followed by psychological (122 respondents), and physical violence (117 respondents).

University students predominantly reported experiences of physical violence on the street, while verbal and psychological violence was

dominant in school / educational setting. Sexual violence was most commonly experienced on the street (8), in school (4), and at home (2) (Table 4). The most frequent form of violence in this population is verbal (361 respondents or 91%), followed by physical (184 respondents or 46%), psychological (97 respondents or 24%), and sexual (3%).

Tabela 4. Data on experiences of violence in relation to age of respondents

| Violence form | Location | HS (N = 269) | | Uni students (N = 395) | | Statistical significance | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|------|---------------------------|------|-----------------------------|-------|
| | | N | % | N | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| Physical | School | 49 | 18.2 | 66 | 16.7 | 0.25 | .61 |
| | Home | 30 | 11.2 | 38 | 9.6 | 0.41 | .52 |
| | Street | 38 | 14.1 | 80 | 20.3 | 4.11 | .04 |
| Verbal | School | 95 | 35.3 | 143 | 36.2 | 0.05 | .82 |
| | Home | 40 | 14.9 | 97 | 24.5 | 9.07 | .003 |
| | Street | 81 | 30.1 | 121 | 30.6 | 0.02 | .88 |
| Sexual | School | 4 | 1.5 | 4 | 1.0 | 0.30 | .58 |
| | Home | 1 | 0.4 | 2 | 0.5 | 0.06 | .80 |
| | Street | 9 | 3.3 | 8 | 2.0 | 1.12 | .29 |
| Psychological | School | 57 | 21.2 | 40 | 10.1 | 15.70 | <.001 |
| | Home | 28 | 10.4 | 24 | 6.1 | 4.16 | .043 |
| | Street | 37 | 13.8 | 33 | 8.4 | 4.95 | .026 |

Residence of respondents. Most respondents from urban areas reported experiencing all forms of violence mainly in school or on the streets, although there is a notable percentage of respondents who reported experiencing violence at home. Particular attention should be given to instances of sexual violence in school (4), on the streets (9), and at home (1) (Table 5). In urban municipalities, the most prevalent type of violence is verbal (89%), followed by physical (44%), psychological (33%), and sexual (2%). In rural areas, the most common form of violence reported is verbal (85%), followed by physical (46%), psychological (33%), and sexual (3%). *Table 5. Data on experiences of violence in relation to location*

| Violence form | Location | Urban (N = 387) | Rural (N = 260) | | Statistical significance | | |
|---------------|----------|-----------------|-----------------|----|--------------------------|-------------|-----|
| | | N | % | N | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| Physical | School | 63 | 16.3 | 48 | 18.5 | 0.52 | .47 |
| | Home | 43 | 11.1 | 23 | 8.8 | 0.87 | .35 |
| | Street | 66 | 17.1 | 48 | 18.5 | 0.21 | .65 |
| Verbal | School | 141 | 36.4 | 93 | 35.8 | 0.03 | .86 |
| | Home | 80 | 20.6 | 54 | 20.8 | 0.02 | .96 |
| | Street | 124 | 32.0 | 74 | 28.5 | 0.94 | .33 |
| Sexual | School | 6 | 1.6 | 2 | 0.8 | 0.77 | .38 |
| | Home | 3 | 0.8 | 0 | 0.0 | 2.03 | .15 |
| | Street | 11 | 2.8 | 6 | 2.3 | 0.17 | .68 |
| Psychological | School | 55 | 14.2 | 41 | 15.8 | 0.30 | .59 |
| | Home | 32 | 8.3 | 19 | 7.3 | 0.20 | .66 |
| | Street | 41 | 10.6 | 27 | 10.4 | 0.07 | .93 |

3.3. Perpetrators

One's schoolmate/peer is the most common perpetrator of violence (23.6%), followed by a father (10.1%), sibling (8.1%), mother (7.2%), teacher/professor (7.1%), former partner (6.5%), current partner (3.8%), and someone else (1.4%) (see Chart 2). In the *someone else* category, respondents listed street fights (3), unknown individuals (2), a police officer (1), a bus driver (1), fans of opposing sports teams (1), and drug addicts (1). This distribution corresponds with reports of fathers, siblings, and mothers being perpetrators of verbal, physical, or psychological violence at home, as well as teachers/professors being perpetrators at school. The gender dimension of violence is confirmed by experiences involving former or current partners as perpetrators.

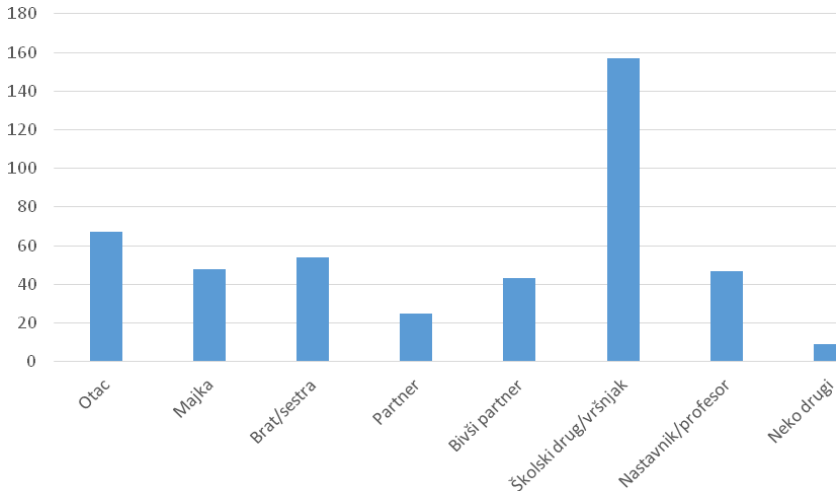


Chart 2. Who committed violence against you? (N = 664)

This distribution of perpetrators is consistent for both males and females (see Table 6). A statistically significant difference exists only for schoolmates/peers, $\chi^2(1) = 31.49$, $p < .001$, who are more frequently reported as perpetrators by males than females. An interesting finding is that former partners are reported as perpetrators in a higher percentage of cases among females (this finding is generally associated with psychological violence or so called stalking in studies on gender-based violence).

Table 6. Perpetrators of violence by gender

| Perpetrator | Males | | Females | | Difference | |
|-------------------|-------|------|---------|------|-------------|-------|
| | N | % | N | % | $\chi^2(1)$ | p |
| Father | 37 | 12.9 | 30 | 8.0 | 4.23 | .039 |
| Mother | 20 | 7.0 | 28 | 7.5 | 0.06 | .81 |
| Brother/sister | 21 | 7.3 | 32 | 8.5 | 0.33 | .57 |
| Partner | 13 | 4.5 | 12 | 3.2 | 0.78 | .38 |
| Former partner | 16 | 5.6 | 27 | 7.2 | 0.73 | .39 |
| Classmate/peer | 98 | 34.1 | 58 | 15.5 | 31.49 | <.001 |
| Teacher/professor | 27 | 9.4 | 19 | 5.1 | 4.74 | .030 |
| Someone else | 9 | 3.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 11.92 | .001 |

The analysis of key findings on the perception of gender-based violence among respondents of both sexes highlights the dominant influence of traditional-patriarchal patterns of gender socialisation and the strong impact of the cultural-historical framework on family, marital, and partner relationships (Spasić, Radovanović, Kekić, & Krstić-Mi-
stridželović, 2022). The perception of violence is simplified and one-sided – violence is largely equated with physical aggression, verbal threats, and sexual abuse. The failure to recognize control tactics as forms of psychological violence hinders or complicates the perception of its gender dimension. The lack of understanding of the concept of violence itself indirectly points to a mistaken perception of its dimensions, causes, factors, context, forms of manifestation, and the lack of recognition of its victimological dimension.

All forms of violence are most prevalent in schools and on the street / in public places, with a somewhat lower incidence at home, as evidenced by the correlations across all sociodemographic factors (gender, age, school, residence). Victims of all types of violence can be found among respondents of both genders. Nearly one-third of respondents of both sexes reported experiencing physical and verbal violence. Notably, girls experience a significant percentage of physical and psychological violence at home compared to other forms of violence, which reflects the existing patterns of gender socialisation (Ignjatović, 2011; Spasić, 2012).

The findings on experienced sexual violence among respondents of both genders are particularly significant (11 males reported experiencing sexual violence on the street, 3 at home, and 6 in school; for females, 2 reported sexual violence in school, while 6 experienced it on the streets). In this case, it is crucial to further differentiate, that is, qualitatively clarify all forms, contexts, characteristics, and frequencies of sexual violence. This type of violence is the most challenging to detect and victims rarely report it, which makes this finding exceptionally important.

On the other hand, after peers/schoolmates or teachers, the second most common perpetrators are fathers, brothers, and sisters, which may seem contradictory given that violence is most prevalent in schools and public spaces. This finding can be explained by the strong influence of traditional patriarchal norms within the family, which dictate that issues occurring within the home or family remain private and are not to be disclosed publicly.

4. Concluding Remarks

The study's results point to the existing, rationally accepted, and morally justified traditional culture of violence against women, that is, domestic and partner violence, as well as violence in schools among peers and by teachers/professors. Gender differentiation is taken as a given mode of social functioning. Across all sample segments based on various sociodemographic characteristics, a similar number of respondents of both sexes (including females) express a positive attitude toward violence against women. This finding underscores deeply entrenched traditional-patriarchal patterns of gender socialisation and the strong influence of the cultural-historical matrix on family, marital, and partner relationships in northern Kosovo.

Prevailing social norms and the patriarchal mentality in the studied local communities have led to a situation where girls and women who experience violence do not recognize its forms and dynamics and do not seek the legal help to which they are entitled. Traditional gender roles continue to be promoted in school literature, where women are depicted as homemakers and mothers who are wise, gentle, and attentive to the instructions given to them, while men are portrayed as strong and taking on various societal roles – doctors, police officers, firefighters etc. Such promotion of gender roles contributes to the continuous reproduction of these gender stereotypes, which also affects the intensity and duration of gender-based violence, particularly domestic violence. When attempting to report violence, girls and women face significant pressures from their communities and families.

Due to a lack of economic independence or as a result of restrictions on property and inheritance rights imposed by prevailing cultural norms emphasising patrilineal ownership, many girls and women are compelled to remain in violent environments. In this way, the culture of poverty and survival strategies, when rationality and awareness are marginalised, serve to reinforce the culture of violence. In the context of how tensions and mismatches between private and public spheres influence each other, the family emerges as a key unit in the private sphere where violence against women often originates; at the same time, it ser-

ves as a model for interpersonal relationships among young individuals. Consequently, the existing conceptions of daily life and human well-being remain incompatible but are, as such, maintained and reinforced within a strong traditional patriarchal framework.

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