

PEER MEDIATION AS A MEANS OF ELIMINATING CONFLICT IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT

Aim. Peer mediation is a tool for the prevention of socio-pathological phenomena occurring in the school environment, is an opportunity to resolve conflicts through reconciliation. The paper focuses on the perception of the importance of peer mediation and on the presentation of the results of a questionnaire survey, the aim of which was to determine the respondents' preferences after completion of the project process.

Methods. The aim of the questionnaire survey was to determine how pupils and students perceive peer mediation. The survey sample consisted of selected pupils from 6 primary schools aged 10 to 15 years and students from 6 secondary schools aged 15 to 18 years. The questionnaire was completed at the beginning (year 2020 - N = 189, including 90 primary school pupils) and end of the project implementation (year 2021 - N = 124, including 56 primary school pupils).

Results. The responses in the entry and exit questionnaires, the respondents declared after participating in the project process an increase in their experience with peer mediation, expressed an interest in becoming peer mediators and resolving personal and school conflicts through peer mediation.

Conclusion. Peer mediation engages pupils in a common dialogue to resolve conflicts at school through reconciliation and is a suitable way to prevent undesirable social phenomena in the school environment. The results of the research showed that respondents preferred peer mediation and perceived it as an appropriate form of conflict resolution in the school environment.



Keywords: conflict, mediation, conflict resolution, peer mediation, social pathology, school environment

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts and disputes are an important part of the reality of everyday life. They are a manifestation of the dynamic course of events in society and of constant change. According to several authors (Křivohlavý, 2002; Wilmot & Hockerová, 2005; Fisher, 2005; Pružinská et al., 2011, Holá, 2011; Pružinská, 2014; Holá, 2014, Hakvoort et al., 2020), conflicts have a psychological, interpersonal, social, and not infrequently legal level. In a broader context, conflicts affect the inherent dignity and worth of human beings (Roubalová et al., 2021; Budayová et al., 2022), and can often be the result of a misunderstanding of the difference between different minority cultures and the culture of the majority population (Tkáčová, Al-Absiová et al., 2021). The escalation of conflicts also occurs when a society is fragmented in terms of values (Manesis et. al., 2019; Judák et al., 2022). The mere misunderstanding of a different opinion can escalate and deepen mutual conflicts (Emmerová, 2012; Roubalová 2022; Králik, Roubalová, Judák et al., 2022).

There is a wide range of approaches to resolving conflicts, and one non-violent approach is the use of mediation. This can be regarded as a process in which a neutral qualified third party assists the disputing parties in finding a mutually acceptable solution. Lenka Holá (2003) states that the aim is to achieve their satisfaction with the process and outcome of conflict resolution. The origin of the term mediation is in the Latin word *medium*. From the perspective of several authors (Riskin, 1997; Knapp & Jongmsa, 2002; Bielešovová, 2013), it refers to an alternative method of conflict resolution that uses the presence of a mediator. Mediation is associated with the Confucian tradition, was further developed in China and Japan, and began to be applied in its modern form in the 1960s in the USA. In the UK and in Europe, the rapid development of mediation was recorded in the 1990s (Šándor, 2002).

PEER MEDIATION

Mediation is most often associated with out-of-court conflict resolution and is used in various areas of social life, namely: out-of-court conflict resolution in the justice system (*Zákon č. 550/2003 Z. z. o probačných a mediačných úradníkoch* [Act No. 550/2003 Coll. on probation and mediation officers]), mediation in the context of misdemeanour hearings (*Zákon č. 372/1990 Zb. o priestupkoch* [Act No. 372/1990 Coll. on Misdemeanours]; Haburajová Ilavská, et al., 2014), family mediation aimed at resolving family conflicts (*Zákon č. 305/2005 Z. z. o sociálnoprávnej ochrane detí a o sociálnej kuratele* [Act

No. 305/2005 Coll. on social and legal protection of children and social care]), mediation in the field of social and legal protection of children and social care (Haburajová Ilavská, et al, 2014; *Zákon č. 305/2005 Z. z. o sociálno-právnej ochrane detí a o sociálnej kuratele*), mediation in the field of education of children and youth as school mediation - resolving school conflicts (Labáth, 1999; Knapp & Jongasma, 2002; Göksoy & Argon, 2016), and also as peer mediation (Gilhooley & Scheuch, 2000; van Gurp, 2002; Cohen, 2005; Lešková, 2010; Bielešovová, 2017).

Pathological behaviour occurs at all levels of society and, according to several authors (Lešková, 2010; Hlad et al., 2022), it is associated with both social and individual consequences of risky behaviour. These require an ongoing approach to educating young persons not only through the family but also through the school environment. Most school conflicts begin with a minor trigger event and escalate as discussions, with the conflict participants focussing on their individual views and personal feelings rather than working towards finding a mutually acceptable solution (Knapp & Jongasma, 2002; Bielešovová, 2013; Çeviker Ay & et al., 2019). One of the forms of effective prevention as well as intervention in the case of inappropriate manifestations directly in the school environment is mediation (Labáth, 1999; Lešková, 2010; Bielešovová, 2017). It is fast, discrete, operational, feasible and can be brought directly into the environment where the conflict arose. It can contribute to changing the culture of conflict resolution and to improving interpersonal relations. What is relevant here is the personal responsibility of each individual involved in the conflict and interested in resolving it in a non-violent way. Mediation can be seen as a great opportunity to maintain a positive school climate.

Holá (2014) states that one of the first to conduct research on the impact of peer mediation on the emergence of conflict was Hanson, who found that behaviour related to verbal abuse and physical assault declined among up to 36% of children. Other research on the efficacy of peer mediation shows that up to 43% of pupils have improved their knowledge about conflict and 42% have increased their ability to resolve conflicts (Holá, 2011).

The aim of mediation is a clearly formulated, understandable and feasible agreement among all the participants in the process, which includes specific resolution procedures, division of responsibilities, tasks and sanctions for non-compliance (Haburajová Ilavská et al., 2014). Howard Irving (2002) states that mediation is successful when the parties are able to negotiate an agreement that is in the best interests of the parties. The goal is also to stabilise the children's relationships with each other, to minimise their exposure to conflicts and quarrels, and to minimise their trauma (Goleman, 1998). Based on recent research, involving pupils in a common dialogue on the issues of conflict resolution in school through reconciliation appears to be an appropriate way to prevent undesirable social phenomena in the school environment (Bielešovová, 2017). Mediation gives pupils to the ability to perceive things from different

points of view, to clarify their attitudes and positions in a conflict, to argue their position, to explain patiently and to understand another point of view.

Peer mediation is a voluntary conflict resolution process where pupils who have been trained in mediation assist other pupils in disputes, seeking to reach a mutually acceptable resolution to their conflict (van Gurp, 2002; Çeviker Ay et al., 2019). It is about the peer mediator acting as an impartial unbiased third party, provided they can build respect, have the trust of their classmates, are a natural authority accepted among the pupils, have communication skills, and are capable of active listening. No matter what kind of conflict children experience, according to Dušana Bieleszová (2013), a community of peers will be the most natural environment for them to share perceptions, feelings, opinions or experiences. The importance of peer mediation is also discussed by Richard Cohen (2005) and highlights the need for a coordinator. Likewise, James Gilhooley & Nannette Scheuch (2000) state that an effective peer mediator is someone who enjoys helping others, with their service fulfilling multiple roles.

The peer mediation process is a non-confrontational process that facilitates the resolution of disputes between students and focuses on the needs of all those involved. The mediation process itself presents an extremely beneficial opportunity for students to engage in real-life dispute resolution, thereby improving the quality of students' lives and preparing them for life after school (Cremin, 2007). According to several authors (Gilhooley & Scheuch, 2000; Baraldi & Iervese, 2012; Bieleszová, 2013; Çeviker Ay & et al., 2019; Travers & Carter, 2021), peer mediation should become an integral part of the whole educational process. Its importance lies in the fact that it develops communication and logical thinking, especially in peer mediators who are tasked with finding a solution to the conflict.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The whole project was organised and implemented by OZ Ave Prosperita under the leadership of project manager Denisa Morongová. The aim of the School and Peer Mediation as a Tool for the Prevention of Bullying and Other Socio-pathological Phenomena project was to teach future peer mediators through the training of mediation skills that will help them to be independent, to develop active listening, to develop verbal and non-verbal communication, to observe the environment, to develop mutual tolerance, respect and esteem, to reduce hate speech, but also in the collective ability to resolve conflicts between peers. The project also focused on school mediation by educators, with whom separate research was conducted.

The aim of the first part of the research, the results of which are presented here, was to determine the opinions of the respondents (pupils

and students), participants in the project, which was implemented in the period of 2020-2021, on conflicts, their resolution and the use of peer mediation.

In order to determine the opinions of the participating pupil and student - respondents, we created a questionnaire of our own construction with identification questions and questions that were focused on the field of conflicts, their resolution, mediation and conflict resolution in the form of peer mediation. We conducted a quantitative survey in which we surveyed a group of subjects repeatedly over a two-year period. The disadvantage of such research is that the sample size of respondents changes over the course of the research, but we anticipated this. The advantage is the possibility of pointing out the developmental trend of the phenomena studied among the respondents.

To measure the respondents' opinions, we used a very appropriate tool, namely verbal scaling. The scale we set for the assessment had 5 levels but some respondents did not complete the question (in the presented results we indicate this fact - 6 No response).

Table 1
Verbal scaling of answers

Always	Very often	Usually	Rarely	Never	No answer
Positive connotations			Negative connotations		X

Source. Own research

In evaluating the choice between alternatives, we considered the selection of alternatives 1-3 as positive alternatives and the selection of alternatives 4 and 5 as negative alternatives.

We set 4 research questions within the survey:

- Research question 1: Do the respondents have experience with peer mediation?
- Research question 2: Are respondents interested in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation?
- Research question 3: Are respondents interested in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation?
- Research question 4: Are respondents interested in becoming a peer mediator/mediator?

To characterise the research population, we used data obtained from the quantitative survey in terms of sociodemographic characteristics, namely gender, age and school of the respondents from two time periods - project entry - October 2020 and project exit - November 2021.

Total	28	100	69	100	2	100	99	100
Total (primary + secondary schools)	65	34.4	119	63	5	2.6	189	100

Notes. First meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

The age distribution of respondents in the entry questionnaires shows that primary school respondents had the largest representation in the age category of 12- and 13-year-olds (both groups 21.1% each) and secondary school respondents had the largest representation in the age category of 17 year-olds (36.4%).

Table 4

Distribution of respondents by age and gender (exit data)

Age	Gender		Men		Women		Unspecified		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school										
10 years	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0
11 years	2	8.3	6	20.0	0	0	8	14.3		
12 years	7	29.2	7	23.3	0	0	14	25.0		
13 years	6	25.0	4	13.3	0	0	10	17.9		
14 years	7	29.2	10	33.4	0	0	17	30.4		
15 years	2	8.3	3	10.0	0	0	5	8.9		
Unspecified	0	0	0	0	2	100.0	2	3.6		
Total	24	100.0	30	100	2	100.0	56	100.0		
Secondary school										
15 years	0	0.0	2	4.9	0	0.0	2	2.9		
16 years	2	8.0	11	26.8	0	0.0	13	19.1		
17 years	11	44.0	11	26.8	0	0.0	22	32.4		
18 years	11	44.0	17	41.5	0	0.0	28	41.2		
Unspecified	1	4.0	0	0.0	2	100.0	3	4.4		
Total	25	100.0	41	100.0	2	100.0	68	100.0		
Total (primary + secondary schools)	49	39.5	71	57.3	4	3.2	124	100		

Notes. Exit - last meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

The age distribution of respondents in the exit questionnaires shows that primary school respondents had the largest representation in the age category of 14-year-olds (30.4%) and secondary school respondents had the largest representation in the age category of 18 year-olds (41.2%).

SURVEY RESULTS

The results of the survey in terms of entry and exit of the implemented project are presented according to the defined research questions by school and gender of the respondents in Tables 5 – 12. The respondents' views on the experience of peer mediation at the project entry are shown in Table 5.

Table 5
Experience with peer mediation – entry data

Alternative	Gender		Men		Women		Unspecified		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school										
Always	2	5.4	4	8	0	0	6	6.7		
Very often	2	5.4	3	6	0	0	5	5.5		
Usually	3	8.1	5	10	0	0	8	8.9		
Rarely	6	16.2	4	8	1	33.3	11	12.2		
Never	24	64.9	34	68	2	66.7	60	66.7		
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Total	37	100	50	100	3	100	90	100		
Secondary school										
Always	0	0	3	4.3	0	0	3	3.0		
Very often	0	0	9	13.1	0	0	9	9.1		
Usually	4	14.3	5	7.2	0	0	9	9.1		
Rarely	4	14.3	6	8.7	1	50	11	11.1		
Never	20	71.4	46	66.7	1	50	67	67.7		
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Total	28	100	69	100	2	100	99	100		
Total respondents										
Always	2	3.1	7	5.9	0	0	9	4.8		
Very often	2	3.1	12	10.1	0	0	14	7.4		
Usually	7	10.7	10	8.4	0	0	17	9		
Rarely	10	15.4	10	8.4	2	40	22	11.6		
Never	44	67.7	80	67.2	3	60	127	67.2		
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Total (primary + secondary schools)	65	34.4	119	63	5	2.6	189	100		

Notes. Entry – first meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

At the project entry, up to 78.8% of respondents (83.1% of men and 75.6% of women) declared that they had no experience with peer mediation.

In terms of the school attended, 78.9% of primary school respondents (81.1% men and 76% women) and 78.8% of secondary school respondents (75.7% men and 75.4% women) declared that they had no experience with peer mediation.

The respondents' views on the experience of peer mediation at the project exit are shown in Table 6.

Table 6

Experience with peer mediation - exit data

Alternative	Gender		Men		Women		Unspecified		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school										
Always	9	37.5	12	40.0	1	50.0	22	39.3		
Very often	5	20.8	5	16.7	1	50.0	11	19.6		
Usually	4	16.7	5	16.7	0	0	9	16.1		
Rarely	3	12.5	5	16.7	0	0	8	14.3		
Never	3	12.5	3	10.0	0	0	6	10.7		
No answer	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0		
Total	24	100.0	30	100.1	2	100.0	56	100.0		
Secondary school										
Always	13	52.0	25	61.0	1	50.0	39	57.4		
Very often	6	24.0	7	17	0	0.0	13	19.1		
Usually	0	0.0	2	4.9	1	50.0	3	4.4		
Rarely	2	8.0	3	7.3	0	0.0	5	7.4		
Never	4	16.0	2	4.9	0	0.0	6	8.8		
No answer	0	0.0	2	4.9	0	0.0	2	2.9		
Total	25	100.0	41	100	2	100.0	68	100.0		
Total respondents										
Always	22	44.9	37	52.1	2	50	61	49.2		
Very often	11	22.4	12	16.9	1	25	24	19.3		
Usually	4	8.2	7	9.9	1	25	12	9.7		
Rarely	5	10.2	8	11.3	0	0	13	10.5		
Never	7	14.3	5	7.0	0	0	12	9.7		
No answer	0	0	2	2.8	0	0	2	1.6		
Total (primary + secondary schools)	49	39.5	71	57.3	4	3.2	124	100		

Notes. Exit - last meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

At the project exit, only 20.2% of respondents declared that they had no experience with peer mediation. In terms of gender, this was 24.5% of men and 18.3% of women.

In terms of the school attended, 25% of primary school respondents (25% men and 26.7% women) and 16.2% of secondary school respondents (24% men and 12.2% women) declared that they had no experience with peer mediation.

The respondents' views on their interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation at the project entry are shown in Table 7.

Table 7*Interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation - entry data*

Alternative	Men		Women		Unspecified		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school								
Always	9	24.4	15	30	1	33.3	25	27.8
Very often	8	21.6	14	28.0	0	0	22	24.4
Usually	8	21.6	7	14.0	0	0	15	16.7
Rarely	6	16.2	12	24	1	33.3	19	21.1
Never	6	16.2	2	4	0	0	8	8.9
No answer	0	0	0	0	1	33.3	1	1.1
Total	37	100	50	100	3	99.9*	90	100
Secondary school								
Always	5	17.9	20	29.0	0	0	25	25.3
Very often	3	10.7	16	23.2	0	0	19	19.2
Usually	7	25	15	21.7	0	0	22	22.2
Rarely	11	39.3	12	17.4	2	100	25	25.3
Never	2	7.1	6	8.7	0	0	8	8
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	28	100	69	100	2	100	99	100
Total respondents								
Always	14	21.5	35	29.4	1	20	50	26.4
Very often	11	16.9	30	25.2	0	0	41	21.7
Usually	15	23.1	22	18.5	0	0	37	19.6
Rarely	17	26.2	24	20.2	3	60	44	23.3
Never	8	12.3	8	6.7	0	0	16	8.5
No answer	0	0	0	0	1	20	1	0.5
Total (primary + secondary schools)	65	34.4	119	63	5	2.6	189	100

Notes. Entry - first meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

At the project entry, 67.7% of respondents declared their interest in resolving personal conflicts through mediation. In terms of gender, 61.5% were men and 73.1% were women.

In terms of the school attended, 68.9% of primary school respondents (67.6% of men and 72% of women) and 66.7% of secondary school respondents (53.6% of men and 73.9% of women) declared an interest in resolving personal conflicts through mediation.

The respondents' views on their interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation at the project exit are shown in Table 8.

Table 8*Interest in resolving personal conflicts through mediation - exit data*

Gender	Exit						Total	
	Men		Women		Unspecified			
Alternative	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school								
Always	1	4.2	8	26.7	0	0	14	25.0
Very often	0	0.0	11	36.7	0	0	18	32.1
Usually	0	0.0	7	23.3	2	100.0	16	28.6
Rarely	6	25.0	3	10.0	0	0	6	10.7
Never	16	66.7	1	3.3	0	0	2	3.6
No answer	1	4.1	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Total	24	100	30	100.0	2	100.0	56	100.0
Secondary school								
Always	7	28.0	11	26.8	0	0.0	18	26.5
Very often	8	32.0	11	26.8	0	0.0	19	27.9
Usually	8	32.0	12	29.3	2	100.0	22	32.4
Rarely	2	8.0	7	17.1	0	0.0	9	13.2
Never	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
No answer	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	25	100.0	41	100.0	2	100.0	68	100.0
Total respondents								
Always	8	16.3	19	26.8	0	0	32	25.8
Very often	8	16.3	22	31	0	0	37	29.8
Usually	8	16.3	19	26.8	4	100	38	30.7
Rarely	8	16.3	10	14	0	0	15	12.1
Never	16	32.7	1	1.4	0	0	2	1.6
No answer	1	2.1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total (primary + secondary schools)	49	39.5	71	57.3	4	3.2	124	100

Notes. Exit - last meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research

At the project exit, up to 86.3% of respondents declared their interest in resolving personal conflicts through mediation. In terms of gender, 48.9% were men and 84.6% were women.

In terms of the school attended, 85.7% of primary school respondents (4.2% of men and 86.7% of women) and 86.8% of secondary school respondents (92% of men and 82.9% of women) declared an interest in resolving personal conflicts through mediation.

The respondents' views on their interest in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation at the project entry are shown in Table 9.

Table 9*Interest in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation - entry data*

Alternative	Gender	Entry						TOTAL	
		Men		Women		Unspecified		N	%
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school									
Always		16	43.3	22	44	3	100	41	45.6
Very often		6	16.2	11	22	0	0	17	18.9
Usually		10	27.0	10	20	0	0	20	22.2
Rarely		4	10.8	5	10	0	0	9	10
Never		1	2.7	2	4	0	0	3	3.3
No answer		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		37	100	50	100	3	100	90	100
Secondary school									
Always		8	28.6	31	44.9	1	50	40	40.4
Very often		8	28.6	24	34.8	1	50	33	33.4
Usually		11	39.3	11	15.9	0	0	22	22.2
Rarely		1	3.5	3	4.4	0	0	4	4.0
Never		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
No answer		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		28	100	69	100	2	100	99	100
Total respondents									
Always		24	36.9	53	44.5	4	80	81	42.9
Very often		14	21.5	35	29.4	1	20	50	26.4
Usually		21	32.3	21	17.7	0	0	42	22.2
Rarely		5	7.7	8	6.7	0	0	13	6.9
Never		1	1.6	2	1.7	0	0	3	1.6
No answer		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total (primary + secondary schools)		65	34.4	119	63	5	2.6	189	100

Notes. Entry - first meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

At the project entry, 91.5% of respondents declared their interest in resolving school conflicts through mediation. In terms of gender, 90.7% were men and 91.6% were women.

In terms of the school attended, 86.7% of primary school respondents (86.5% of men and 86% of women) and 96% of secondary school respondents (96.5% of men and 95.6% of women) declared an interest in resolving school conflicts through mediation.

The respondents' views on their interest in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation at the project exit are shown in Table 10.

Table 10
Interest in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation - exit data

Gender	Exit							
	Men		Women		Unspecified		TOTAL	
Alternative	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school								
Always	11	45.8	13	43.3	0	0	24	42.8
Very often	9	37.5	11	36.7	2	100.0	22	39.3
Usually	4	16.7	5	16.7	0	0	9	16.1
Rarely	0	0.0	1	3.3	0	0	1	1.8
Never	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
No answer	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0
Total	24	100.0	30	100.0	2	100.0	56	100
Secondary school								
Always	8	32.0	20	48.8	1	50.0	29	42.7
Very often	10	40.0	10	24.4	0	0.0	20	29.4
Usually	6	24.0	10	24.4	0	0.0	16	23.5
Rarely	1	4.0	0	0.0	1	50.0	2	2.9
Never	0	0.0	1	2.4	0	0.0	1	1.5
No answer	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	25	100.0	41	100.0	2	100.0	68	100
Total respondents								
Always	19	38.8	33	46.5	1	25	53	42.7
Very often	19	38.8	21	29.6	2	50	42	33.9
Usually	10	20.4	15	21.1	0	0	25	20.2
Rarely	1	2.1	1	1.4	1	25	3	2.4
Never	0	0	1	1.4	0	0	1	0.8
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total (primary + secondary schools)	49	39.5	71	57.3	4	3.2	124	100

Notes. Exit - last meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

At the project exit, 96.8% of respondents declared their interest in resolving school conflicts through mediation. In terms of gender, it was 98% men and 97.2% women.

In terms of the school attended, 98.2% of primary school respondents (100% men and 96.7% women) and 95.6% of secondary school respondents

(96% men and 97.6% women) declared an interest in resolving school conflicts through mediation.

The respondents' views on their interest in becoming a peer mediator/mediator at the project entry are shown in Table 11.

Table 11

Interest in becoming a peer mediator – entry data

Alternative	Gender	Entry						TOTAL	
		Men		Women		Unspecified		N	%
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school									
Always		15	40.6	29	58.0	2	66.7	46	51.1
Very often		6	16.2	8	16	1	33.3	15	16.6
Usually		10	27.0	8	16	0	0	18	20
Rarely		3	8.1	3	6	0	0	6	6.7
Never		3	8.1	2	4	0	0	5	5.6
No answer		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		37	100	50	100	3	100	90	100
Secondary school									
Always		6	21.4	38	55.1	1	50.0	45	45.5
Very often		6	21.4	13	18.9	1	50.0	20	20.2
Usually		10	35.7	7	10.1	0	0	17	17.2
Rarely		4	14.3	9	13.0	0	0	13	13.1
Never		2	7.2	2	2.9	0	0	4	4.0
No answer		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total		28	100	69	100	2	100	99	100
Total respondents									
Always		21	32.3	67	56.3	3	60.0	91	48.1
Very often		12	18.5	21	17.7	2	40.0	35	18.5
Usually		20	30.8	15	12.6	0	0	35	18.5
Rarely		7	10.7	12	10.1	0	0	19	10.1
Never		5	7.7	4	3.3	0	0	9	4.8
No answer		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total (primary + secondary schools)		65	34.4	119	63	5	2.6	189	100

Notes. Entry – first meeting with respondents (project participants).

Source. Own research.

At the project entry, up to 85.1% of respondents declared their interest in becoming a peer mediator. In terms of gender, this was 81.6% men and 86.6% women. In terms of the school attended, 87.7% of primary school respondents (83.8% men and 90% women) and 82.9% of secondary school respondents (78.5% men and 84.1% women) declared an interest in becoming a peer mediator/mediator.

The respondents' views on their interest in becoming a peer mediator/mediator at the project exit are shown in Table 12.

Table 12

Interest in becoming a peer mediator - exit data

Alternative	Gender		Men		Women		Unspecified		TOTAL	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Primary school										
Always	13	54.2	16	53.3	1	50.0	30	53.6		
Very often	5	20.8	8	26.7	0	0	13	23.2		
Usually	5	20.8	5	16.7	0	0	10	17.8		
Rarely	1	4.2	1	3.3	1	50.0	3	5.4		
Never	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0		
No answer	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0	0	0.0		
Total	24	100.0	30	100.0	2	100.0	56	100		
Secondary school										
Always	16	64.0	25	61.0	1	50.0	42	61.8		
Very often	5	20.0	11	26.8	0	0.0	16	23.5		
Usually	1	4.0	2	4.9	1	50.0	4	5.9		
Rarely	1	4.0	2	4.9	0	0.0	3	4.4		
Never	1	4.0	1	2.4	0	0.0	2	2.9		
No answer	1	4.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.5		
Total	25	100.0	41	100.0	2	100.0	68	100.0		
Total respondents										
Always	29	59.1	41	57.7	2	50	72	58.1		
Very often	10	20.4	19	26.8	0	0	29	23.4		
Usually	6	12.2	7	9.9	1	25	14	11.3		
Rarely	2	4.1	3	4.2	1	25	6	4.8		
Never	1	2.1	1	1.4	0	0	2	1.6		
No answer	1	2.1	0	0	0	0	1	0.8		
Total (primary + secondary schools)	49	39.5	71	57.3	4	3.2	124	100		

Notes. Exit - last meeting with respondents (project participants)

Source. Own research

At the project exit, 92.8% of respondents declared their interest in becoming a peer mediator/mediator. In terms of gender, this was 91.7% men and 94.4% women. In terms of the school attended, 94.6% of primary school respondents (95.8% men and 96.7% women) and 91.2% of secondary school respondents (88% men and 92.7% women) declared an interest in becoming a peer mediator/mediator.

DISCUSSION

The results of the research in terms of the age of respondents showed several facts that reflect the views of the respondents in the 12 participating groups from 6 primary and 6 secondary schools. To test for dependence, we used the Chi-square test of independence at the $\alpha = 5\%$ significance level. Testing was carried out in relation to the four research questions, in terms of the gender of the respondents (men/women) and the type of school (primary school/secondary school).

The respondents' views on their experience of peer mediation were verified by question 1: "Do you have experience with using peer mediation?"

Table 13

Hypothesis testing for question No. 1

Category	Entry			Exit		
	Test criterion [G]	CHISQ. TEST [p-value]	Decision	Test criterion [G]	CHISQ. TEST [p-value]	Decision
Critical value: $\chi(1-\alpha)$; df = 3.841						
Gender						
Gender (primary school)	0.321	0.57079	Do not reject H_0	0.019	0.89064	Do not reject H_0
Gender (secondary school)	1.256	0.26237	Do not reject H_0	1.333	0.24836	Do not reject H_0
Gender (total)	1.37	0.24184	Do not reject H_0	0.549	0.45891	Do not reject H_0
School						
School (total)	0.0	0.98577	Do not reject H_0	1.287	0.25668	Do not reject H_0

Source. Own research

The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at both the entry and exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between experience with peer mediation in terms of the respondents' gender in either group (primary school, secondary school, and total). The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at both the entry and exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference between experience with peer mediation in terms of the type of school attended.

The respondents' views on their experience with peer mediation were verified by question 2: "Are you interested in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation?"

Table 14*Hypothesis testing for question No. 2*

Category	Entry			Exit		
	Test criterion [G]	CHISQ. TEST [p-value]	Decision	Test criterion [G]	CHISQ. TEST [p-value]	Decision
Critical value: $\chi(1-\alpha); df = 3.841$						
Gender						
Gender (primary school)	0.198	0.65609	Do not reject H_0	35.321	2.79612E-09	Reject H_0 Accept H_1
Gender (secondary school)	2.094	0.14787	Do not reject H_0	1.087	0.29715	Do not reject H_0
Gender (total)	2.628	0.10501	Do not reject H_0	16.417	5.08269E-05	Reject H_0 Accept H_1
School						
School (total)	0.192	0.66087	Do not reject H_0	0.028	0.86667	Do not reject H_0

Source. Own research.

The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at the entry testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation in terms of the respondents' gender in either group (primary school, secondary school, and total). The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at the exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in the "secondary school" group in interest in resolving in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation in terms of the respondents' gender.

The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at the exit testing indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in the "primary school" and "total" group in interest in resolving in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation in terms of the respondents' gender. We accept hypothesis H_1 (for question 2 - in terms of gender) that there is a significant difference between genders in the respondents' opinion about their interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation.

The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at both the entry and exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation in terms of the type of school attended.-

The respondents' views on their experience with peer mediation were verified by question 3: "Are you interested in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation?"

Table 14*Hypothesis testing for question No. 3*

Category	Test criterion [G]	Entry		Exit		
		CHISQ. TEST [p-value]	Decision	Test criterion [G]	CHISQ. TEST [p-value]	Decision
Critical value: $\chi(1-\alpha)$; $df = 3.841$						
Gender						
Gender (primary school)	0.004	0.949851529	Do not reject H_0	0.017	0.89642	Do not reject H_0
Gender (secondary school)	0.029	0.865617392	Do not reject H_0	0.126	0.72255	Do not reject H_0
Gender (total)	0.037	0.848059416	Do not reject H_0	0.072	0.788481	Do not reject H_0
School						
School (total)	5.252	0.02192	Reject H_0 Accept H_1	0.684	0.40816	Do not reject H_0

Source. Own research

The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at both the entry and exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in interest in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation in terms of the respondents' gender in either group (primary school, secondary school, and total). The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at the entry testing indicated that there was a statistically significant difference in interest in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation in terms of the type of school attended. The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at the exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation in terms of the type of school attended.

The respondents' views on their interest in becoming a peer mediator were verified with question 4: "Are you interested in becoming a peer mediator?"

The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at both the entry and exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in interest in becoming a peer mediator in either group (primary school, secondary school, and total) in terms of the respondents' gender.

The resulting Chi-square [χ^2] at both the entry and exit testing indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in interest in becoming a peer mediator in terms of the type of school attended.

Table 14
Hypothesis testing for question No. 4

Category	Test	Entry	Decision	Test	Exit	Decision
	criterion	CHISQ.		criterion	CHISQ.	
	[G]	TEST		[G]	TEST	
		[p-value]			[p-value]	
Critical value: $\chi(1-\alpha)$; df = 3.841						
Gender						
Gender (primary school)	0.742	0.38908	Do not reject H_0	0.025	0.87328	Do not reject H_0
Gender (secondary school)	0.413	0.52066	Do not reject H_0	0.021	0.88501	Do not reject H_0
Gender (total)	0.821	0.36491	Do not reject H_0	0.02	0.88631	Do not reject H_0
School						
School (total)	0.913	0.33944	Do not reject H_0	0.221	0.63840	Do not reject H_0

Source. Own research

CONCLUSION

The escalation of conflicts resulting also from the value fragmentation of society offers space for a broader discourse on how to eliminate negative manifestations. The need to challenge values, ethics and mutual respect and esteem in everyday life, not excluding the school environment, is presented by multiple authors (Lešková, 2010; Göksoy & Argon, 2016; Králik, Roubalová, Hlad et al., 2022; Petrikovičová et al., 2022). The increase of negative phenomena in society, but also in the school environment, is documented by various statistics as well as several research findings (Lešková, 2010; Emmerová, 2011; Dulovics, 2012; Emmerová, 2014; Rovňanová, 2016; Niklová, 2016; Asmus et al., 2017; Çeviker Ay et al., 2019; Freire et al., 2020; Mičková, 2020; Lešková, 2020; Šulřová, 2021; Jarmoch et al., 2022). Peer mediation finds its place in the school environment as a pedagogical practice. According to several authors (Kondrla et. al., 2022), it requires the constant updating of innovative methods and approaches that will improve the overall climate for successful implementation of the educational process. It is in such an environment that a person can realise and improve not only their happiness but also their overall quality of life (Murgaš et al., 2022).

This fact opens the way to their elimination in a non-violent way, where peer mediators have their place as independent partners in conflict resolution. An essential reason for the introduction of mediation at schools, as Dušana Bielešzová (2017) argues, are reasons such as the need for stability

and improvement of the quality of relationships in the pedagogical and pupil collective and the interest of educators to provide pupils with a suitable model for conflict resolution.

The results of the conducted research pointed to several facts that were found after 18 months of project implementation aimed at acquiring the competences necessary for the application of peer mediation by the project participants.

Entry data indicated that only 21.2% of respondents had experience with peer mediation. After 18 months of project implementation, there was a significant increase in the selection of positive connotations declaring experience with peer mediation - 79.8% of respondents, an increase of 58.6%. In terms of gender as well as type of school, we did not observe a significant difference in preferences.

Conflicts are a natural part of our lives. On the issue of resolving personal and school conflicts, there was a shift in the respondents' preferences as a result of completing the project cycle. 67.7% of respondents declared an interest in resolving personal conflicts through peer mediation at the beginning of the project and 86.3% of respondents at the end of the project, which is an increase of 18.6%. Similar results were observed in terms of interest in resolving school conflicts through peer mediation. It can be stated that there was already a high level of interest in this area at the beginning of the research - 91.5% of respondents were interested in resolving school conflicts through school mediation. Overall, we saw a 5.3% increase in respondent interest following the implementation of the project, resulting in an overall respondent interest rate of 96.8%. The fact that there was a 7.7% increase in the interest of respondents in becoming a peer mediator (85.1% of respondents at the project entry and 92.8% of respondents at the project exit) can be considered a significant achievement of the project.

Other authors have come to similar results. Three-year longitudinal data showed significant reductions in the school's out-of-school suspensions after implementation of the peer mediation program. Mediation training also resulted in significant mediator knowledge gains pertaining to conflict, conflict resolution, and mediation (Schellenberg et al., 2007). Robert D. Harris (2006) demonstrated the results that peer mediators effectively modelled, and disputants effectively learned, conflict resolution knowledge, attitudes, and skills that contributed to a significant improvement in conflict attitudes and behaviours, and a significant reduction in disputant discipline problems following mediation. Also Edward Sellman (2011) states that peer mediation is most successful in schools where there was a considerable shift in the division of labour, accompanied by the production of new cultural tools that promoted new ways of thinking, speaking and acting with regard to conflict.

Peer-mediated interventions offer significant social benefits (Travers & Carter, 2021). Peer mediation programmes increase pupils' social status and empower them socially, including outside the school environment.

Peer mediation thus boosts their self-esteem and makes their school life easier overall (Baraldi, 2012). In this context, we see room for a broader impact of the media, as in the opinion of several authors (Králik & Máhrik, 2019a; Králik & Máhrik, 2019b; Tkáčová, Pavlíková et al., 2021). We live in an age of information and digital media, which are expected to influence not only the development of critical thinking, but also moral formation and tolerance.

Mediation brings tolerance, patience, respect, esteem, responsibility, trust, critical thinking, healthy communication, independence and empathy to schools. The starting point can be seen in sufficient education through the media, but also in the more practical implementation of peer mediation at schools and support for mediation initiatives by entities promoting the development of peer mediation. Based on the experience from project implementation and the results of the research, we can conclude that pupils and students who have undergone the peer mediation programme try to resolve conflicts by using peer mediation.

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