RESEARCH ON PEER VIOLENCE, CYBERBULLYING AND VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS IN MONTENEGRO

Executive Summary

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The research was conducted as part of the project "Prevent bullying and violence in schools in Montenegro", implemented by the Council of Europe and funded by the Federal Republic of Germany.

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Introduction

This research on peer violence, cyberbullying and violence in schools in Montenegro was conducted within the framework of the project "Prevent bullying and violence in schools in Montenegro", implemented by the Council of Europe in partnership with the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, with financial support from Germany. The project aims to improve the system for the prevention of and protection of children from peer violence, cyberbullying and other forms of violence in schools in Montenegro.

School violence is one of the most complex social challenges facing contemporary education. It does not refer solely to individual incidents, but reflects broader social relationships, values and patterns of communication that shape the everyday lives of children and young people. It manifests in different forms, including verbal, social and digital, as well as physical and sexual harassment, and affects not only students, but also teachers, parents, the wider school community and society as a whole. At the same time, school violence should not be viewed in isolation, but as part of a wider system in which family dynamics, the digital environment, institutional practices and social norms interact.

In response to the need to understand this complex phenomenon in a comprehensive manner, this research aims to provide a thorough and empirically grounded insight into the prevalence, forms and dynamics of school violence in Montenegro, as well as into the ways in which different actors - students, parents and school staff - perceive, experience and interpret violence. Particular focus is placed on differences in perception among these groups, as well as on the gap that often emerges between children's experiences and their parents' perceptions, which may represent a significant barrier to timely identification and an appropriate response.

This research proceeds from the assumption that school violence is not solely the result of individual behaviour, but rather the product of the interaction between individual, family, school and broader social factors. Accordingly, the analysis aims not only to identify the various manifestations of violence, but also to understand the context in which it emerges, persists or remains unnoticed. Particular attention is devoted to the digital environment, which is increasingly shaping the daily lives of children and young people and creating new risks, while also offering new opportunities for prevention and support.

The research on peer violence in Montenegro is methodologically based on the research "School Violence and Student Well-Being in Serbia", also conducted within the framework of a project implemented by the Council of Europe, with financial support from Germany.

It is worth noting that this research in Montenegro received substantial support from the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation, which played a key role in facilitating participant engagement and organising visits to schools to conduct surveys with both students and school staff.

The report draws on an analysis of data gathered through a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods, enabling the phenomenon of violence to be examined from multiple perspectives and across different levels. The quantitative component provides insights into the prevalence of violence, behavioural patterns and attitudes among a large sample of participants,

while qualitative findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the meanings, experiences and interpretations of actors within the educational process. A particular value of the study lies in its parallel analysis of the perspectives of students, parents and school staff, enabling the identification of both convergences and significant divergences in their perceptions. The analysis of parent-child relationships represents an important methodological innovation, as it is based on paired responses from children and their parents, allowing a direct comparison of their attitudes and experiences.

The structure of this report follows this analytical logic. After outlining the methodological framework, the findings are presented from the perspectives of school staff, parents and students, with an in-depth analysis of key dimensions of violence, including the digital environment, school relationships and response mechanisms. A specific section focuses on parent-child relationships, highlighting the perceptual gap and its implications for preventing violence. The final section offers integrated recommendations designed to strengthen policies, practices and intersectoral cooperation in the area of school violence prevention and response.

The goal of this report is to provide, alongside a description of the current situation, an analytical basis for action, facilitating the development of systemic, sustainable and coordinated measures that promote a safer, more inclusive and supportive school environment for all children in Montenegro.

2. Methodological Framework

The methodological framework for this study was built upon the research conducted in Serbia.[1] To maintain comparability of findings, the core methodological arrangements, in particular the analysis of four target groups (younger and older children, parents and school staff), remained unchanged, as did the research topics addressed by the study. The research conducted in Montenegro aimed to advance this approach further by also gathering data through qualitative methods, including focus groups and interviews.

The research on peer, cyberbullying and school violence in Montenegro is grounded in a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection in order to provide a comprehensive, reliable and multidimensional understanding of the prevalence, forms and patterns of violence, as well as the experiences, perceptions and needs of different actors involved the education system. This mixed-method approach enables both the quantification of trends at the national level and a deeper understanding of the context, causes and consequences of violence in the school environment.

The quantitative component of the research was implemented through field data collection using the CAPI (Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing) method, involving direct visits to schools throughout Montenegro. The study covered 120 primary schools and 49 secondary schools, ensuring representa tiveness across territorial, demographic and institutional dimensions. In primary schools, students from the sixth and eighth grades participated in the survey, while in secondary schools the sample included students in the first and third grades, enabling the examination of children's experiences at different developmental stages and points of educational transitions. The sampling design allows for reliable national-level estimates, with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of ±1.55% for indicators measured at a prevalence rate of 50%.

Table 1: Overview of respondents in the quantitative part of the research

Respondents	**Targeted N**	**Realized N**	**Completion percentage**
Primary school students (6th and 8th grades)	1200	2690	**224%**
Secondary school students (1st and 3rd grades)	1000	1285	**129%**
Parents	700	842	**120%**
School staff	500	1025	**205%**
TOTAL	**3400**	**5842**	

[1] Popadić et al. (2025). *School Violence and Student Well-being in Serbia*. Council of Europe.

Data collection was conducted between 3 September 2025 and 18 November 2025, with the first student surveys carried out on 19 September 2025. All underaged participants in the study took part with the consent of their parents or guardians. The student questionnaires were available in both Montenegrin and Albanian, ensuring linguistic inclusiveness and equal access to the research for all target groups. In addition to students, the study also included school staff and the parents of children included in the sample. These two groups completed the questionnaires using the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) method, which allowed for greater flexibility, improved accessibility and additional anonymity in providing responses.

Data collected in the field was conducted by a total of 41 interviewers from different regions of Montenegro who were specially trained for this study. A considerable number of interviewers came from within the school system, including teachers, pedagogues and psychologists, which contributed to a better understanding of the school context and helped build trust with participants. All interviewers received prior training covering the research methodology, ethical principles, working with children and sensitive topics, as well as data protection procedures.

Data collection was organised in clearly defined phases. The first phase began with direct contact with schools where contact details of school principals and designated school representatives were obtained. During this phase visits and logistical arrangements for conducting the survey were scheduled. In the second phase, the survey itself was implemented; students completed the questionnaires independently on computers or tablets, depending on the technical capacities of the school, in the presence of interviewers who provided technical and organisational support. Teaching staff received links and QR codes to complete the questionnaire online, while parents, subject to prior consent, received a link or QR code for voluntary participation, with the option of completing the questionnaire with the assistance of an interviewer.

In the third phase, continuous quality control of the collected data was conducted. Research coordinators regularly monitored fieldwork activities, maintained communication with interviewers and provided support in resolving technical and organisational challenges, ensuring the consistent application of the methodology and high data quality.

The qualitative component of the study further enriched the understanding of the quantitative findings and enabled an exploration of the experiences and perspectives of key actors. Within this component, four focus groups were conducted with primary school students and five with secondary school students, alongside three focus groups with parents and two focus groups with school staff (teachers and pedagogues). Instead of conducting a single focus group with children with disabilities, individual interviews were held with students who have a form of disability, ensuring that their perspectives were also included in the study. In addition, ten in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives of relevant institutions, as well as five interviews with representatives of civil society organisations and experts working in the fields of child protection, education and violence prevention. This approach enabled the identification of nuanced behavioural patterns, interpersonal dynamics and response mechanisms, while also providing a deeper understanding of institutional capacities, barriers and opportunities for improving existing policies and practices.

The comprehensive research design which integrates different methods, data sources and stakeholder perspectives allows for the triangulation of findings and strengthens the validity and reliability of the results. The combination of quantitative indicators and qualitative insights contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexity of peer and school violence, and supports the development of evidence-based recommendations tailored to the actual needs of children, families, schools and decision-makers.

3. Overview of Research on Peer Violence

Peer violence represents one of the most serious challenges for contemporary education systems, as it can have long-term effects on students' well-being and educational outcomes.

Findings from the first national study on Peer Violence and Student Well-being in Serbia (2025),[2] which surveyed more than 5,200 students, parents and school staff across 77 schools, revealed that six out of ten students had experienced at least one form of violence in school. Verbal violence was the most prevalent, and 27% of those students did not report it to their parents or the school, highlighting low levels of trust and the need to improve communication and preventive mechanisms. The study is particularly valuable as it provides a comprehensive, empirically based understanding of the causes, dynamics and consequences of peer violence in a regional context that is socially and educationally comparable to Montenegro, and serves as a key reference point for the methodology of the research conducted in Montenegro.

Other relevant international research, such as PISA 2022, shows that approximately 20% of students in OECD countries experience some form of violence multiple times per month, while physical violence is reported by around 4% of students. Schools with higher levels of violence show markedly lower educational outcomes, even after accounting for socio-economic factors. Although 2022 data point to a slight reduction in violence compared with 2018, the scale of the problem remains considerable.

Experiences of violence differ by gender and age. Boys are more likely to engage in physical violence, whereas girls are more frequently victims of relational forms of aggression, such as the spreading of rumours. Age patterns indicate that violence is most prevalent in early adolescence, especially around the age of 13, and generally decreases in older age groups. Gender differences in victimisation are not uniform and vary between countries.

Positive developments have been noted in the areas of school climate and students' sense of belonging - factors that are closely linked to lower levels of violence and social exclusion. In some countries, including Montenegro, students report an above-average sense of belonging to their school, which is associated with greater social integration and lower perceptions of insecurity.

At the same time, the importance of cyberbullying is increasing. Around one in six adolescents report having experienced cyberbullying, with girls and children from socio-economically vulnerable families more frequently affected. While most violence still occurs through direct interpersonal interactions, cyberbullying is showing upward trends in both victimisation and active participation, with particularly harmful effects on children's mental health.

[2] Popadić et al. (2025). *School Violence and Student Well-being in Serbia*. Council of Europe.

The findings suggest that quantitative data alone is not sufficient to fully understand this phenomenon, highlighting the need to include the perspectives of parents and school staff. Research indicates that parents most commonly respond by talking to their child, whereas contact with the school is less frequent, particularly when the school is perceived as safe. At the same time, parental engagement in school life is declining in many countries, although evidence shows that programmes actively involving parents can reduce violence, especially among younger children.

The perspective of school staff remains under-explored, despite their crucial role in prevention and intervention. Teachers link violence to poor school climate, unclear norms, and limited family and community support, and exposure to violence negatively impacts their professional performance and job satisfaction. These findings highlight that peer violence has broader systemic consequences for both students and educational personnel.

In this context, research involving all key actors, such as studies conducted by the Council of Europe, forms a crucial basis for evidence-based policy-making. This data allows for a deeper understanding of the dynamics of violence and the design of more effective, contextually appropriate strategies for prevention and response in the education system.

4. School Violence from the Perspective of School Staff

4.1. Key Findings

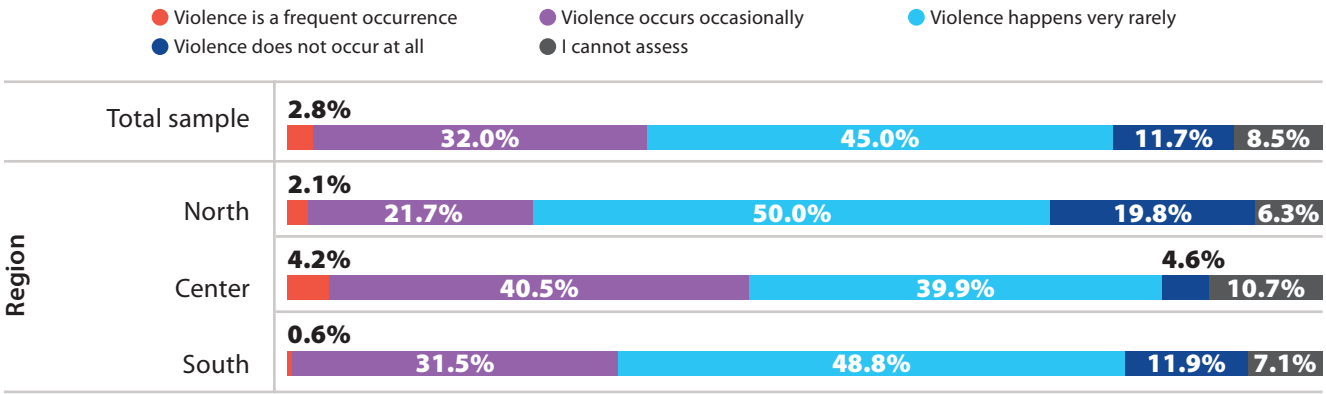
- Most school staff (79.8%) consider that violence exists to some extent, though the majority rate it as very rare or occasional, with only about 3% regarding it as frequent.
- Perceptions of violence are closely linked to school climate: the less frequent the violence, the more positively the atmosphere is viewed.
- Nearly half of school staff (44.7%) feel that there is more violence in schools now than five years ago.
- Verbal and social forms of violence are identified as the most widespread, with around 90% of staff indicating that mocking, insulting and name-calling occur in schools.
- Physical violence is also recognised, with student fights reported as the most common type, present in most schools (83.4%).
- Cyberbullying is seen as a genuine and increasing concern. More than 70% of staff report its existence, and two-thirds believe it has increased over the past five years.
- The most commonly reported forms of cyberbullying include unauthorised photographing or recording of students, exclusion from online groups, and the sending of offensive or threatening messages.
- Staff express significant concern over the impact of digital devices on students, with the majority considering that technology adversely affects children's physical and mental health, behaviour, and daily functioning.
- School staff primarily link student violence to external and social factors, including social media, the broader media, peers, and family relationships, which almost all respondents recognise as the most significant drivers of violent behaviour.
- Victims are most commonly perceived as quiet, withdrawn, and "unpopular" children, and nearly half of staff consider children from lower socio-economic backgrounds to be particularly vulnerable.
- Boys are slightly more often seen as prone to violence, although nearly half of staff believe that both boys and girls are equally capable of aggressive behaviour.
- The majority of staff (80.4%) indicate that they are not aware of cases in which students have reported being subjected to violence by teachers, while 14.3% state that they are aware of such cases.
- Staff generally assess their own competencies as high, with around 80% stating that they know how to identify, respond to, or provide support to a student experiencing violence.
- Despite this high level of self-assessed competence, more than half of staff feel that they require further training in violence prevention and intervention.
- The measures staff perceive as most effective in addressing violence include involving social services, improving school-parent collaboration, and limiting mobile phone use, while also stressing the importance of consistent disciplinary action and greater institutional involvement.

4.2. Analysis of the Key Findings from the School Staff Survey

The study conducted with staff in primary and secondary schools in Montenegro offers highly important insights into violence in the school environment from the perspective of those engaged in the educational process on a daily basis. The sample of 1,025 participants, including teachers, educational support staff, school leaders, and administrative personnel from nearly all municipalities, enables reliable conclusions regarding prevalent patterns of violence, perceptions of safety, professional challenges, and the institutional capacity of schools to respond to violence.

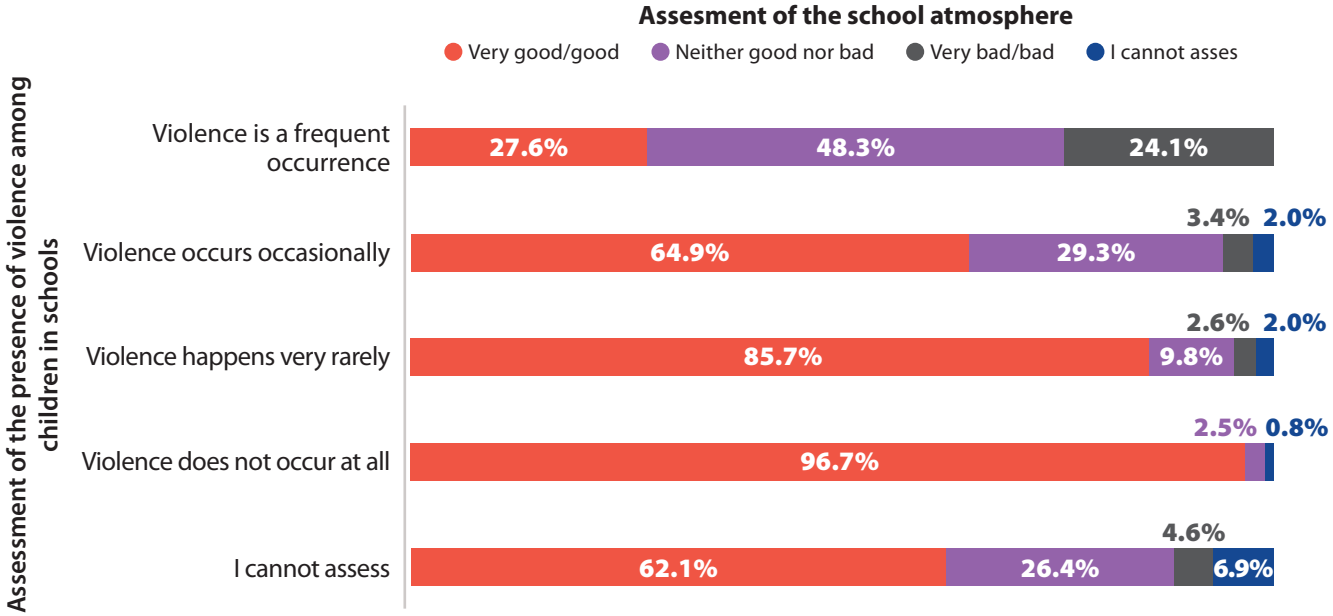
The majority of school staff acknowledge that student violence exists, but generally assess it as infrequent or occasional. Only a small percentage view it as a common feature of school life, suggesting that serious and ongoing forms of violence are not perceived as dominant.

Graph 1: What would you say, how much violence is there among children in the school where you work?



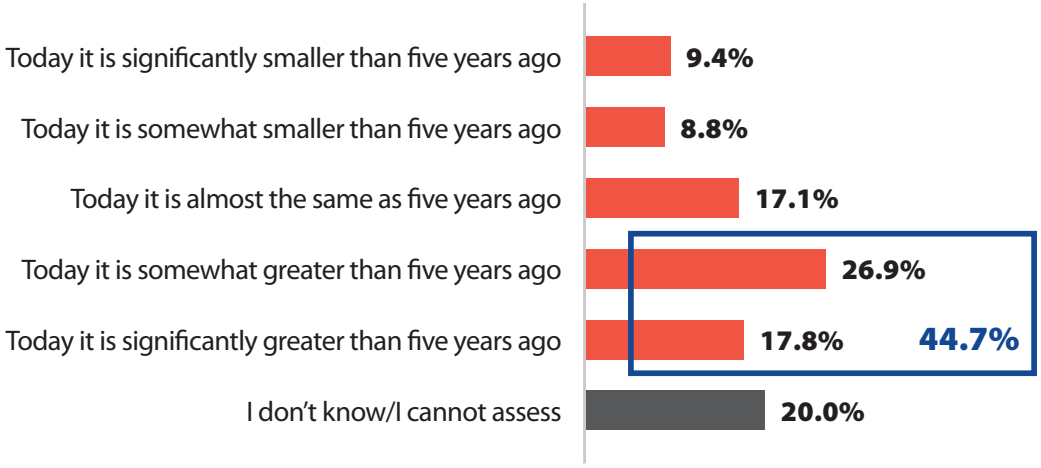
Although many school staff acknowledge the presence of some level of violence in schools, the overall atmosphere is still generally regarded as positive. Additional analysis suggests a relationship between staff perceptions of student violence and their assessments of the school climate. As incidents of violence become less frequent, perceptions of the atmosphere become progressively more favourable. Staff who view violence as frequent are considerably more likely to rate the school atmosphere as poor (24.1%) compared with those who see it as infrequent.

Graph 2: Relationship between the perception of violence and the evaluation of the school atmosphere

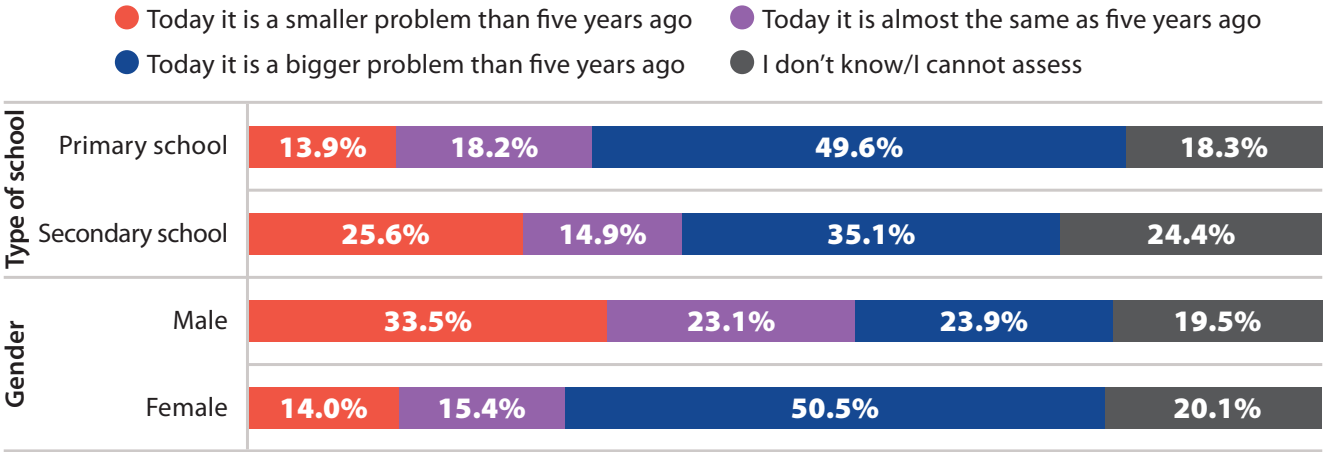


Still, almost half of school staff consider that violence is more prevalent today than five years ago, suggesting a strong subjective perception that the situation has worsened. This trend is especially pronounced among primary school staff and female staff, which may reflect both heightened sensitivity to early forms of aggression in children and greater awareness of the problem.

Graph 3: What would you say: is the problem of violence in schools today smaller, greater, or the same as it was five years ago?

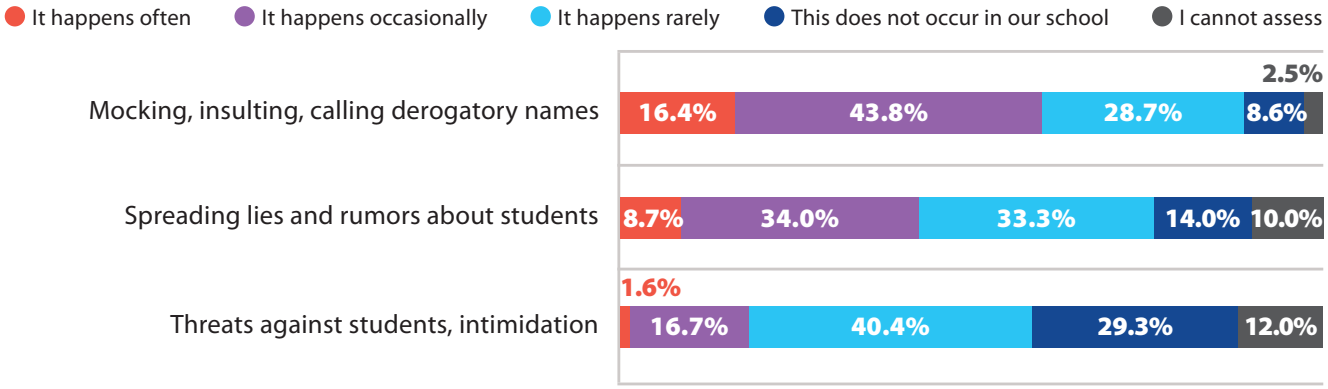


Graph 4: What would you say: is the problem of violence in schools today smaller, greater, or the same as it was five years ago? According to the type of school and the gender of school staff.



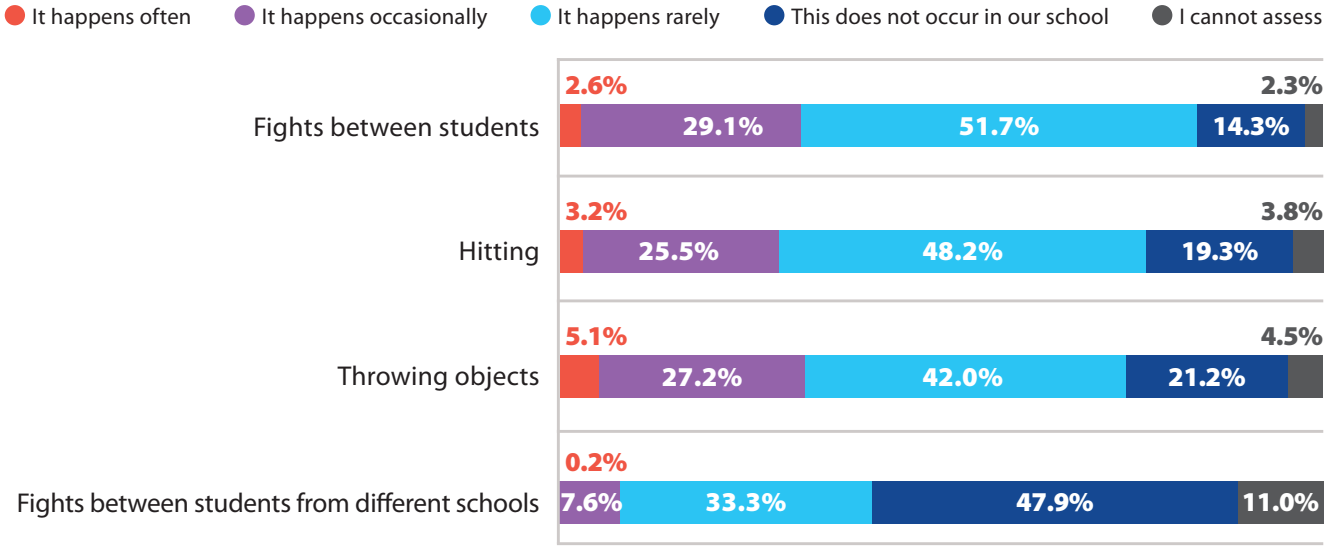
In terms of specific forms of violence, school staff most commonly recognise verbal and social violence as the dominant and most prevalent types. Mocking, insults, name-calling, and the spreading of rumours occur in most schools, often as intermittent but repeated incidents. These behaviours are frequently not viewed as "serious incidents" but as part of routine peer interactions, increasing the risk of normalisation and delayed identification. Because of their subtle and enduring nature, verbal and social violence may have long-term impacts on children's emotional security and mental health.

Graph 5: How often are the listed forms of violent behaviour present in the school where you work, in your opinion? Total sample (N=1025)



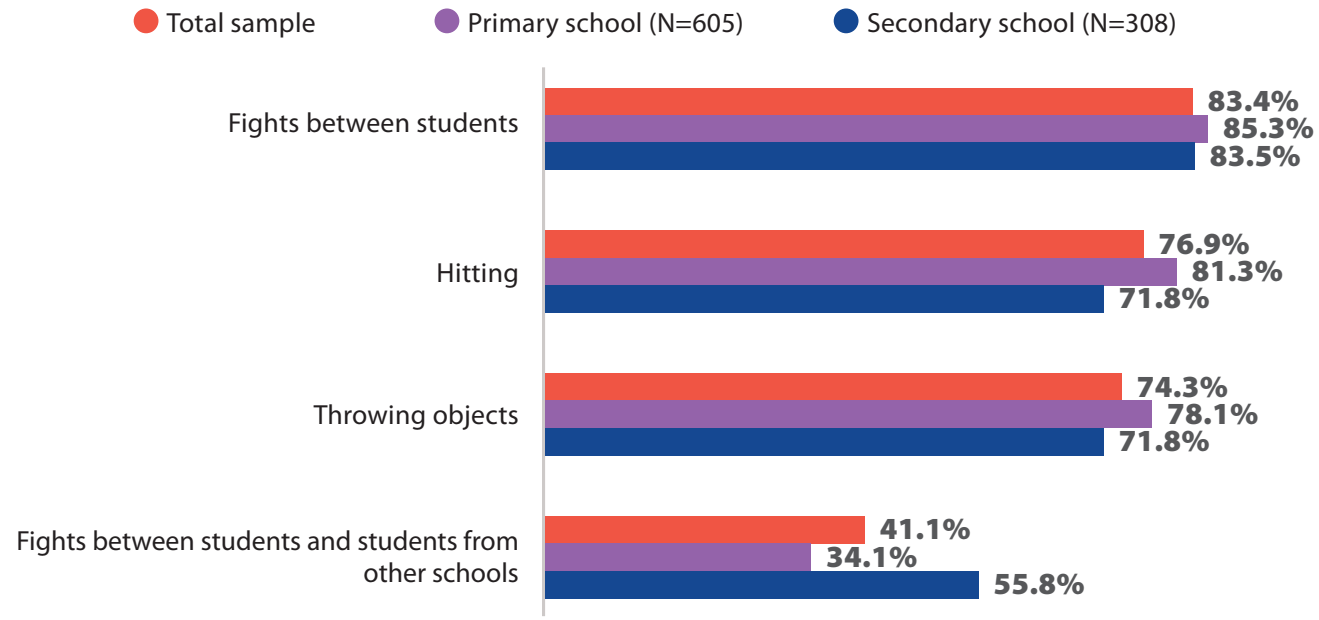
Physical violence is also acknowledged by school staff, though generally in milder and less frequent forms. Student fights are the most prevalent form of physical violence and occur in a substantial number of schools.

Graph 6: How often are the listed forms of violent behaviour present in the school where you work, in your opinion? Total sample (N=1025)



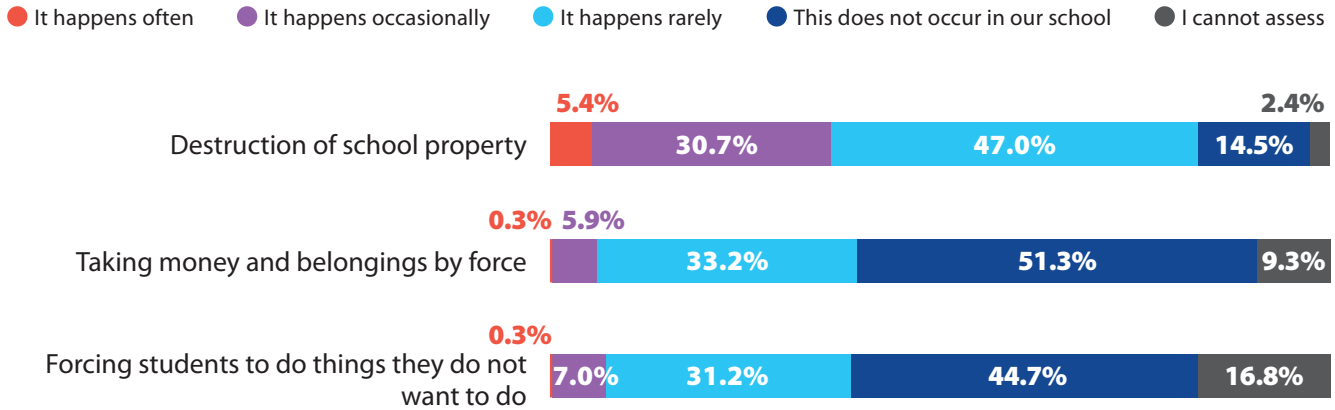
More direct and impulsive forms of physical conflict, such as hitting or pushing are more common in primary schools, while in secondary schools, conflicts involving students from different schools are reported more frequently. These patterns point to developmental differences between children and adolescents, with older students more likely to engage in group-based or identity-driven conflicts, often occurring outside the immediate school setting.

Graph 7: Physical forms of violence that are present in the school rarely, occasionally, or often



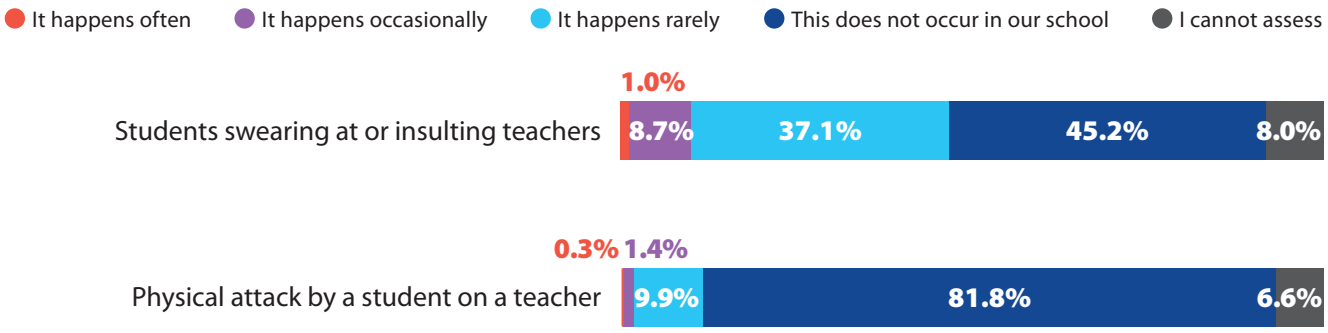
Property-related and coercive forms of violence (forcing peers to act against their will), including damage to school property, taking personal belongings, or coercing peers, are present in schools but are considered less prevalent than verbal and physical forms. Damage to school equipment emerges as the most common issue within this category and appears equally widespread in primary and secondary schools, suggesting that vandalism reflects a broader challenge related to school discipline and attitudes towards shared property. Other forms of coercive behaviour occur mainly sporadically, but they still represent a risk to students' sense of security.

Graph 8: How often are the listed forms of violent behaviour present in the school where you work, in your opinion? Total sample (N=1025)



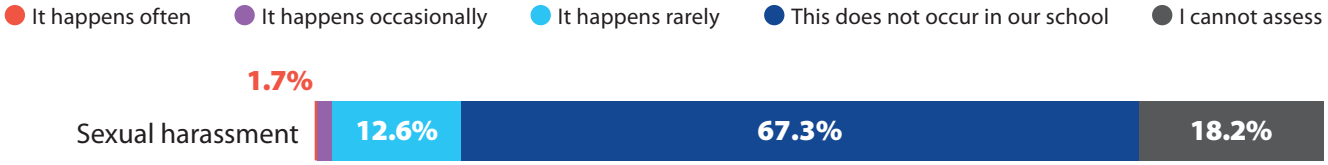
School staff generally perceive violence directed at teachers as rare and predominantly verbal. Swearing and verbal abuse by students are somewhat more frequently reported in secondary schools, while physical attacks are extremely rare, though still present in a small number of cases. Despite the relatively low percentages, such incidents carry considerable symbolic and professional significance, as they directly undermine teachers' authority and contribute to feelings of insecurity and professional pressure among staff.

Graph 9: How often are the listed forms of violent behaviour present in the school where you work, in your opinion? Total sample (N=1025)



From the perspective of staff, sexual harassment is the least frequently recognised form of violence in schools. Most respondents report that such incidents do not occur in their institutions, while a smaller proportion identify rare or occasional cases, somewhat more commonly in secondary schools. However, staff emphasise that this is a highly sensitive area in which underreporting is common due to fear, shame, or lack of trust, suggesting that the actual extent of the problem may be greater than what is visible to school staff.

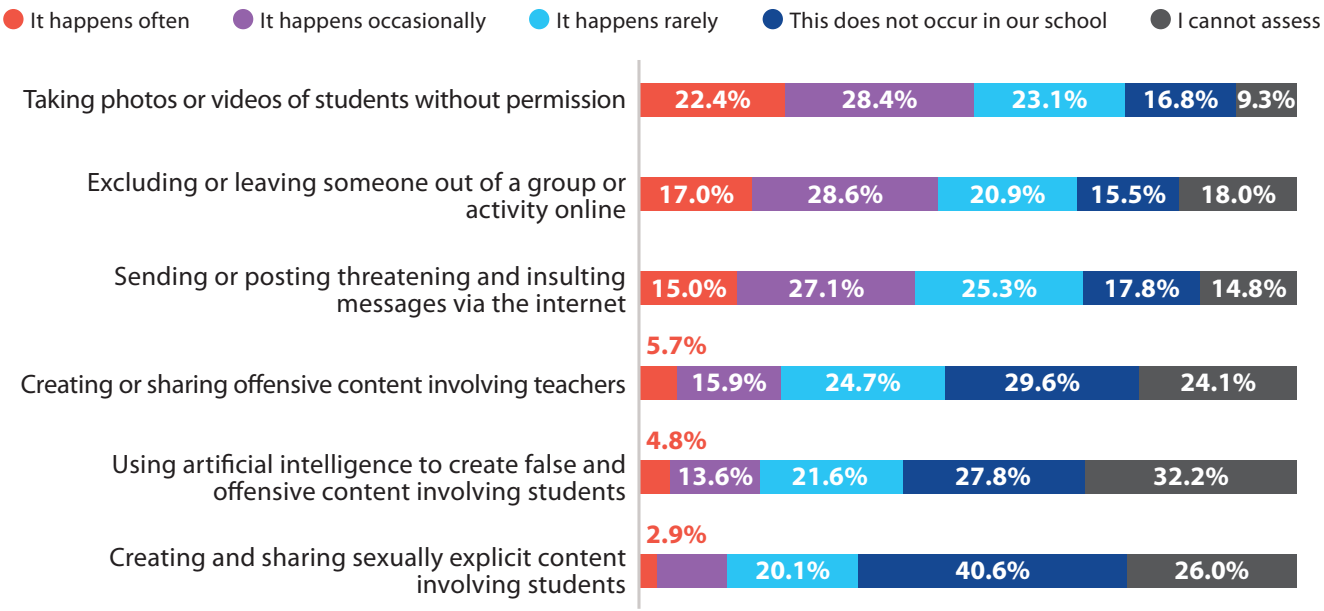
Graph 10: How often are the listed forms of violent behaviour present in the school where you work, in your opinion? Total sample (N=1025)



Students' subjective sense of safety further highlights the complexity of the issue. Although nearly half of school staff report that they have never had the impression that a student was afraid to attend school because of their peers, a considerable proportion note that they have occasionally observed such situations. This suggests that fear of school is not widespread, but that there remains a consistent group of students whose experience of the school environment includes feelings of insecurity, indicating the need for targeted preventive and supportive measures.

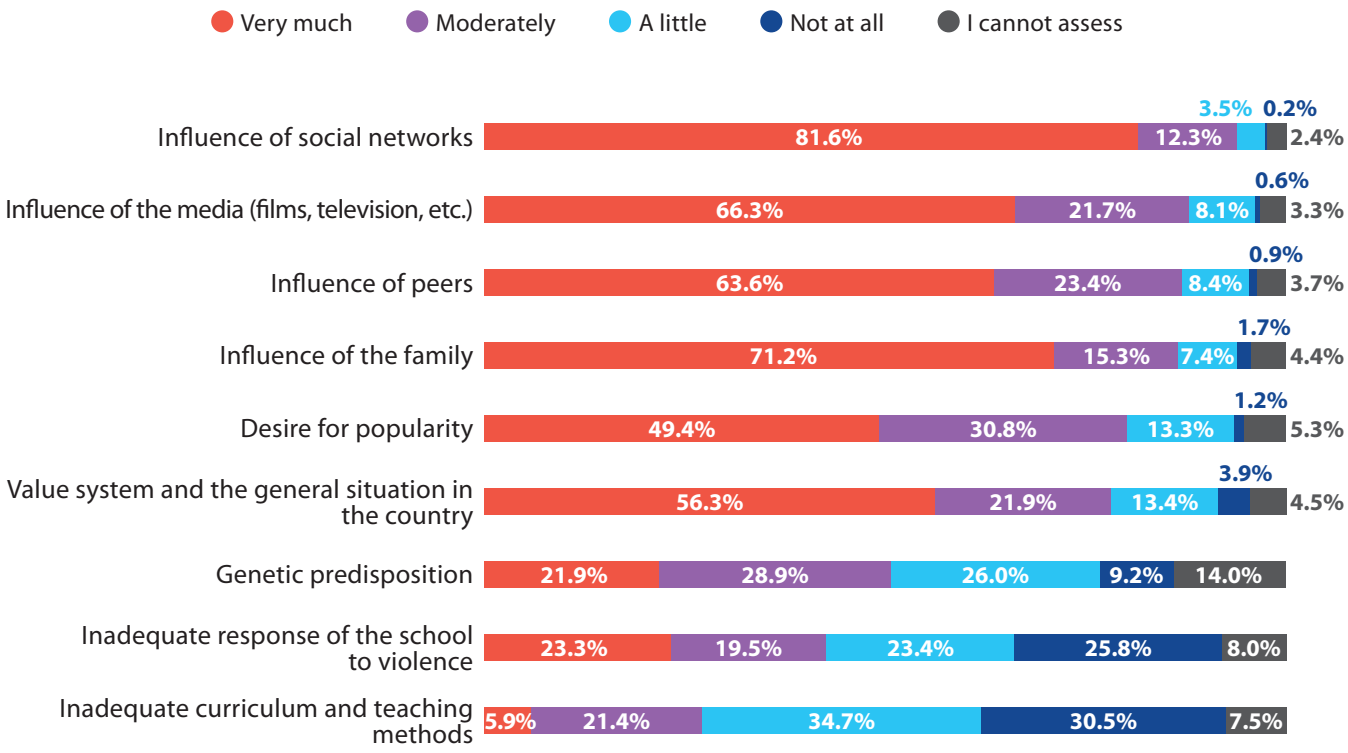
Cyberbullying occupies a prominent place in staff perceptions and is viewed as an increasingly significant challenge for schools. More than two-thirds of staff believe that cyberbullying is more prevalent today than it was five years ago, and most consider it to be a problem that is as serious as violence occurring in face-to-face contexts. The most frequently identified forms of cyberbullying include unauthorised photographing or recording of students, exclusion from online groups, and the sending of insulting messages.

Graph 11: In your opinion, to what extent are the following forms of cyberbullying present among students?



School staff express significant concern about the wider impact of digital technologies on children. Most believe that the use of digital devices negatively affects students' physical and mental health, behaviour, and day-to-day functioning. While the potential benefits of technology for learning and communication are acknowledged, these are perceived more cautiously and less frequently than its negative effects. Consequently, most teachers do not encourage the use of mobile phones during lessons, and schools generally implement restrictive policies, most commonly through bans or strict limitations on phone use.

Graph 12: To what extent, in your opinion, do the following factors influence violent behaviour among students in school?



Profile of children vulnerable to violence (according to school staff):

School staff most frequently perceive quiet and withdrawn children as those most likely to experience violence, with 57.3% identifying this group as the most vulnerable. Similarly, "unpopular" children are viewed as particularly at risk (58.7%), suggesting that social inclusion and peer acceptance play a significant role in the likelihood of victimisation. Children from lower socio-economic backgrounds are also perceived as more likely to be victims of violence (44%), indicating that material inequalities may influence their position within peer environments. Regarding academic achievement and gender, staff do not identify clear differences. Most believe that children with both higher and lower academic performance experience violence to a similar extent (51.2%), and that boys and girls are equally likely to be victims (57.7%).

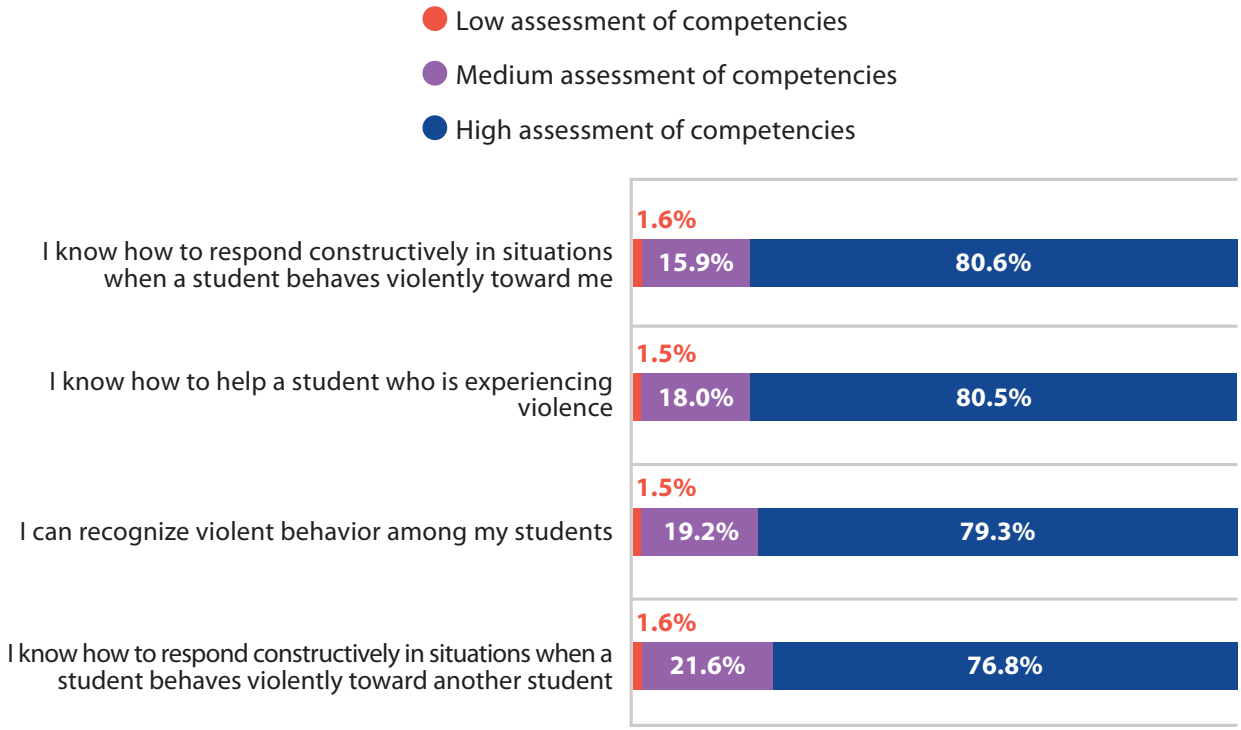
Profile of children who engage in violent behaviour (according to school staff):

School staff most frequently associate violent behaviour with students who provoke or challenge others and seek dominance within peer groups, while violence is not viewed as a trait of a clearly defined category of students. Although some staff tend to associate violent behaviour more often with children from higher socio-economic backgrounds or those with lower academic performance, the dominant perception is that such behaviour can be exhibited by students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds and levels of academic achievement. Similarly, while boys are somewhat more often perceived as prone to violence, nearly half of staff believe that boys and girls are equally represented among those who engage in violent behaviour. This suggests that violence is perceived as a broader behavioural pattern rather than one associated with gender, academic success, or socio-economic background.

When explaining the causes of violence, school staff primarily attribute it to external and social factors, including family relationships, peer influence, social media, and the broader media environment. School-related factors are less frequently perceived as central causes, which may reflect both a tendency to locate responsibility outside the school and a perception of the school's limited institutional capacity to influence wider social dynamics. Violence is often interpreted as a consequence of a child's behaviour or their being perceived as "different", while discriminatory motives are less frequently recognised, suggesting limited awareness of structural forms of inequality.

School staff generally rate their own competencies for responding to violence as high; however, more than half report a need for additional training. Trust in school actors, such as headteachers, school counsellors and class teachers, is relatively strong. At the same time, key challenges identified include a lack of institutional support, pressure from parents, and negative public perceptions of teachers. Most staff believe that schools formally respond to violence in line with existing regulations, but they consider cooperation with parents to be uneven and often insufficient, particularly in the area of prevention.

Graph 13: How do you assess your personal competence for dealing with problems related to students' violent behaviour?



Overall, the findings indicate that school staff perceive violence in schools as a complex, multidimensional, and evolving phenomenon. While most forms of violence are considered rare or occasional, a strong perception that the problem is increasing, particularly in the digital environment, highlights the need for a systemic, long-term, and cross-sectoral response. Such a response should combine preventive measures, efforts to promote a positive and inclusive school climate, the strengthening of staff competencies, the active involvement of parents, and clear institutional support in order to create a safe and supportive environment for all children.

5. School Violence from the Perspective of Parents

5.1. Key Findings

- The authoritative parenting style predominates in the sample (79.3%), characterised by warmth, communication, and clearly defined boundaries.
- When children break rules, 78.1% of parents respond through discussion and explanation, aiming to help children understand their behaviour and learn from it.
- The majority of parents regularly attend parent-teacher meetings (89.2%), indicating a high level of involvement and cooperation with schools.
- Most parents believe their child enjoys school (84.6%), although a smaller, notable proportion report negative experiences.
- Over half of parents perceive peer violence at school as either frequent or occasional. Violence is more frequently reported by parents of primary school children than by those of secondary school students.
- Differences in physical appearance, behaviour, or style (clothing/hairstyle) are most commonly cited as triggers for violence. Factors such as nationality, religion, names, disability, and sexual orientation are rarely identified.
- Fewer than half of parents have been directly informed by schools about procedures for addressing violence; those who are familiar with the procedures generally trust their effectiveness.
- In cases of violence, parents most commonly advise children to seek support from teachers or school counsellors.
- Nearly all children use the internet (97.1%), with a substantial proportion spending 1-3 hours per weekday (48.7%), and around one quarter spending four hours or more (22.6%).
- More than half of families impose no restrictions on internet use (55.6%), though primary school parents are significantly more likely to set limits than secondary school parents.
- The majority of parents consider online insults and harassment to be frequent (83.6%).
- Most parents acknowledge that schools have policies on mobile phone use, but note some inconsistency in rules and enforcement. Parents tend to rely on schools to regulate phone use rather than establishing strict rules at home.

5.2. Analysis of the Key Findings from the Parental Survey

A comprehensive understanding of school violence requires examining the family context and how parents perceive the school environment, their children's experiences, and the role of schools in violence prevention and response. The parental perspective offers valuable insights into children's daily interactions, emotional state, and behavioural patterns, as well as parents' level of trust in schools and the wider education system. This study's findings are based on responses from 842 parents of primary and secondary school children across nearly all municipalities in Montenegro, allowing for a wide-ranging view of predominant parental attitudes and experiences.

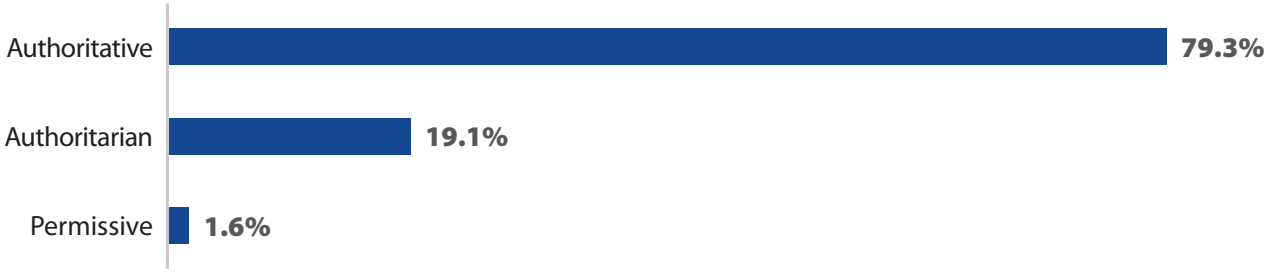
Numerous studies around the world show that parenting styles have a strong and long-term influence on children's development. Montenegro is no exception, according to the collected data.

Tabela 2: Roditeljski stilovi

	Parenting Styles	**Characteristics of Parenting Styles**
1	Authoritative parenting style	Authoritative parents combine firm expectations with emotional warmth and support. They establish clear rules while explaining them and helping the child comprehend the consequences of their actions. They promote conversation, value the child's feelings and opinions, and support autonomy within a well-defined structure.
2	Authoritarian parenting style	Authoritarian parents focus on enforcing strict discipline, obedience, and respect for authority. Rules are imposed without discussion, emotional interaction is limited, and misbehaviour is generally managed through sanctions or inflexible correction.
3	Permissive parenting style	Permissive parents combine high emotional support with minimal demands and restrictions. They grant children substantial freedom, seldom enforce rules, and frequently accommodate their wishes. The primary concern is the child's happiness and comfort rather than maintaining structured routines.
4	Neglectful/Uninvolved parenting style	Neglectful/avoidant parents combine low emotional support with minimal expectations. They provide no rules or structured guidance and engage very little with the child.

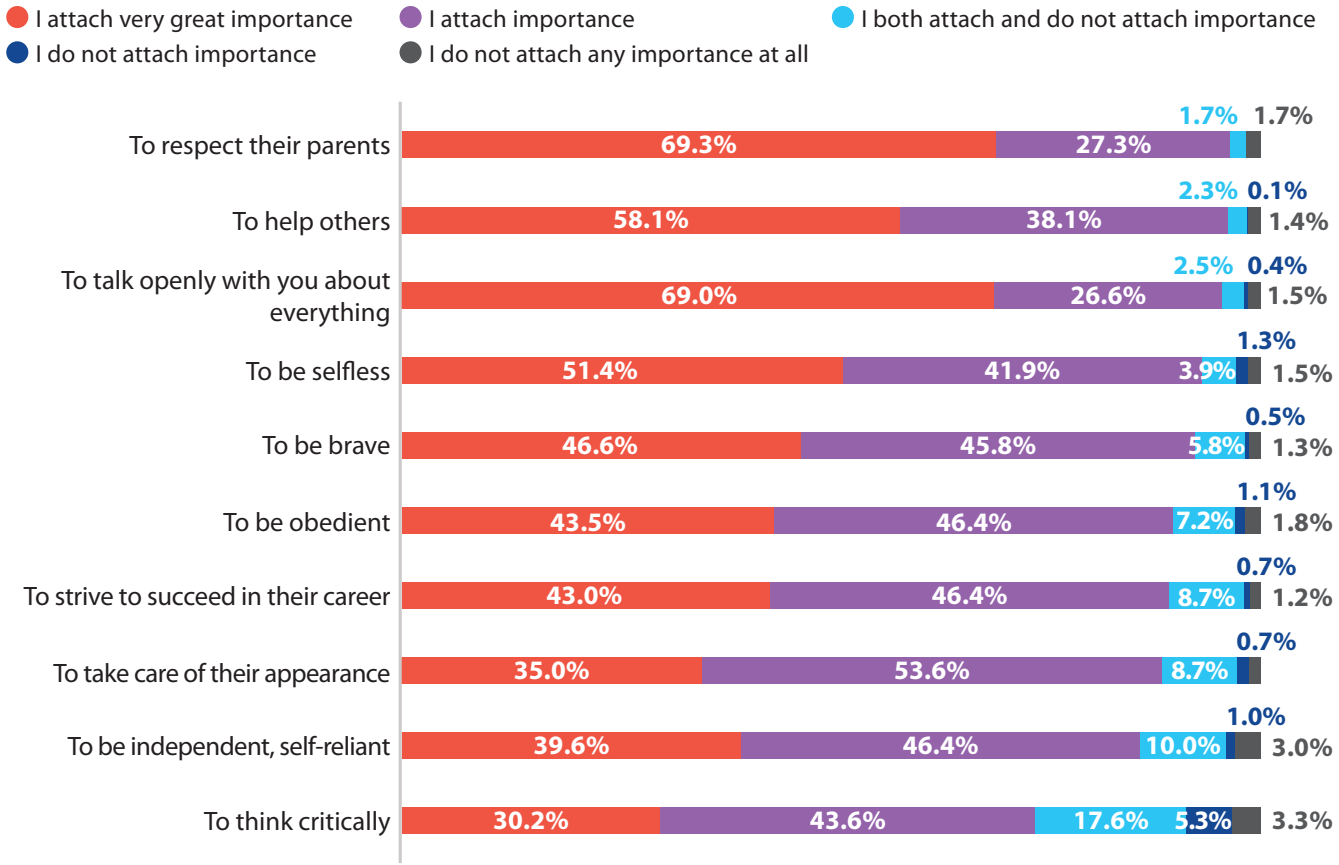
Analysis of parental styles reveals a strong predominance of the authoritative approach, characterised by warmth, open communication, and clearly defined boundaries. The majority of parents report engaging with their children about mistakes and inappropriate behaviour, seeking to help the child understand the consequences of their actions rather than relying on punitive measures. Many parents also discuss their children's feelings, worries, and opinions on a daily basis, reflecting a high level of emotional engagement and availability. When children's desires conflict with parental expectations, parents typically favour discussion and compromise, thereby maintaining authority while recognising the child's perspective. These findings suggest that most parents in the sample cultivate a supportive and communicative relationship, which serves as a key protective factor against violence.

Graph 14: Parenting styles index (PSI)



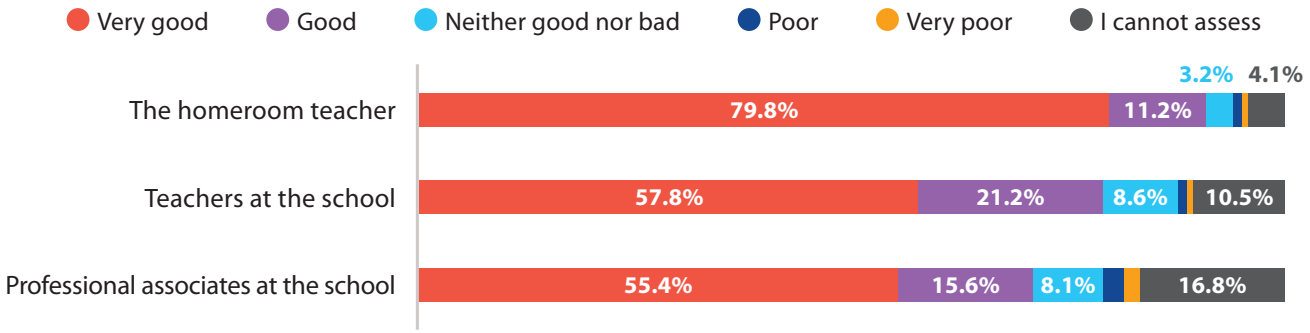
Regarding educational attitudes, parents largely prioritise the cultivation of moral and social values within the family context. Respect for parents and open communication with children are viewed as key parenting attributes, complemented by an emphasis on empathy, altruism, and generosity. Traits such as courage, obedience, and personal achievement are also highly regarded.
Critical thinking, while acknowledged as important by many parents, ranks lower in terms of priority, reflecting a predominant focus on traditional and prosocial values, with comparatively less attention to fostering autonomy and independent thought.

Graph 15: We will list some traits that children can acquire in the family, and you should tell us how much importance you attach to each of them.



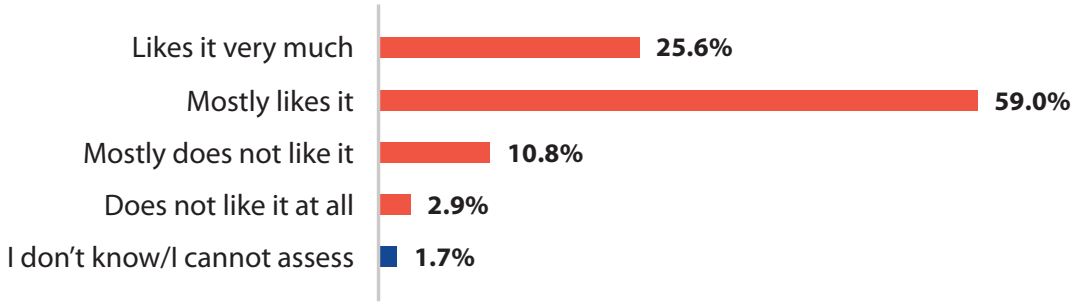
Parents largely perceive their relationship with the school as positive. The majority indicate regular attendance at parent-teacher meetings and assess their collaboration with class teachers and other school staff very favourably.

Graph 16: How would you rate your relationship with:



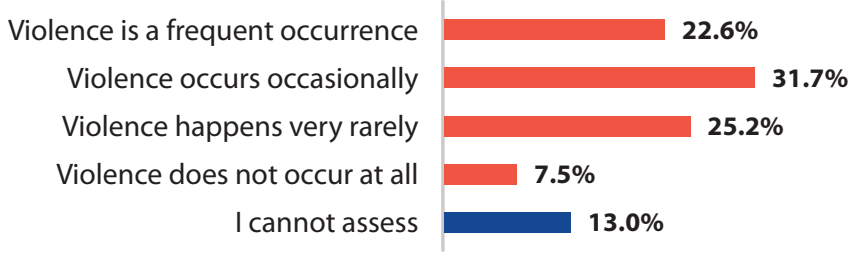
The majority of parents believe their child likes going to school, suggesting generally positive attitudes among children towards the school environment. Nevertheless, a smaller yet significant number of parents report that their child experiences school negatively, signalling the need for targeted attention to this subgroup.

Graph 17: What would you say: how much does your child like going to school?

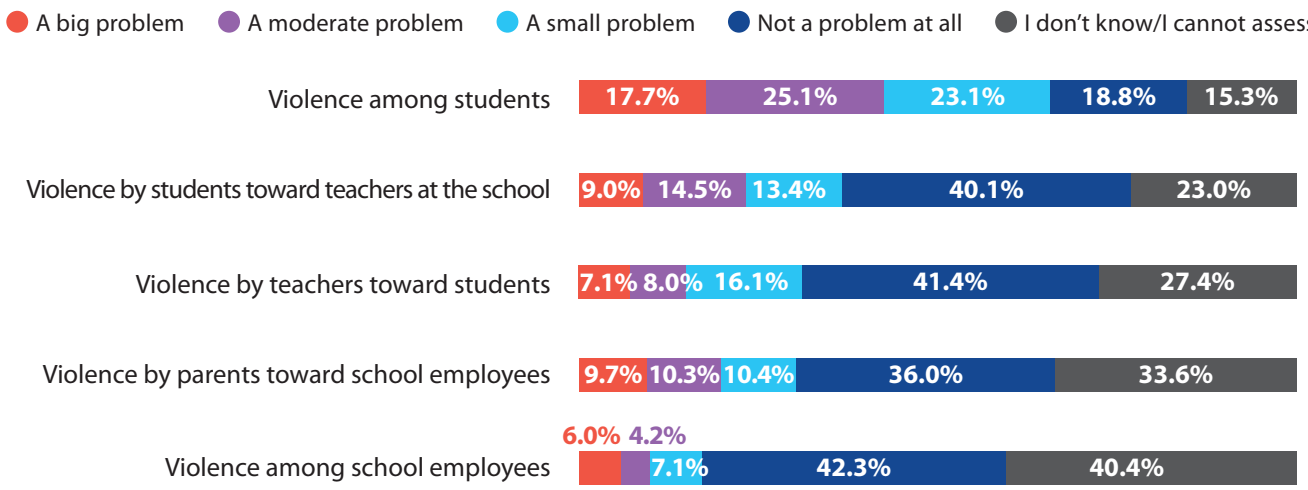


Although parents generally perceive their relationship with the school positively, a substantial number recognise that violence is present in the schools their children attend. Over half of parents report that violence occurs either frequently or occasionally, with those of primary school children more likely to perceive it as frequent compared to parents of secondary school students. This highlights a discrepancy between positive assessments of school collaboration and awareness of the prevalence of violence, suggesting that strong communication with the school does not necessarily prevent recognition of serious problems in peer interactions.

Graph 18: What would you say: how much violence is there among children in the school your child/your children attend?

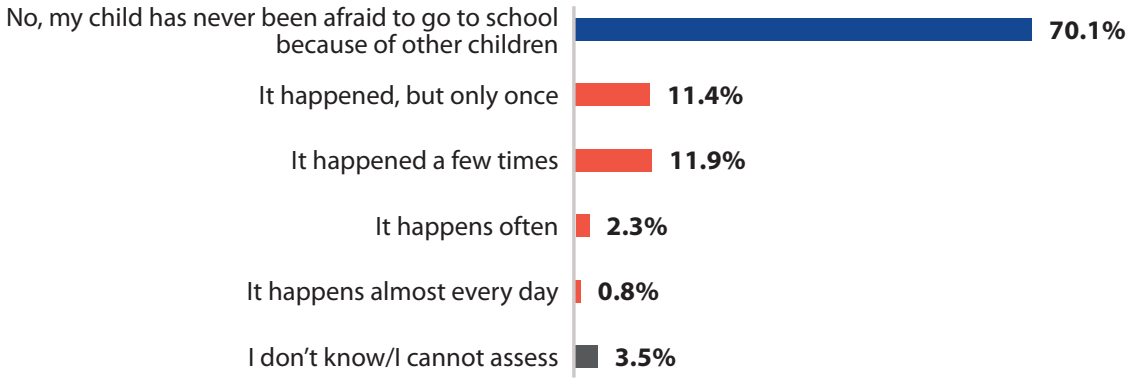


Graph 19: What do you think, how much are the following forms of violence a problem in the school your child attends?



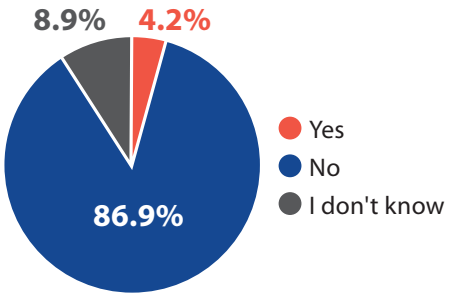
In terms of children's experiences, most parents indicate that their child has never felt afraid to attend school due to other children, though around one in four children experience this fear at least occasionally.

Graph 20: Have you ever had the impression that your child is afraid to go to school because of other children?

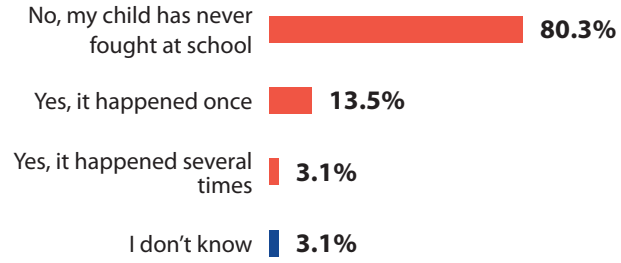


Parents are more likely to identify verbal and social forms of violence, including insults, ridicule, and social exclusion, whereas physical violence and theft are less frequently reported. Most parents consider that their child has not been involved in fights or engaged in aggressive behaviour, while a minority acknowledge such experiences.

Graph 21: Has it ever happened that your child behaved violently, as far as you know?

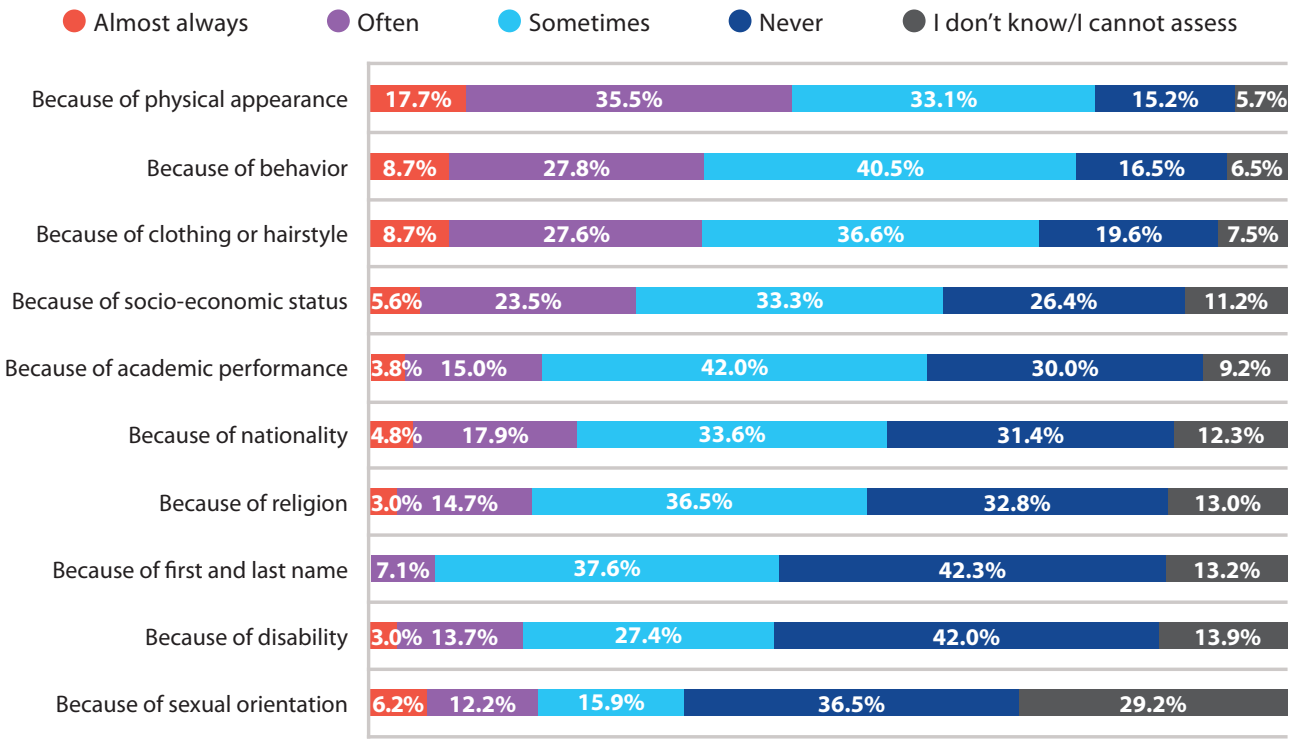


Graph 22: Has your child ever been involved in a fight that occurred at school?



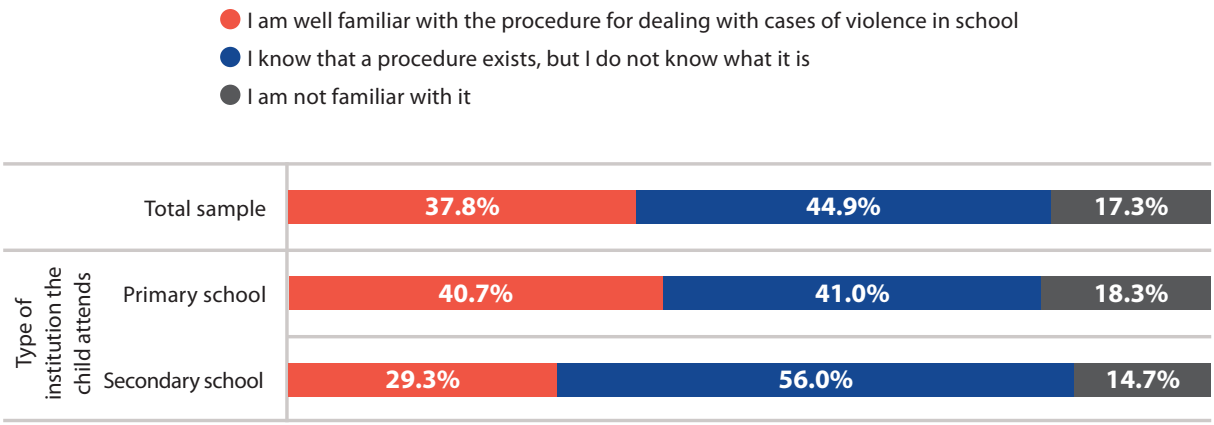
Parents identify differences in appearance, behaviour, and personal style as the most common causes of violence, whereas identity-based factors, such as nationality, religion, disability, or sexual orientation, are largely unrecognised or perceived as infrequent.

Graph 23: What do you think, how often is the following a reason for children to be violent toward others?



Parental views regarding school responses to violence are mixed. Some parents report being well-informed about the school's procedures and trust their effectiveness, while a substantial proportion indicate a lack of information on how schools address such incidents. Parents of primary school students are generally more aware of these procedures than those of secondary school students, suggesting potential gaps in communication between schools and parents of older children.

Graph 24: In the case of violent behaviour by a child at school, the school has an obligation to act in a certain way. Are you familiar with how the school should respond in cases of violence at school? According to the type of institution the child attends.



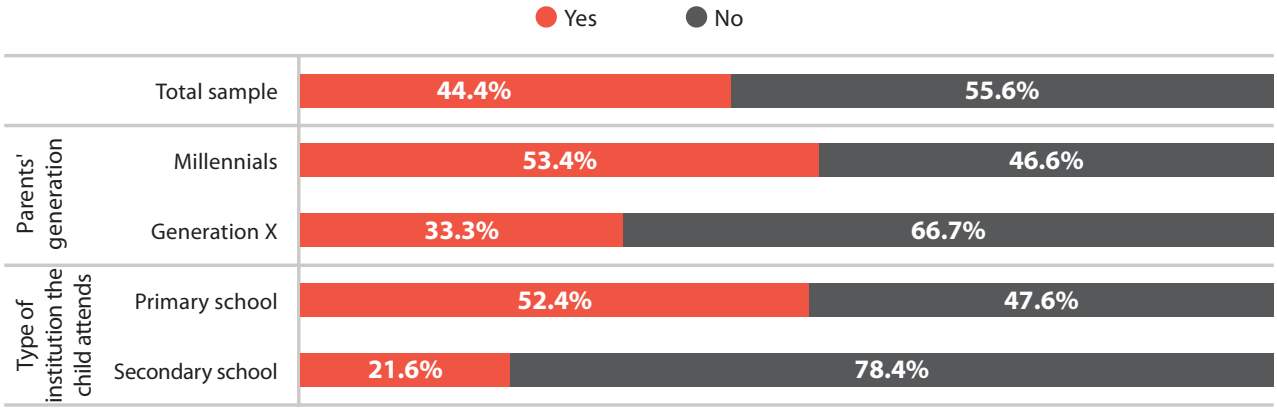
When incidents of violence occur, parents generally recommend that children seek support from their class teacher or school professionals, whom they trust most. The measures parents consider most effective in addressing violence include consistent sanctions for aggressive behaviour, enhanced collaboration between school and family, and a stronger role for specialised support services.

Table 3: What do you think, which of the listed measures would be most effective in combating violent behaviour among students?

	First rank	Second rank	Third rank	Total sum
Consistent punishment of students who behave violently	21.9%	14.7%	8.6%	45.2%
Better cooperation between the school and parents	23.4%	9.4%	8.7%	41.5%
Greater support from psychologists and pedagogues	7.7%	11.2%	9.0%	27.9%
Better cooperation between students and teachers	8.0%	12.6%	5.2%	25.8%
Better supervision of all students	6.5%	10.5%	11.6%	28.6%
The presence of school police officers	7.0%	7.8%	11.2%	26.0%
Support and assistance for students who behave violently	7.0%	8.4%	9.0%	24.4%
Developing communication skills	7.2%	8.9%	6.8%	22.9%
Applying teaching methods that engage students and stimulate their interests	2.7%	6.5%	8.1%	17.3%
Involving social services	2.6%	3.3%	8.7%	14.6%
Banning the use of mobile phones in school	2.7%	4.3%	6.3%	13.3%
A complete ban on the use of mobile phones up to a certain age	3.3%	2.4%	6.8%	12.5%

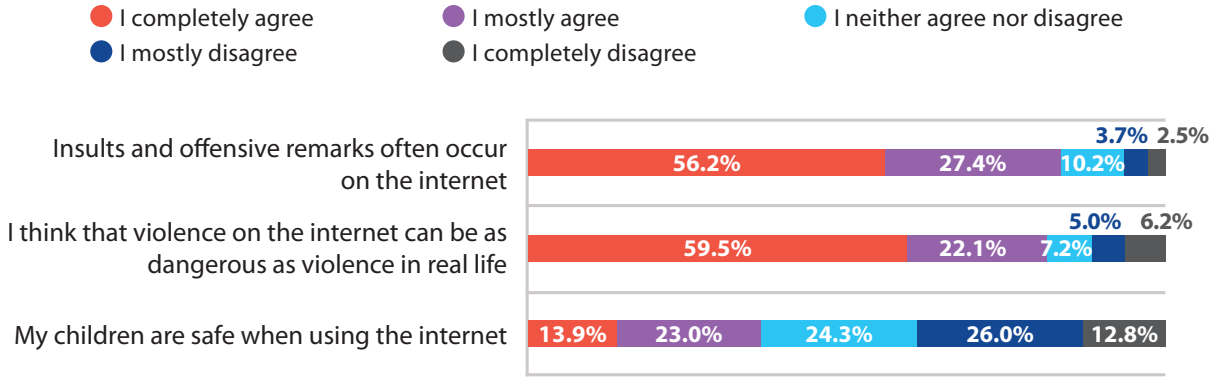
From the parents' perspective, the digital environment emerges as a particularly sensitive area. Almost all children use the internet, and a considerable share spend several hours online each day, mainly via their personal mobile phones. More than half of parents report not setting clear restrictions on internet use, while parents of primary school students tend to impose stricter limits than parents of secondary school students.

Graph 25: Could you briefly describe what restrictions your children have when using the internet, if you set any restrictions? According to the parents' generation and the category of institution the child attends.

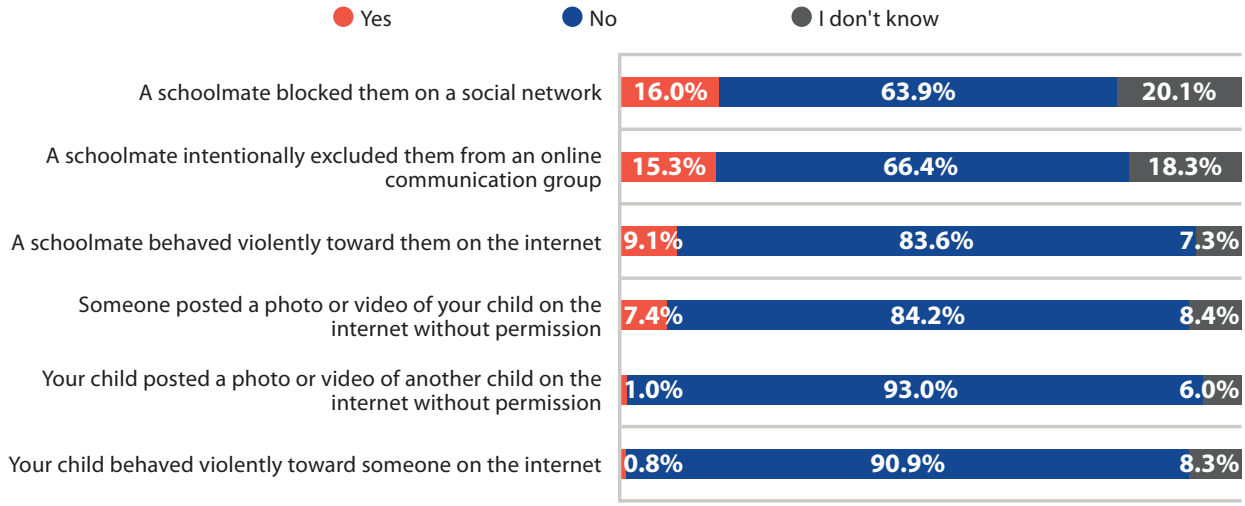


Parents widely perceive online insults and offensive communication to be common and believe that cyberbullying can be as harmful as violence occurring in person. Nevertheless, many parents do not actively seek information about children's digital safety, relying primarily on personal judgement or informal knowledge. While most parents acknowledge that schools have some rules governing mobile phone use, they also express expectations for stronger and more consistent regulation by schools.

Graph 26: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Graph 27: As far as you know, has any of the following happened to your child in the past year?



Overall, the findings suggest that parents largely view themselves as active and responsible participants in their children's upbringing, placing strong emphasis on communication, emotional support and the transmission of moral values. At the same time, parents recognise violence in schools as a real and relevant concern, particularly in its verbal, social and digital forms. While trust in schools and their key actors appears relatively high, the results point to the need for greater transparency, clearer communication with parents regarding procedures, and stronger partnerships between schools and families. These findings underline that effective violence prevention requires a coordinated and systemic approach in which families and schools function as interconnected and complementary systems of support for children.

6. School Violence from the Perspective of Students

6.1. Key Findings

- The majority of students report a sense of belonging at school and perceive it as a safe environment. However, emotional attachment to school shows a slight decline with age, being somewhat lower among secondary school students than among primary school students.
- More than half of students do not view violence as a dominant feature of their school environment; however, a considerable proportion recognise the presence of violent individuals or groups within schools.
- Overall, the findings indicate that students are more likely to perceive the presence of violent individuals or groups in the upper grades of primary and secondary schools.
- Physical fights are not uncommon, as more than half of students report that at least one fight occurred in their school during the previous school year.
- A significant proportion of students report experiencing various forms of peer violence, most commonly verbal and social forms such as mocking, insulting, gossiping, and social exclusion.
- Students most frequently identify differences in physical appearance, behaviour, clothing style, hairstyle and academic performance as common triggers for such behaviour.
- Factors such as nationality, religion, socio-economic status or disability are rarely identified as causes of violence, although they are reported by a smaller proportion of students.
- Most students who have experienced violence report having confided in someone, most frequently their parents, highlighting the important role of the family as the primary source of support.
- Boys are more likely than girls to report experiences of violence, whereas girls are more likely to keep such experiences to themselves.
- Internet use among students is nearly universal, with access most commonly taking place through personal mobile phones.
- Students report that insults in online spaces are frequent and that cyberbullying can have serious consequences; the most commonly reported negative experiences include being photographed or recorded without consent, receiving offensive messages and exclusion from online groups.

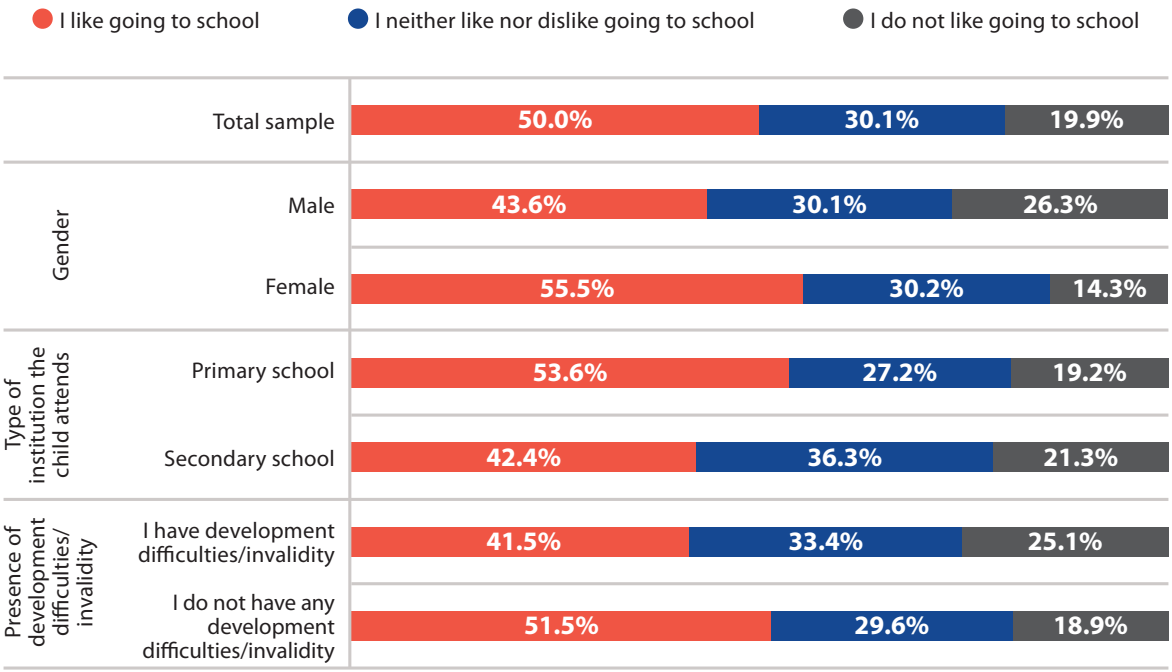
6.2. Analysis of the Key Findings from the Student Survey

Understanding school violence through the eyes of students is essential for capturing the everyday dynamics of school life. Students act as direct participants, observers, and in some instances, as victims or perpetrators of violence. Their perceptions of school, sense of belonging, feelings of safety, and personal experiences of violence offer a comprehensive view of the school environment, beyond what adult perspectives alone can provide. This analysis draws on responses from 3,975 students from primary and secondary schools throughout Montenegro, providing an in-depth exploration of experiences across age groups, educational stages, and individual characteristics.

2690 Primary school students (6th and 8th grades)
1285 Secondary school students (1st and 3rd grades)
Total number of students: 3975

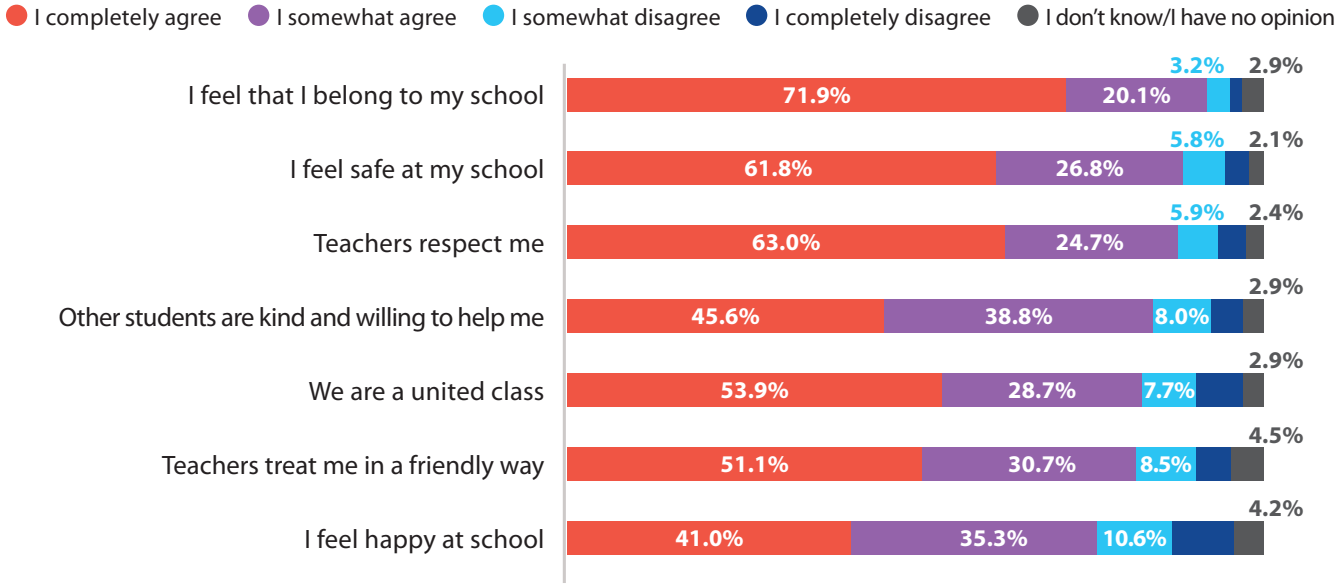
The findings on students' attitudes towards school shows a varied pattern. While around 50% of students report enjoying school, nearly one third maintain a neutral stance, and roughly 20% hold a negative view. This suggests that school does not uniformly serve as a positive and engaging environment for all students. Variations are observed by gender and age, with girls and primary school students more frequently expressing positive attitudes than boys and secondary school students. Furthermore, students experiencing some form of difficulty are less likely to enjoy school, highlighting their potentially higher vulnerability in the educational setting.

Graph 28: What would you say, do you generally like going to school? According to gender, type of institution, and presence of developmental difficulties/invalidity.



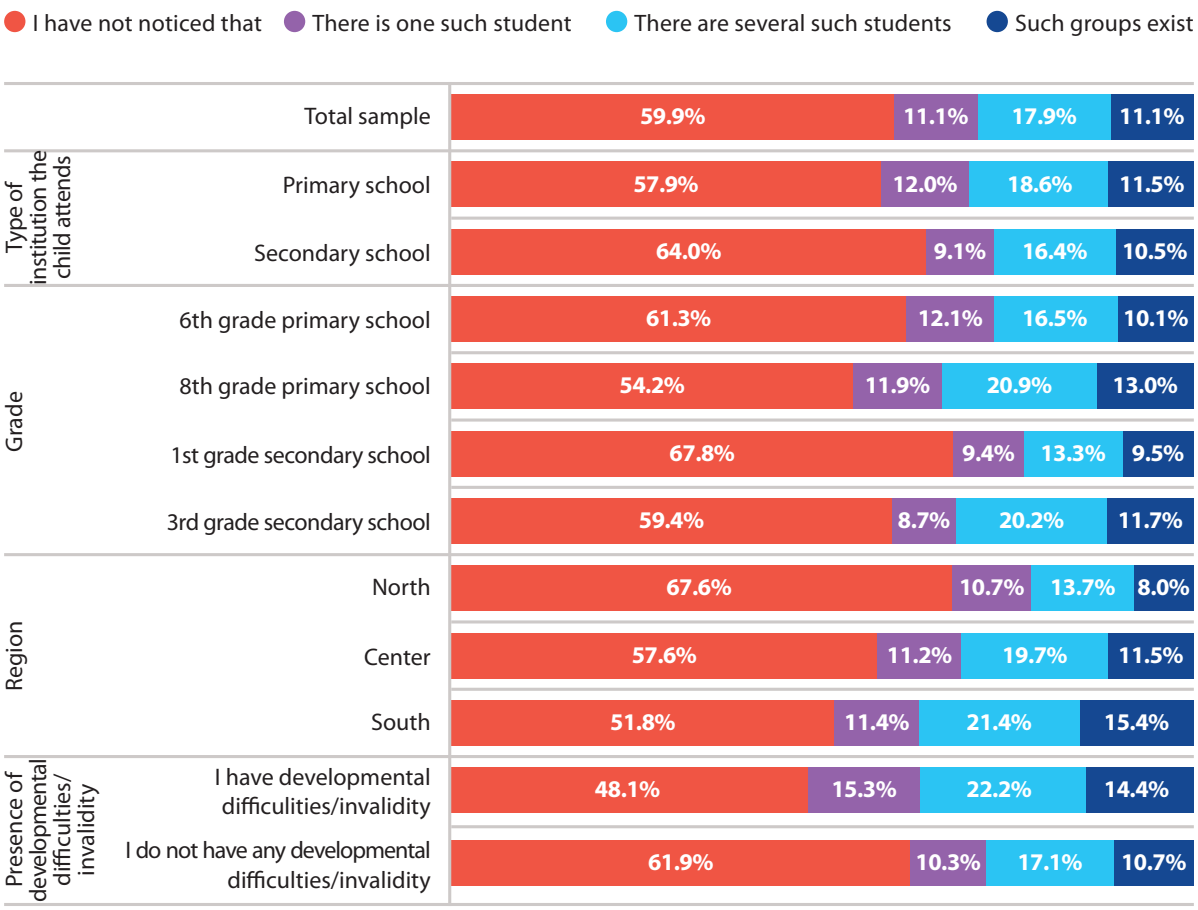
Overall, the majority of students demonstrate a strong sense of school belonging and consider their school a relatively safe environment. Many students indicate that they feel accepted, respected by their teachers, and that interactions with peers are generally satisfactory. Emotional attachment to school shows a slight decline with age, as secondary school students report lower levels of happiness and perceive teachers as less approachable, potentially reflecting the increased academic and social demands of adolescence. Despite this, students recognise the critical role of schools in ensuring safety and inclusion for all, with girls particularly highlighting the importance of security and inclusivity within the educational setting.

Graph 29: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



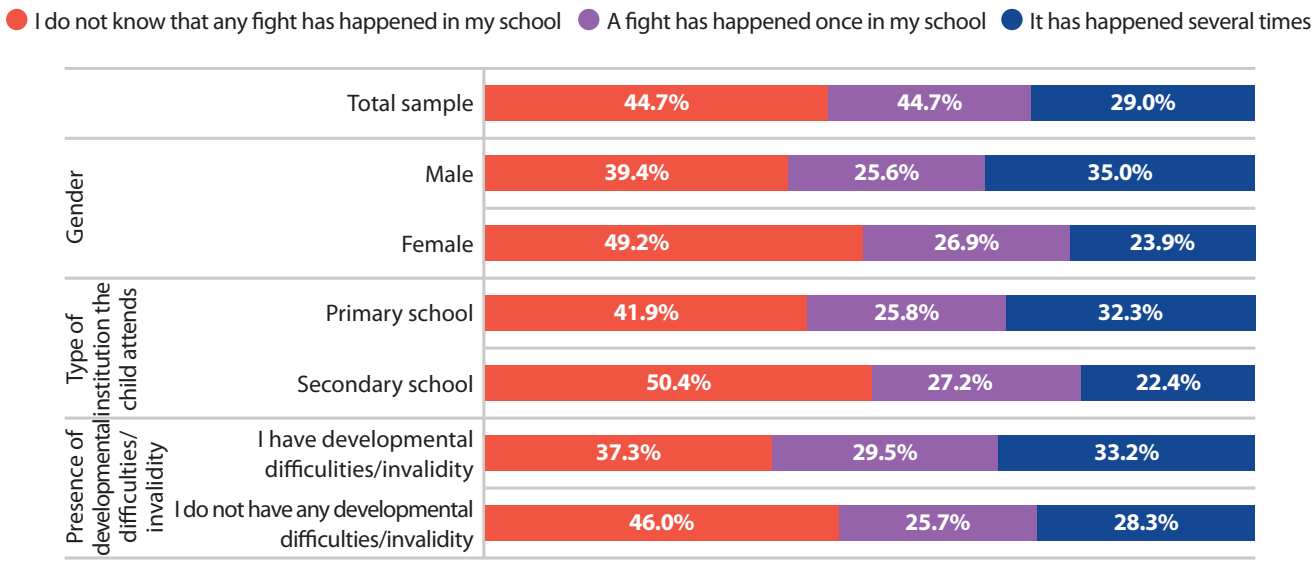
The perception of school violence among students indicates that most do not consider it a prevalent phenomenon in their school. Nearly three-fifths of students report no awareness of violent peers or groups. Nevertheless, a notable proportion identify instances of violence en acted by individuals or organised groups who target others. This perception differs by age, region, and individual student characteristics. Older students, particularly those in the final year of primary school and the upper years of secondary school, are more likely to perceive patterns of violent behaviour, potentially reflecting their longer exposure to the school environment and a more sophisticated understanding of peer dynamics. Students in the southern region and those with additional needs report higher levels of perceived violence, suggesting the influence of specific contextual and risk factors.

Graph 30: Are there students in your school who are violent and bully other students?

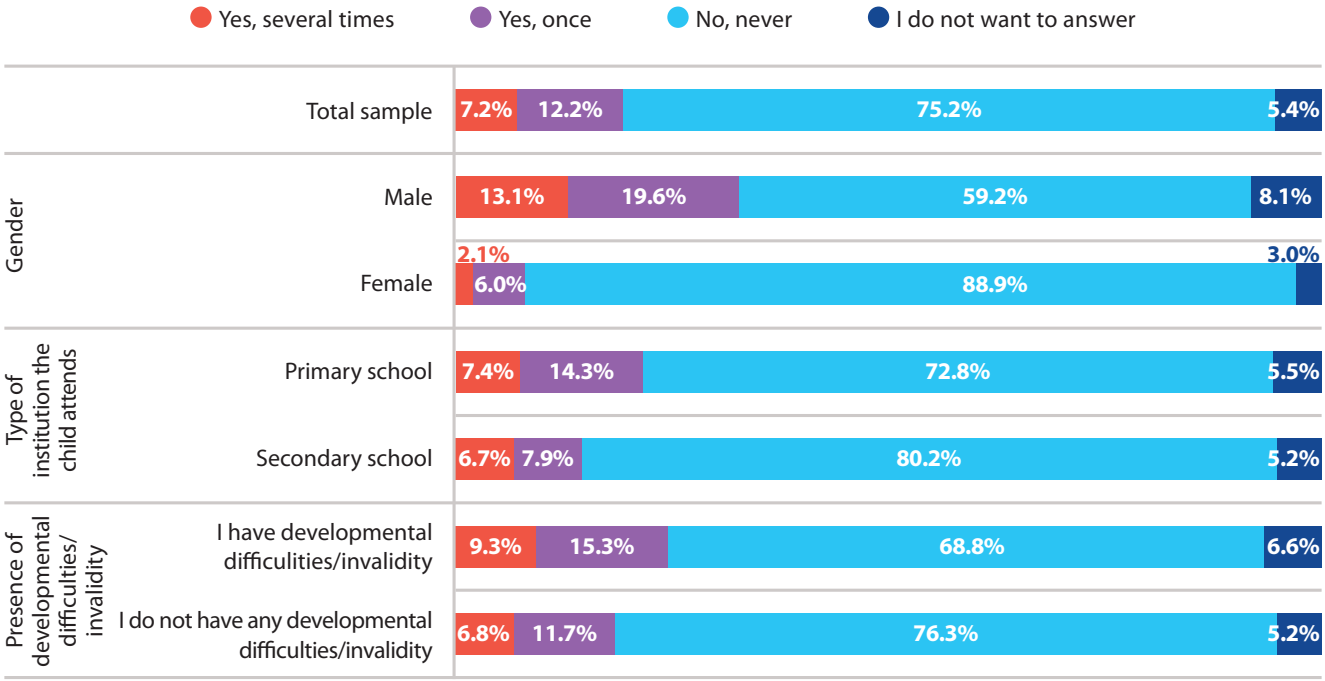


Physical confrontations represent a notable phenomenon within schools. Over half of students indicate that at least one fight took place in their school during the preceding academic year. While the majority of students have not personally engaged in physical disputes, nearly 20% acknowledge being involved in at least one incident. Such physical conflicts are more prevalent among boys, primary school students, and students with additional needs, suggesting higher exposure to direct forms of violence in these groups. Students identify self-defence, prior verbal insults, and ongoing disagreements as the primary triggers, illustrating that physical aggression often emerges as an escalation of prolonged peer-related tensions.

Graph 31: Do you remember if a fight happened in your school during the last school year?



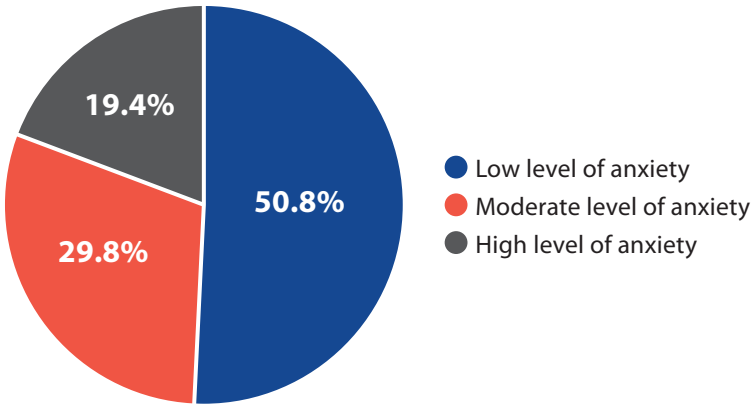
Graph 32: Have you ever been in a fight with someone at school?



In the initial section of this chapter, students' emotional and psychological states are assessed using a series of statements addressing feelings of worry, fear, sadness, nervousness, and difficulty in relaxing. Respondents were categorised according to the intensity of emotional distress, encompassing heightened anxiety and depressive feelings, versus those exhibiting minimal or no such indicators. This method facilitates the identification of students who may be especially vulnerable and at increased risk of adverse outcomes related to peer victimisation.

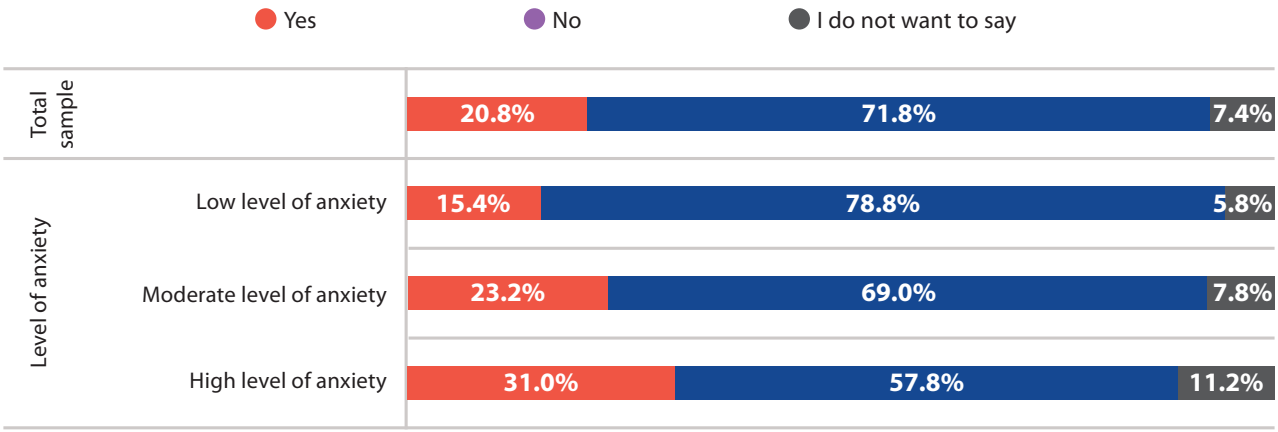
To provide a concise and comparable measure of students' emotional well-being, responses concerning the extent to which students feel worried, nervous, relaxed, fearful, or happy were combined to create a composite anxiety indicator reflecting anxiety levels. Notably, almost one in five students (19.4%) were classified within the high-anxiety group, indicating a substantial proportion of students for whom elevated anxiety may have a meaningful impact on daily functioning.

Graph 33: Students' level of anxiety



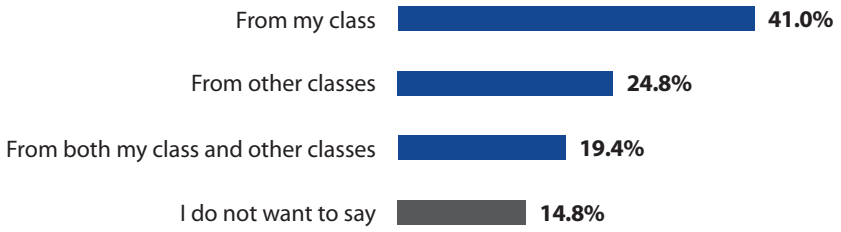
Of particular concern is the finding that students exhibiting higher levels of anxiety are considerably more likely to report experiences of victimisation compared to their peers with lower anxiety levels.

Graph 34: Has anyone been violent toward you?

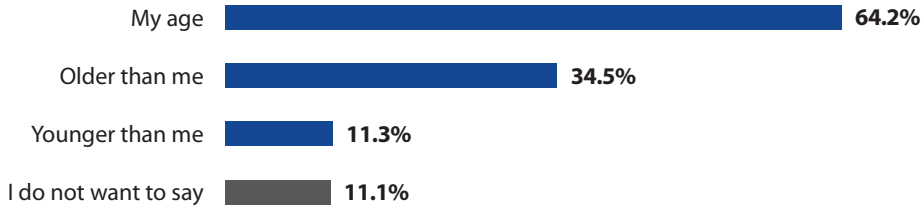


The findings indicate that student victimisation primarily originates from peers within their immediate school context. A large proportion of incidents involve perpetrators from the same class, with others coming from different classes within the school. While most students report that the perpetrators were of similar age, over a third identify older perpetrators, highlighting a potential power imbalance and greater susceptibility among younger students.

Graph 35: Which class are those who were violent toward you from? (Students who experienced violence, N=826)

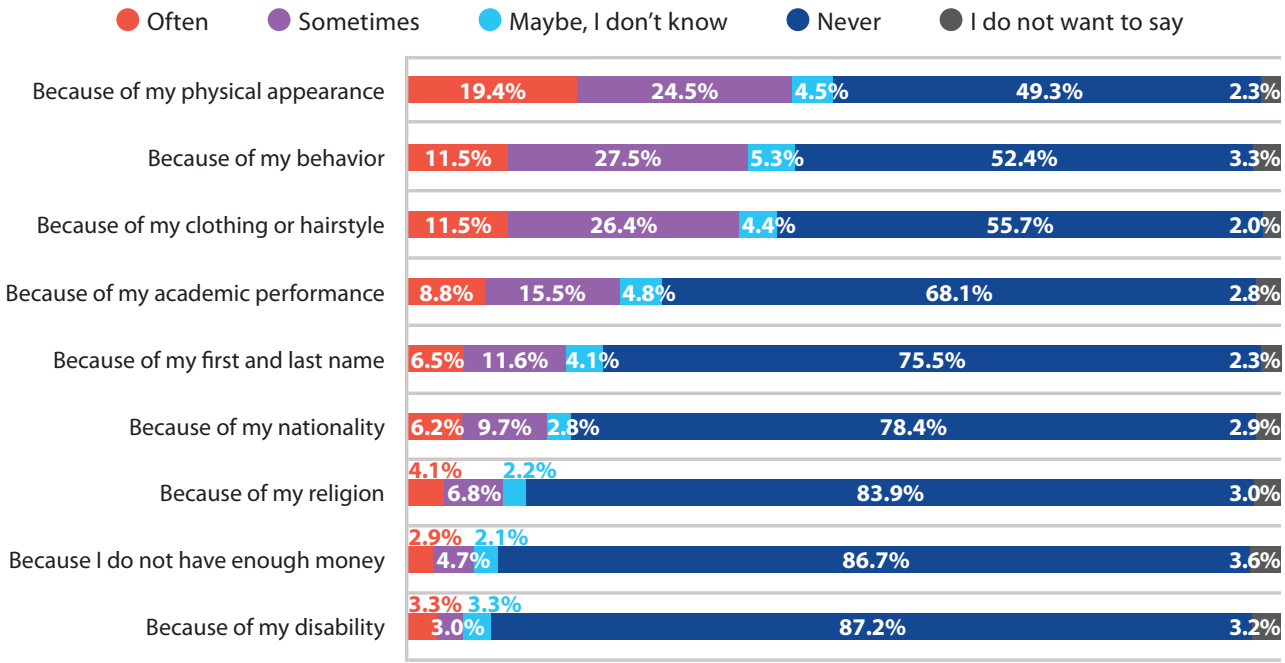


Graph 36: What age were those who were violent toward you? (Multiple answers possible) (Students who experienced violence, N=826)



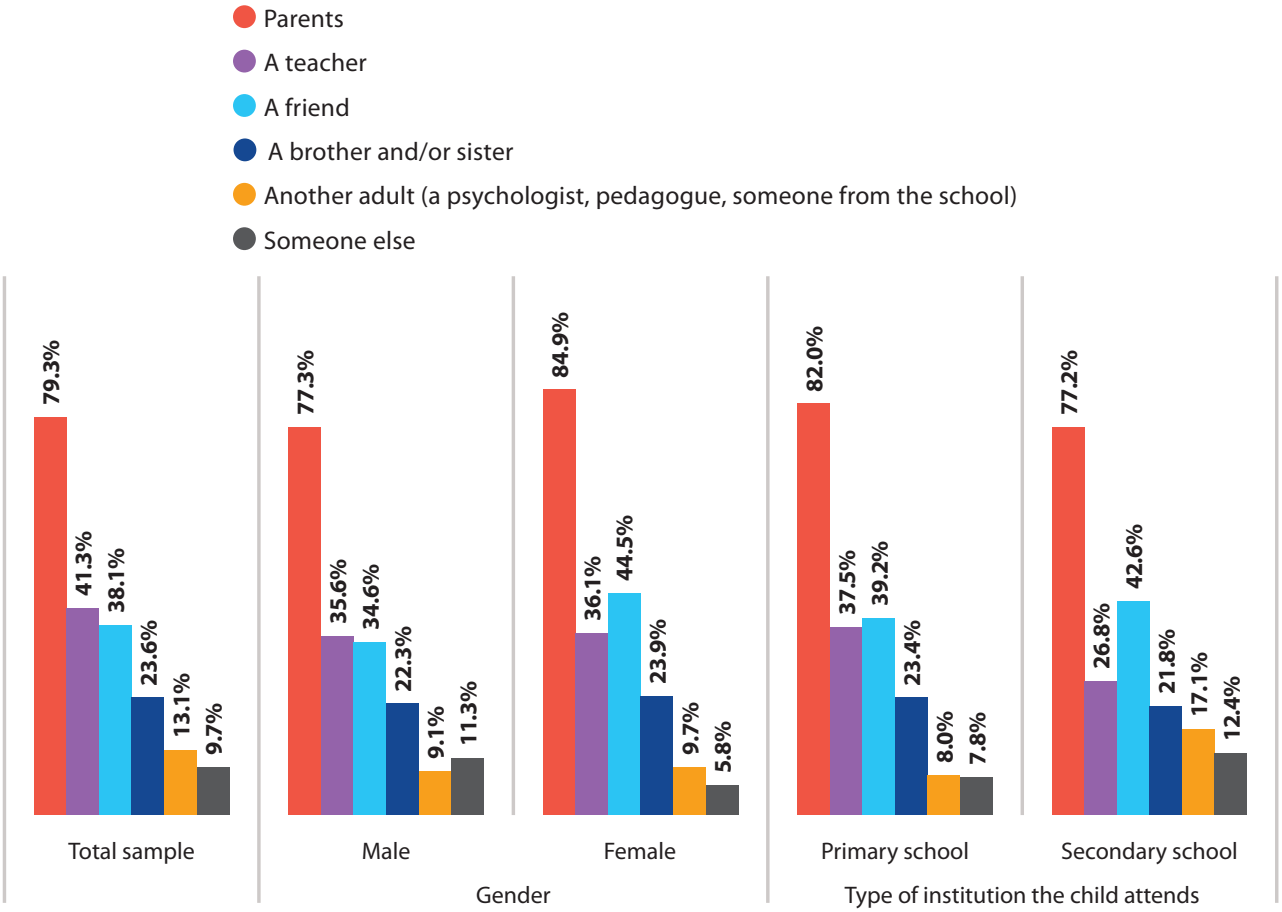
Students predominantly identify physical appearance, behaviour, dress, hairstyle, and academic achievement as the primary triggers for violence. Identity-based factors, including nationality, religion, or disability, are reported less often, though they remain present in some cases.

Graph 37: If other students have ever behaved badly toward you, why do you think they did that? (Students who experienced violence, N=826)



In terms of responses to school violence, the majority of students who have experienced such incidents indicate that they sought assistance, with parents being the predominant source of support. Boys tend to report instances of violence more frequently than girls, whereas girls more often internalise these experiences, which may increase their exposure to longer-term adverse effects. Teachers are acknowledged as significant, although underutilised, sources of support, while school psychologists and counsellors are infrequently consulted. These findings highlight the importance of improving the visibility and accessibility of professional support services within the school environment.

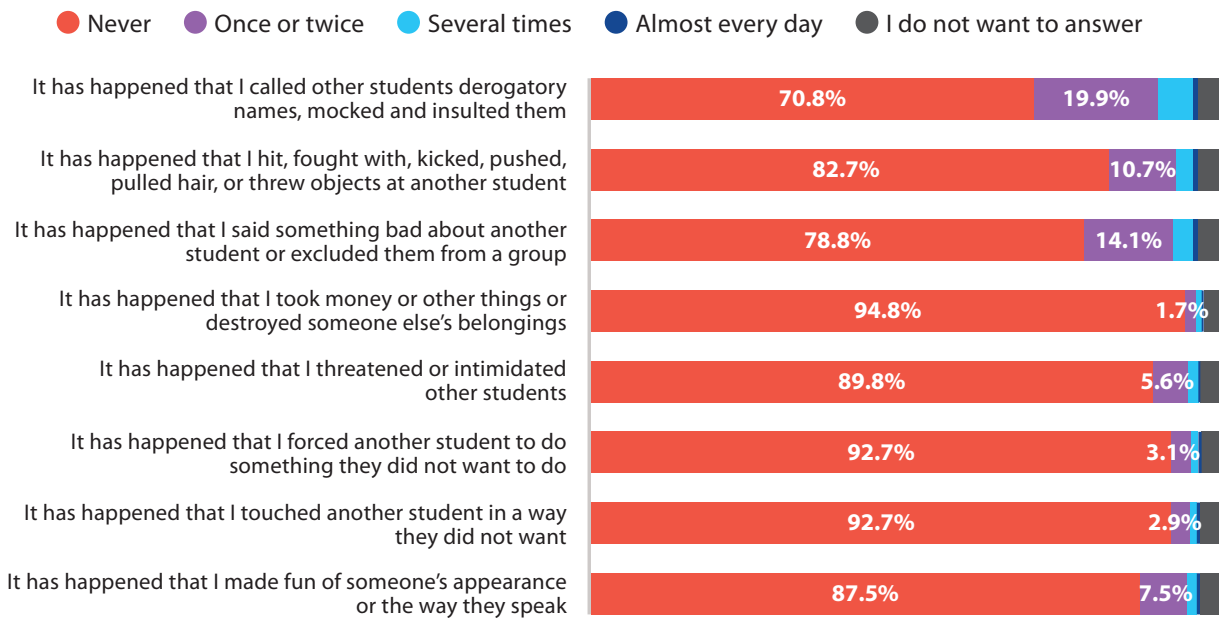
Graph 38: Who did you tell? (Multiple answers possible) (Students who experienced violence and reported it to someone, N=588)



The following section of the chapter analyses students' experiences as perpetrators, including the frequency and types of violent behaviour they have themselves displayed towards their peers. Understanding these patterns offers insights into the dynamics of peer violence from the perspective of those who engage in it and informs the design of targeted prevention initiatives that combine disciplinary measures with the promotion of empathy, conflict management skills, and constructive peer interactions.

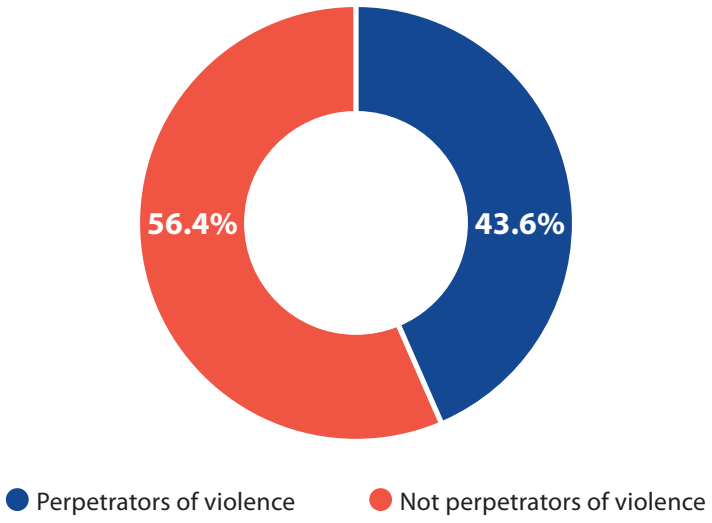
The results show that most students report never having engaged in the listed violent behaviours, suggesting that violence is not a dominant pattern of behaviour among the respondents.
Nevertheless, a considerable number of students report occasional involvement in different forms of violence, with verbal aggression emerging as the most common.

Graph 39: Have you ever done any of the following to another young person?



In total, nearly half of the students surveyed (43.6%) indicate that they have engaged in some form of violent behaviour towards their peers on at least one occasion. Reported behaviours include calling peers derogatory names, mocking, insulting, gossiping, excluding others from groups, hitting, threatening, coercing, or otherwise acting violently.

Graph 40: Have the students committed at least one form of violence?

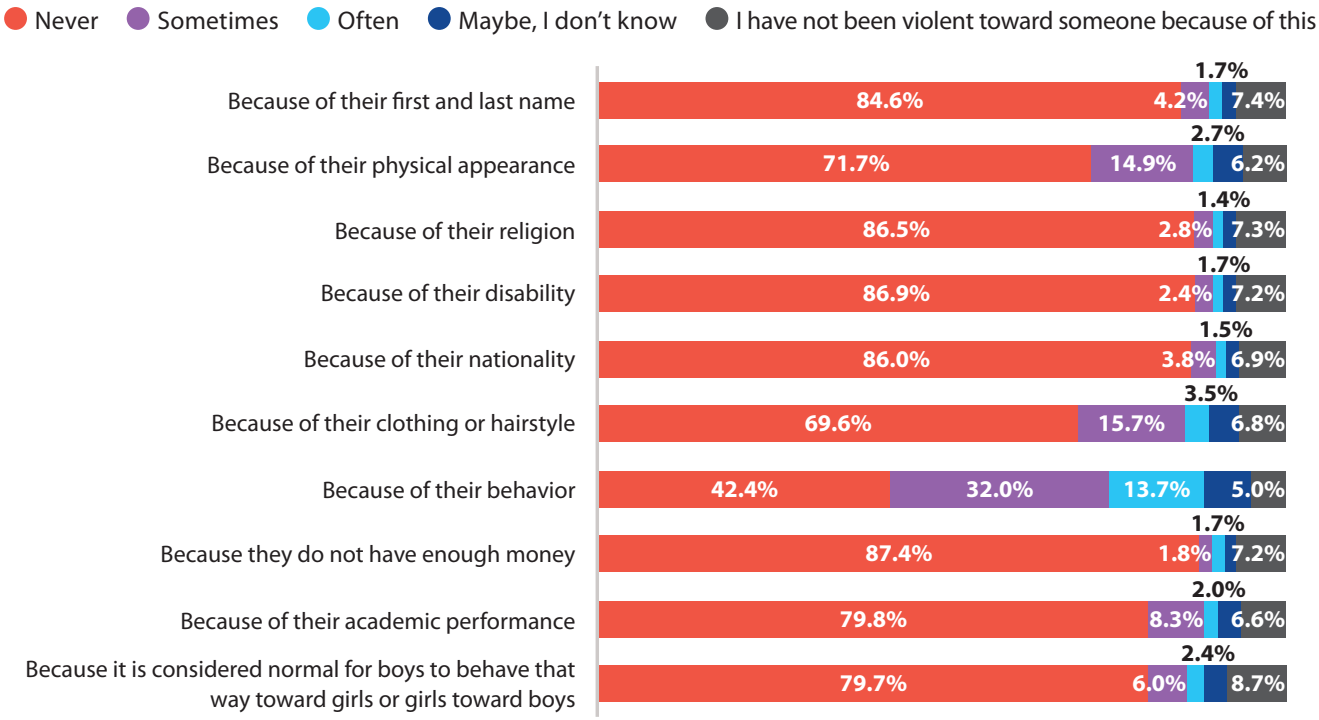


It should be noted that these findings are based on students' self-reports of violent behaviour, offering an informative but inherently limited source of data. While self-reporting allows for direct insight into students' actions as perpetrators, responses may be affected by social desirability, with some students potentially minimising or denying their behaviours due to fear of censure or repercussions.

When analysed by gender, male students are considerably more likely to be classified as perpetrators of violent behaviour (52.2%) compared with female students (36.2%). Over half of the school boys self-report having engaged in violent actions towards peers at least once, whereas the proportion among girls is slightly above one third.

Findings indicate that the majority of students who have engaged in violent behaviour generally refute having acted out for discriminatory or prejudiced reasons. Across most categories examined (including name, religion, disability, nationality, and socio-economic status), more than 86% of respondents report that they have never directed violence for these reasons, while an additional 6-7% select responses implying the same.

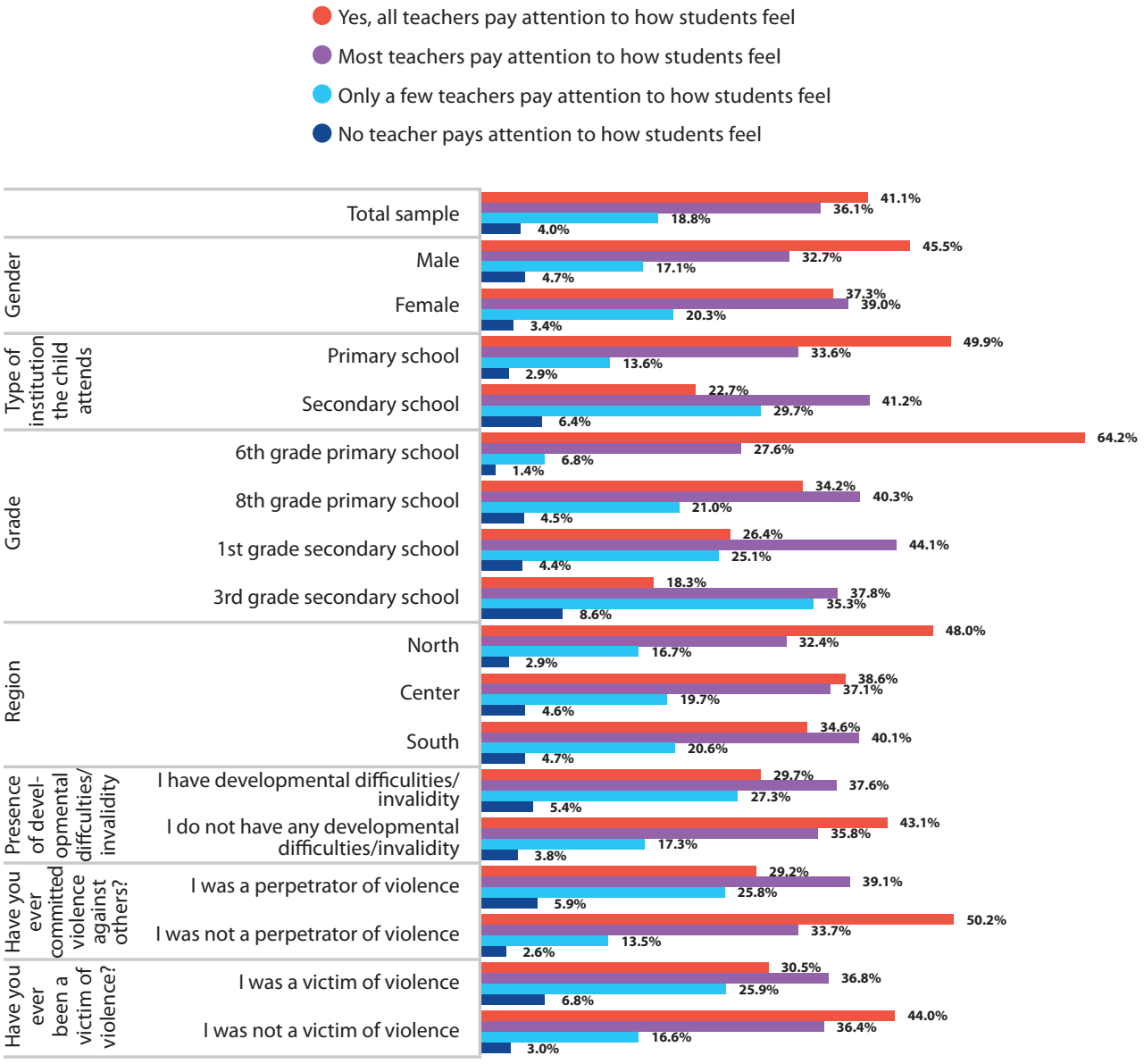
Nevertheless, for certain motives, higher levels of self-reported justification are apparent, with the victim's behaviour emerging as the most commonly recognised factor.



The relationship between students and teachers represents one of the key factors shaping students' experiences in the school environment and their willingness to report violence or seek help. Students more often report being treated fairly and feeling safe in their communication with teachers, particularly in primary schools, where relationships with teachers are more personal and more frequently based on continuous contact. However, a decline in students' perceptions of their relationships with teachers becomes apparent with increasing age. Secondary school students are less likely to view teachers as empathetic or supportive, reporting increased feelings of distance, formality, and limited teacher engagement with their personal concerns. These findings suggest that during adolescence the relationship between students and the school changes, with teachers increasingly perceived less as a source of support and more solely as authority figures or evaluators.

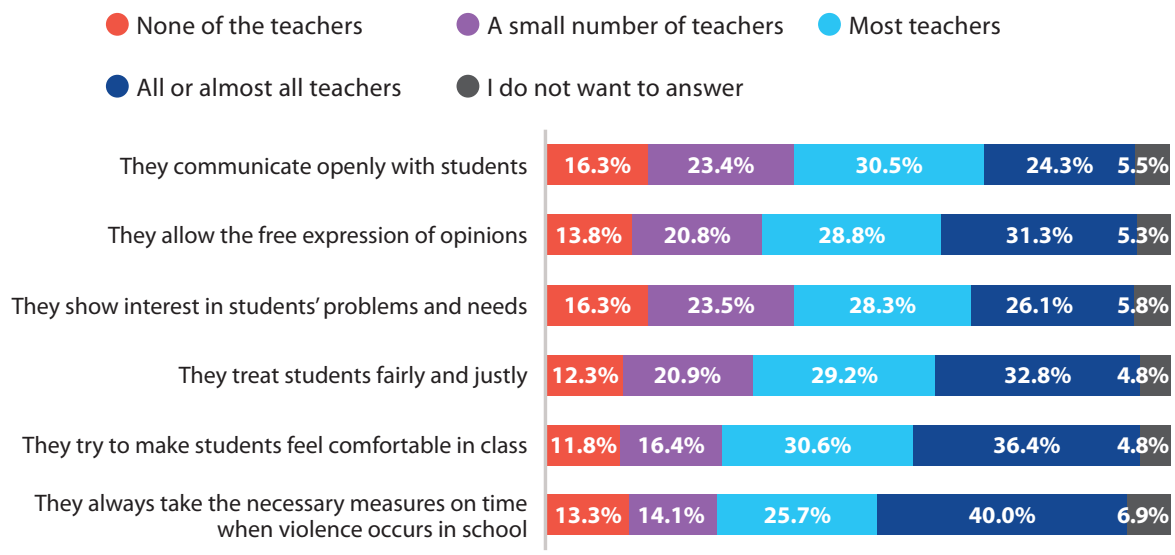
It is particularly noteworthy that students who have experienced peer violence express significantly higher levels of distrust towards teachers and show a lower willingness to turn to them for help. These students more often believe that teachers do not always respond in a timely manner, that they minimise problems, or that they are unaware of what is happening among students. Such perceptions further increase the risk of violence going unreported and prolong the duration of negative experiences.

Graph 42: Do you think your teachers care about how students feel? By various characteristics.



It is precisely the relationship between teachers and students that shapes the overall school climate. Students' perceptions of how teachers treat them directly influence both the prevention of and responses to peer violence. The results indicate a predominantly positive perception of teachers' attitudes towards students. Most students believe that the majority, or all, of their teachers behave in a desirable manner across key dimensions.

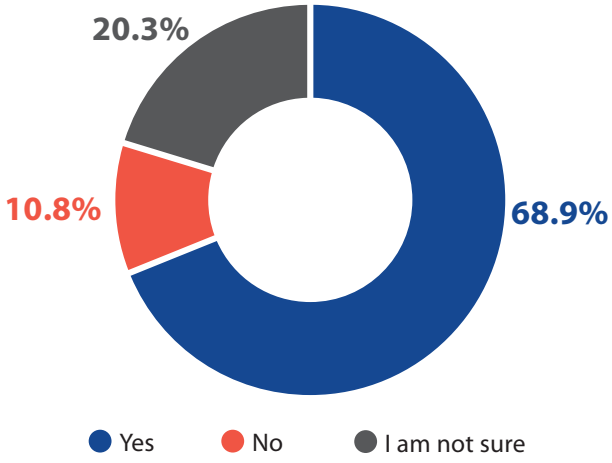
Graph 43: Now think about how teachers at your school, overall, treat students. How many teachers behave in the following ways?



The results indicate a predominantly positive perception of teachers' attitudes towards students. Most students believe that the majority, or all, of their teachers behave in a desirable manner across key dimensions. However, it is concerning that, for each dimension, more than one in ten students report that none of their teachers display such desirable behaviour.

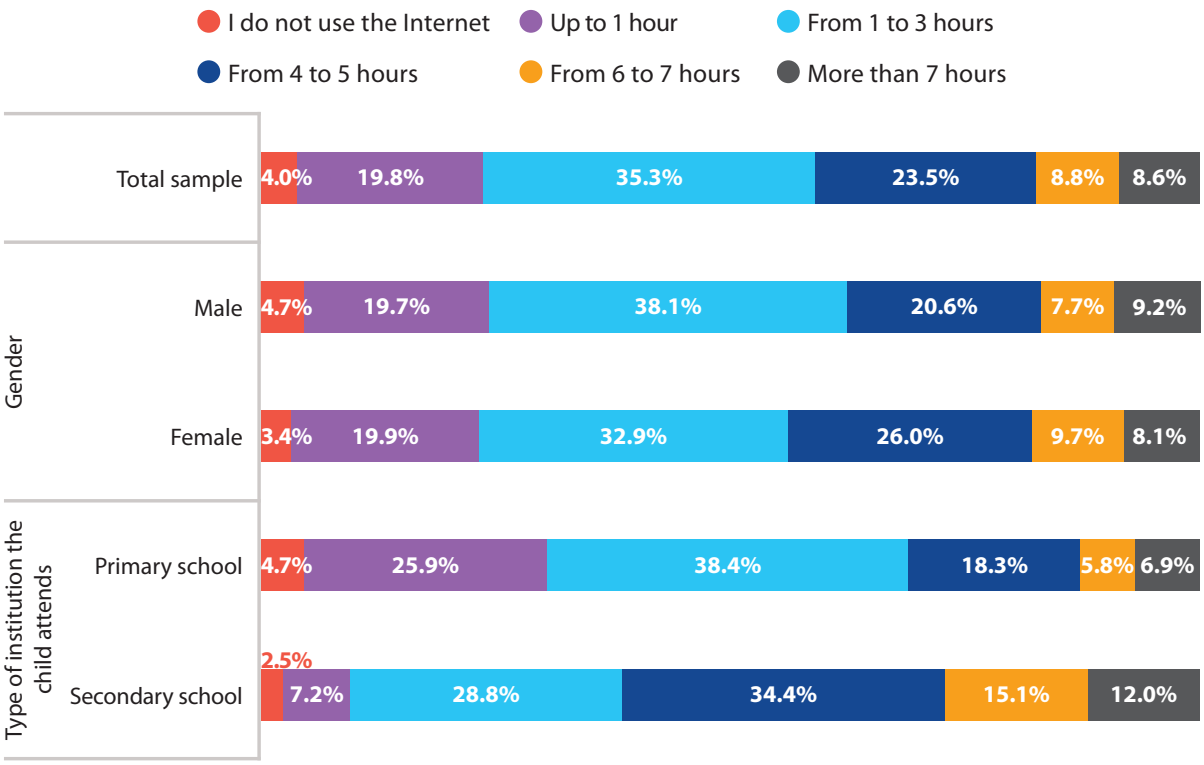
Trust between students and teachers represents an invaluable resource that schools and relevant institutions could further strengthen in order to make schools even safer and more welcoming environments for students. In this regard, it is encouraging that as many as two thirds of students report having a teacher with whom they can talk if something is bothering them at school.

Graph 44: Do you have a teacher you can talk to if something bothers you at school?



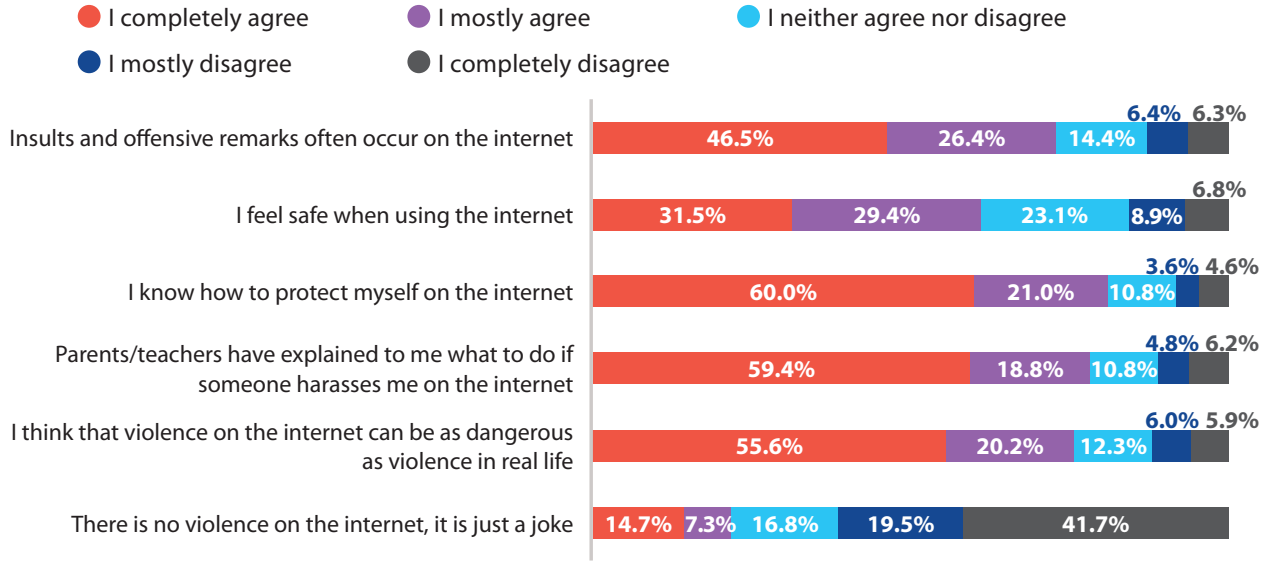
The digital environment plays an important role in students' experiences. Almost all students use the internet, primarily through their personal mobile phones, with secondary school students spending considerably more time online.

Graph 45: How much time do you spend on the internet on weekdays?



Students report that insults on the internet are common and that cyberbullying can be serious. The most frequently mentioned unpleasant experiences include being recorded or photographed without consent, receiving offensive messages, and being excluded from online groups.

Graph 46: To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



Overall, the findings from the students' perspective indicate that, for most students, school represents a relatively safe and inclusive environment. At the same time, however, a significant number of students are exposed to various forms of violence, particularly verbal, social, and digital. Students with disabilities, those experiencing heightened anxiety, and older primary school students appear to be particularly vulnerable. These findings clearly point to the need for a systemic and preventive approach that simultaneously strengthens students' emotional wellbeing, peer support, and the availability of help within the school environment.

7. The Parent-Child as the Unit of Analysis: Perception Gaps and Their Implications

7.1. Key Findings

- The analysis consistently shows that parents and children often perceive the same phenomena differently, whether in relation to violence, anxiety, or online risks. This gap is not marginal; it affects a substantial portion of the sample and represents a systemic pattern rather than an exception.
- Across multiple dimensions, ranging from anxiety to online harassment, parents tend to perceive the problem as less severe than it is experienced by their children. This finding suggests that a substantial portion of children's experiences remains either unrecognised or underestimated.
- The analysis shows that girls are more likely to experience a greater gap in perception, particularly regarding the emotional and psychological aspects of wellbeing. This suggests that their experiences are more often "invisible" to adults, even when signs of distress are present.
- Although differences emerge according to the family's educational and material status, they do not fully explain the variations in perceptions of violence and risk. In families with higher levels of education or a more stable financial situation, the perception gap is also present.
- The results clearly show that differences in perception increase with age. Among secondary school students, parents are considerably more likely to underestimate both emotional difficulties and exposure to violence compared with parents of younger children. This suggests that as children gain greater autonomy and digital independence, parents have less insight into the challenges they face in their daily lives.
- Although a significant number of children use more online platforms than their parents recognise, this in itself does not increase the likelihood that violence will go unnoticed. In other words, children's online presence is not, by itself, a sufficient condition for "invisible violence". The key issue is not the amount of digital activity, but rather how it is discussed and understood.

7.2. Analysis of the Key Findings in the Dyadic Research Design

One of the most important methodological strengths of this research is the use of a dyadic research design, in which the parent and the child form a single unit of analysis. This approach goes significantly beyond standard research models in which children and parents are treated as separate and unrelated groups of respondents. Instead, the dyadic design allows children's experiences and parents' perceptions to be analysed in direct relation to one another, within the same family context.

The principal advantage of this design is that it goes beyond measuring the prevalence of particular phenomena and enables the identification of perception gaps, that is, discrepancies between children's reported experiences and parents' awareness of them. In domains such as school violence, psychological well-being, and exposure to online risks, these gaps represent some of the most significant findings, as they reveal situations in which children's difficulties remain unrecognised, underestimated, or misinterpreted by adults.

The strength of the findings generated through this approach lies in the fact that a parent's response can be directly compared with the response of their own child, rather than with the average response of a different group of children. This eliminates a large portion of the noise typically present in conventional comparisons between independent samples. The analysis is therefore not based on abstract differences between groups, but on concrete relationships within the family, which significantly enhances the interpretative value of the results.

A particularly important contribution of this design is its ability to identify so-called "invisible problems", that is, situations in which a child reports violence, emotional distress, or risky online experiences, while the parent simultaneously believes that such problems do not exist. Such findings have significant practical implications and strong potential to inform further action in the prevention of violence, as they clearly highlight the limits of parental awareness and the need for targeted interventions that cannot be based solely on parental assessments.

In addition, the dyadic design makes it possible to analyse both the direction and the intensity of differences in perception, that is, whether parents systematically underestimate or overestimate certain risks and experiences of their children. This creates space not only for descriptive analysis, but also for understanding structural patterns in family communication, supervision, and trust. The findings generated through this approach provide a strong empirical basis for recommendations directed at parents, schools, and institutions responsible for child protection.

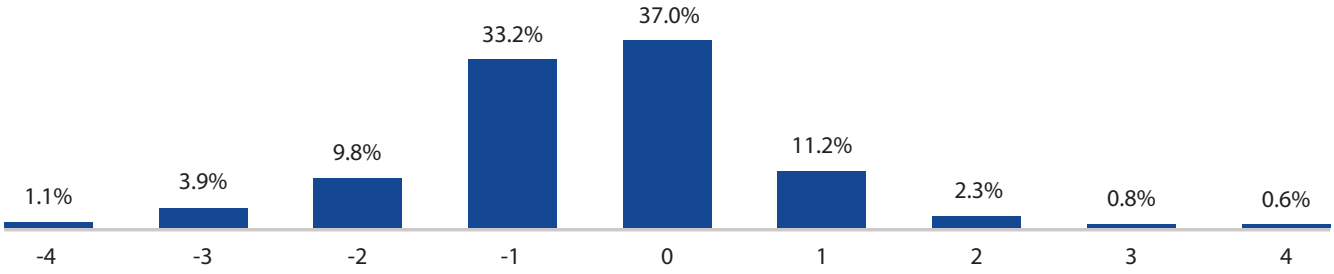
Within this study, parents and children were linked through a unique identification variable (CODE), with each code representing a single parent-child dyad. The codes were distributed to parents or guardians through the consent forms, and parents were instructed to enter the assigned code at the beginning of the survey. Children subsequently received the same code through the consent process and were likewise asked to enter it before proceeding with the questionnaire. Using this procedure, responses from 644 parent-child dyads were successfully matched, corresponding to a total of 1,288 respondents. Among these, 482 dyads (964 respondents) involved parents and children attending primary school, while 162 dyads (324 respondents) involved parents and children attending secondary school.

In this section of the report, the analysis is conducted exclusively at the dyadic level, without treating parents and children as independent units of analysis. The emphasis is placed on assessing levels of agreement, identifying perception gaps and their direction, and detecting patterns in which parental perceptions diverge from children's reported experiences. Additional attention is devoted to the construction of composite indicators (indices of anxiety, exposure to violence, and online risks) in order to enhance the analytical robustness of the findings.

Children's attitudes towards school represent an important indicator of their overall wellbeing, sense of belonging, and motivation to learn. The way a child perceives school, whether they attend with enthusiasm, indifference, or resistance, is closely linked to their emotional state, the quality of their relationships with peers and teachers, as well as to the broader family and social environment. For this reason, understanding this relationship is crucial not only for education policy, but also for the prevention of emotional difficulties and early forms of disengagement from the education system.

The variable "how much the child likes school" was constructed on the basis of responses provided by both the child and the parent to the same question, with responses coded on an ordinal scale. For the purposes of the analysis, the perception gap between the parent and the child was calculated as the difference between their two values (parent-child). Negative values indicate that the parent underestimates how much the child likes school, while positive values indicate an overestimation. This approach allows for a direct comparison of perceptions within the same parent–child pair.

Graph 48: How much do children like going to school?



Findings indicate that parental and child perceptions regarding the extent to which children enjoy school frequently diverge. In approximately 37% of cases, parents and children are in complete agreement, whereas in most other cases a perceptual gap is observed. Underestimation is the predominant pattern, with nearly half of parents (48%) judging their children's enjoyment of school to be lower than the children report.

In order to obtain a reliable and substantively valid indicator of children's emotional state, an **anxiety index** was constructed in the study based on several individual indicators measuring different aspects of internal distress and emotional discomfort. Rather than relying on a single question, which may be influenced by momentary mood or situational factors, a composite approach was used, enabling a more stable and robust assessment.

The children's anxiety index was constructed as the arithmetic mean of responses to five statements covering key dimensions of anxiety: frequent worry, nervousness in new situations, feelings of sadness or low mood, the presence of fears, and difficulties in relaxing.[3] Taken together, these items capture both the emotional and cognitive aspects of anxiety, thereby reducing the risk that the result reflects a temporary state or an isolated experience.

The same index concept was applied to parental responses, with parents assessing the same aspects of their child's emotional functioning. This ensured methodological symmetry between the child's and the parent's perspectives: both indices are based on identical indicators measured on the same scales, enabling direct and valid comparison between the two assessments.

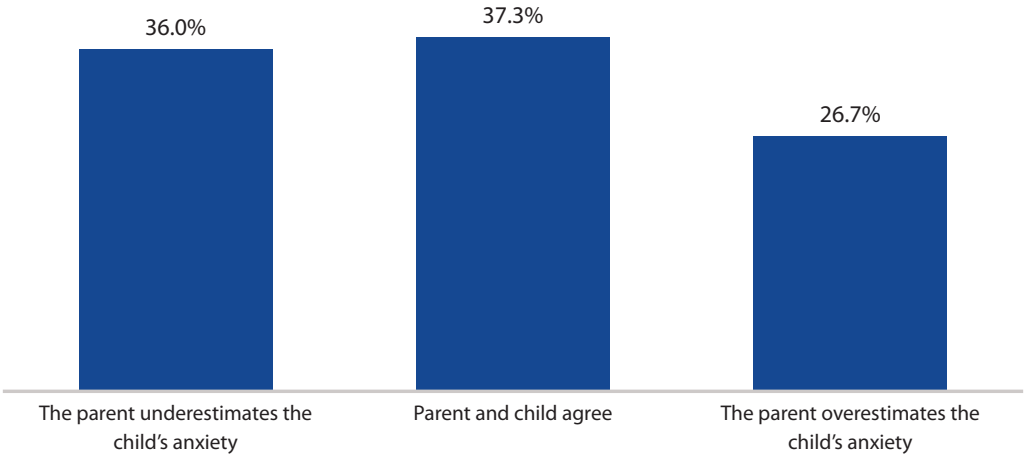
[3] - I often get anxious, even when there's nothing to worry about
- I get anxious in new situations and my confidence drops easily
- I often feel sad, unhappy, or tearful."
- I'm scared of a lot of things and I frighten easily
- It's hard for me to relax

For each parent-child dyad, the discrepancy between parental and child assessments (parent minus child) was computed. Three categories were subsequently defined:

1. Parental underestimation of child anxiety - where the parent's rating is lower than the child's (negative discrepancy),
2. Parent-child concordance - where assessments are equal or show minimal difference (discrepancy close to zero),
3. Parental overestimation of child anxiety - where the parent reports higher anxiety than indicated by the child (positive discrepancy).

This method facilitates examination not only of anxiety levels but also the direction and intensity of the perceptual gap, offering a significant analytical advantage of the dyadic design.

Graph 49: Anxiety index, parent-child comparison



Analysis revealed that parents underestimated their child's anxiety in 36.0% of dyads, indicating that over a third of children report higher levels of emotional discomfort than acknowledged by their parents. This highlights the existence of "invisible" emotional distress, which may remain unnoticed and unaddressed within daily family interactions.

Regression analysis was used in this section to explore the interplay of child, family, and contextual factors and to assess their influence on the misalignment between child-reported anxiety and parental perception.

The analysis used the anxiety gap as the dependent variable, calculated as the difference between parental ratings and the child's self-reported anxiety. Positive values reflect parental overestimation of the child's anxiety, whereas negative values reflect underestimation of the child's emotional state.

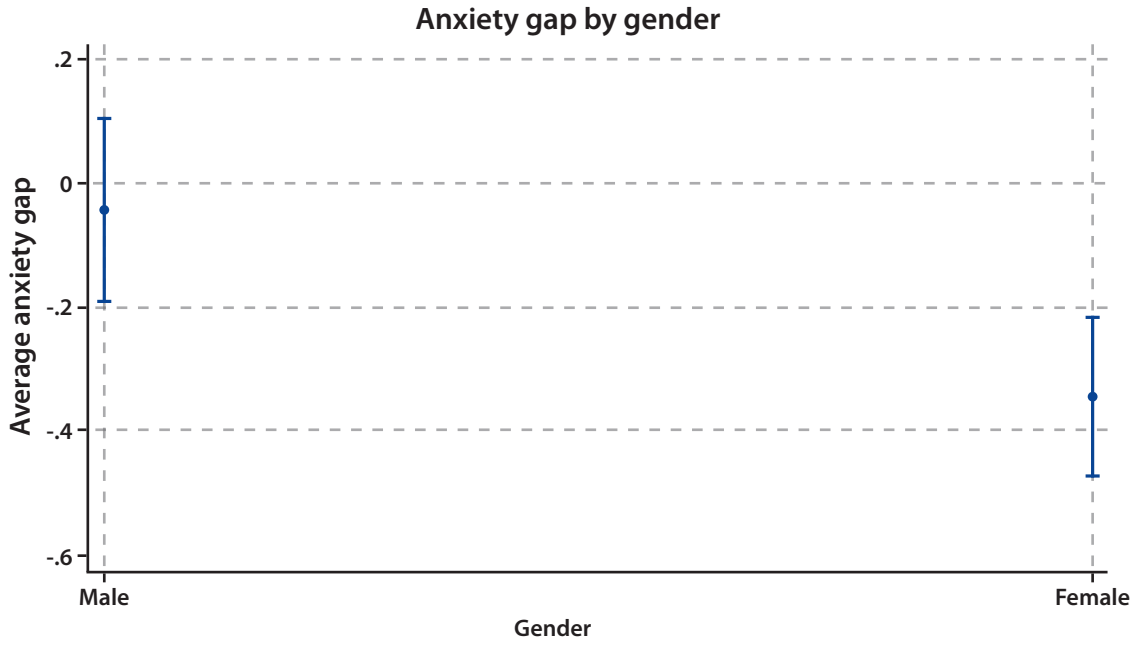
The regression models incorporated the following sets of predictors:

- Child-level characteristics (gender, school type),
- Family-level characteristics (parental education, household financial status),
- Contextual factors (geographic region).

This approach enables the simultaneous examination of both individual and structural factors that may influence parental perception.

The findings reveal that the child's gender is a significant predictor of discrepancies in anxiety assessment, with girls showing a negative effect of -0.34.

Graph 50: Anxiety gap - results of the regression model



This means that, on average, parents underestimate the level of anxiety among girls by about one third of a scale point more than they do among boys, even when other relevant characteristics such as parental education, household financial situation, and type of school are controlled for. In other words, under the same objective conditions, girls exhibit higher levels of anxiety than parents perceive, and this perception gap is systematically larger than it is for boys.

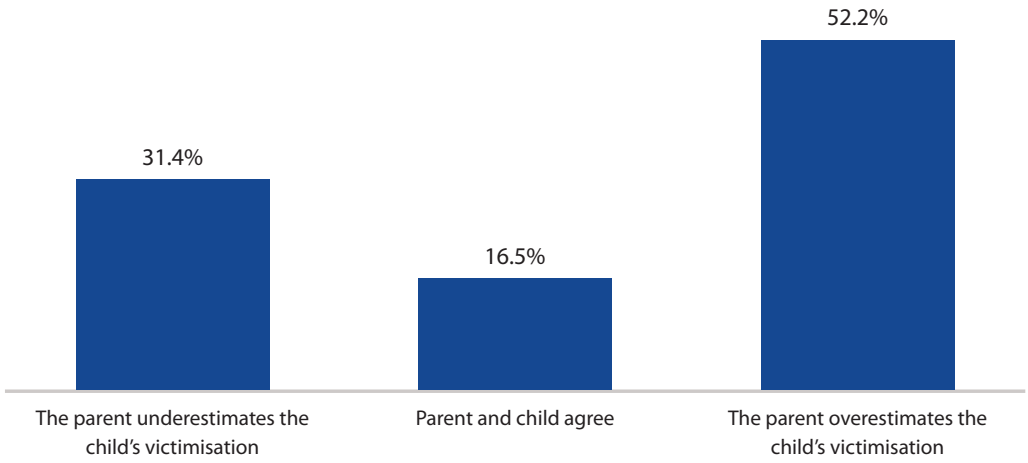
The findings further suggest that these discrepancies are more closely linked to familial factors than to peer-related dynamics. Systematic underestimation of children's difficulties by parents implies that children's emotional experiences are either not fully acknowledged or are interpreted differently within the household. This reflects patterns embedded in family communication, normative expectations, and the ways in which emotions, vulnerabilities, and challenges are addressed.

Experiences of violence and harassment in the school environment represent one of the key factors shaping children's wellbeing, their sense of safety, and their relationship with school. In this study, a **victimisation index** was developed to capture multiple forms of violent behaviour to which children may have been exposed at school. The index was constructed on the basis of responses to five questions covering different forms of victimisation, ranging from verbal insults and social exclusion to physical violence and inappropriate behaviour. In this way, it becomes possible to assess the overall intensity of exposure to violence rather than focusing on individual incidents alone.

The victimisation index was computed separately for children and parents, enabling a direct comparison of their respective perceptions of the same experiences[4]. This approach allows for the examination of both the overall level of victimisation and potential discrepancies in how these experiences are understood and interpreted by children and their parents.

To gain deeper insight, the perception gap between parents and children was analysed. The gap was calculated by subtracting the child's index score from that of the parent. The resulting differences were then categorised into three groups: agreement between parent and child (index difference less than 1), underestimation of victimisation by the parent, and overestimation by the parent.

Graph 51: Gap in the victimisation index



The analysis of the gap within the parent-child pairs reveal a different nuance: in more than half of the cases, parents assess that the child is exposed to a higher level of victimisation than the child reports themselves. This indicates that the differences are generally small but frequent, and tend to move in the direction of parental "overestimation". In other words, although children on average report a higher intensity of victimisation, parents more often slightly exaggerate their child's experience compared with the child's own self-assessment.

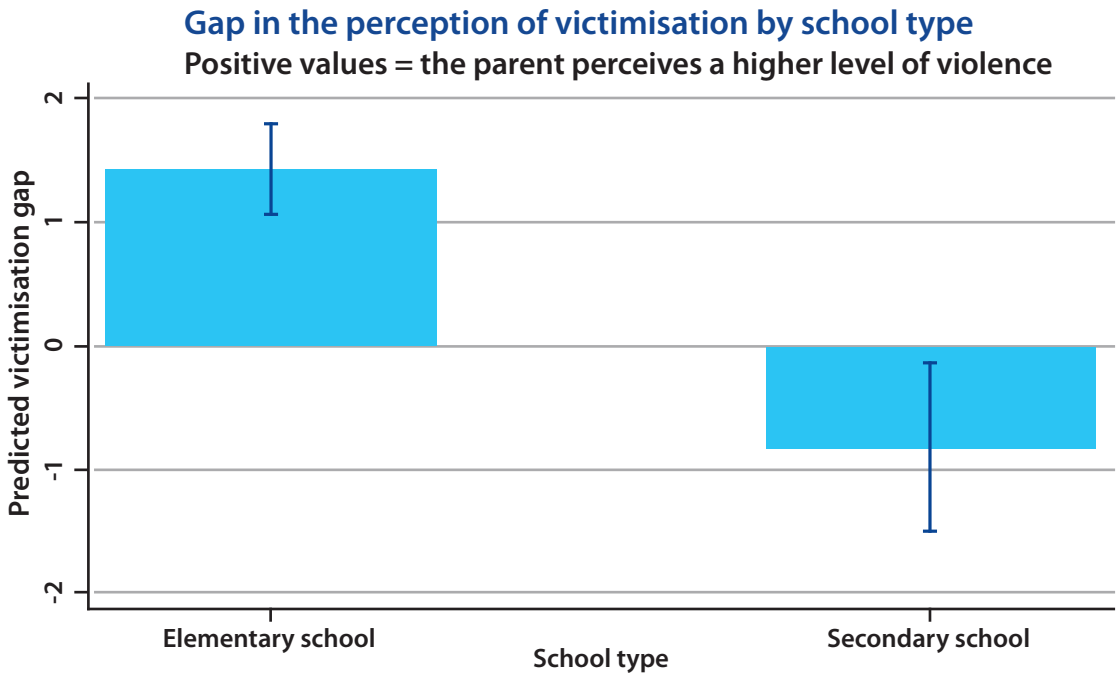
Notably, this pattern shifts markedly when considering the school category in relation to the victimisation perception gap within the multivariate model.

[4] The index was based on the following items:
p1 - the child was called derogatory names, mocked, or insulted;
p2 - the child was physically attacked (hit, pushed, kicked, etc.);
p3 - rumours were spread about the child, they were gossiped about, or socially excluded;
p4 - the child's personal belongings were taken or destroyed;
p5 - the child was exposed to inappropriate physical contact or comments related to their body.

In primary schools, the average gap is positive, meaning that parents, on average, estimate a higher level of victimisation than that reported by the children themselves. In other words, parents of primary school students are more likely to believe that their child is exposed to violence to a greater extent than the child reports. The confidence interval lies entirely above zero, indicating that this effect is stable and statistically robust.

In secondary schools, the gap reverses, becoming negative: children report higher levels of victimisation than parents recognise. Here, parents systematically underestimate their child's experiences, with the confidence interval entirely below zero. This suggests that, with increasing age, the dynamics of communication and perception also change, with older children more often experiencing forms of violence that remain "invisible" to their parents.

Graph 52: Effect of school type on the gap in the perception of victimisation

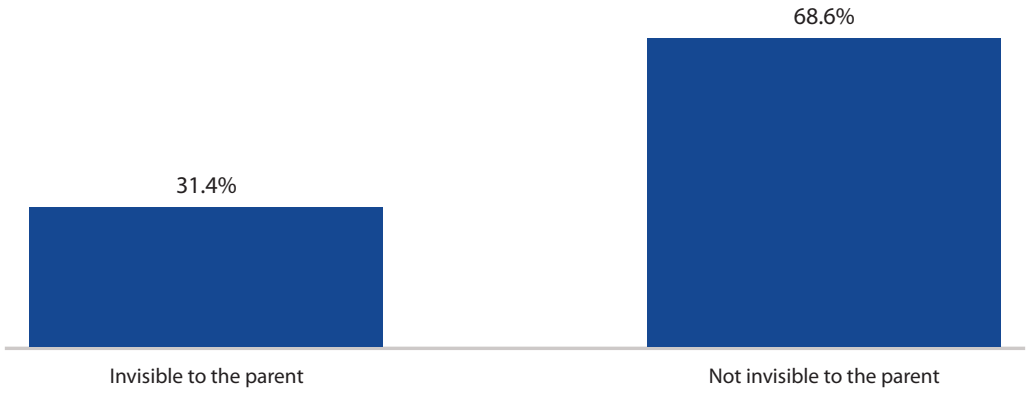


A particularly important concept in this study is so-called **invisible violence**, which refers to forms of violence experienced by children but not recognised or reported by their parents. These are situations in which a child indicates that they have been exposed to violence, while the parent assesses that no violence has occurred. Such experiences often remain hidden from adults, as they do not manifest through open conflicts, physical injuries, or clear signals, but rather occur through more subtle forms, such as social exclusion, verbal belittling, cyberbullying, or repeated "minor" incidents that children perceive as significant.

This concept is especially important because it highlights the limits of parental insight into children's everyday experiences, particularly in school and digital settings, where much interaction takes place outside direct adult supervision.

Invisible violence constitutes a particular subset of the perception gap in victimisation, specifically the segment with the most significant social impact. As demonstrated in the preceding section, the data indicates that approximately one-third of all violence experienced by children goes unrecognised by their parents.

Graph 53: Invisible violence

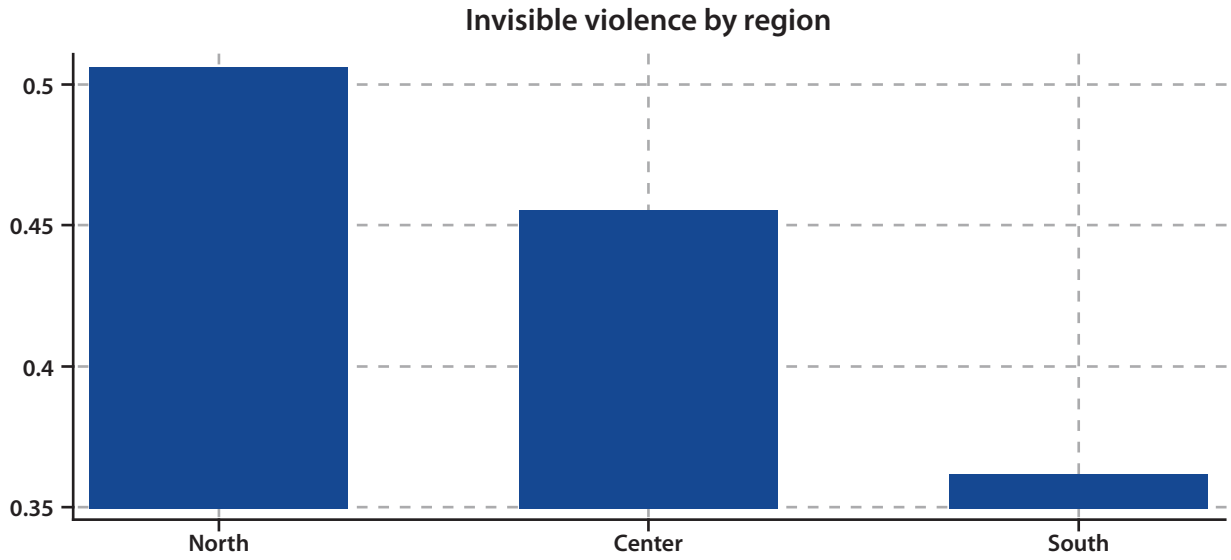


To identify factors associated with invisible violence, we applied logistic regression in which the dependent variable was defined as a situation where the child reports violence while the parent does not recognise it (i.e. underestimates it). The model includes key sociodemographic and contextual variables: the child's gender, parental education, the household's financial situation, type of school, and region. In this way, we estimate which factors increase or decrease the likelihood that experiences of violence remain "invisible" to parents.

The most pronounced effect is observed in relation to the type of school. Secondary school students have a significantly higher likelihood that their experiences of violence remain invisible to their parents compared with primary school students. Given that the results show invisible violence to be more prevalent among secondary school students, this points to a strong developmental and peer dynamic, which in this case has a considerably greater influence than factors originating within the family. As children enter adolescence, their autonomy increases, their social circles expand, and the importance of peers becomes more dominant in relation to the family. During this period, communication with parents often becomes more selective, while experiences, particularly sensitive ones such as violence or humiliation, are more likely to remain within the peer sphere. This helps explain why parents of older children have less insight into their children's experiences, not necessarily due to a lack of interest, but rather because of changing developmental dynamics and relationship structures.

Regional differences are also evident. Compared with the northern region, children from the southern region have a significantly lower likelihood of experiencing invisible violence. This means that parents in the south are more likely to recognise their children's experiences of violence than parents in the northern regions.

Graph 54: Invisible violence - effect of region in the multivariate model



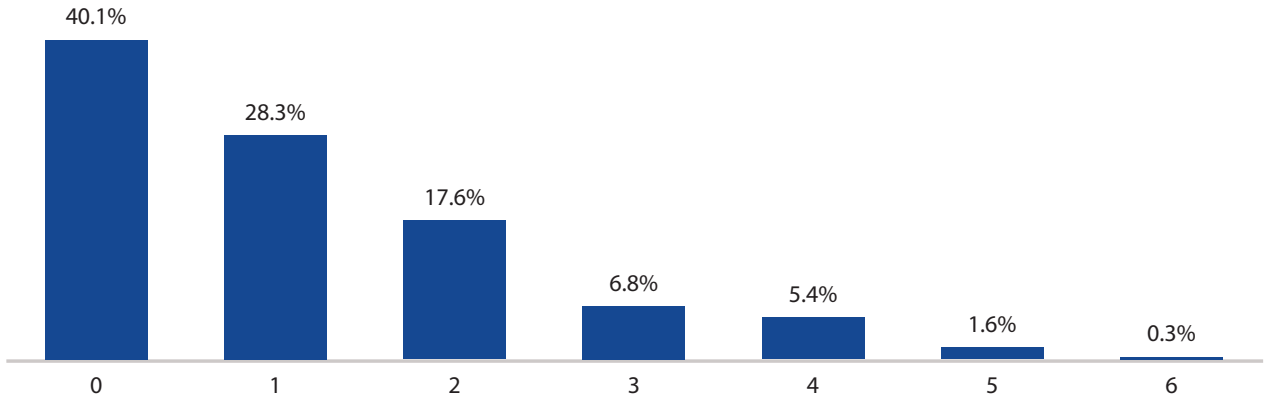
The digital environment appears to exacerbate the perceptual gap between parents and children: interactions take place outside the direct supervision of adults, distinctions between playful behaviour and bullying are frequently ambiguous, and experiences may rapidly escalate or disseminate without visible cues. This suggests that "invisible violence" is particularly likely to occur online, where parents typically have limited visibility into the content, peer interactions, and relational dynamics. In contrast to the school setting, where adults maintain some level of institutional oversight, online spaces operate largely beyond parental control. Accordingly, discrepancies in perception regarding children's digital behaviours, risk exposure, and online victimisation are likely to be more pronounced.

In order to quantify this phenomenon, an online discrepancy indicator was developed, capturing the difference between the number of digital platforms reported by the child as being used and the number reported by the parent[5].

A positive score on this indicator reflects that the child engages with more online platforms than acknowledged by the parent, signalling a portion of online activity that is effectively "invisible" to the parent. Each unit represents the count of platforms reported by the child but unreported by the parent. A score of zero denotes complete agreement between parent and child regarding the number of platforms used.

[5] Specifically:
- for each child, the total number of platforms they use was calculated (e.g., social media, messaging apps, video platforms, etc.);
- next, the number of platforms the parent believes the child uses was determined;
- the difference between these two figures represents the online gap.

Graph 55: Online gap in the number of platforms used by the child and reported by parents

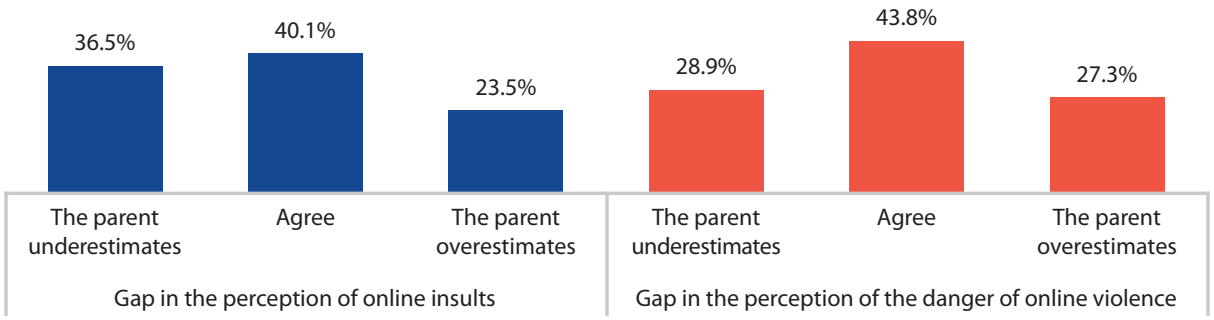


The majority of children (40.1%) are classified in category 0, indicating that parents in these instances correctly identify all the online platforms accessed by their child. Nonetheless, for almost 60% of children there exists some level of online discrepancy, with each child engaging on at least one platform unrecognised by the parent. The most frequently observed magnitude of this gap is moderate: 28.3% of children use one additional platform beyond parental awareness, while a further 17.6% use two.

Subsequently, two measures were developed to assess the perceptual gap between children and parents regarding online safety. The objective was not merely to identify the occurrence of cyber-bullying, but to examine how these experiences are understood by children relative to parental awareness. This divergence in perception serves as a crucial marker of potentially "invisible" risk.

The first measure captures the frequency of online insults, while the second measure reflects the perceived seriousness of cyberbullying.

Graph 56: Gap in the perception of online danger between parents and children



Findings indicate a considerable perceptual gap between children and parents concerning online risks, evident in both the reported frequency of online insults and the perceived severity of cyberbullying. While alignment of views occurs in some families, a substantial share of parent-child dyads exhibit divergence, suggesting that the digital environment frequently remains partially "invisible" to adults.

In terms of online insults, parents are more likely to underestimate the extent of their child's exposure, with children reporting higher frequencies of such incidents than parents perceive.

In contrast, differences in the perceived severity of cyberbullying are relatively balanced, with some parents overestimating and others underestimating the seriousness of these experiences. This highlights that discrepancies in perception extend beyond the prevalence of bullying to its meaning and potential consequences.

Descriptive statistics and more sophisticated modelling both suggest that discrepancies in platform usage do not translate into greater disparities in perceived online risk. Although the so-called "online gap" is widespread, it is insufficient in itself to account for instances of invisible bullying. The mere fact that a child engages with more digital platforms than parents are aware of does not imply that bullying will go unnoticed. These results underscore that, in understanding invisible bullying, relational quality, communication, and familial trust are more influential than the quantity of a child's digital activity.

8. Overview of the Key Findings from the Qualitative Study: Focus Groups

The qualitative component of the study, based on focus groups with students, parents, teachers, and professional support staff, provides deeper insight into the everyday experiences, meanings, and emotions underlying the quantitative findings. These discussions clearly show that violence in schools is not perceived solely through visible incidents, but also through long-term patterns of relationships, feelings of insecurity, and a lack of trust in the protection system. The qualitative findings confirm that violence has subtle yet profound consequences for school life, particularly when it remains unreported or becomes normalised.

Within the framework of this research, a total of fourteen focus groups were conducted, covering different age groups and roles within the school system. Focus groups were organised with primary and secondary school students, parents of school-aged children, as well as teachers and professional support staff. Four focus groups were conducted with primary school students, including two with sixth-grade students and two with eighth-grade students. Five focus groups were held with secondary school students, two with first-year students and three with third-year students. In addition, three focus groups were conducted with parents of school-aged children, as well as two focus groups with teachers and school counsellors, ensuring a multi-perspective analysis of peer violence and school relationships. Instead of conducting a single focus group with children with disabilities, interviews were carried out with pupils who have a form of disability, thereby ensuring that their perspective was also included in this research.

Students perceive school as an ambivalent space: at once a place of social interaction and routine, but also a potential source of insecurity. Even when they do not directly experience violence, awareness of violent incidents in the broader environment contributes to a persistent sense of caution.

"School's alright because of my friends, but you never feel completely safe, because you never know when something might happen."
(Girl, Year 8)

The sense of safety depends strongly on the climate within the class. In classes marked by pronounced divisions and hierarchies, students more frequently speak about discomfort and social exclusion, whereas in more cohesive classes the school is experienced as a safer environment. Among secondary school students, a greater distance towards the school as an institution is also evident, while a sense of belonging to the class or to a smaller group of friends becomes the main source of security.

"I go to school because of my mates, not really for the lessons."
(Boy, Year 3)

"My class is fine, but school doesn't matter much to me."
(Girl, Year 1)

Focus group discussions clearly indicate the presence of informal peer hierarchies and "popular" groups that shape classroom dynamics. Students who are not part of these circles often describe experiences of being ignored, excluded, and subtly humiliated. Although they rarely label these experiences as violence, they nevertheless affect them deeply.

"A If you're not in the main gang, it's like you don't even exist."
(Boy, Year 8)

In children's narratives, the boundary between teasing and violence exists, but it is recognised intuitively rather than formally. Children clearly point out that repetition, intent, and an imbalance of power make the key difference, although such behaviours are often tolerated as a "normal part of school life."

"If it happens once, it's a laugh, but if it keeps happening, it's just not funny anymore..."
(Boy, Year 6)

Bystander silence and the passive tolerance of violent behaviours are identified as among the most challenging dimensions of the issue.

"The worst is when everyone just stares in silence."
(Boy, Year 8)

Students clearly distinguish between the ways in which boys and girls tend to engage in conflicts. Physical violence is more often associated with boys and is perceived as short-lived, whereas among girls conflicts are more frequently described as prolonged verbal disputes, exclusion, and damaged relationships, which tend to have a stronger emotional impact.

"Boys fight, then the next day it's like it never happened."
(Girl, Year 6)

"Words can hurt more than a fight."
(Girl, Year 8)

These findings indicate that psychological and social forms of violence are more often minimised, even though students themselves recognise that they can be equally, or even more, harmful than physical violence.

Students perceive cyberbullying as pervasive and particularly difficult due to its permanence and the speed with which it spreads. Although they apply individual strategies of protection, the sense of systemic support remains weak.

"Online is the worst, because it doesn't stop when you get home."
(Boy, Year 8)

"Just one message can stick with you everywhere."
(Girl, Year 3)

A pronounced gender dimension is also evident in cases of cyberbullying and sexual violence, where girls report experiences of judgement and victim-blaming.

"If something happens to a girl online, it's always her fault right away."
(Girl, Year 3)

A student's trust in teachers is key when it comes to reporting violence. They tend to rely on certain individuals, usually their form tutors, rather than seeing the school as a supportive system.

"I can talk to my form tutor, but not the other staff."
(Girl, Year 6)

When problems are ignored, punishments are unfair, or some students are favoured, it really damages trust and puts students off reporting violence.

"Kids would say more if they knew someone'd actually step in."
(Girl, Year 8)

The apprehension of being sanctioned together with the perpetrator further reinforces students' silence and tolerance of violent behaviour.

Parents report concern over the downplaying of violence and the perceived lack of transparency in schools' responses, especially in smaller or more close-knit communities.

"Here, they just shove everything under the rug so that people don't talk about the school having a problem."
(Parent)

Teachers and educational professionals highlight constraints in resources, heavy administrative workloads, and the uneven implementation of procedures.

"It's all on paper, but in practice things are often improvised."
(Pedagogue)

Cyberbullying emerges as a domain where the school's responsibilities remain ambiguous and insufficiently clarified.

"Everything happens outside school, but the consequences are seen in the classroom."
(Pedagogue)

Qualitative analysis highlights that peer violence represents a systemic issue rather than isolated events, shaped by social relationships, silence, normalization, and inconsistent adult intervention. While children demonstrate considerable insight and reflective capacity, they frequently feel unsupported. Confidence in the school as a protective institution is fragile, hinging on particular staff members rather than institutional structures.

"The issue isn't that you can't see the violence, it's that people act as if it doesn't exist."
(Girl, Year 3)

A pronounced gender dimension is also evident in cases of cyberbullying and sexual violence, where girls report experiences of judgement and victim-blaming.

The findings underscore that consistent practices, empathetic engagement, and transparent institutional responses are essential conditions for fostering a safe school climate and interrupting patterns of violence.

"If something happens to a girl online, it's always her fault right away."
(Girl, Year 3)

9. Overview of the Key Findings from Qualitative Study: Interviews

The qualitative component of the research also included interviews with representatives of relevant institutions (education, social and child protection, healthcare, the police, and the Ombudsman), as well as with international organisations, civil society organisations, and professional associations. The aim was to examine how the system in Montenegro recognises and seeks to address peer violence in schools, but also more broadly within the context of children's and young people's development.

The shared message of the interviewees can be summarised in a single sentence: the problem is recognised, but the system still tends to react once violence has occurred rather than preventing it effectively.

Almost all interviewees consider peer violence in Montenegro to be neither an isolated nor a marginal problem. However, they differ in their assessments of whether violence has increased or whether it has simply become more visible.

"I don't think violence has increased dramatically, but it has become more visible. Children report it more, parents are more aware, and the media spreads information faster. "

By contrast, the civil society sector expresses a more measured and cautious perspective:

"Visibility isn't the same as a solution. We still have cases that take a long time before the system responds. "

Interviewees highlight shifts in the character of violence. While physical aggression remains, verbal denigration, social marginalisation, and online harassment have become increasingly prevalent. Digital platforms extend conflicts and erode the distinction between school and private spheres.

"What used to be sorted out in the playground now goes on all night on the phone. The child has no space to escape. "

Children who stand out in any way, whether due to socio-economic circumstances, disability, background, or behaviour, are especially vulnerable.

"Exclusion is quiet, but very harmful in the long run. "
"Special attention should be given to children with disabilities, as they are, I'm afraid, particularly vulnerable. "

Interviewees indicate that a formal regulatory framework has been established, including protocols, guidelines, school-based teams, and mandatory reporting requirements. Yet, its effective implementation varies according to the capacity and expertise of each school.

"The system exists. The question is how effective it is in each school. "

The analysis points to a discrepancy between formal regulations and their practical application.

"Most staff at schools seem either undertrained or completely unaware of these regulations. "

"Anything goes on paper. The real question is if the school's got the people, time, and support to actually do it. "

Civil society representatives notably highlight the lack of systematic policy evaluation. While strategies are in place, there is a shortage of evidence regarding their real-world impact.

"We've got the paperwork, but there isn't enough info to tell if the measures really cut down on violence or just made the procedure official. "

Simultaneously, respondents acknowledge positive progress, especially in terms of schools becoming more responsive to reports and less tolerant of neglecting incidents.

"Nowadays it's much harder to completely cover up a case. "

Schools are acknowledged as key sites for prevention and intervention, yet they represent the most vulnerable point regarding available capacities. The shortage of school psychologists and educational specialists is particularly highlighted.

"In such conditions, the psychologist reacts when a problem occurs. There's no time for preventive workshops. "

According to the participants, teachers experience heavy workloads and are confronted with substantial expectations, often without sufficient support.

"Teachers are supposed to act as teachers, psychologists, and mediators all at once. That's way too much if they don't get extra support. "

Private tutoring, often undertaken for economic reasons, is recognised as an additional factor contributing to teachers' workload.

"If a teacher's doing extra lessons after school, it's tough to expect them to have time for more workshops. "

Nonetheless, some schools have established effective internal procedures and preventive initiatives. The challenge is that these practices remain isolated cases.

"Some schools perform excellently, but it's kept internal. "

Interviewees highlight the importance of sharing best practices and creating structured networks among schools.

They further underscore the necessity of implementing a centralised case-monitoring system, noting that fragmented data hinders effective strategic planning.

Existing support mechanisms are in place, yet they are not consistently accessible in terms of scope or timeliness, especially concerning mental health services.

"Kids need quick and ongoing support. If they wait weeks, the intervention loses its impact. "

Interventions targeting children who have engaged in violent behaviour are acknowledged as insufficiently developed.

"Punishment by itself doesn't change behaviour. You need to work with the kid and their family. "

Respondents highlight that violent behaviour frequently originates within the family context.

"We all know that violence often, in a way, gets passed from parents to their kids. It could be parents being violent to children, or fights between parents that kids see, showing them bad behaviour patterns. "

The role of parents is pivotal, yet complex.

"Parents often come in thinking their kid's a victim of the system. "

Cyberbullying adds an additional layer of complexity. Within this context, participants highlight the risks associated with popular online games that feature open chat functions.

"Parents often assume their kid's safe because they're 'just gaming,' but they don't get that these games are now social networks with open chats. "

Peer violence in Montenegro constitutes a multifaceted issue, closely intertwined with school climate, family dynamics, and the online environment. Although regulatory frameworks are in place, the main challenges pertain to their consistent enforcement, the enhancement of school capacities, and more effective cross-sectoral coordination.

Simultaneously, stakeholder discussions highlight a readiness to acknowledge systemic weaknesses and the need for reform. This combination of problem awareness and receptiveness to change represents a crucial basis for the development of a more efficient, preventative, and coordinated child protection system.

10. Recommendations for Enhancing Prevention and Response to Peer Violence, Cyberbullying, and Violence in Schools

10.1. Evidence-Based Recommendations from the Quantitative Findings

Based on key quantitative findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Implement an early detection and reporting system for school-based violence

Although most staff believe that violence is not common, the data indicate that verbal and social forms of violence are widespread, and that some students occasionally feel afraid to come to school. Standardised recording would help ensure that violence is properly recognised and could reduce the gap between adults' perceptions and students' actual experiences.

2. Target preventive interventions towards verbal and social violence and cyberbullying

The most common forms of violence are not physical, but verbal, social, and online, yet they are often not perceived as "serious". Interventions should therefore focus specifically on these forms, as they often constitute the basis for later, more severe forms of violence and have a strong impact on students' sense of belonging and safety. Peer education could be used as a complementary model, in which older students work with younger ones to help them recognise and respond to these forms of violence.

3. Establish clear, accessible, and confidential reporting mechanisms for students

Although most students confide in their parents, a significantly smaller number turn to the school, particularly to school support services. This points to the need for clear, confidential, and child-friendly reporting channels, accompanied by transparent information about what happens after a report is made. Each school should have clearly visible information indicating who the contact person is, what the reporting process involves, and how students' privacy is protected. Schools should also regularly communicate concrete examples of outcomes (without revealing identities) in order to build trust in the system.

4. Enhance digital safety systematically and regulate the use of mobile devices

Cyberbullying is widespread, while schools and parents apply uneven approaches to preventing this form of violence. Clear, harmonised standards for the use of mobile devices are needed, alongside education for students about digital risks and responsible online behaviour. Parents should also be involved through short workshops on digital risks, as a large proportion of cyberbullying takes place outside the school environment.

In addition, existing guidelines for schools on responding to cases of violence should explicitly and in detail address cyberbullying as a distinct category. This should include specific procedures for recognising, documenting, and responding to cyberbullying, as well as clear guidance on responsibilities in situations where the violence occurs outside school premises and beyond the time the child spends at school.

5. Implement targeted measures for age groups at higher risk (upper primary and secondary levels)

The findings show that violence and feelings of insecurity increase with age, particularly in the higher grades of primary school and in secondary school. Preventive programmes therefore need to be tailored to different developmental stages, with a focus on group dynamics, peer pressure, and digital identity.

6. Increase schools' capacity to respond to violence through enhanced professional support and staff training

Although school staff rate their own competencies for responding to violence in school highly, they simultaneously express a need for additional training and support. Particular attention should be given to recognising "invisible" forms of violence, working with parents, and managing conflict situations.

7. Strengthen collaboration between schools and parents through structured communication

While parents generally trust schools, many are unaware of the procedures for responding to incidents of violence. A systematic approach is required to inform parents of rules, roles, and response protocols, reinforcing partnership rather than relying on sporadic communication. Parents should also be engaged in preventive initiatives to contribute actively to enhanced school-family cooperation.

8. Implement targeted support measures for children at heightened risk

The data indicates that children with disabilities, as well as those who differ in behaviour or appearance, are more frequently exposed to violence. Individualised approaches, additional support, and inclusive practices are therefore necessary in order to reduce isolation and stigmatisation.

It is important to emphasise that the basis for an increased risk of violence is not limited only to visible differences in appearance or behaviour. Research and practical experience indicate that children may also be exposed to violence and discrimination on the grounds of religion, ethnic background, socio-economic status, or family origin. These forms of violence often remain invisible or are not recognised as such, particularly in environments where certain prejudices are deeply embedded in the local context. For this reason, individualised and inclusive approaches must be applied consistently across all settings, rather than selectively according to what the local community recognises as a "legitimate" difference. Training for teachers and professional support staff should explicitly include recognising discrimination on all grounds, including those that may be culturally or locally normalised.

9. Enhancing the school's role as a safe and supportive environment

A proportion of students perceive school in neutral or negative terms, indicating the need to strengthen relationships of trust, belonging, and emotional safety. Schools should be spaces in which students feel seen, heard, and protected.

10. Implement a monitoring system for evaluating measures and informing decisions

It is necessary to establish a system for monitoring key indicators (the prevalence of violence, school responses, and students' sense of safety) and to use these data to inform the planning of interventions and public policies.

10.2. Recommendations Drawn from the Qualitative Research and Expert Interviews

Drawing on the results of the qualitative study, observed challenges in practice, and perspectives of stakeholders from the education, social welfare, and civil society sectors, the following principal recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhancing the preventive function of the education system from early childhood

Prevention of violence should start in early childhood and be maintained consistently across all educational stages. It is vital to systematically foster socio-emotional competencies in children, such as empathy, non-violent communication, emotion management, tolerance, and collaborative skills. These should be embedded within standard curricular and extracurricular programmes rather than implemented as one-off initiatives. Particular attention must be given to the prevention of cyberbullying, accompanied by clear guidelines and an educational approach to the use of digital technologies in schools.

2. Developing effective family support systems

A significant systemic shortcoming is the lack of structured and ongoing support for families whose children are involved in violent incidents, either as victims or perpetrators. It is essential to enhance mechanisms for counselling, psychological assistance, and parent education, including programmes aimed at improving parental competencies and structured "parenting schools." Parents should have clearly identified support channels and confidence in relevant institutions, with efforts to reduce stigma around seeking help. Emphasis should be placed on early intervention, prior to escalation and the need for punitive measures.

3. Enhancing school and specialist service capacities

Schools currently lack sufficient human and institutional capacities to respond adequately to violence. Professional support services (psychologists, pedagogues, and social workers) represent a key resource for prevention, yet their potential is not sufficiently utilised. The number of professional support staff should be systematically increased, with the requirement that every school has a psychologist regardless of the number of students, while their continuous training should be institutionally and permanently regulated.

It is also particularly important to change the perception of the role of school support services. Professional support staff have often been viewed through a "punitive" lens, as individuals to whom children are sent when they have committed a misconduct. This perception needs to be actively changed, as it directly affects whether students will seek help when they need it. The role of professional support staff should be clearly defined and communicated to all stakeholders: early identification of risks, support for students and teachers, coordination with external services, and the implementation of systemic prevention measures.

4. Strengthening the professional competencies of class teachers in leading the class community

The class teacher is often the first and most important adult to recognise dynamics within the class, notice signs of violence or exclusion, and build relationships of trust with students. However, in practice, leading the class community is often reduced to administrative tasks, without clear pedagogical content.

It is therefore recommended to introduce mandatory training for class teachers that would include techniques for facilitating group discussions, recognising and managing group dynamics, methods of sociometric monitoring within the class, procedures for responding to situations of violence, and the link between the class community and violence prevention. The class community period should have a structured and pedagogically designed content, and the class teacher should be recognised as a key actor in preventive work, not merely as an administrator.

The same logic should be applied to parent–teacher meetings. Instead of being limited to the communication of administrative information or discussions about grades, these meetings should become a space for meaningful cooperation between the school and families, including the exchange of information about the school climate, violence prevention, digital safety, and ways in which parents can support their children. Class teachers should be equipped to lead such meetings in a constructive and inclusive manner, rather than simply conveying messages from the school administration. In this way, parent-teacher meetings become part of the preventive system rather than an isolated administrative obligation.

5. Strengthening intersectoral collaboration and clarifying responsibilities

Effective prevention of violence necessitates robust collaboration among the education sector, social work centres, healthcare providers, the police, and civil society organisations. Operational mechanisms for information exchange and coordinated action must be established, with clearly delineated mandates and responsibilities. While existing legislation and protocols are generally adequate, their implementation remains inconsistent with the main challenge lying, not in the legal framework, but in its systematic enforcement.

Youth violence prevention extends beyond the school environment. Out-of-school time, sports, youth programmes, and recreational activities provide critical contexts for both risk and protective factors. It is recommended to formalise structured cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Science and Innovation and the Ministry of Sport and Youth, encompassing: joint design of youth programmes incorporating violence prevention, coordination of sports and youth initiatives as protective interventions (particularly for at-risk children), provision of extracurricular activities as safe spaces, and joint monitoring of at-risk children's participation in out-of-school programmes.

6. Enhancing social support services for children and youth

The development and reinforcement of social support services is recommended. These should include: counselling facilities for children and young people that can be accessed independently of parents or schools; psychosocial support for victims of violence and at-risk children; peer support and mentoring initiatives; and services that are geographically accessible, including in smaller urban centres and rural communities. Such services must be tailored to the needs of children, confidential, and destigmatised, which entails proactive communication to inform children and young people of available support and how to access it. It is particularly crucial that children are aware they can seek assistance directly, without fear of repercussions or mandatory parental notification in every instance. Active involvement from local authorities, as well as from professionals and NGOs experienced in working with children and youth, is also essential.

7. Enhancement of early detection and response mechanisms

There is a need to establish clear and mandatory procedures for the early detection of violence, ensuring that all stakeholders in the system are required to respond. Neglecting, postponing, or minimising the issue considerably raises the risk of escalation. Particular emphasis should be placed on the systematic monitoring and documentation of violent incidents to facilitate prompt and adequate intervention, as well as the assessment of the effectiveness of implemented measures.

8. Enhanced protection and inclusion for children in vulnerable groups

Children with disabilities, particularly those on the autism spectrum, are at heightened risk of social isolation and exposure to violence. It is crucial to implement inclusive educational approaches, provide additional specialist support, and build the capacity of schools to meet the needs of these children. Concurrently, peer sensitisation and the promotion of a culture of acceptance and solidarity should be prioritised.

9. Strengthening parental engagement and trust between families and schools

A deficit of trust between parents and the education system poses a significant obstacle to preventing violence. Establishing regular, reciprocal, and substantive communication between schools and parents, grounded in partnership rather than oversight or sanction, is essential. Parents must be actively involved in school life and in initiatives aimed at preventing violence.

10. Harmonisation of strategic documents and establishment of a coherent violence prevention framework

A significant systemic challenge in Montenegro's approach to preventing violence among minors is the proliferation of strategic documents, action plans, and protocols that are not fully harmonised. This misalignment generates confusion regarding institutional responsibilities, hinders effective coordination, and may result in parallel responses to the same issues without synergy. It is recommended that competent authorities undertake a comprehensive review of all documents relevant to child and youth violence prevention, identify overlaps, gaps, and inconsistencies, and develop an integrated framework that clearly specifies the hierarchy of documents, roles and responsibilities, and monitoring mechanisms.

11. Enhancing data collection and utilisation

While substantial data and experiential knowledge exist, they are currently underutilised in the formulation of policies and interventions. It is necessary to implement a systematic approach to the collection, analysis, and application of data regarding school violence, alongside continuous monitoring of the effectiveness of interventions. Data should inform decision-making processes rather than serve solely as administrative documentation.

12. Engaging children and young people as active participants

Children and young people should be acknowledged as active agents in shaping solutions. Their perspectives, needs, and recommendations must be incorporated into violence prevention policies and programmes. Establishing peer support networks, participatory approaches, and secure environments for expressing opinions is vital for fostering trust and a sense of belonging within the school community.

13. Enhancing the role of social-emotional learning (SEL) within education

Social-emotional learning, encompassing the cultivation of empathy, emotion management, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making, provides a critical foundation for school-based violence prevention. SEL competencies should be systematically embedded across the curriculum, within class communities, and through extracurricular programmes.

14. Long-term, systemic, and sustainable approaches

Prevention of violence cannot be achieved through isolated projects or short-term interventions. A sustained, intersectoral, and sustainable strategy is necessary, supported by clear political and institutional responsibility. Each sector must fulfil its designated role, without deflecting responsibility, to ensure a safe, supportive, and inclusive educational environment for all children.

The project "Prevent bullying and violence in schools in Montenegro" aims to strengthen the system for protecting children from peer, online, and other forms of violence by enhancing the implementation of existing policies and developing new solutions. Through national assessments of school safety and studies on cyberbullying, as well as the development of policy recommendations and practical guidance, the project seeks to contribute to a safer school environment. Its activities focus on supporting policy makers, educational institutions, and professionals, while actively involving civil society, parents, and local communities. The project is implemented by the Council of Europe with financial support from Germany, from December 2024 to December 2026.

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