Coping specificities in children and adolescent dealing with bullying behaviour

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Abstract: The aim of this review was to present the characteristics of coping strategies, and impact of bullying on the coping strategies chosen by children and/or adolescent victim to deal with the situation. This article involved an analysis of studies in coping strategies during bullying. Research databases were searched up until 2015 for studies relating to the investigation of any coping approach in children and adolescents involved in bullying. Studies that assess coping strategies through theoretical models suggest two types of strategies: 1) self-reliance/problem solving and seeking social support operacionalized as approach strategies and 2) distancing, externalizing and internalizing identified as avoidance approach strategies. Based on the conducted research we may conclude that the most commonly coping strategy in dealing with bullying utilizes the approach strategies. Additionally, we propose that considerable between-person variation in approach coping and avoidance coping may be predictable from gender and age characteristics. Based on the review we concluded that general trend in use of most coping responses is variable regarding the form of violence. A strategy of avoidance tends to be more prevalent in indirect forms of violence, seeking social support in situations of threats and verbal aggression and fighting back in physical aggression.

Keywords: *bullying, coping strategies, gender, age*

BULLYING

Despite the perception of school being a safe environment, available data suggest that bullying in school is very common. Many researchers have attempted to define bullying (Smith, 2003; Merrell et al., 2008; Salmivalli, 2010). Norwegian researcher Dan Olweus (1998) is considered the "pioneer" in bullying research. The author defines bullying as repeated and prolonged exposure to negative behaviours by one or more children. Although individual cases of serious violent behaviour may be considered as bullying, Olweus' (1998) definition emphasizes duration, repetition and imbalance of power. Physical abuse is one of the most visible forms of bullying which may include kicking, pushing, pinching and so on. Verbal abuse often accompanies physical bullying and includes insulting remarks, spreading rumours and teasing (Bilić and Karlović, 2004). Crick and Grotpeter (1995) found a distinction between psychical and relational aggression. The authors defined relational aggression as harming others through the purposeful manipulation and damage of their peer relationships, while physical aggression is defined according to overt actions, such as hitting or pushing. It is important to note that the bullying is a subjective experience with almost every child experiencing it in a different way. One child can interpret it as verbal teasing, while another as a form of relational abuse (Unnever and Cornell, 2004; Boulton, Smith, and Cowie, 2010). Children exposed to bullying can be distinguished as victims, bully/victims, bullies and bystanders (Dake, Price, and Telljohann, 2003; Arseneault et al., 2006).

Children involved in bullying behaviours commonly demonstrate a number of short-term and long-term psychological and health problems (Stassen Berger, 2007; Lunde, Frisen, and Hwang, 2007; Boivin et al., 2010; Sesar and Sesar, 2012; Sigurdson et al., 2014). Victims are likely to view school as an unhappy setting, develop negative attitudes toward school and avoid going to school (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1996). Furthermore, exposure to violence is causally related to anxiety, depression low self-esteem, feelings of loneliness and suicidal thoughts and intentions (Dickerson Mayes et al., 2014; Mills et al., 2004; Cammack-Barry, 2005; Newman, Holden, and Delville, 2005). The severity of the consequences of bullying may result from the fact that victims have daily contact with the bullies during the school period (Olweus, 1978).

Regardless of studies that acknowledge the serious and long-term negative effects of bullying victimization, psychological distress in some victims may not be evident (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Ladd, 2001). For instance, Hoover, Oliver, and Hazler (1992) found that although numerous children, at some point during the period of education, may be exposed to some form of bullying, the majority of them do not suffer significant trauma as a result of such experiences. To get more insight into the reasons why do some children exposed to

bullying develop psychological problem and others do not, researchers have tried to examine which variables can have mediating effects. According to conducted studies, the strategies which victims employ to cope with bullying can be one of the significant mediating variables between bullying and its effects (Khamis, 2015; Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1997; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner, 2002; Visconti and Troop Gordon, 2010). It was found that the strategies employed to cope with bullying have significant effects on the victim's functioning as well as on the duration of the bullying behaviour (Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2004; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner, 2002; Visconti and Troop-Gordon, 2010; Smith et al., 2004). According to the above, the aim of this paper is to give an overview of the studies conducted to date which have examined the coping strategies employed in relation to bullying, as well as the efficiency of different coping strategies.

I. STRESS AND COPING WITH STRESS IN CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE

Based on the transactional model of stress and coping developed by Lazarus and Folkman (2004), stress is defined as the experience that arises from transactions between people and the external environment, particularly the type of transaction which is related to disagreement between individual power and the perceived challenges or needs. Such transactions include the stimulus and response, and therefore the term 'stress' refers to cause, reaction and its consequences. The development of psychological stress is caused by the individual's analysis which consequently determines whether it is a stimulus or a situation stressor. Reaction to stress depends on the mechanisms of adjustment used to maintain balance. They are split in three basic forms: tolerance to stress and/or the consequences of the state of stress; controlling or activity in relation to the stressor or symptoms of stress, resignation or withdrawal to cope with a stressful situation.

Studies regarding coping with stressful life events in children and adolescents have been primarily focused on coping with severely stressful situations, which are present in a small number of young people's lives, such as serious illness, death of a close friend/relation or any other similar experience (Baucom et al., 2015; Chelf and Ellis, 2002; Compas et al, 2014; Rask, 2002). However, most stressful experiences and events in adolescence occur daily, such as, for example, examinations at school, conflicts with peers and so on.

According to the literature there are gender- and age-related differences in the use of coping strategies during stress. Girls tend to use more relational and assertive strategies, such as seeking social support or talking about the problem (Roecker Phelps, 2001; Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner, 2002; Camodeca and Goossens, 2005; Rose and Rudolph, 2006; Eschenbeck, Kohlmann and Lohaus, 2007), while boys more commonly tend to use strategies of avoidance or distancing as a response to a stressful situation (Camodeca and Goossens, 2005; Hampel and Petermann, 2005; Eschenbeck et al., 2007).

Researchers are however inconsistent in their findings on the differences in problem-focused strategies between genders. Li, DiGiuseppe and Froh (2006) discovered, that among adolescents, boys exhibited greater tendency to use problem-focused coping style than girls. Examining gender differences in perceived stress and coping styles, Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2008) found that boys prefer use of direct problem solving, distraction, avoidance or disengaging more than girls. Some research suggests that there are no differences (Frydenberg and Lewis, 1993; Monteiro, Balogun and Oratile, 2014), while others state that girls use more problem-focused strategies compared to boys (Herman-Stahl, Stemmier and Petersen, 1995).

The cognitive and social development of the child significantly contributes to the appraisal of a stressful situation and the use of coping strategies. Because of the sense of illusory control and undeveloped ability of assessing whether the situation is beyond their control, younger children may mainly focus on fear and fantasies during the observation of situations, which can contribute to the use of non-adaptive coping strategies (Brdar and Rijavec, 1997). As children grow older an increasing number of strategies develop. However, children do not use all of them. Sharrer's and Ryan-Wenger's (1991) findings suggest that children aged between eight and nine have a significantly higher prevalence of certain coping strategies compared to children aged between 10 and 12. Similar results were obtained by Brodzinsky et al. (1992). According to their results, it may be concluded that younger children are more prone to use of diverse coping strategies, while older children rely mostly on a small number of strategies which seem to be useful in dealing with stress. Garemzy and Rutter (1993) state that the coping strategies adopted at school age tend to last throughout life.

Furthermore, older children use more cognitive strategies when faced with an emotionally excited situation (Rybski, 1997). More frequent use of cognitive strategies in older children, compared to younger children, is the result of experience of internal stress or meeting with more internal psychological challenges. Older children rely heavily on emotion-focused coping strategies which may be the consequence of the development of the ability to use and verbalize cognition that manages emotions (Harris and Lipian, 1990).

During the transition from the period of childhood to adolescence, children reduce support from adults in situations of stress and are more likely to seek help from peers (Eschenbeck et al., 2007; Skinner and Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). In addition, adolescents compared with children aged between 4 and 8 more commonly use strategies of distraction and/or avoidance during stressful situations (Hampel and Petermann, 2005; Roecker-Phelps, 2001). Renk and Creasey (2003) states that adolescents employ an increased use of

problem-focused strategies that becomes over time more complex. The main reason for this is the development of more complex language and the development of meta-cognitive skills (e.g., cognitive restructuring of conflict situations, the use of instruction to eliminate negative emotions, the ability to produce alternative solutions to problems, etc.) (Compas et al., 2001). Several other studies have also documented age dependent increase in the frequency and variety of cognitive and emotion coping strategies (Donaldson et al., 2000; Monteiro, Balogun and Oratile, 2014).

II.   COPING WITH BULLYING

The parents of children exposed to bullying often advice their children about coping with the bullying behaviour of their peers. Their most common advice is to "step back from the situation of abuse", "seek the help of older children or adults" and "tell the abuser to stop" (Olweus, 1993). However, researchers are interested in assessing whether children use the mentioned methods of coping with bullying; the influence of forms of bullying behaviours and the role in bullying behaviours on coping strategies; age and gender differences in coping strategies; the effectiveness of those strategies and the influence of coping strategies on the psychological adjustment of children involved in bullying behaviour.

Sesar, Šimić, and Barišić (2011a) conducted research on 478 children aged 11 to 15 years with the aim of examining the prevalence of general coping strategies in bullying situations. The findings showed that the most frequently used coping strategies were problem-focused strategies and seeking social support. After that followed internalizing and distancing, while the least commonly used strategy was externalizing. This finding is at least partly in accordance with results of Causey and Dubow (1992) that reported a high prevalence of the strategy of self-reliance and problem solving, a medium prevalence of the strategy of seeking social support and internalizing and distancing, and a low prevalence of externalizing. According to Causey and Dubow (1992), self-reliance/problem solving and seeking social support represent approach strategies of coping, while distancing, externalizing and internalizing represent avoidance strategies. A similar finding on the prevalence of coping strategies with bullying was obtained in the study by Kristensen and Smith (2003). Khamis (2015) point out that emotion- focused coping strategies represent risk factors for the development of bullying behaviours whereas problem-focused coping are significant protective factors. The author found that victimization was more prevalent among children who used emotion-focused coping strategies than among children who used problem-focused coping strategies. Other studies have confirmed that problem focused strategies are effective in decreasing vicitimization (Flanagan et al., 2013; Hampel, Manhal and Hayer, 2009)

The obtained results cannot be directly compared with those using other scales or approaches for measuring coping strategies, but we can draw some parallels. Smith, Shu, and Madsen (2001) reported the common use of the strategy of "ignoring the abuser" and "telling the abuser to stop", which could tentatively be considered as a type of self-reliance and problem solving. A slightly lower frequency was obtained for the strategies of "asking adults for help" and "asking friends for help", which could be compared with the strategies of seeking social support. "Fight back" is a strategy similar to externalizing, while "crying" is similar to the strategy of internalizing, which showed the lowest use in a situation of exposure to bullying. Similar findings were reported by Bibou-Nakou and Markos (2013) in high school students from different geographical areas. Authors indicated that the "ignoring the bullying" (56.1%) and "avoiding getting into the situation" (32.1%) were the most used coping strategies.

Researchers have also been interested in determining the reasons why certain children do not use the 'search for help from adults' strategy in situations of bullying. O'Connell, Pepler and Craig (1999) linked this with the characteristic of the bullying. Children exposed to relational bullying (especially social exclusion) may not recognize this form of behaviour as abuse and consequently may not seek the help of adults. When they become aware of this form of abuse they still may refuse to discuss it with their parents because of fear regarding the reaction of the bullies when they are found to have reported the behaviour.

Some children do not have confidence in adults and refuse to seek help from them, whether they are school staff or parents, because of uncertainty as to whether the adults will respond appropriately (Cowie and Olafsson, 1999). Yeung and Leadbeater (2010) acknowledge that some children and adolescents may be reluctant to seek help from adults because they believe that the problem will not be resolved, the conflict may be exacerbated, or they will experience reprisal from the aggressor.

Unlike the victims, children categorized as bully/victims typically show a higher prevalence of "aggressive" coping strategies in response to abusive behaviour in school than children exposed to bullying or those not involved in bullying behaviours (Olafsena and Viemero, 2000; Sesar, Šimić, and Barišić, 2011b). These results are consistent with those obtained in the study by Kristensen and Smith (2003). The authors' note that children exposed to violent behaviour are at the same time violent towards others, compared to children exposed to bullying and those not involved in bullying, and are more prone to externalizing. Bijttebier and Vertommen (1998) also examined the frequency of coping strategies and found that bully/victims prefer externalizing compared to children not involved in bullying. The findings of similarities in coping strategies

between bullies and bully/victims are the result of similar individual characteristics between these two groups in their aggressive tendencies (Olweus, 1993). Chen et al. (2012) emphasize that to these subsequent incidence of aggressive behavior might lead lack of peer supports and experience of peer rejection. They postulated that fewer peer supports and experience of peer rejection tend to cause more frustration and development of negative attitudes and emotions towards others and themselves, which might lead to subsequent aggressive behaviors.

Coping with bullying in relation to the type of bullying behaviour

Thus far the studies conducted in this field suggest that the forms of bullying behaviour to which children and/or adolescents are exposed can have significant influence on the use of coping strategies (Roecker Phelps, 2001). Owens, Shute, and Slee (2000) analysed the strategies that children exposed to bullying use in dealing with indirect forms of bullying. Girls aged 15 years were shown images of indirect aggressive behaviours. The respondents' task was to indicate how they would cope with the presented form of bullying. The most common answer was that they would be in denial about the problem or pretend that the event did not affect them. In the case that those strategies were not effective, the children acknowledged that they would use the strategies of avoidance by joining another group of children, avoiding going to school, or in extreme cases attempting suicide. In asking the respondents to think about other forms of coping strategies and the effectiveness of beating the aggressor, the girls stated that confronting the abuser would probably make the situation worse.

Eslea (2001) conducted a survey on a sample of 198 boys and girls aged 11-15 years. The participants exposed to threats and verbal aggression mostly relied on a strategy of "telling someone about the abuse" (22%), "ignoring the situation" (18%), "avoiding the aggressor" (18%) and "confronting the bullies verbally" (16%). In situations of indirect abuse such as spreading rumours, the most common response to the abuse was "verbal confrontation" and "ignoring the situation" (27%), "telling someone" (19%) as well as "doing nothing" (15%). When the bullies tried to isolate the victim, the frequently used strategies were "doing nothing" (33%), "ignoring the situation" (27%) and "telling someone what had happened" (18%). The examined coping strategies in response to a situation of alienation showed that half of the participants (49%) "telling someone what had happened", while 13% argued with the person who had stolen the object. Regarding physical aggression, 42% of the respondents got into a fight with the aggressor, 25% "telling someone what had happened" and 11% "avoiding the aggressor". Obtained results are in accordance with the assumption of Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1973). According to this theory, children exposed to physical aggression respond with physical aggression. Due to the fact that indirect forms of abuse are often hidden and subtle, victims have more difficulty in coping with the bullies because they often do not know the identity of the bully who may be, for example, spreading rumours via the Internet (Waasdorp, Bradshaw, and Duong, 2011).

Flanagan et al. (2012) examined the potential of forgiveness as a coping response for negative peer experiences in early adolescence. Participants were 6th through 8th grade students at a middle school (46% girls). Forgiveness was showed as significant coping strategies for peer victimization experiences. This coping strategies employed by adolescents in response to negative peer experiences was related to their adjustment.

More recently, Kokkinosa et al. (2014) also examined coping with bullying and victimization among preadolescents, as well as moderating effect of self-efficacy on the relationship between coping and bullying/victimization. Results indicated that all forms of bullying (physical, verbal, behavioral, direct and indirect relational) were also related to less frequent reported use of passive avoidance, whereas behavioral and indirect relational bullying were negatively associated with less frequent reported use of rumination. Both passive avoidance and rumination are ineffective coping strategies, the latter may be indicative for development of internalizing problems. Self-efficacy moderated the association between bullying/victimization and coping. Greater use of ineffective coping (i.e., resignation, passive avoidance) predicted bullying and victimization among preadolescents with moderate and low levels of social and emotional self-efficacy, whereas greater use of adaptive coping (i.e., positive self-instructions, social support) was reported by those with higher self-efficacy beliefs.

Age and gender differences in coping with bullying behaviours

The type of coping strategies is determined by the cognitive and social development of the child. According research by Sesar et al. (2011a), younger children, compared to older children, are more likely to use problem-focused strategies and to seek social support in coping with bullying. Other studies (Huter and Boyle, 2004) also confirmed the relationship between younger chronological age and the use of seeking social support as a strategy. Kristensen and Smith (2003) affirm the use of seeking social support in younger children, but highlight the use of distancing and internalizing. Frisén, Hasselblad, and Holmqvist (2012) state that children younger than 13 rely more on seeking help from parents, while older children avoid that type of coping strategy. The feeling of dependence on parents leads logically to younger children asking for help from parents in

situations of exposure to stress. On the other hand, older and more independent adolescents can consider seeking help from parents as humiliating. Family relationships change during puberty in such a way that conflicts between adolescents and parents become more frequent, while the strength of commitment decreases, which could contribute to the obtained differences (Berk, 2004).

Also, Zimmer-Gembeck and Skinner (2011) find out that children engage in more sophisticated and self-dependent forms of coping as they grew older. They begin to handle stress on their own as opposed to relying on others. It can be concluded that younger children deal with bullying by telling someone older about the problem (teacher or parent), while older children seek less help from adults. Another possible explanation for these differences could be the characteristics of groups of children. During the period of adolescence children have more negative attitudes towards those members of groups that seem helpless and who seek help from adults (Olweus and Endresen, 1998; Smith and Shu, 2000). Children especially have negative attitudes towards boys who cannot cope with bullying and consequently have more inferior social status. "Snitching" too has negative connotations and may discourage pupils from seeking help in a situation where they really need to (Kristensen and Smith, 2003).

Older children, compared to younger children, prefer the use of externalizing in coping with bullying (Sesar et al., 2011). Externalizing is a coping strategy manifested through aggressive behaviour such as: swearing, yelling at others, or throwing things in anger. Fox and Boulton (2005) also confirmed this aggressive approach in dealing with bullying among children aged 10-14 years. One explanation for the frequent use of externalizing and this aggressive approach in dealing with bullying among older children can be differences in the physical strength. Older children are more powerful and therefore more likely to be able to deal with bullying with aggressive behaviour, while younger children due to their lower body strength may use other coping strategies that are more effective for them such as attempts to solve a problem by seeking the help of others. In some research conducted thus far (Smith et al., 2001) it was found that an older age is a statistically significant predictor for the use of distancing as a coping strategy. Smith et al. (2001) suggest that a large part of the decrease in exposure to abuse by age may be due to the use of more effective coping strategies or "learning based on experience" in dealing with milder episodes of violence and harassment. However, in serious and recurring cases of violence this likely flows from flaws in the learning of adequate coping strategies.

Waasdorp and Bradshaw (2011) study confirms that age is important determinant related to coping with bullying. Authors identified certain classes characterized by similar coping strategies. The majority of the children in their study belong to group that used passive strategies, while relatively small group belonged to those that endorsed physically and verbally aggressive responses. There was an active or support-seeking group in middle school that sought support from a parent or adult, but this group was not present in a high school setting. In high school, there was an undifferentiated group that sought support, told the bully to stop, and/or walked away, but they were not characterized primarily by seeking social support.

Besides age, gender has also been the focus of many pieces of research. The results of the conducted research acknowledge that boys are generally prone to fighting back or the use of physical aggression (Naylor, Cowie, and del Rey, 2001), while girls are more likely to seek support from their friends or adults (Naylor et al., 2001; Smith et al., 2001; Hunter and Boyle, 2004).

In addition to a strategy seeking social support and externalizing, differences in the ways of dealing with respect to gender were established for some other coping strategies. The study by Kristensen and Smith (2003) found that girls use more likely to seek social support and to internalize, while boys rely on externalizing. Sesar et al. (2011a) found statistically significant gender differences in the use of problem-focused coping strategies, seeking social support and internalizing. Girls used the afore-mentioned strategies more frequently compared to boys.

The differences in the socialization process that are related to stereotypes and gender role expectations could be one of the main reasons for the gender difference in dealing with bullying. Girls are encouraged to express emotions and seek social support more than boys (Ptacek, Smith, and Zanas, 1992; Almeida and Kessler, 1998). Furthermore, the well-known phenomenon regarding the difficulties young men have in sharing feelings about personal problems (Österman et al., 1997; Cunningham et al., 1998) may be the result of the socialization of boys. In addition, the experiences in relationships with other people (Hartup, 1983; Wong and Csikzentmihalyi, 1991) and their perception of masculinity (Naylor and Cowie, 1999) may cause the differences in dealing with bullying.

The difference in dealing with bullying behaviour between girls and boys could also be influenced by the form of violent behaviour which children are exposed to. Exposure to indirect forms of bullying (such as spreading rumours, social exclusion) affects the social status and social relationships of the victim (Murray-Close, Ostrov, and Crick, 2007) which consequently limits the victim to seek support from friends. If we take into account the results of studies conducted to date that emphasize that girls frequently use the seeking of social support strategy in stressful situations (Eschenbeck et al., 2007), then the social damage that occurs as a result of exposure to indirect bullying can induce girls to use more non-adaptive coping strategies such as settling it with

the bully or reciprocating violence. In contrast, boys consider relationship with peers less important relationships (Rose and Rudolph, 2006). Therefore, for boys that have experienced threats or had disrupted social relations, such an experience is not assessed as harmful to their social status (Crick, Grotpeter, and Bigbee, 2002). It can be concluded that the emotional experience of victimization through indirect forms of bullying may have different impact on the two genders, which could consequently influence the type of reaction to bullying. Gender differences were also confirmed in response to direct forms of bullying. Boys who have had experience of direct forms of bullying may feel social pressure to respond with aggressive behaviour in order to maintain social status or to avoid possible stigmatization related to boys' social role (Berger and Rodkin, 2009; Oransky and Marecek, 2009). Getting help from a friend when a child is dealing with direct forms of bullying, such as physical aggression, may be useful especially during the upper grades of elementary school when this form of bullying behaviour is most common. Research shows that bully/victims rely on aggressive behaviour as a response to victimization (Nansel et al., 2004).

As female are more likely to deal with the consequences of abuse and neglect by internalizing than males, this may explain well known gender differences in associations between abuse and psychological problem (Adams et al., 2013). Adams et al. (2013) reported an increased likelihood of a major depressive episode in girls with trauma experience, suggesting females may deal with the consequences of abuse and neglect by internalizing, whereas boys are more likely to externalize.

Obtained results indicates that different coping strategies studied among bullied children and adolescent should not been exclusively studied in isolation from other related demographic and psychological factors (Hansen et al., 2012)

Effectiveness of coping strategies in dealing with bullying

Regarding children who have experienced bullying, not all coping strategies are equally as effective in handling violent behaviours. Therefore a number of studies have focused on examining the effectiveness of certain coping strategies in dealing with bullying behaviour. According to longitudinal research conducted among boys exposed to bullying at the age of five and six, bullying is more prolonged in those boys who react with violence in fighting back than those who seek the support of friends (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1997).

McLean (1994) examined the effectiveness of coping strategies among 200 pupils exposed to abuse. The participants evaluated the effectiveness of certain strategies in dealing with bullying. The most effective strategies in stopping violent behaviour were as follows: do the same thing as the bully, become friends with the bully or fight back. The participants found the following strategies least effective: ignore the bully, tell the bully that he/she will be reported to teaching staff, threaten to hit, seek the help of a teacher, parents, friends, brother or sister, making new friendships. Finally, strategies that have little effect are as follows: answering to the bully, confronting a bully and showing that the person is not disturbed by that type of behaviour. Analysis of the results shows that the most effective strategies are those in which the victim actively handles with the bully, while the least effective were those based on threats to bully, ignoring a bully or telling someone else about the situation. According to children aged 12-18 who reported being bullied, the coping strategies described as "helplessness" and "opposition to aggression" were related to initiation or continuation of bullying among girls (Salmivalli et al., 1996). In boys only the strategy of "opposition to aggression" was related to initiation or continuation of bullying. A lower frequency of bullying behaviour and/or cessation of aggressive behaviour was determined in girls who did not feel helpless during a situation of violence, as well as in boys who did not react by fighting back at the aggressive behaviour of others. Smith et al. (2001) examined the prevalence of coping strategies among children aged 10 to 14 years exposed to bullying. The findings showed that the most frequently used coping strategies were "ignoring the bully", "asking him/her to stop bullying", "seeking the help of adults" or "fighting back". The least used coping strategies were "get away", "asking a friend for help" and "crying". The coping strategies of "crying", "get away", "asking bully to stop" and "asking for the help of adults/friends" were related top more frequent aggressive behaviour. However, the limitations of the longitudinal data do not allow for making conclusions about the causal relationship.

Eslea (2001) examined the effectiveness of coping strategies used by pupils exposed to bullying in children aged 11-15 years. The author found fighting with the bully to be quite effective in a situation of verbal bullying (the calling of derogatory names, threatening, spreading rumours, etc.) and direct bullying such as taking personal belongings and committing physical aggression. Ignoring the bully was the most effective in a situation where the bully stealing personal things of victims, physical aggression and the spreading rumours. Telling someone what happened, as a strategy of seeking social support, was found to be effective in a situations of stealing personal things, exposure to threats, the calling of derogatory names and spreading rumours. The author states that confronting the bully is not an especially effective strategy in dealing with bullying.

Smith et al. (2004) investigated the effectiveness of strategies among victims of bullying aged 13-16. The most effective coping strategy pupils revealed to be the strategy of telling someone what happened, as well as the strategy of making new friendships. Both strategies were mostly used by pupils who have been abused but

were able to stop the bullying compared to those that were exposed to bullying but could not stop it. There were no statistically significant differences in the use of coping strategies such as ignoring the situation that had occurred, confrontation or avoiding the bully.

Frisen et al.'s (2012) study on the effectiveness of coping strategies examined 273 victims of bullying at age 18. The study was conducted in Sweden, a country that uses an intensive bullying prevention programme and that reports a very low prevalence of bullying. The most effective way of bullying reduction involved holistic support from school staff, transition to a higher grade and changes in coping strategies in dealing with bullying. Small numbers of participants acknowledged that bullying stopped after receiving help from peers.

Finally, Mora Mechan (2006) using a retrospective approach examined the long-term consequences of exposure to bullying, the mediator role of coping strategies as well as the perception of the effectiveness of coping strategies among 219 participants aged 18-40 years. Seeking help from family members was assessed as the most effective strategy for all victims who have used this strategy during high school, as well as for one third of victims during primary school. Ignoring the problem was found to be a good strategy for dealing with bullying among more than half of the interviewed victims of primary school age and 17% of the victims of secondary school age. Furthermore, the victims of bullying during primary school, compared to those in secondary school, used significantly more strategies in dealing with bullying, as well as considered them equally effective. Victims of bullying during secondary school stated that a more effective coping strategy was seeking help from others like family, friends or teachers.

Generally, the best estimated strategies were those that included focusing on solving a problem as well as a strategy of avoidance such as ignoring. For some authors (Roth and Cohen, 1986) avoidance as a coping strategy can be recognized as an active way of solving a problem because it can be assumed, especially in the majority of cases of verbal aggression, that by using it the victim can show the bully that his/her behaviour has not effect. In the group of strategies that have been found as less effective were strategies of confrontation (e.g., fighting with the bully). One possible reason of perceiving confronting as a non-effective strategy may be that this strategy uses the aggressive approach in dealing with bullying. If it is continuously used it can cause more problems than benefits to the victims (Fournet, Wilson, and Wallander, 1998; Olafsen and Viernero, 2000).

Kanetsune and Smith (2002) found that students in higher grades have a defined idea of what would be the best coping strategies for every form of bullying behaviour. According to the authors, problem-focused strategies, compared to emotion-focused strategies, were assessed as more effective. However, knowledge of appropriate strategies for coping with different forms of bullying behaviour does not necessarily mean that children use them in a situation of exposure to bullying.

Frisén, Hasselblad and Holmqvist (2012) assessed effectiveness of coping strategies on a sample of Swedish students through qualitative analysis. They asked 273 former victims in Sweden, all 18 year old, to explain what had made the bullying stop (if it did) and content analysed the results. Overall, 25% said it was support from school personnel, 23% support from parents, 12% a change of appearance or way of being, 11% a change of school or class, 11% making new friends, 8% the bullies changed their attitude, 5% no particular reason, 4% support from peers, and 3% other reasons.

Paul, Smith and Blumberg (2012) attempted to find out perceived effectiveness in the general student population of coping strategies and school intervention in relation to traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The typical forms of traditional bullying behaviour included hurtful physical actions, damaging personal property, verbal abuse and social exclusion. Students reported the most helpful approach in coping with traditional bullying and cyberbullying was the support of family members. Regarding the helpful intervention, for both traditional bullying and cyberbullying, suspension from school was considered useful.

Based on the results of conducted studies to date, it can be concluded that problem-focused strategies (Baldry and Farrington, 2005) and those of seeking social support (Kochenderfer and Ladd, 1997; Visconti and Troop-Gordon, 2010) are over the short-term and long-term related to a lower prevalence of victimization. Approach strategies, such as problem-focused or seeking social support, can strengthen children or adolescents, as well as moderate the negative consequences related to bullying (Roth and Cohen, 1986; Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub, 1989). However, as the results of previous research make evident, coping strategies per se are not always related to positive outcomes. Strategies of avoidance, cognitive or behavioural, represent a significant risk factor for exposure to aggressive behaviour (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Skinner, 2003).

It should be noted that recent research shows that the effectiveness of coping strategies may not be related just to the type of coping strategies, but also to the prevalence of violence. According to research by Kochenderfer-Lad and Skinner (2002), certain coping strategies considered as effective (e.g. problem-focused strategy) are useful only to children who are not often exposed to bullying.

In addition, the results of conducted studies acknowledge numerous specific factors related to coping, such as social cognition, assessment of threat (Hunter and Boyle, 2004), emotional intelligence and sense of control (Hunter and Borg, 2006). The limitation of results obtained by longitudinal methodology reduces the validity of the findings on how these variables predict changes in coping through time. Children who told

someone (parents, teachers, friends or pupils) that they were being bullied state that it helped them to have someone who they could talk to or who could listen to them, and that this process of conversation gave them strength to overcome the problem and to appreciate that they have a person who cares about them (Naylor and Cowie, 1999).

III. CONCLUSION

This paper reviewed the coping strategies used in stressful situations during childhood and adolescence, as well as addressed the specificities of coping strategies in dealing with bullying. The findings showed no consistent gender differences in coping style during stressful situations, although a tendency of using problem-focused strategies in girls as well as internalizing in boys is apparent. Studies found that at younger ages children develop and use more types of coping strategies in stressful situations. Furthermore, in the above-mentioned studies the most commonly suggested coping strategy in dealing with bullying utilizes the approach strategies. This is a type of strategy that significantly contributes to reducing the prevalence of victimization. Surprisingly children who are aggressive toward others reported a higher prevalence of avoidance strategies. Gender and age differences in coping strategies showed that girls, as well as younger children, use more seeking social support and internalizing strategies, while boys and older children us externalizing. This paper highlights the influence of different types of victimization on coping strategies. For example, a strategy of avoidance was found to be more prevalent in indirect forms of violence, seeking social support in situations of threats and verbal aggression and fighting back in physical aggression.

Based on the conducted studies it may be concluded that it is of particular importance to investigate the effectiveness of certain coping strategies and differences in coping strategies regarding the forms of bullying. Furthermore, it would be very interesting to examine relationship between personality traits and coping strategies, as well as the role of the family in forming coping styles. Longitudinal studies should be conducted that could provide insight into changes that occur in the selection of coping strategies over time. The results of the research have practical implications in the prevention of bullying, as well as in the provision of psychological assistance to children who are involved in bullying. Many educators, health professionals, parents and adults who interact with children and youth people could play a positive role in teaching children how to deal with this problem. It would be very useful to develop group treatment programmes for those exposed to bullying. This type of therapy could help children to learn how to manage and develop effective coping strategies. Seeing that other members of groups have significant problems which they manage serves as positive reinforcement for children.

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