

## The Significance of Professional Development for School Librarians and Teachers in Preventing Violence against Children in the Digital Environment

Anida Dudić-Sijamija<sup>#,\*</sup>, Lamija Silajdžić<sup>s</sup> and Emina Adilović<sup>i</sup>

<sup>#</sup>*Department of Social Work, Faculty of Political Sciences University of Sarajevo,  
Sarajevo - 710 00, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

<sup>s</sup>*Department of Communication/Journalism, Faculty of Political Sciences University of Sarajevo,  
Sarajevo - 71 000, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

<sup>i</sup>*Institute for Social Research, Faculty of Political Sciences University of Sarajevo,  
Sarajevo - 71 000, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

<sup>\*</sup>*E-mail: anida.dudic@fpn.unsa.ba*

### ABSTRACT

Children and youth have predominantly shifted social activities into the digital sphere, leading to the consistent prevalence of digital technologies in the classroom. Besides numerous benefits, it also brought challenges, such as (cyber)bullying. Many teachers may approach the issue of cyberbullying with reservations, either because they do not view it as a serious problem or believe that they should not play a role in its resolution. Therefore, it is crucial to provide teachers and librarians with professional development on the challenges and risks of cyberbullying among pupils. Using quantitative method, this paper examines the competencies and experiences of teachers and librarians in Bosnia and Herzegovina in addressing the issue of cyberbullying among pupils. The importance of ongoing professional development and the availability of education in recognising risky behaviours of pupils online is particularly emphasised. The data indicates that, despite their engagement in lifelong learning, teachers and librarians require systematic and continuous training to understand and respond promptly to emerging digital risks involving children.

**Keywords:** Teacher; Librarian; Cyberbullying; Pupil; Professional development

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education should be considered as part of the response to calls for long-term and preventive investments in the fight against harmful content and hate speech. Violence, whether offline or online, undeniably belongs to harmful discourses. If society normalize, tolerate, or fail to sanction it, it risks setting itself significantly back on the path of civilisational development.

According to UNESCO publication from 2023<sup>1</sup>, enhancing educational efforts entails creating a robust system that discourages exclusionary rhetoric and hate speech, thereby fostering resilience among learners against hateful discourse. This aligns with the Education 2030 Agenda and the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal target 4.7, emphasising the broader societal, humanistic, and ethical goals of education.

Given the widespread digitisation of contemporary societies and the fact that it has brought additional challenges to educational systems, among others, we should emphasise the importance of lifelong learning for teachers and librarians

as s key participants in the educational process. This is crucial for them to effectively tackle the (new) challenges they and their students face in the ever-evolving digital landscape, especially considering the growing issues, such as cyberbullying and other forms of digital violence.

### 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The need for the prevention of digital violence against children arises from digital exposure and the increasing amount of time spent online, as highlighted by Vajzović<sup>2</sup>, *et al.* in 2020 Another document from The Canton Sarajevo Government<sup>3</sup> showed that more than one-third of youth in Bosnia and Herzegovina spend over six hours on smartphones daily.

In addition to these data, Torrey<sup>4</sup> indicates that the use of digital technologies in education is consistently prevalent in the classroom. This can create the illusion that relying on digital tools is always desirable for children, not only in leisure time but also for fulfilling obligations.

However, despite using digital tools in both learning and teaching daily, LearnSafe<sup>5</sup> company states that one in ten teachers is confident that their pupils are safe online. This underscores a critical need for more education and

awareness regarding digital safety. Schools must invest in teachers' and librarians' training, provide ongoing support, and educate pupils on the responsible use of technology.

Kimmons<sup>6</sup> notes that some recent cases have demonstrated that lawsuits are brought against schools and teachers in situations of exceptional abuse due to their passivity in responding to online harassment. Dunmade and Tella<sup>7</sup> emphasise the role of librarians in addressing inappropriate cyberethic behaviour among pupils to properly meet their information needs and take responsibility for their online behaviour.

In line with above mentioned, the hybrid model of multi-component integration of media and information literacy in education assumes ensuring lifelong learning for the participants in the educational process, with the professional development of teachers and librarians emerging as a key element. Vajzović<sup>8</sup>, *et al.* in 2021 have delineated this model which involves: a) horizontal integration – collaboration between teachers and librarians within curricula and lesson plans, as well as learning outcomes; and b) vertical integration - development of science, research, and lifelong learning for future teachers, providing support to decision-makers through science and research, ensuring professional development, and collaborating with teachers, librarians, and other stakeholders across all levels of the education.

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### 3.1 Aims and Hypothesis

The subject of the research is the prevention of digital violence against children as one of the priorities for the professional development of teachers and school librarians. The research was initiated based on the following problem statements: Do teachers and librarians actively participate in online safety education, and do they instruct pupils for protecting themselves from digital violence?

The aim of the research is to identify and analyse the role of teachers and librarians as key participants in educational process in preventing digital violence against children. Additionally, the research aims to assess the importance of their professional development regarding harmful content online.

The hypothesis is: Despite teachers and librarians' involvement in continuous professional development, there is a crucial need for professional development focused on preventing digital violence against children.

#### 3.2 Methods

Quantitative research was conducted in this paper, using a survey questionnaire. It was modelled by Frljak<sup>9</sup> and distributed online via emails from the database of teachers and librarians, which was previously accessible to researchers. The questionnaire consisted of 13 closed-ended questions with provided response options of intensity scaled using a Likert scale. The collected data was processed in „IBM SPSS Statistics” software, using the methods of univariate statistics.

#### 3.3 Sample and Procedure

The sample (N=100) consisted of teachers (73) and librarians (27). Participants were 87 females and 13 males. Most respondents have extensive professional experience in schools. (Table 1).

**Table 1. Sample**

<b>Sample: N=100</b>	
<b>Gender:</b>	N
Females 87	Males 13
<b>Role in school:</b>	
Teachers 73	Librarians 27
<b>Age:</b>	
25-34	6
35-44	31
45-54	43
55-64	20
65+	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Professional experience in school:</b>	
1 year or less	0
2-4 years	3
5-8 years	10
9-15	24
16 years and more	53
No answer	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 3.4 Ethics

The survey was anonymous and voluntary, and participants could opt out of the research in any given moment. That contributed to a high level of trust between the participants and researchers, resulting in valuable feedback. The research was conducted in accordance with ethical research principles and the guidelines of the EU, with prior approval from the Ethics Committee of the institution in which the authors are engaged<sup>10</sup>.

### 4. RESULTS

Research has shown that teachers and librarians believe that their profession requires continuous improvement - 63 have participated in children's online safety education. On the other hand, 22 did not participate, but they want to in the future. However, 12 of the respondents have never participated in training on this topic. The remaining 3 did not answer.

According to self-assessment, 60 of teachers and librarians believe they are informed about the basics of digital violence against children.

**Table 2. Attitudes and experiences of teachers and librarians regarding the phenomenon of violence against children in the digital environment**

Statements	1(N)	2(N)	3(N)	4(N)	5(N)	Mean	Std. Deviation
The teaching/library profession requires continuous professional development.	4	2	2	8	84	4.66	.93
I am striving to engage in organised forms of professional development on digital violence.	3	2	14	25	56	4.29	.98
I am independently researching digital violence.	6	5	18	28	43	3.99	1.16
The phenomenon of digital violence is present in the school where I work.	12	15	34	20	19	3.63	1.06
In school classes, we discuss pupils activities on the internet.	4	2	15	25	54	3.19	1.04
Teachers lack the necessary foundational knowledge about digital violence.	16	7	35	20	22	3.25	1.32
The curriculum lacks instructional units addressing digital violence.	5	6	25	20	44	3.92	1.17
The school should provide assistance to pupils who are exposed to digital violence.	6	0	10	13	71	4.43	1.085

(5 - strongly agree; 4 - agree; 3 - neither agree not disagree; 2 - disagree; 1 - strongly disagree)

**Table 3. The reaction of teachers and librarians to potential violence against children on the internet**

Statements	N
I would refer him/her to someone at school who has a better understanding of computers than I do.	2
I would familiarize someone from the school team with it (pedagogue, social worker, psychologist...)	0
I would advise students not to pay attention to it.	0
I would advise students not to visit that website or to block the person who has disturbed them on the internet.	7
I would check what is written on that website.	5
I would inform the parents of the students.	23
I would try to determine who the author is.	1
I would not attach particular importance to it; children write all sort of things.	62
I don't know exactly what should be done in such situations.	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 4. Teachers' and librarians' experience of digital violence against pupils**

Statements	1(N)	2(N)	3(N)	4(N)	5(N)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pupils received a disturbing or offensive text message via mobile phone.	68	9	9	4	6	1.66	1.195
Somebody recorded pupils with a mobile phone against their will and sent that recording to others.	76	6	10	3	4	1.54	1.080
Somebody harassed pupils with phone calls.	77	10	7	2	4	1.47	1.021
Somebody harassed pupils online.	77	8	6	4	4	1.51	1.071
I have not had any incidents of pupils reporting internet violence to me.	74	3	9	3	11	1.73	1.368

(5 – strongly agree; 4 – agree; 3 – neither agree not disagree; 2 – disagree; 1 – strongly disagree)

Furthermore, 34 of them are only familiar with the basics of children's online safety and 6 stated that they are very poorly informed about the phenomenon.

Most teachers and librarians (M=4.66) showed a commitment to the concept of lifelong learning and

professional development regarding the phenomenon of digital violence (Table 2). Teachers and librarians stated that they actively engage in education on digital violence against children (M=4.29) and they independently research this phenomenon (M=3.99). It is also essential to note that the acquired knowledge is being transferred

to pupils through various activities ( $M=3.19$ ). However, they believe that schools should provide more assistance to pupils exposed to digital violence ( $M=4.43$ ), and that it is necessary to innovate curricula ( $M=3.92$ ).

Regarding potentially experienced digital violence, Table 3 shows that teachers and librarians collaborate with schools' psychologists/pedagogues/social workers and state that they would first consult the experts (62) and parents (23). Some of them would check the websites (5) or try to determine who the author is (1), and others would advise pupils to block the person who has harassed them (7) or refer them to someone who has a better understanding of computers (2). It is also noteworthy that none of the participants in this study indicated that they would take no action in response to a cyberbullying report. This strongly suggests that teachers and librarians are cognizant of the significance of their involvement in such scenarios, particularly given that pupils perceive them as trusted figures.

In Table 4, it is apparent that teachers and librarians did not record cases of pupils seeking help regarding experienced digital violence: 77 of them stating that they had never received reports of pupils being harassed via phone calls, 77 had never received reports of pupils being harassed online, and 76 had never received reports of cyberbullying where someone recorded pupils against their will and shared, and 68 did not have experience reporting harassment through offensive text messages via mobile phone.

If we consider only this data (Table 4), we would obtain a distorted picture of the prevalence of digital violence (74 respondents say that they have never had any cases of pupils reporting digital violence to them). The problem of (cyber)bullying has been persistent in Bosnian-Herzegovinian schools for quite some time, as indicated by numerous incidents, even deadly ones. This represents the most extreme form of unacceptable behaviour among children, significantly impacting their upbringing and education, fostering a negative classroom atmosphere, and leading to various behavioural challenges.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Muratbegović<sup>11</sup>, *et al.* emphasise that education of teachers and librarians is an important task nowadays to meet the needs of increasingly demanding and technologically educated generations of pupils burdened with the challenge of navigating the digital space. Schools face numerous challenges and often encounter high expectations. Research Šerić<sup>12</sup>, *et al.* has shown that schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina faced violence among pupils and juvenile delinquency in recent years. Research by Dudić<sup>13</sup> has also shown that schools have not adequately addressed students' social problems.

The results of our research regarding teachers' and librarians' active participation in online safety education are discouraging. The problem is twofold: (1) the position of the teachers' and librarians' professions in Bosnia and

Herzegovina is influenced and challenged by various economic, political, and social factors. All of this can affect the motivation of school staff in their professional and educational endeavours. (2) Professional development of teachers and librarians is regulated by a series of laws and sublegal acts at lower levels of government, leading to inconsistencies in practice.

Although professional development regulations mandate continuous education for teachers and associates, shortcomings persist, including the absence of formal evaluation processes and official standards for assessing and self-evaluating teachers, hindering the development of individual plans aligned with actual training needs. Kafedžić<sup>14</sup>, *et al.* also underscore the lack of connection between the topics of mandatory professional development and the analysis of student achievements, as well as clear goals for improving educational practice and goals for pupils.

The results of our research have shown that teachers do not report pupils approaching them about issues related to digital violence. This clearly indicates that the data is contradictory because other research in Bosnia and Herzegovina indicates that pupils are exposed to it. An example is a study by Sivrić & Topić<sup>15</sup> on a sample of 279 pupils, which revealed that 40 % received offensive messages online from friends or acquaintances. At the same time, 15 % admitted to sending offensive messages to others, compared to 67 % who claimed they had never sent such a thing online.

Comparing these data, we cannot interpret it in a way that pupils do not experience digital violence, but rather that they do not talk about this problem with teachers and librarians. All of this emphasizes the importance of systematic, ongoing education in a child-friendly manner to introduce them to support services and experts with whom they can discuss the experienced online violence. It could be achieved through organising some interactive sessions in schools to educate them about digital violence, or through developing anonymous and accessible platforms for pupils where they can report issues without fear (suggestion boxes, online chat services, etc.).

All stakeholders - school staff, students, parents, experts, and decision-makers should actively participate in the prevention process. Together, they can foster an environment that promotes open dialogue, encourages collaboration, and emphasises that seeking help is a sign of strength.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Research results presented in this paper indicate teachers and librarians recognise the importance of professional development in creating positive digital school environment, benefiting educational process overall. The research identified two professional groups: a) ones who are aware of the importance of professional development, the phenomenon of digital violence itself, and have experience in organising activities to protect

pupils in the digital space, and b) ones who do not choose topics related to digital violence for professional development, consequently not familiar with the basics of digital violence, do not know how to react promptly in a certain situation, and do not discuss online challenges with pupils.

This research should certainly be further expanded with both quantitative and qualitative studies, involving not only teachers and librarians but also experts who either influence decision-making in educational policies or can assess the most adequate solutions for preventing online violence against children. Future research should also involve parents, as they play a crucial role as key stakeholders in promoting safe online practices among children.

The results presented in this paper serve as a reminder to all participants in the education system to dedicate more time and attention to these topics, ensuring that digital violence is no longer treated as a taboo in society.

## REFERENCES

1. UNESCO. Addressing hate speech through education: A guide to policy-makers. UNESCO, Paris/USA, 2023. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000384872> (accessed on 07 December 2023).
2. Vajzović, E.; Hibert, Mario; Turčilo, Lejla & Džihana, Amer. Medijska i informacijska pismenost: istraživanje i razvoj. Fakultet političkih nauka, Sarajevo, 2020.
3. The canton sarajevo government. The draft youth strategy for canton sarajevo 2024-2028. Ministry of education, science and youth of sarajevo canton, sarajevo, 2024.
4. Torrey, T. Preparing future teachers to redefine learning with technology. *J. of Digital Learning in Teacher Edu.*, 2017, **33**(2), 44-45. doi: 10.1080/21532974.2017.1281654
5. LearnSafe. Online safety on School computers. Oct 19. <https://learnsafe.com/online-safety-on-school-computers/> (accessed on 07 December 2023).
6. Kimmons, R. Online safety. In the K-12 educational technology handbook, edited by A. Ottenbreit-Leftwich & Kimmons R. EdTech books. 2020. [https://edtechbooks.org/k12handbook/online\\_safety](https://edtechbooks.org/k12handbook/online_safety) (accessed on 07 December 2023).
7. Dunmade, A.O. & Tella, A. Libraries and librarians' roles in ensuring cyberethical behaviour. *Libr. Hi Tech News*, 2023, **40**(7), 7-11. doi: 10.1108/LHTN-04-2023-0068
8. Vajzović E.; Hibert Mario; Turčilo Lejla; Vučetić Vuk; Silajdžić Lamija. Medijska i informacijska pismenost: Dizajn učenja za digitalno doba. Sarajevo: Faculty of political sciences, 2021.
9. Frljak, Adna. Prevencija digitalnog nasilja kao jedan od prioriteta stručnog usavršavanja nastavnika. University of sarajevo. 2021. Master thesis.
10. The Ethics committee issued a decision of approval for the implementation of this research on december 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023.
11. Muratbegović, E.; Hasanović, Eneid, Zečević, Ivana, Rizvo, Samir, Efendić, Amela. Smjernice za postupanje u slučaju nasilja nad djecom u digitalnom okruženju BiH. EMMAUS, sarajevo, 2017.
12. Šerić, N.; Buljubašić, Suada; Šadić, Sanela; Dudić, Anida. Socijalni rad u obrazovanju. Fakultet političkih nauka, Sarajevo, 2020.
13. Dudić, Anida. Izazovi i perspektive socijalnog rada u obrazovanju. *DHS*, 2019, **1**(7), 401-418. <https://oaji.net/articles/2020/8977-1602516065.pdf> (accessed on 07 December 2023).
14. Kafedžić, L.; Zečević, Ivana; Bjelan, Sandra; Rangelov-Jusufović, Radmila. Studija o aktuelnom stanju u oblasti stručnog usavršavanja nastavnika u osnovnim školama u BiH. COI step by step, sarajevo, 2013.
15. Sivrić, I.; Pandža Topić, M. Virtualni svijet djece i mladih: Izazovi na putu odrastanja. *Obrazovanje odraslih*, 2021, **1\_2** (20), 79-110.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Dr. Sc. Anida Dudić-Sijamija** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Social Work on Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo. Her areas of interest include: Social issues, Human rights and youth issues. Contributions to the current study: Research design, data analysis and interpretation, graphical presentation of data, manuscript draft preparation and review.

**Dr. Sc. Lamija Silajdžić** is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Communication/Journalism on Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo. Her areas of interest include: Communication skills, Digital communication and challenges, Media and information literacy. Contributions to the current study: Conceptualisation of the study, manuscript draft preparation and review.

**Emina Adilović, MA** is Senior Expert Research Associate at the Institute for Social Research on Faculty of Political Sciences, University of Sarajevo. Her areas of interest include: Library and information science, Media and information literacy and information security. Contributions to the current study: Literature review, assistance in data tabulation, referencing and review.