

Results from Recent European Research on Youth Violence Prevention: Some Lessons for Serbia

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This paper analyses the results of a study entitled: *Youth Deviance and Youth Violence: A European Multi-agency Perspective on Best Practices in Prevention and Control (YouPrev)*. This assessment was conducted in order to shed some light on the effects of current youth violence prevention measures in six European countries (Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain) and contributes to the future development of juvenile violent crime prevention in Serbia. Comparative and evaluative studies on preventive measures, as well as the exchange of experience and best practices, are considered preconditions for any appreciable improvement in youth violence prevention. Juvenile crime prevention in Serbia is (at least declaratively) widely understood as initiatives that require a systematic multidisciplinary and multi-sectoral approach. However, similar to the conclusions adopted in relation to European countries covered by the *YouPrev* study, juvenile delinquency prevention in Serbia must be improved, using evaluation and fundamental systematic approach. The importance of both future research on risk and protective factors, as well as a rigorous impact evaluation of preventive interventions, should be acknowledged in order to make a significant and viable progress in juvenile crime prevention in Serbia.

Keywords: juvenile delinquency, violence, crime prevention, *YouPrev* study, Serbia

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1 Introduction

During the past decade, experts and scholars in Serbia dedicated a great deal of attention and their academic endeavours to the reform of the juvenile justice system, as well as to the establishment and improvement of a multi-agency mechanism for the protection of children from violence and abuse. At the same time, research into the factors contributing to youth delinquency and violence did not receive the same amount of consideration and enthusiasm. Even though it is impossible to claim that the problem of juvenile crime in Serbia has reached an alarming rate (Ignjatović, 2014), a moderate increase in juvenile crime during the past decade, accompanied by individual criminal offences committed by youth in a particularly brutal fashion, often contributed to the unjustified outbursts of moral panic and received inadequate media attention characterised by a sensationalistic and super-

ficial approach to reporting. Alternatively, these events should have stimulated more in-depth research in this field in order to prevent the current state-of-play, which is characterised by a tacit, yet palpable pessimism with respect to important opportunities for the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

Juvenile delinquency is a complex issue and one of the most challenging criminological or social problems, which deserves consideration in every research endeavour. During the past few decades, researchers across the globe contributed to a much better understanding of risk factors and protective measures, which are generally identified as areas that should be targeted by various prevention activities. However, the complex nature of juvenile delinquency, which is based on a combination of interactions between interpersonal networks and micro and macro social environments, calls for a much greater effort than simply identifying risk and protective factors. Efficient and successful strategies for countering this problem require a high quality and continuous commitment of researchers, experts and policy-makers working in the field of crime control. Identifying key domains, as well as risk and protective factors operating within these domains, is merely the beginning of such efforts. The exploration of different ways in which the impacts of individual factors and the effects of their interactions may be controlled, as well as the implementation of preventive measures based on acquired knowledge, are a very demanding, albeit not an unattainable

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undertaking. The evaluation of existing prevention programmes and the exchange of experience at national and international levels, represent the first steps in this direction and allow further developments in this field.

A project entitled *Youth deviance and youth violence: A European multi-agency perspective on best practices in prevention and control* (henceforth: *YouPrev*) was implemented in 2011 and 2012, which was aimed at promoting the development of research-based and applicable knowledge in this field by highlighting the impacts of existing prevention programmes and activities in certain European Union member states. The project involved the implementation of research activities in six countries, i.e. Belgium, Hungary, Germany, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain, and was conducted by an international consortium composed of several universities, research institutes, non-governmental organisations and the European Police College. The role of the project coordinator was entrusted to the Department of Criminology and Interdisciplinary Crime Prevention of the German Police University in Münster.

Studies involving research focusing on juvenile delinquency and its prevention were aimed at examining local and regional conditions surrounding the implementation of delinquency control and prevention programmes. Data were collected using a self-report survey focusing on deviant and delinquent behaviour among secondary school students (Baier, Pfeifer, Simonson, & Rabold, 2009), as well as on the basis of questionnaires and interviews, which were used to collect data on the prevention of crime and deviant behaviour from the point of view of both experts and adolescents. Other instruments included semi-structured questionnaires, which focused particularly on the state-of-play with respect to delinquency, juvenile delinquency control and prevention in local contexts, as well as on efficient and inefficient programmes and measures in this field. In addition to youth and relevant experts working at the local level (representatives of law enforcement authorities and social services), data in individual countries were also collected from experts (researchers, practitioners and policymakers) operating at the national level. This involved the use of the Delphi method and an online questionnaire was distributed in two cycles in order to assess future developments or predict individual problems related to youth delinquency and foresee efficient measures for its prevention in the coming decade. Cycle three of the study involved the distribution of the Delphi-based questionnaire at the international level.

This paper presents the results of studies conducted within the framework of the aforementioned project with a view to examine the current state-of-play in the field of juvenile

delinquency and youth violence prevention in a specific part of Europe. It should serve as a basis for contemplating existing and future research in this field in Serbia, since this is an inevitable step that in order to develop and improve any further responses to juvenile delinquency in the country.

2 Results of the *YOUPREV* Study

2.1 Youth Victimization, Delinquency and Violence

Within the *YouPrev* project, a survey on school-attending youth was conducted in one urban and one rural area in each of the participating countries⁴ (Görge et al., 2013), with 10,682 students (average age of 15) participating. Fifty per cent of respondents from each of the participating countries were female.

Overall, the prevalence of victimisation was slightly higher among girls (52% of girls and 48% of boys were affected by some victimisation at least once in their lifetime), as well as among youth living in urban environments (62.4% of youth from urban areas and 37.6% of youth from rural areas were victimised at least once in their lifetime). Theft is the most common source of victimisation (Taefi & Görge, 2013: 162). The rate of victimisation among girls is lowest in Slovenia and Spain, and the highest in Belgium, which has the highest number of respondents who were victims of theft and emotional violence in the past 12-month period. The rate of victimisation among boys is generally highest in Belgium and Germany, even though boys in Germany are less likely to fall victims of robbery and extortion than in other countries. Boys in Spain are most likely to become victims of theft, robbery and extortion, but they are less frequently exposed to hate crimes and relationship violence than their counterparts in other countries.

A total of 16.7% of students admitted to truancy in the past 12-months period, with the highest rate of truancy reported in Belgium (31%), while the lowest rate was reported in Slovenia (8%). As much as 15% of all respondents in Belgium reported being truant at least three times during the previous 12-month period. Approximately half of all students (47.5%) admitted to being drunk at least once in their lifetime, while 19% reported cannabis consumption. 6.4% of respondents admitted to using inhalants at least once in their lifetime; at the same time, the share of respondents, who consumed sedatives, a combination of alcohol and pills, amphetamines, hero-

⁴ With the exception of Belgium, where the survey was conducted in three areas (urban, rural and semi-urban) in order to include students from different language groups.

in, cocaine, crack, magic mushrooms, hallucinogens, steroids or Ritalin, ranged from 1.6% to 5%. Experience in drunkenness was most widespread among Hungarian students, while cannabis consumption was most often reported by students in Belgium and Spain (Taefi & Grger, 2013: 163).

The prevalence of self-reported delinquency⁵ committed during the twelve months before the survey amounted to 30.7% of the total sample of respondents and ranged from 43.8% in Belgium to slightly below 25% in Portugal and Slovenia. A fifth (19%) of all students admitted to committing property crime, while 8.5% reported they committed a violent crime during the previous past 12-month period. Self-reported crime consisted predominantly of minor offences, such as shoplifting (10%) and graffiti (9.2%), while participation in group fights was the most commonly represented violent criminal offence (7.6%). A small number of respondents admitted to committing serious types of crime, such as assault (1.5%) or robbery/extortion (0.7%). With the exception of shoplifting and graffiti, all types of delinquent behaviour were more common in boys – 37% of boys and 25% of girls admitted to committing at least one of the observed offences during the past 12-month period. The difference in delinquency rates between boys and girls was lower in property crime (17.2% compared to 13.4%) than in violent (13.2% compared to 5.8%) crime (Taefi & Grger, 2013: 165).

Results of logistic regression analysis show that contacts with violent peers, the adoption of violence-legitimising norms of masculinity and frequent alcohol abuse represent the strongest predictors of violent behaviour among youth. Contact with violent peers in a socially disorganised environment, the acceptance of violent behaviour as an indicator of a “true man,” and low self-control also represent important factors explaining violent behaviour among youth (Hirtenlehner, Pauwels, & Meško, 2014, 2015), while poor parental supervision and variables, such as age and cannabis consumption, have a moderate impact. Gender does not seem to be a significant predictor of property offences, while contacts with deviant and violent peers have a stronger contribution to property offences than to youth violence. The acceptance of norms and the ability of self-control have a strong impact, while parental supervision and alcohol and cannabis consumption have a moderate impact (Taefi & Grger, 2013: 166–167).

2.2 Experts' Views on Youth Delinquency and Impacts of Prevention Programmes

Experts from the countries included in the *YouPrev* study mainly consider the problem of juvenile delinquency as a universal and transient developmental phenomenon. The violation of social norms and rules is an integral part of the growing-up process and is most often limited to a short period during adolescence and rarely takes the form of offences that are more serious than petty crime. Only a small number of minors become persistent offenders prone to committing serious criminal offences. Juvenile delinquency is also considered a socially determined phenomenon, since the influence of family, peers and the social environment are deemed extremely important. As a rule, minors who become persistent offenders are normally affected by several stress-inducing factors. These are usually young men with an unfavourable socio-economic background and low parental supervision, who are marginalised, have a low level of education and are often prone to psychoactive substance abuse (Grger et al., 2013: 182).

Experts evaluated preventive efforts in their respective countries very differently. The fact that secondary and tertiary approaches to prevention focus primarily on risk factors and “target groups” was particularly pronounced in Belgium and Germany. This is why respondents from these countries stressed the need for a supplementary development of primary prevention programmes and corresponding social-policy measures. Many experts believe that prevention activities are not awarded enough attention and that the social response to juvenile delinquency continues to be primarily considered through the response of the penal system. Preventive programmes are most often developed on an unreliable theoretical and empirical basis, implemented in an unsystematic manner, and rarely evaluated and poorly funded. In declarative terms, cooperation is well defined and accepted; in practice, however, prevention is usually considered an issue that has to be dealt with either by the school, the police or by social services alone (Grger et al., 2013: 184).

According to many experts, the provision of adequate funding, a systematic approach to addressing the problem of juvenile delinquency and a sound scientific evaluation of preventive measures and programmes are of utmost importance in the field of prevention. Most experts believe that future developments in the field of juvenile crime will be affected by demographic, technological and social changes typical of contemporary European societies (Grger et al., 2013: 183). However, most experts agree that this problem will retain its basic characteristics in the coming decade – it will continue to be widespread yet mainly episodic in its nature, and composed of predominantly less serious offences.

⁵ Data regarding students' delinquent behaviour were collected using 16 questions included in the self-report survey. These referred to: group fights, shoplifting, graffiti, carrying weapons or weapon-like objects, vandalism, theft of personal belongings, drug dealing, bicycle theft, carrying a firearm, assault, hate crime, vehicle theft, burglary, robbery, extortion and car or motorcycle theft.

Results of the Delphi survey, which was conducted in order to collect data related to experts' expectations and predictions with respect to the most important challenges facing European policies for the prevention of juvenile delinquency in the future, reveal important concerns. Experts fear that the current economic crisis will create long-term consequences both regarding restricting government spending, as well as in terms of increasing competition due to shrinking supply in the labour market and the economic polarisation of the population. It is also estimated that the risks of ethnic segregation and other forms of social exclusion will increase, while intra-community solidarity will decline, which may enhance the risk of delinquent behaviour. However, the volume of juvenile delinquency is not expected to increase, as the birth rate in Europe continues to decline. It is presumed that the increased development of information technologies will somewhat change the nature of juvenile delinquency and that cybercrime will be on the rise in the coming years. Crime related to drug abuse is also expected to increase (Wagner, Kraus, & Görden, 2013: 172–173). The strengthening of professionalism is a necessary and inevitable step that will have to be made in the field of preventing juvenile delinquency and violence; preventive efforts must be improved by providing better training and education of experts and practitioners, as well as by relying on sound scientific knowledge. Preventive measures ought to prevail over punitive responses and be tailored to the needs of target groups, include early intervention measures, and focus on risk (such as psychoactive substance abuse, participation in delinquent groups of peers, etc.) and protective factors (such as good parenting skills, good general education, etc.). It is also necessary to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of preventive measures and share experiences regarding effective programmes. Prevention requires a multi-sectoral approach and the cooperation of different groups of professionals, such as the police, social workers, teachers and others, while active participation of young people, as well as their parents, in preventive programmes should also be guaranteed (Görden et al., 2013).

2.3 Young People's Views on Delinquency and Violence Prevention

Results of the *YouPrev* study show that one-quarter of all participating students were involved in programmes and activities aiming at violence prevention during the past twelve months, while 70 % of them received information regarding harmful effects of psychoactive substances. The study also reveals a very significant finding, as it demonstrates that youth from all participating countries believe that the influence of schools, which are the principal actors in terms of implementing activities aimed at preventing violence and psychoactive substance abuse, is rather weak (Taefi & Görden, 2013: 168).

Young people believe that delinquency and violence may be prevented by adopting measures which ranked from the most to the least effective from their perspective, include listening to young people's concerns and problems, improving their prospects of getting a job; providing good general education and opportunities for spare-time activities; providing training related to social skills; providing clear information regarding potential consequences of their behaviour; providing counselling to their parents and, finally, harsh punishment. This means that young people are not completely opposed to punitive responses to violence. However, they consider them less effective in comparison to other measures. It is important to note that the above findings were consistent across all participating countries.

Young people in all participating countries perceive their parents and friends as the most influential actors in terms of prevention, while police officers are perceived as most influential among groups of professionals, even though the influence of professionals in general was considered moderate or poor. It is interesting, yet rather alarming, to note that teachers and social workers are deemed to have the least influence in terms of prevention (Taefi & Görden, 2013: 168).

3 Developments in the Field of Youth Violence Prevention in Serbia

The recent reform of the juvenile justice system in Serbia was characterised by the strengthening of the principle of diversification of proceedings instituted against minors and by broadening the range of alternative measures and sanctions, as well as by tertiary prevention measures aimed at juvenile offenders, including correctional programmes in institutional settings. However, it has not achieved the desired results in terms of reducing recidivism, which is why the professional public continues to be generally convinced that youth violence and violent victimisation are problems, which must, above all, be addressed by introducing appropriate multi-agency primary prevention measures. At the same time, it could be said that this belief has not been sufficiently defined, either in terms of reflections and considerations regarding primary prevention programmes (in the past few years, these were predominately composed of accredited programmes for the professional training of employees working in the field of education, which focused on violence prevention, while they rarely included educational programmes focusing on individual types of violence and implemented by civil society organisations) or with respect to a strategic approach to juvenile delinquency and violent crime prevention.

Nevertheless, certain preconditions for a more active engagement of education and training institutions in the field of vio-

lence prevention were recently created. Their tasks and responsibilities in this field were clearly defined through the process of adopting a Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Education and Training Institutions (Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Education and Training Institutions, 2007)⁶ and a *Framework Action Plan for the Prevention of Violence in Education and Training Institutions* [Okvirni akcioni plan za prevenciju nasilja u obrazovno-vaspitnim ustanovama] (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, 2009),⁷ as well as particularly through the adoption of the *Rules on the Protocol of Action in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect* (Pravilnik o protokolu postupanja u ustanovi u odgovoru na nasilje, zlostavljanje i zanemarivanje, 2010), which contain practical provisions for the implementation of norms related to the protection from violence stipulated in the *Act on the Foundations of the Education System* (Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja, 2009, 211, 2013, 2015, 2016). The latter especially obliges education and training institutions to adopt intervention measures in response to violence, as well as measures in the field of prevention.⁸

A programme entitled “School without Violence – Towards a Safe and Enabling Environment for Children”, which was originally initiated by UNICEF, is one of the broadest and most ambitious programmes for the prevention of youth violence in Serbia. This programme has been in place since the 2005/2006 academic year. Today, it is implemented by the Violence Prevention Unit⁹ of the Ministry of Education,

Science and Technological Development with the expert and financial support of UNICEF and in cooperation with the Council for Children’s Rights, Institute for the Advancement of Education, as well as government ministries responsible for health, labour and social policy, internal affairs, and youth and sports. According to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, 251 schools (242 primary and 9 secondary schools) from approximately 90 Serbian cities and towns decided to participate in the programme (MESTD RS, 2016). The number of participating schools exceeds the available financial means, although financial support for participation in the programme is also provided by parents, schools and local governments (UNICEF Serbia, 2016). The programme involves children, teachers, other school employees, parents and local communities, and its activities are oriented towards raising their awareness and knowledge, as well as towards changing their attitudes to violence, internalising rules and norms of behaviour and strengthening their skills in order to enable intervention mechanisms to provide a rapid and efficient response to violence. The programme is implemented via four components: the research component (exploring experience in the field of violence and attitudes towards violence); the education component (training school staff in the field of violence, communication skills, open dialogue between children and adults, constructive interventions and establishment of internal and external safety net at school); the peer component (activities enabling children to recognise violence, promote peer protection, build trust and reduce violent behaviour); and the family/media/local community component (promoting cooperation and mobilising the public in order to establish alliances in the field of prevention). Each school is required to establish a team responsible for supporting the implementation of the programme and monitoring its execution, which simultaneously operates as the Team for the Protection of Children from Violence as foreseen in the Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Education and Training Institutions. In 2008, UNICEF published a handbook for parents (*How Was School Today?*), which contains clearly presented information for the recognition of aggressive behaviour, violence and victimisation in children, as well as ways in which parents may contribute to their prevention.

⁶ The Protocol was adopted by the Ministry of Education in 2007 in line with the General Protocol for the Protection of Children from Abuse and Neglect and the National Action Plan for Children, which were adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia (Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Education and Training Institutions, 2007).

⁷ The Framework Action Plan, which was adopted by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia in 2009 within its scope of activities for the prevention of violence, provides for a series of preventive activities at the level of institutions and local communities, as well as at the national level (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, 2009).

⁸ The Protocol of Action in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect stipulate that children, students, parents and employees shall jointly plan, devise and implement preventive activities and methods for communicating the content, measures and activities aimed at preventing and protecting children from violence, abuse and neglect, and contain a series of duties and responsibilities imposed on institutions, employees, teachers, parents, children and students for violence prevention (Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016).

⁹ The Violence Prevention Unit was established in 2012 with the expert and financial support of UNICEF. Its role is to plan, co-

ordinate and monitor responses of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and other partners involved in the protection of children from violence in the education system. Its tasks include, *inter alia*, the implementation of the “School without Violence” programme, providing support to school networks with a view to introduce the practice of sharing experience in the field of violence prevention, enhancing regional school networks in order to ensure the collection of best practice examples, etc. (Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development [MESTD RS], 2016).

By recognising the problem of digital violence, which is becoming ever more significant with the widespread use of digital technologies, the Violence Prevention Unit has – in cooperation with UNICEF and the Telenor company – initiated a project entitled “Stop Digital Violence” aimed at increasing the awareness of students, teachers and parents regarding the risks of information technologies, methods for protecting oneself and ways in which to react in violent situations. Within the aforementioned project, a campaign entitled “Choose Words, Prevent Hate Speech” was also launched. The campaign calls upon youth to share positive messages, react to and report digital violence. In 2016, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Pedagogical Society of Serbia published a thematic handbook dedicated to the prevention of digital violence (MESTD RS, 2016). The project saw the participation of over 4,000 students and 1,000 teachers and parents, while project activities involved lectures, workshops, quizzes and applications on social networks (UNICEF Serbia, 2015). Activities aimed at raising awareness regarding digital violence also included the participation of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which initiated a national campaign against online hate speech a few years ago (in the framework of the European campaign under the same name). In 2013, the Ministry established the National Committee against Online Hate Speech, which brings together over 30 representatives of various institutions, youth and sports organisations, local self-governments and the media. Its aim is to devise and implement activities for raising awareness and knowledge regarding hate speech and methods for its prevention. As part of the aforementioned campaign, the Umbrella Youth Organisation of Serbia and the Organisation of Creative Grouping, which participated in a project entitled “Schools against Online Hate Speech”, carried out a series of training programmes for secondary school students and teachers. These were implemented under the auspices of the Council of Europe’s European Youth Foundation and with the support of the Serbian Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports (Umbrella Youth Organisation of Serbia, 2014).

The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA RS, 2016) has been developing programmes entitled “School Police Officer” and “Safe Childhood – The Development of Youth Security Culture” in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development for many years. The first programme (launched in 2002) is aimed at enhancing safety and security at schools and improving communication between children and the police. Currently, 365 police officers are performing the role of school police officers at 675 primary and secondary schools across Serbia. Their tasks include, *inter alia*, direct presence on school grounds; detection of criminal and minor offences, and the imposition of necessary

measures against perpetrators; detection and prevention of anti-social behaviour in the school area and the imposition of measures against owners of restaurants and similar facilities operating in the school area in order to prevent the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors. The second project tries to build trust between students and the police, and to prevent bullying, psychoactive substance abuse and victimisation due to digital violence. The project targets fifth year primary school students. So far, its education activities involved more than 100,000 students in 1,250 schools (MIA RS, 2016.).

As already mentioned, a number of activities in the field of violence prevention, mostly education and awareness raising activities, were also put in place by individual citizens’ associations. For instance, Centar E8 (2013), a Belgrade-based youth organisation, which carries out peer education programmes and campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles, gender equality and non-violence among youth, has recently been conducting a series of training courses in the framework of a campaign entitled “Be a Man – Change the Rules” (Centar E8, 2013). These took place under the auspices of certain programmes financially supported by several foreign and national donors. The aim of these activities was to involve young men in the prevention of violence and promote gender equality. In the framework of this project, which is supported by the UNICEF Office in Serbia and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, several “Be a Man” clubs were established across the country. Their objective is to bring together boys and young men of primary and secondary school age and carry out different awareness raising activities focusing on the issue of violence at the local community level.

Despite the fact that the number of awareness raising campaigns and preventive activities initiated at national and local levels has multiplied, their significance for the prevention of youth violence remains questionable, since there are no reliable indicators demonstrating their effectiveness. The implementation of most programmes lacks continuity and these programmes are rarely evaluated, while the effects of those programmes, which have undergone appropriate evaluation, such as the “School without Violence” programme, are still mediocre. In fact, this programme was assessed in 2009 within the scope of an evaluation study which included 40 schools conducted by Ipsos Strategic Marketing (2009). The programme was deemed partly successful, since the reduction of (physical, verbal, psychological and social) violence occurred only in children attending lower grades of primary school, but not in older children (Ipsos Strategic Marketing, 2009). Overall, the programme achieved its greatest success in raising awareness about different types of violence. Challenges supposedly jeopardising the success of the programme, included the fact that schools are inundated with similar and

various other projects, and often find it difficult to implement the programme due to lack of teachers and the complex organisation of its contents. A significant finding identified by the evaluation also referred to parents' and local communities' lack of interest and poor participation in achieving the objectives of the programme. Furthermore, it became evident that after the initial enthusiasm, motivation started to gradually decline as the programme advanced and became ever more complex. The success of its measures began to decline, while the number of schools that failed to implement a given part of the programme, as well as the number of mentors, who voiced their dissatisfaction with its implementation, started to increase. In addition, the study pointed to problems arising due to the lack of time and resources, while a tendency to implement formal procedures, considered a task that has to be accomplished "for the sake of UNICEF" could also be observed (Ipsos Strategic Marketing, 2009: 9).

The lack of commitment to various tasks in the field of violence prevention demonstrated by schools is also mentioned in the 2011 Report of the Ombudsman and the Young Counsellors Panel. The Report (Nešić & Jović, 2011), which includes the results of research conducted by the Young Counsellors Panel in 72 primary and secondary schools across Serbia, states that the implementation of schools' obligations in the field of violence prevention (schools are required to organise discussions and talks for students, provide promotional materials focusing on violence prevention and training in the field of non-violent communication, problem-solving skills and alternative conflict resolution). These measures are prescribed by the Act on the Foundations of the Education System, Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Education and Training Institutions (Posebni protokol za zaštitu dece i učenika od nasilja, zlostavljanja i zanemarivanja u obrazovno-vaspitnim ustanovama [Special Protocol for the Protection of Children and Students from Violence, Abuse and Neglect in Education and Training Institutions]) (Ministry of Education of the Republic of Serbia, 2007) and the Rules on the Protocol of Action in Response to Violence, Abuse and Neglect (Pravilnik o protokolu postupanja u ustanovi u odgovoru na nasilje, zlostavljanje i zanemarivanje, 2009). Implementation of these measures is not satisfactory. The research also found that even though three-quarters of students recognise bullying as an issue in their schools, a whopping 60% of students do not know whether their school has adopted any preventive activities (Nešić & Jović, 2011: 19, 23).

The need for developing effective preventive measures in Serbia was also highlighted by recent empirical findings on the prevalence of violence among youth and the involvement of youth in preventive programmes. For instance, a study into

the state-of-play and the needs of youth in Serbia conducted by the Ninamedia Research Agency towards the end of 2015, shows that in the past 12-month period, 8.6% of youngsters between 15 and 19 years of age were subjected to verbal or physical violence committed by their peers and that 2.7% were subjected to digital violence, while 16.2% witnessed violence or intolerance among peers. A total of 75% of young people subjected to violence did not report these events to the competent authorities, and more than one-fifth of all youth did not know whom they ought to report them to. Only 15.6% of respondents in the aforementioned age group actually participated in a programme promoting the principles of tolerance, mutual understanding and anti-discrimination in the previous 12-month period (Ninamedia Research, 2015: 93–96). In 2011, the Centar E8 (2013) youth organisation conducted a study, which involved male secondary school students in 16 cities and towns across Serbia. Results of this study show that 38% of students believe that violence against homosexuals is always justified; 13% of respondents participated in beating someone, who was believed to be homosexual or considered overly effeminate in the past 12-month period; 39% of respondents hit or kicked another male in the past 12-month period and the same percentage of respondents humiliated, insulted or threatened another male; during the past 3 months, 6% of respondents committed some type of physical violence, and 14% of respondents committed some type of verbal violence against women (Jakovljević & Arsenov, 2012: 20). A study conducted in 2013 by the Centre for Education, Research and Development, which included a sample of 1,000 third-year students from 40 secondary schools, demonstrated that 23.7% of students were involved in a fight at least once during the past 12-month period. It also showed that 16% of male students get drunk more than three times a month, while 14% of students consumed marijuana or other drugs in the past 12-month period (Popić, Savić, & Branković, 2014).

4 Discussion and Proposals

When considering the issue of representativeness of national samples of students and the low response rate of experts, which consequently led to an unbalanced professional structure of respondents (for instance, the sample of German experts was dominated by police officers, while there were hardly any police officers in the sample of Belgian experts, which mainly comprised social workers), one could claim, that the *YouPrev* study suffers from certain methodological limitations, which also affect its reliability. Nevertheless, its findings bear great significance. To some extent, theoretical assumptions related to the importance of young people's lifestyles and contexts, which determine the functioning of risk factors contributing to violence (Riley, 1987) and victimisa-

tion, are reinforced. Youth violence is mainly directed against peers, while perpetrators and victims often share similar routine activities (Pauwels & Swenson, 2011). Consequently, the knowledge of young people's lifestyles may be applied to identify individual fields on which preventive activities should focus. Existing findings suggest that routine activities associated with delinquency and violence include, in particular, psychoactive substance abuse; frequenting dangerous areas or premises; socialising with delinquent peers; and certain habits related to culturally created beliefs that violence is acceptable in particular situations. The specificity of young people's lifestyles within a cultural context prevents the simple replication of preventive models, which is why they need to be designed on the basis of knowledge of routine activities in a specific social setting.

It is widely known that preventive actions focusing on isolated risk factors do not yield satisfactory results and that violence prevention elements ought to target different factors at multiple levels. These range from those leading to a reduction of cognitive capacities and the ability of self-regulation and self-control (Hirtenlehner et al., 2014, 2015), such as psychoactive substance abuse (Ribeaud & Eisner, 2006), to cultural norms related to the acceptability of violence. The array of measures included in an ambitiously devised prevention programme must cover as many aspects as possible at all levels, from micro to macro levels. It should encompass a comprehensive set of actions, from primary prevention measures to specific secondary and tertiary prevention measures; from early intervention measures, which include counselling and therapeutic activities for parents of problematic children, to those directed towards the rehabilitation of offenders. All measures should be based on clear evidence regarding their efficacy, as well as on knowledge and findings regarding dynamics within the constellation of risk and protective factors. The least one could expect from contemporary criminology in the field of prevention is to provide findings based on longitudinal studies and research into life trajectories in the scope of a dynamic social context. These research studies enable both the dissemination of knowledge regarding risk and protective factors, as well as the empirical validation of preventive measures, while results of longitudinal studies may represent a solid basis for prevention strategies.

The seriousness of any approach to violence prevention is reflected in the strategic positioning of preventive activities and measures within a national strategic document. These provide basic guidelines for the conception of action plans dedicated to prevention at the local level, as well as umbrella plans, which systematically incorporate various (often insufficiently related) activities in the field of social and situational prevention, activities for the prevention of specific

aspects and types of violence or violence in different types of social environments. Furthermore, the determination of state authorities and local communities to become actively and thoroughly engaged in violence prevention, in addition to adopting a responsible attitude towards the needs and resources within a community, also implies that they intend to persevere in order to achieve an adequate and rigorous implementation of programmes. Evaluation, which provides solid grounds for further development in this field, should become a mandatory component of every preventive action.

Policy-makers involved in the drafting of policies for the control of violent crime and juvenile delinquency in Serbia should apply lessons drawn from experience gained in the field of youth violence prevention in other European countries. This should be done, not only to emphasise the importance of evaluation and a systematic approach to prevention, but also to stress the fact that violence prevention should not be reduced to awareness-raising campaigns, particularly those launched by actors that are not perceived as influential by the youth. The fact that research into preventive activities targeting youth must include adolescents' perspectives is an equally important lesson (Taefi, Görgen, & Kraus, 2013). They are the only ones who can tell us who they see as *significant others*, what personally obliges them to respect the rules and which group of adults they actually believe.

Last but not least, the *YouPrev* study is one of many studies pointing out the differences in the participation of youth in delinquency. While delinquency is a transient phenomenon for the vast majority of youth, which represents an expression of rebellion or a phase characterised by experimentation, fewer young people become persistent offenders, whose delinquent activities gradually become more frequent and severe. These youngsters normally come from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, are not effectively supervised by their parents, and have poor education and are often prone to alcohol and drug abuse (Hrnčić, 1999; Ljubičić, 2009). Reaching out to them in order to include them in preventive actions, which may only be achieved through well-planned and optimally selected working methods (Jovanović Mađar, 2014), while avoiding their stigmatisation and marginalisation (Görgen et al., 2013), will be a major challenge. The involvement of parents in prevention activities (Bertok, Wikström, Hardie, & Meško, 2012) will be an equally important challenge, since many of them are currently experiencing a great deal of stress, anxiety and despair due to economic and social uncertainties or have found themselves in the spiral of consumerism and apathy, and have no energy or motivation to improve their parenting skills. This is but one of the problematic aspects in the field of juvenile delinquency prevention, which, however, also points to the fact that it is – in every society and at multiple levels

– inevitably related to the issues of social capital, social equity and social justice. Therefore, caring for young people should be a significant part of social (crime) prevention policies (Meško & Flander, 2016; Jere, Meško, & Kanduč, 2012; Meško, Kanduč, & Jere, 2011) which have recently been reduced due to neoliberal politics, economic crisis and priorities given to situational crime prevention.

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Rezultati nedavne evropske raziskave o preprečevanju nasilja med mladostniki: nekaj izkušenj iz Srbije

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V prispevku smo analizirali rezultate študije z naslovom *Youth Deviance and Youth Violence: A European Multi-agency Perspective on Best Practices in Prevention and Control (YouPrev)*. Na podlagi analize smo opredelili nekatere učinke ukrepov preprečevanja nasilja mladih v šestih evropskih državah (Belgiji, Nemčiji, Madžarski, Portugalski, Sloveniji in Španiji) z namenom prispevati k nadaljnjemu razvoju preprečevanja nasilne kriminalitete mladih v Srbiji. Primerjalne in evalvacijske študije o preventivnih ukrepih, kot tudi izmenjavo izkušenj in najboljših praks, razumemo kot predpogoj za izboljšanje preprečevanja nasilja mladih. Preprečevanje prestopništva mladih v Srbiji (vsaj na deklarativni ravni) se pojmuje kot sistematična multidisciplinarna in multisektorska dejavnost. Podobno kot kažejo rezultati študije *YouPrev*, je treba ukrepe na področju preprečevanja nasilja mladih v Srbiji izboljšati z evalvacijami in temeljnim sistematičnim raziskovanjem. Raziskovanje varovalnih dejavnikov in dejavnikov tveganja, kakovostne izvedbe preventivnih programov in evalvacije preventivnih intervencij vidimo kot temelj uspešnega razvoja preprečevanja mladoletniškega prestopništva v Srbiji.

Ključne besede: mladoletniško prestopništvo, nasilje, preprečevanje kriminalitete, študija *YouPrev*, Srbija

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