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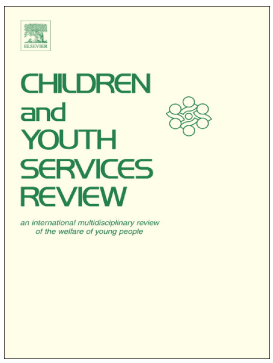

School violence in two Mediterranean countries: Italy and Albania

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School violence in two Mediterranean Countries: Italy and Albania

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VICTIMIZATION IN SCHOOLS: COMPARING ITALY AND ALBANIA

Abstract

School victimization includes every form of violent offense, including physical or psychological brutality, abandonment or exploitation, and sexual abuse experienced by students. Being tied to a specific cultural context, school victimization can present differences in terms of frequency and risk factors in various countries. The aim of this study is to describe this phenomenon, its incidence and prevalence, and the risk factors associated with it (i.e., gender and age) in Italy and Albania; two European nations geographically close but with significant differences in historical, cultural, and legislative traditions. A total of 596 participants - schoolchildren from grades 6-13, of whom 261 were Italian and 335 were Albanian -- anonymously filled out the ICAST-CI questionnaire. The results show that school victimization affects both countries. Both in Italy and Albania, physical, and psychological abuse are the most common forms of victimization, while sexual abuse is the least frequent. Furthermore, in terms of demographics, the victims' peers are the most-frequent perpetrators in every category of victimization. However, Albania presents significantly higher levels of physical victimization than Italy and a higher percentage of adult offenders. Gender and age are significant risk factors of school victimization, albeit with some differences concerning the types of abuse in both nations.

Keywords: school violence, Italy, Albania, adolescents, abuse, victimization

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Introduction

Definition of victimization at school

School victimization is becoming a pressing social problem worldwide (Benbenishty & Astor, 2008). The number of minors involved in some form of victimization is alarming, to the point of it being recognized as a genuine social problem in both the United States and Europe (Hornor, 2010). In fact, it is estimated that every year 246 million minors worldwide experience some form of victimization in the school environment (UNESCO, 2017). Further, as recognized by Pinheiro (2006) in his report for the United Nations Study on Violence against Children, cases of violence in schools are generally hidden, under-reported, and under-recorded. Furthermore, not all forms of abuse have received the same amount of attention. Great interest has been shown, for instance, in the study of domestic violence while less attention has been paid to victimization experienced in the school context.

Research on school victimization has mainly focused on bullying and on new forms of victimization tied to the proliferation of communication technologies, i.e., cyber-bullying (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2016). Bullying is probably the most frequent and widespread sub-type of school violence, however it can be considered only one of the many forms of school violence.

The concept of *school victimization* that we are adopting in this paper covers a wider phenomenon than bullying, incorporating all acts of aggression and abuse occurring in the school context, without them being necessarily repeated in a certain time span or perpetrated in an asymmetrical power relationship between perpetrator and victim (Henry, 2000). School victimization includes every form of violent offense, including physical or psychological brutality, abandonment or exploitation, and sexual abuse experienced by students. School

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violence includes not only violence among peers, but also corporal punishment and other forms of violence directed at students by teachers (Lester, Lawrence, & Ward, 2017).

Prevalence of the phenomenon

The prevalence of school victimization varies from study to study, due to cultural and socio-contextual factors, but also to the research methodologies and instruments used to measure it. From a recent meta-analysis carried out on 80 studies conducted in different parts of the world, it emerges that 36% of adolescents have suffered bullying, while 15% declare they have been the target of cyber-bullying (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014). Eslea et al (2004) made a comparison of 7 nations on the prevalence of school bullying: China, the UK, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Portugal and Spain. The data show that the percentage of students who see themselves as victims ranged from 5.2% in Ireland to 25.6% in Italy. According to a recent review by Chan and Wong (2015), in Chinese societies (i.e. Mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau) traditional school bullying victimization rates range from 2 to 66%. This high range can be due to not only to regional differences, but also to the several instruments used and to the different characteristics of the samples involved in the researches included in this review. Perren, Dooley, Shaw, and Cross (2010) compared Switzerland and Australia, finding higher percentages of bullying victims in the former (Switzerland victims: female 11.1%, male 13.8%; Australia victims: female 9.6%, male 9.1%). In more general terms, the research conducted in the USA reveals higher rates of school violence than in other western countries, while Asian nations tend to report levels that are lower than or comparable to those in European countries (Eslea et al., 2004; Modecki et al., 2014; Sittichai, 2014; Zych, Farrington, Llorent, & Ttofi, 2017).

Risk factors for school victimization: gender, age, and cultural influences

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Gender is a significant variable in the study of school violence. Males typically show greater aggressive behavior than females in the school context, and this seems to be confirmed both by studies in western (Baldry, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Rigby, 2005) and eastern countries (Chen & Astor, 2009). Females tend to perpetrate fewer acts of physical violence than males (Grunseit, Weatherburn, & Donnelly, 2008), and they tend to victimize other females when they do (Roland & Idsøe, 2001). Conversely, males engage in more frequent acts of physical violence, directed at victims of both genders. Males seem to get more easily involved in episodes of bullying and tend to be more commonly perpetrators and victims of direct forms of bullying, while girls are found to be more involved in forms of indirect bullying (Hong & Espelage, 2012). Shute, Owens, and Slee (2008) find that girls are often sexually victimized by boys, especially with verbal rather than physical forms of aggression. Regarding physical violence, the literature shows that males are more exposed to it than females, and abuse peers of both genders more frequently (Roland & Idsøe, 2001); females are more frequently victimized by same-gender students (Grunseit et al., 2008). With respect to sexually abusive behaviors, males perpetrate this type of school violence most often (Kaltiala-Heino, Fröjd, & Marttunen, 2016). Also, females are at a higher risk of being victims of sexual harassment, although not all the authors agree with this statement. For instance, some studies have found that female students experience sexual victimization at school significantly more frequently than males (Hand & Sanchez, 2000; Timmerman, 2003), whereas other studies found that males and females experience similarly high levels of sexual victimization (Fineran, Bennett, & Sacco, 2003). These apparently contradicting findings could be due to different operational definitions of sexual victimization used by different authors and to cultural differences (Attar-Schwartz, 2009).

Age has a significant role in the school violence phenomenon. In a review of the literature

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on studies conducted in the West on bullying, Smith, Madsen and Moody (1999) found that bullying declines as age rises, and more recent studies confirm a peak during early adolescence and then a decrease during high school (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Pepler et al., 2006; Troop-Gordon, 2017). However, while this applies to European and Anglo Saxon countries, the same data do not seem to emerge from studies conducted in other cultural contexts, like Malaysia and Ethiopia (Benbenishty & Astor, 2008). According to Benbenishty and Astor (2008), in cultures where the importance of age and seniority is emphasized, older students may be more inclined to victimize younger ones, and it is likely that in such a cultural context bullying is perceived as a normative act by the authorities, including those at school. From a developmental perspective, some factors like advanced cognitive skills, greater equity in peer structures, and a more sophisticated sense of identity can lead to a greater decrease in the frequency of aggressive behavior in adolescence, along with learning how to avoid potential bullies (Troop-Gordon, 2017).

Gender, social norms, and wider cultural factors have a significant influence on school violence. Discriminatory gender norms supporting the dominance of men over women, and the perpetuation of these norms through violence are found in some form in almost every culture. Similarly, widespread social norms affirming the authority of teachers over children legitimize the use of violence to maintain discipline. Children and adolescents who do not to conform to these norms are often subjected to violence at school. Schools themselves can encourage children to be violent by enacting discriminatory practices, or through curricula and textbooks supporting the use of violence (Parkes, 2015; UNESCO, 2017).

Power imbalances and gender discrimination in schools can promote attitudes and practices that repress children, forcing them to grow tolerant to forms of violence such as

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corporal punishment. Schools and the education system are also influenced by wider social and structural factors and may reflect and reproduce environments that do not protect children and adolescents from violence. For example, physical and sexual violence can be more prevalent in schools in contexts where it is also more prevalent in wider society (Imbusch, Misse, & Carrión, 2011; UNESCO, 2017).

In view of the importance of cultural factors, comparative studies of school violence in different countries are needed in order to achieve a better understanding of how the wider cultural framework affects the phenomenon.

Italy and Albania

Italy and Albania are two European countries that are geographically close and have shared historical backgrounds. The Italian peninsula and the Albanian territories were part of the Roman Empire. During the Second World War Albania was occupied and subjected to the Italian fascist regime, and later liberated by the anti-Nazi forces. Furthermore, the economic and political crises at the end of the last century caused an endless flow of Albanian refugees towards the Italian coast. Today, Italy is still a favored destination for men and women from Albania. According to data supplied by the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Albanians are the second largest ethnic community (in Italy?) with 498,419 members, of whom 27.7% are minors. According to a study by ISTAT (2016), over a quarter of the students of Albanian descent present in the Italian school system had prior contact (for varying lengths of time) with the school context in their country of origin.

In spite of the geographical proximity and shared past, Italy and Albania are quite different in cultural norms and values (Farina & Belacchi, 2014). Albania was a patriarchal society characterized by high levels of violence, and has only recently begun to face the issue of

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childhood abuse and mistreatment, since the collapse of the Soviet Union (Sicher et al., 2000). In the Albanian cultural context, physical and psychological violence are considered acceptable forms of discipline, both at school and at home, and Albanian children themselves have internalized the idea that such practices are necessary in bringing up children (Qirjako, Burazeri, & Amursi, 2014). A UNICEF study (Tamo & Karaj, 2006) underlined that Albanian parents feel physical violence can have positive effects on the growth of children, but that physical violence is more harmful than the psychological kind. Many Albanian teachers also believe that aggressive behavior like bullying is connected to the child's normal development (Kashahu, 2014). A recent study on beliefs on corporal punishment of children conducted by interviewing parents and teachers (Karaj, 2009) found that 76% of parents and 57% of the teachers think that it is acceptable to slap children. However in 2010, Albania officially banned all forms of corporal punishment on minors (Qirjako et al., 2014).

Compared to Albania, the Italian state has a longer legislative, pedagogical and social tradition for the protection of children. Italian education, both at home and at school, was marked by the use of violence as a way of correcting children for much of last century. However, in the last few decades this approach has been progressively abandoned and today the use of force as a means of education tends to be condemned by Italian public opinion and disallowed by the authorities (Malizia, 2016).

However, a profound link seems to survive in the Italian context between masculinity and violence, which can also affect the school situation. An interesting study by Gini and Pozzoli (2006) found, in a sample of Italian primary school pupils, that irrespective of sex, masculine traits predicted active bullying behavior. As previously stated, the phenomenon of school violence involves Italy too: actually some studies portray an even worse situation than in other

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European and Western countries (Menesini et al., 2003; Smith, 2004).

However, data concerning school violence and bullying in the two countries, Italy and Albania, are quite sparse, outlining important differences: a study conducted in Italy by Terres des Hommes and the Italian Committee of Services Against Child Abuse (CISMAI) (Autorità Garante per l'Infanzia e l'Adolescenza [Authority for Children and Adolescents], CISMAI, & Terre des Hommes, 2015) found that 1% of children are victims of maltreatment and have been taken into care for this reason. Among these, 76.5% reported being victims of sexual abuse, 71.0% reported being physically abused and 53.1% reported suffering psychological maltreatment. Obviously these data refer only to children and adolescents that have been officially identified as victims of abuse, but many cases of abuse remain hidden or are not-reported to authorities. A study by ISTAT (2015), carried out on a sample of students aged between 11 and 17 years, revealed that 19.8% of Italian adolescents had been victims of violence perpetrated by peers in the year before the survey, and 9.8% report that these episodes were repeated every week. The study revealed that younger students (11-13 years) had been bullied more than older students (14-17 years) (22.5% vs 17.9%), and females had been victimized more than males, regarding both acts of traditional bullying (20.9% vs 18.8%), and cyber-bullying (7.1% vs 4.6%).

According to findings from the Balkan Epidemiological Study on Child Abuse and Neglect (Cenko, Hazizaj, Çoku, & Haxhiymeri, 2013) Albanian children (11 to 16 years old) report a high incidence and prevalence of child mistreatment and abuse. Psychological abuse is the most frequent form of victimization experienced by children, with a prevalence of 62%, and an incidence in the last year of 69%. The next most common form of maltreatment, physical victimization, was reported less frequently, with a prevalence and incidence equal to 60% and

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48% respectively. Sexual victimization was the form of maltreatment that was reported least frequently by children: eleven percent reported having suffered sexual violence during their lifetime, with a 9% incidence in the last year. With respect to bullying in particular the National Survey on the Phenomenon of Bullying and Extremism in the Education System of Albania (Dragoti & Ismaili, 2017), 19.4% of the students declare that they have been involved in bullying: 9.7% as victims, 5.2% as the bullies of others, and 4.3% as both victim and bully. The perpetrators of bullying are 68% male and 32% female, while among the victims 52% are male and 48% female. The data therefore show a greater involvement of boys in bullying, both as victims and as aggressors. According to the Albanian national survey, the highest incidence of bullying is in 11th grade, followed by 5th grade. As far as school violence in general is concerned, in 2013 the study carried out by Save The Children, Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes Foundation showed that 42% of the students questioned expressed a sense of insecurity in their school context, and 28% had been involved in serious conflict in schools.

Aim of the study

The aim of this study is to describe and compare the phenomenon of school victimization in two European countries, Italy and Albania, two countries that are geographically very close yet culturally quite distant. To the best of our knowledge, no studies have been published analyzing school victimization in both the countries. In particular, we aim to study the prevalence and incidence of in-school physical, psychological and sexual victimization in the two countries and identify possible differences. Further, we aim to describe the school victimization phenomenon by identifying the most frequent types of abusive behavior and the most frequent perpetrators. Lastly, we aim to study and compare the role of gender and age in the two countries as possible risk factors linked to a higher likelihood of being victimized. Due to

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the cultural differences described above, we expect to find significant differences, with Albanian students being more frequently victimized. Regarding possible risk factors, we expect to find a higher incidence of physical victimization among males and a higher incidence of sexual victimization among females in both countries. Regarding age, we expect to find a higher incidence of each type of victimization among students from lower grades.

Methods

Participants

The sample was made up of 596 schoolchildren from grades 6-13 (261 Italians and 335 Albanians). In the Italian sample (mean age= 13.25; SD= 2.19), 36.4% were males, while in the Albanian sample, 46.8% were males (mean age= 14.08 years, SD= 2.35). Participants were recruited from schools in two medium-size cities in western Italy and northern Albania. Among Italians, 60.8% of the recruited sample was composed of middle school students, while the 44.9% of the Albanian sample was made up of middle school students.

In Italy, 7.7% of the sample consists of first- or second-generation immigrants, while immigrants were 2.4% of the Albanian sample.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from 14 Italian and 18 Albanian public schools during the 2015-2016 school year. Teachers and school principals approved the participation of students in the study. Preceding the data collection, individual consent for participation, as well as active parents' consent, was obtained. We informed the participants that data confidentiality would be assured, participation in the study was voluntary, and that they could decline to participate and withdraw from the research at any time. Participants were also informed about the nature and objective of the study, which was approved by the IRB of the University of Turin (approval

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number: 47096). Students did not receive any kind of remuneration for participating in the study.

Instruments

The *Ispcan Child Abuse Screening Tool Child Institution Version (ICAST-CI)* is an internationally recognized screening instrument designed to identify cases of institutional violence (Zolotor et al., 2009). It was chosen because of the need to obtain results that can be compared at the international level. The original design was based on the experience of scholars and experts from 40 countries. ICAST-CI was initially translated into six languages and tested in the field in four countries on a convenience sample of 571 pre-adolescents and adolescents ages 12 to 17 years old, selected from schools and classes where the researchers had easy access. The ICAST-CI has been previously validated and used in different countries (Child, Naker, Horton, Walakira, & Devries, 2014; Kumar, Kumar, Singh, & Kar, 2017).

For this study, the ICAST-CI was translated into Italian following the criteria established by Van de Vijver and Hambleton (1996). School teachers, students, and psychologists were also involved in the translation and adaptation process. The ICAST-CI consists of 19 items for physical victimization, 12 items for psychological victimization, and 10 items for sexual abuse, with response modalities that allow the investigation of the frequency of the episodes of violence and the perpetrators concurrently. Items were introduced by the following sentence: “Thinking about yourself in the last year, has anyone at school done something like:”. Exemplar Items are “Hurt you or caused pain to you?”, “Shouted at you to embarrass or humiliate you?”, “Did anyone touch your private parts or breasts when you didn’t want them to?”. Possible answers about frequency ranged from 1.*Never* to 3. *Many times*, with a supplemental answer “*Not in the past year but it has happened*”. Reliability computed as Cronbach’s alpha for the ICAST-CI

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subscales was generally acceptable, Physical abuse, Italy α = .66 , Albania α = .77 , psychological abuse Italy α = .76 , Albania α = .74 , sexual abuse Italy α = .70 , Albania α = .71.

Data analysis

Given the aims of the study, we analyzed the Italian and Albanian participants' responses to questionnaire items and described the incidence and prevalence of the three kinds of abuse investigated by ICAST-CI as reported by the adolescents and we tested for differences between the two countries controlling for gender and school grade imbalance, using Mantel-Haenszel chi-square test. We computed reliability of the three scales and the correlations between the three dimensions separately for both countries. Next, in order to provide a more detailed description of the phenomenon in both countries, we reported the incidence and the perpetrators (adult, peers, or both) of the most common behaviors for each kind of abuse. Finally, in order to estimate the impact of potential risk factors, we ran separate logistical regression analyses using gender and type of school as regressors and the three types of abuse (physical, psychological and sexual) as outcome variables. For each abuse type, we reported risk estimates [odds ratio (OR)] and 95% confidence intervals (CI) for each regressor.

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 24.0 for Windows.

Results

Table 1 shows prevalence and incidence (in the last year) of the three different kinds of victimization that were investigated in the study. Both in Italy and Albania, psychological victimization was reported by students more frequently than other kinds of abuse. The second most frequent type of abuse reported was physical mistreatment. The least frequently experienced type of abuse was sexual victimization, which had an incidence of 23% in Italy and 27.5% in Albania. No significant differences between the two countries emerged for

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psychological and sexual abuse, either regarding incidence or prevalence. The only significant difference that was found entails physical abuse, which showed a higher incidence and prevalence in Albania, reaching 67.2% and 76.1%, respectively.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Table 2 shows the most frequent abusive behaviors for each kind of abuse for both countries. For each abusive behavior, the incidence and perpetrators are indicated. Regarding perpetrators, each behavior was reported as perpetrated by an adult, a peer, or both (i.e., this percentage represents the proportion of students who experienced this kind of abuse by a peer and an adult, not necessarily in the same episode).

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Table 3 shows the incidence and demographic distribution for each kind of abuse studied. In Italy, we found a significantly higher incidence of physical and psychological abuse for males and for students from middle school, while no differences emerged for sexual abuse. In Albania, more differences emerged. Regarding gender, we found that males more frequently reported having experienced each kind of abuse. As to type of school, there was only one significant difference: Sexual abuse was more frequent in high school.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

Table 4 shows the ORs regarding the demographic characteristics affecting the probability of being a victim of each kind of abuse, separately for Italy and Albania. Coherently with the descriptive statistics reported in Table 3, we found that in Italy, being male was a risk factor for being physically or psychologically abused. Regarding type of school, Italian students from middle school had a significantly higher chance of being a victim of physical and psychological abuse, while no influence emerged for sexual abuse.

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In Albania, we found that being male represented a risk factor for physical and sexual victimization. Albanian students from high school were more at risk for sexual abuse.

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

Discussion

The main aim of our study is to compare two European countries, Italy and Albania, in relation to the prevalence and incidence of three forms of school victimization (i.e. psychological, physical and sexual) in middle school and high school. We found that school victimization involves both Italian and Albanian students, and in both countries psychological abuse is confirmed as the most widespread form violence at school, while sexual victimization is the least common in both the countries, both in terms of incidence and prevalence.

In particular, the prevalence of psychological abuse is close to 90% in the Italian context, and only slightly lower in Albania (86%). Regarding physical violence, Albanian students reported significantly higher levels of both incidence (Albania: 67%; Italy: 52%) and prevalence (Albania: 76%; Italy: 68%). Lastly, sexual victimization presented much lower levels of prevalence (Albania: 30%; Italy: 35%) and incidence (Albania: 28%; Italy: 23%), without significant differences between the two countries. These results are in line with previous findings from literature on childhood abuse (Cenko et al., 2013; Longobardi, Settanni, Prino, & Gastaldi, 2015; Tamo & Karaj, 2006; Zolotor et al., 2009).

The second aim was to describe the school victimization phenomenon in the two countries, both with respect to the most frequent abusive behaviors and the most frequent perpetrators. We found that the incidence of the most common behaviors are generally comparable between the two Countries, with the exception of physical victimization, for which Albanian students reported higher levels of incidence. For instance, the most frequently reported

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event in both countries was being slapped on the arm or hand, but the incidence was 38% for Albania and 22% for Italy. Regarding perpetrators, specifically for physical victimization, both in Italy and Albania, student victims said their peers were the perpetrators in most cases. However, by looking at the five forms of physical violence that are most widespread in these countries, in Albania, the percentage of adults who physically mistreat the young and the percentages of co-offenders (adults and peers) are generally higher than in the Italian sample. A similar situation can be found for sexual victimization. In both countries, peers are more frequently identified as the perpetrators of sexual abuse. However, in Albania, the percentage of adults indicated as being responsible for sexual abuse tends to be higher.

The last aim of the study was to compare the two countries with respect to gender and age as potential risk factors for school victimization. Our expectations were only partially confirmed. Gender emerged as a significant variable, though with differences between the two countries. Both in Italy and in Albania males are more at risk for physical and psychological victimization. With respect to sexual victimization, our data are in line with the sector of the literature that sees males as being at higher risk of being victimized. As far as sexual victimization is concerned, the literature often indicates that females are more exposed to this form of abuse (UNESCO, 2017). However, our data do not support this finding. While in Italy no significant difference was found between males and females in terms of the prevalence of sexual victimization, in Albania the analysis indicates males as more at risk of sexual abuse. Moreover, these data are similar to the findings of the BECAN (Cenko et al., 2013) study in the Albanian context. It is possible that in a society like the Albanian one, dominated by a patriarchal mentality, females are less likely to report sexual abuse for fear of being blamed for initiating it and/or of being ostracized by their society as is commonly the case. Another possible explanation for these results is the

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unavoidable bias linked to the instrument: the quite broad operational definition of sexual victimization used in this study could have affected our results. A narrower operational definition could have led to partially different results.

With respect to age, the literature underlines a decrease in aggressive behaviors while growing up, with a peak in early adolescence followed by a decline (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Nansel et al., 2001; Pepler et al., 2006; Troop-Gordon, 2017). Overall the data from Italian students are compatible with the literature and in line with the data from a recent study by ISTAT (2015) on bullying in Italy. Specifically, in the Italian sample there is a lower incidence of psychological and physical victimization among high school students compared to those in middle-school, while no difference is found in the incidence of sexual abuse. In the Albanian sample, on the other hand, no difference was found between middle and high school students in relation to the prevalence of psychological and physical abuse, while high school students experience a greater risk of sexual victimization than middle- school students.

Limitations

Our study, descriptive and cross-sectional, is the first in the literature to describe and compare Italy and Albania on the phenomenon of school victimization. The fact that an internationally validated instrument was used is certainly a strength of our investigation, and provides the scientific community with useful data for scholars and policy makers who are interested in studying the phenomenon from a cross-national perspective. Nevertheless, the study presents a series of limitations. First of all, the sample is convenience and not representative, so the generalization of the results at a national level in the two countries is hampered. Furthermore, the cross-sectional nature of our study does not allow inferences to be made about any cause-and-effect relations between the type of school violence and the risk factors examined.

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Moreover, the study did not consider some of the possibly influential variables on the risk of school victimization such as SES and school poverty. Further studies are needed to investigate the impact of these other factors on school victimization. Lastly, the instrument that we used does not consider other forms of school victimization that are becoming more common among adolescents, such as cyberbullying or homophobic slurs and insults, which deserve to be the focus of a deeper analysis (Sari & Camadan, 2016).

Conclusions

This study aimed at comparing the phenomenon of school victimization in Italy and Albania, two European countries that are geographically close, but have different historical, cultural, and legislative traditions and norms, even with respect to educational policies and childhood-protection laws and programs (Qirjako et al., 2014).

Overall, the findings of this study seem to depict the Albanian scholastic context as more violent, especially in regard to physical victimization. Although in recent years Albania has adopted several legislative interventions aimed at reducing the phenomenon of physical violence against children, it is possible that the influence of the traditional Albanian patriarchal culture resists this social change. In fact, our results seem to indicate that aggressive physical acts and physical punishments are still in use, probably supported by the cultural acceptance of physical violence as an acceptable educational method and the belief, held by teachers too, that physical aggression is typical aspect of the normal adolescent development (Kashahu, 2014; Qirjako et al., 2014; Tamo & Karaj, 2006). In such a context, it is plausible that there is a proliferation of violence in interpersonal relations. However, it cannot be ruled out that other sociocultural variables, such as economic culture and cultural values not taken into consideration for this study, may influence the phenomenon.

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Unlike Albania, Italy has not yet completely banned corporal punishment in every setting, but has a longer tradition of laws protecting children. Support for violence as a form of education was part of Italian culture for most of last the century but in recent decades this ideology has been progressively abandoned (Malizia, 2016). However, our data, in line previous findings, outline the phenomenon of school violence as a problem in Italy ~~too~~ (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2017; Istituto Nazionale di Statistica (ISTAT), 2015).

As a final remark, it is worth pointing out that psychological violence emerges as an issue that is very common in both countries. This kind of abuse deserves additional attention, not just because it is difficult to identify, but also because it is often underestimated, despite the negative impact that it has on the individual's development, and on the emergence of psychopathologies (Brassard & Fiorvanti, 2015; Hart & Glaser, 2011).

Implications

Studying school victimization with a cross-national perspective not only allows us to reflect on the impact cultural dimension may have on violence-related phenomena, but lets us contribute to monitoring and mapping the spread of the phenomenon in different regions of the world. Knowledge of the prevalence of the phenomenon, and its risk and protective factors can be used to implement culturally appropriate ad hoc strategies for intervention and protection. In addition, the data emerging from the research can be used to urge the authorities in charge to finance intervention projects designed to combat school violence, and to enact legislation for the protection of childhood. In particular, valuable lessons can be learned from research conducted in countries with a different incidence of school victimization in order to achieve a critical understanding of individual, school, and societal factors influencing the incidence of school victimization, both directly and through mediation mechanisms. In turn, this knowledge can be

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used to develop and adapt health promotion and prevention strategies tailored to different cultural contexts. Our study is a preliminary contribution in this direction, providing input for the understanding of the phenomenon and the risk factors involved, highlighting the similarities and differences in the two contexts studied. Nevertheless, the research must continue and our data are not conclusive. In particular, the nature and causal links between risk factors and episodes of victimization need to be clarified. Factors that in this research have not been considered can also be examined, such as SES. In addition, the research could shift from a strictly descriptive approach to more theoretically oriented study.

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Table 1.

Prevalence and Incidence of Physical, Psychological and Sexual abuse in school, in Italy and Albania

	Physical abuse		Psychological abuse		Sexual abuse	
	Prevalence	Incidence	Prevalence	Incidence	Prevalence	Incidence
Italy	68.1%	52.1%	89.3%	75.9%	34.5%	23.0%
Albania	76.1%	67.2%	86.0%	81.8%	29.9%	27.5%
Significance of difference	$p = .04$	$p < .001$	$p = .12$	$p = .10$	$p = .15$	$p = .36$

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Table 2.

The 5 Most frequent abusive behaviors and their perpetrators in Italy and Albania

	Physical abuse					Psychological abuse					Sexual abuse				
	Behavior (Has somebody …)	**Incidence**	**Perpetrators (Adult/Peer/Both)**			**Behavior (Has somebody …)**	**Incidence**	**Perpetrators (Adult/Peer/Both)**			**Behavior (Has somebody…)**	**Incidence**	**Perpetrators (Adult/Peer/Both)**		
Italy	Slapped you on your arm or hand?	21.7%	17.6%	66.2%	16.2%	Sworn at you?	59.7%	5.7%	88.0%	6.3%	Shown you pictures, magazines, or movies of people or children doing sexual things?	11.2%	2.4%	97.6%	0.0%
	Kicked you?	20.2%	4.2%	93.1%	2.8%	Called you rude or hurtful names?	37.3%	5.6%	90.3%	4.0%	Did anyone at school (work) kiss you when you didn't want to be kissed?	8.9%	0.0%	100%	0.0%
	Hit you by throwing an object at you?	19.1%	11.3%	83.1%	5.6%	Deliberately insulted you?	34.4%	8.3%	84.3%	7.4%	Touched your body in a sexual way or in a way that made you uncomfortable? By "sexual way" we mean touching you on your genitals or breasts.	8.4%	2.9%	91.4%	5.7%
	Hurt you or caused pain to you at school?	17.8%	1.1%	94.4%	4.4%	Shouted at you to embarrass or humiliate you?	25.9%	21.1%	62.2%	16.7%	Did anyone at school (work) touch your private parts or breasts when you didn't want them to?	5.4%	0.0%	90.0%	10.0%

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	Hit you with a closed fist?	13.6%	4.0%	90.0%	6.0%	Stole or broke or ruined your belongings?	25.5%	1.1%	96.7%	2.2%	Opened or took their clothes off in front of you when they should not have done so?	3.4%	18.2%	81.8%	0.0%
Albania	Slapped you on your arm or hand?	38.4%	36.7%	50.8%	11.7%	Swore at you?	60.2%	7.8%	75.3%	16.9%	Showed you pictures, magazines, or movies of people or children doing sexual things?	18.1%	18.5%	61.1%	20.4%
	Twisted your ear as punishment?	28.5%	20.0%	69.2%	10.8%	Deliberately insulted you?	43.4%	8.2%	67.0%	24.7%	Did anyone at school (work) kiss you when you didn't want to be kissed?	14.7%	2.7%	94.6%	2.7%
	Slapped you on your face or head as punishment?	27.4%	23.8%	60.0%	16.3%	Stole or broke or ruined your belongings?	39.6%	14.5%	67.9%	17.6%	Touched your body in a sexual way or in a way that made you uncomfortable? By "sexual way" we mean touching you on your genitals or breasts.	7.7%	13.6%	59.1%	27.3%
	Hit you by throwing an object at you?	22.2%	27.6%	58.2%	14.3%	Shouted at you to embarrass or humiliate you?	35.5%	29.5%	41.9%	28.6%	Did anyone at school (work) touch your private parts or breasts when you didn't want them to?	4.0%	23.1%	69.2%	7.7%
	Hurt you or caused you pain at school?	19.3%	17.2%	70.7%	12.1%	Called you rude or hurtful names?	34.4%	8.3%	72.2%	19.4%	Did anyone at school (work) make you have sex with them?	3.3%	40.0%	50.0%	10.0%

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Table 3.

Incidence and demographic distribution of student abuse (Italy: n = 261, Albania: n = 335).

		Incidence					
		Italy			Albania		
		Physical abuse	Psychological abuse	Sexual abuse	Physical abuse	Psychological abuse	Sexual abuse
Gender	Male	64.2%	84.2%	20.0%	76.0%	85.7%	39.0%
	Female	45.2%	71.1%	24.7%	59.3%	78.5%	17.5%
		($p < .01$)	($p < .05$)	($p = .39$)	($p < .01$)	($p < .05$)	($p < .001$)
Type of school	Middle school	60.4%	79.9%	21.9%	72.4%	80.7%	20.0%
	High school	37.0%	68.5%	25.0%	62.4%	82.6%	34.3%
		($p < .001$)	($p < .05$)	($p = .57$)	($p = .06$)	($p = .66$)	($p < .01$)
Total		52.1%	75.9%	23.0%	67.2%	81.8%	27.5%

Note: Significance values refer to chi-square tests

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Table 4.

Risk for physical, psychological and sexual abuse by gender and type of school (Italy: n = 261, Albania: n = 335).

	Type of abuse	Gender	OR	Confidence limits (95%)		Type of school	OR	Confidence limits (95%)	
				Lower	Upper			Lower	Upper
Italy	Physical abuse	Female	1.00	Referent		Middle school	1.00	Referent	
		Male	2.18	1.30	3.66	High school	0.39	0.23	0.65
	Psychological abuse	Female	1.00	Referent		Middle school	1.00	Referent	
		Male	2.17	1.14	4.14	High school	0.55	0.31	0.98
	Sexual abuse	Female	1.00	Referent		Middle school	1.00	Referent	
		Male	0.76	0.41	1.41	High school	1.19	0.66	2.16
Albania	Physical abuse	Female	1.00	Referent		Middle school	1.00	Referent	
		Male	2.13	1.32	3.42	High school	0.63	0.39	1.01
	Psychological abuse	Female	1.00	Referent		Middle school	1.00	Referent	
		Male	1.62	0.91	2.88	High school	1.14	.65	2.00
	Sexual abuse	Female	1.00	Referent		Middle school	1.00	Referent	
		Male	3.05	1.84	5.05	High school	2.09	1.25	3.48

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VICTIMIZATION IN SCHOOLS: COMPARING ITALY AND ALBANIA

Highlights

- The aim of this study is to describe the risk factors and incidence and prevalence of school victimization
- The results show that physical and psychological abuse are the most common forms of victimization
- The victims' peers are the most-frequent perpetrators in every category of victimization
- Albania presents significantly higher levels of physical victimization than Italy and a higher percentage of adult offenders