RESEARCH REPORT

- RESULTS OF A BASELINE STUDY -

Conducted within the project „*Youth for Change: Building the resilience of Serbian youth through youth engagement, leadership and development of cognitive and social-emotional skills*"

Belgrade, Serbia
2020

CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Even though there is a growing research interest and evidence on the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism, previous studies indicated no single cause (Mcgilloway, Ghosh, & Bhui, 2015), unique profile of psychopathology or personality traits that makes individuals more prone to radicalization and violent extremism (Demunter et al., 2019).

Several groups of risk factors were, however, identified. Accordingly, young people, in a formative life period, living in Serbia – a region with a recent history of violent interethnic conflict, could represent the population of particular interest for exploring radicalization and violent extremism.

The main aim of this study was to assess the potential for radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia and to explore protective and risk factors for these phenomena. Our results should inform data-driven programs aiming to reduce and prevent radicalization and violent extremism.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 288 students aged between 15 and 18 (29% males) from Belgrade and Sandžak region participated in the study. They completed comprehensive questionnaire assessing radicalization and violent extremism that was conceptualized as three dimensional Militant-Extremist Mindset, including 1) acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence in certain circumstances; 2) beliefs in divine power such as heaven and God, role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures; 3) and belief that there is something importantly wrong with the world we live in, and that the present-day world is vile and miserable. In addition, using a comprehensive battery of psychological instruments, interethnic perception and interaction was assessed, as well as potential risk factors for radicalization and violent extremism that were grouped around two broad clusters:

1) contextual risk factors, including financial and socio-emotional deprivation and exposure to violence and hostile school environment and 2) psychological risk factors including self-concept and esteem-related factors, ideology-related factors, and interaction-related psychological factors.

RESULTS

Global social out-group acceptance ratings showed no extreme out-group distance or rejection. Results revealed overall general positive attitudes of Serbs towards Bosniaks and vice versa. We observed somewhat higher distance towards Albanians among youth in the Belgrade area, and towards members of Roma ethnicity in both regions.

Results indicated that youth in Serbia is not prone to accept, justify, and advocate for the use of violence, to a moderate extent believes in divine power. However, they show relatively pronounced tendencies towards perceiving the world as vile and miserable. When comparing regions in Serbia, it can be noticed that youth in Belgrade show significantly more proviolence tendencies, to a larger extent perceive the world as dangerous place, and believe in divine power less then youth from Sandžak.

The results have shown different contextual and psychological drivers of each dimension of the militant extremist mindset. *Belief in divine power* was best predicted by the level of religiosity, followed by authoritarian tendencies. In addition, results indicated that those who come from dysfunctional families and were exposed to hostile school environments exhibit more pronounced views on the *world as vile and miserable*, indicating the importance of contextual factors in shaping this world view. Those supportive of intergroup hierarchies and innate inequalities were also more prone to see the world as dangerous.

Finally, psychological factors were the only ones contributing to *pro-violent tendencies* among youth in Serbia, whilst contextual factors were not very predictive in that regard. Acceptance, justification, and advocacy for the use of violence thus seem to be related to attitudes which support favorizing certain groups at the expense of other groups, and group inequality; young people who reported feeling more socially isolated and lonely were also more likely to endorse violent solutions in intergroup relations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study results, recommendations on interventions for prevention and reduction of radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia are provided and discussed, including:
1) interventions addressing attitudes towards intergroup relations
2) interventions addressing social isolation and loneliness
3) Interventions addressing family functioning and school environments
4) Interventions addressing negative worldview

INTRODUCTION

During the last few decades, there is a growing interest and research evidence on the process of radicalization that can lead to extremism and violence. OSCE (2019) defines radicalization that leads to violent extremism as "dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, even legitimate, course of action", while the term violent extremism refers to "acts of violence that are justified by, or associated with, an extremist religious, social, or political ideology".

Radicalization may eventually lead to advocacy, support or engagement in violence and terrorism, but often radical ideas won't lead to violence, and individuals who are engaged in violence do not necessarily support any of the radical ideologies (Borum, 2012). In line with this, literature offers two commonly accepted approaches to radicalization: 1) radicalization as a process that leads to violent extremism and 2) radicalization as a broader phenomenon of having far-reaching ideas of changing societies.

Unrelated to a specific approach to radicalization, previous studies identified multiple causes that drive the phenomenon, such as global and regional politics, intergroup conflicts, group inequalities, social exclusion and marginalization, poverty, etc. (Borum, 2011; McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008; Petrović & Stakić, 2018; CeSID, 2016). In addition, it was shown that threatened identity and self-uncertainty could lead to seeking for, and identifying oneself with groups that can offer strong boundaries and directive leadership, often including radical ideology and involvement in violence (Ellis & Abdi, 2017; Hogg, 2014).

Bearing in mind recognized drivers of radicalization, in the context of past events and civil war in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, increased violent radicalization and strengthening of right-wing movements in Serbia in the last decade of the last century does not come as a surprise. Despite democratic transitions in Serbia at the beginning of 2000 some authors have argued that right-wing movements continued to grow. These authors identify two main forms of extremism in Serbia, right-wing extremism and Islamist extremism (Petrović & Stakić, 2018).

One of the main strategies in countering radicalization and violent extremism is preventing radicalization of young people, that are targeted as one of the most vulnerable groups and are more likely to engage in extremist groups (Silke, 2008). As we previously stated, some of the most emphasized individual drivers of radicalization are threatened identity and self uncertainty. The fact that adolescents are in the process of identity forming which often entails crises makes them more vulnerable and prone to seek for stable identity and self-purpose in the extremist groups. Besides identity crises, there are other factors associated with radicalization and engagement in violence, especially among youth, which are social identification, status-seeking, and revenge-seeking (Dandurand, 2015).

Previous studies exploring radicalization or related constructs among youth in different regions in Serbia indicated that young people in Serbia are disappointed, bitter, and distrustful towards social actors (CeSID, 2016), as well as more politicaly cynic in comparison to their peers from Western European countries (Žeželj, 2007). In addition, it was shown that Roma people and youth aged 15-19 are most likely to engage in violence (Petrović & Stakić, 2018). Regionally, it is young people from South Serbia (CeSID, 2016). The same survey revealed that young people in South-Western Serbia have a stronger religious identity (CeSID, 2016).

Despite the growing importance of the topic in question and local contextual factors that could represent additional risk factors for radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia, there is a lack of studies that comprehensively assessed and explored drivers of radicalization and violent extremism in a single design.

Aiming to provide data needed to inform evidence-based programs striving to prevent and reduce radicalization and violent extremism, this study will explore these phenomena and related protective and risk factors. The young population was selected as the target group, as it was shown they represent a group under increased risk for involvement in radical groups and violence. In addition, in order to

support ethnical and religious diversity in the assessment of these phenomena, and provide the perspective of youth from both the majority population in Serbia as well as minorities, the study included young people from the Belgrade and Sandžak area, i.e. South-Western region of Serbia.

Based on both theoretical concepts and the body of evidence from previous studies, protective and risk factors for radicalization and violent extremism within this study are grouped around two main clusters, which are explored in depth. The first group of factors includes contextual risk factors such as financial and socio-emotional deprivation and exposure to violence and abuse, which were shown to be related to readiness for involvement in radical groups and violence. The second cluster includes psychological factors that are shown to be drivers of radicalization and violent extremism, and can be grouped into two sub-clusters: identity and self worth (self-esteem, self-transcendence[1] and self isolation/loneliness) and ideological views (right wing authoritarianism, social dominance orientation, egalitarianism, and religiosity). Additionally, this study aims to provide evidence on interethnic perception and interaction among youth in both regions, thus enabling a better understanding of the potential for intergroup conflict.

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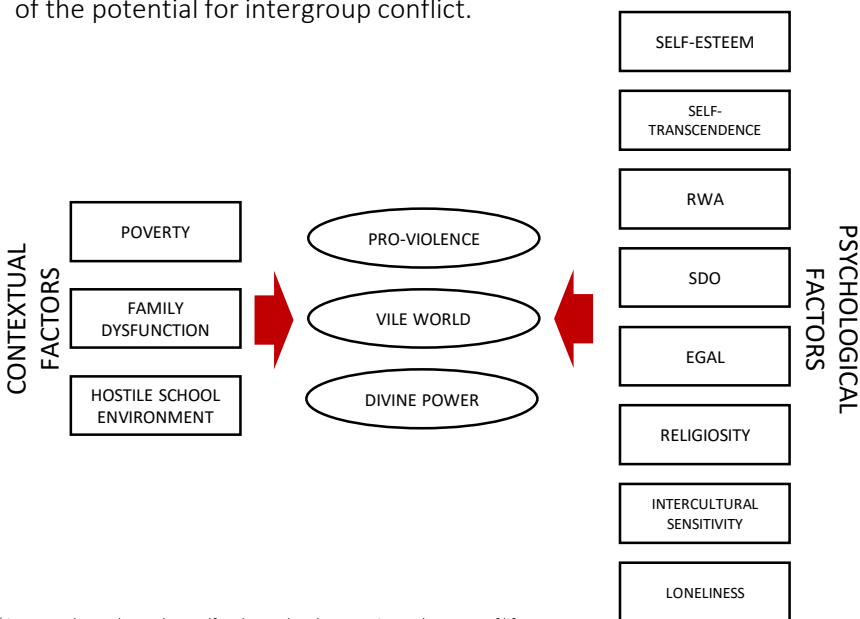
[1] interests that go beyond oneself and are related to meaning and purpose of life.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data were collected during September and November 2019. The sample consisted of 288 students attending high schools and technical schools in Belgrade, Sjenica, and Novi Pazar. Students were recruited in coordination with the school psychologists and approached in predefined time during school hours. All participants and their parents or legal guardians were informed about the objective of the study and invited to participate on a voluntary basis. All participants who took part in the study had the informed consent signed by them, their parents, or the legal guardian. All participants completed a set of questionnaires during group sessions on school premises. In line with recommended practices, we back translated the questionnaires that were not previously available in Serbian. Data collection was conducted by trained psychologists, and after filling the questionnaires all participants were debriefed. All personal information was kept confidential and all the data were anonymized prior to data analysis. All procedures adhered to the Declaration of Helsinki standards, and the study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Department of Psychology, University of Belgrade, Serbia (Protocol #2019-037).

Data analysis strategy. We report descriptive measures (frequencies and averages) in the total sample and by regional subsamples. We also report if there are any significant differences between the subsamples. When interpreting those, the reader needs to bear in mind that, due to the rather large samples, even small differences tend to be significant, so one needs to assess the range of it, i.e., whether they are substantial or not.

We continue to report correlational and regression analyses to test which are the most important determinants of militant extremist mindset.

SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHICS CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE

The sample consists of 288 students aged between 15 and 18. Most of the students have between 16 and 17 years of age (86%). The participants were recruited from four high schools in Serbia: IX gymnasium and technical school "Drvo Art" from Belgrade region, Economic-Trading school in Novi Pazar and Technical high school in Sjenica from Sandžak region.

The gender and regional structure of the sample are depicted in Figures 1 and 2, while the ethnic and religious structures of the sample are presented in Figures 3 and 4.
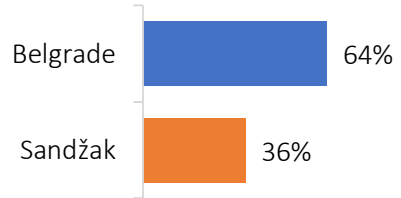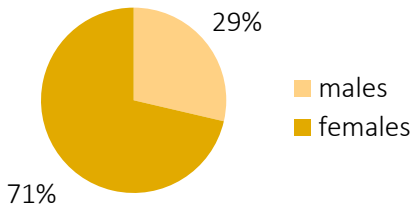

Figure 1. Gender structure of the sample
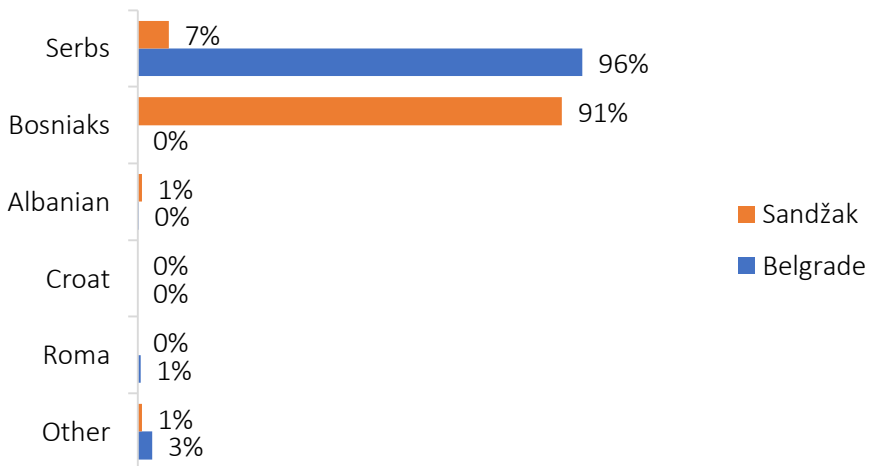

Figure 2. The regional structure of the sample

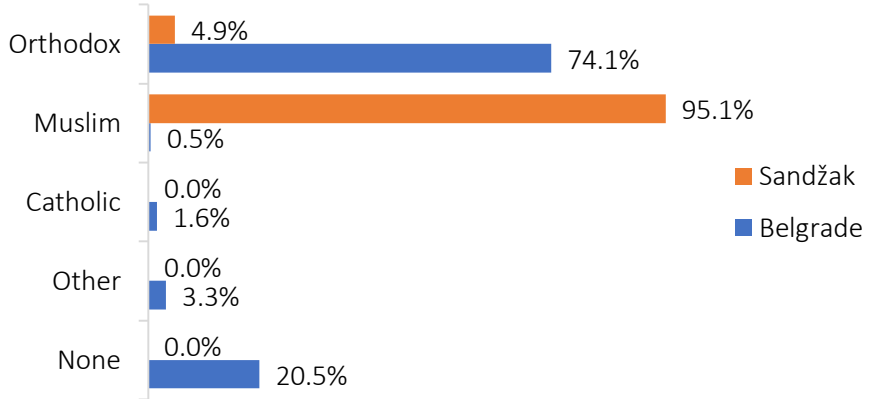*Figure 3*. Ethnic structure of the sample

Figure 4. Religious structure of the sample

In addition, the one-item measure was used for self-reported religiosity ("*How religious are you?*"), accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – not religious at all to 5 – very much religious. The average self-reported religiosity for Belgrade and Sanžak regions is given in Figure 5. As can be seen, participants from the Sandžak region reported being more religious than participants from the Belgrade region.
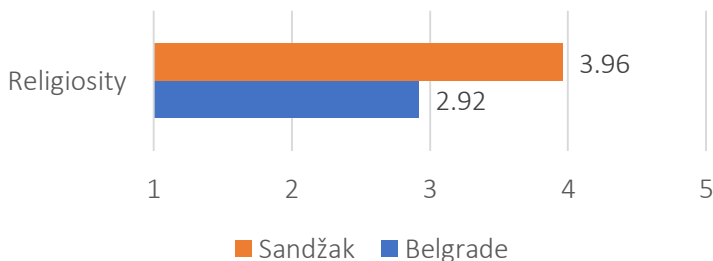

Figure 5. Self-reported level of religiosity

INTERETHNICAL PERCEPTION & INTERACTION

CONTACT BETWEEN ETHNIC GROUPS

We assessed how often adolescents from different ethnic groups have contact with one another, and how much they enjoy that experience.

Quantity of interethnic contact (Đorđević, 2015; Zezelj, Milošević-Đorđević, Van Niekerk, & Pavlović, 2019) was assessed with items describing the frequency of contact with one's in-group and outgroup members in different contexts. Assessed groups are those to which social distance is most expressed among the population in Serbia (Albanians, Roma, Croats, Bosniaks, and the majority- Serbian group) (Biro, Mihić, Milin, & Logar, 2002).

Firstly, the contact was measured as the number of friends of different ethnicities (Albanians, Roma, Croats, Bosniaks, and Serbs) where participants on a 5-point scale indicated how many of their friends are members of each of these ethnic groups (1 – none, 2 – minority, 3 – half of them, 4 – majority, 5 – all of them).

The familiarity with the groups was assessed using a single-item measure in which the participants were asked to assess how well are they acquainted with each of the given ethnic groups (1 – not at all, 5 – very well).

In addition, quantity of contact across different contexts was examined. More precisely, three 5-point items measuring the frequency of interaction was used, namely, contact in school, neighborhood, and in free time.

Quality of contact was assessed with the item describing pleasantness (positive-negative) of contact with own group and outgroup if a participant ever was in direct contact with different groups. The participants rated pleasantness on a 10-point scale (1 – very unpleasant, 10 – very pleasant).

When taken into account all measures of contact, the results have shown, as expected, that participants predominantly interact with their own group in different contexts. As it is depicted in Table 1, participants from Belgrade have minimum contact, if any at all, with members of other groups, while participants from Sandžak have some contact with Serbs, as it is expected due to the ethnic composition in this region, but minimum contact with other groups, as it is depicted in Table 2.

The results are similar regarding group familiarity, i.e., the participants from the Belgrade region are the most familiar with their own group, while they are relatively unfamiliar with other groups. Similarly, in the Sandžak region, the predominant ethnic group reported being familiar with their own group, while having relatively low familiarity with out-group members except for Serbs who are the second largest ethnic group in this region.

As for the pleasantness of contact, it was rated highly positive for Serbs and Bosniaks within all participants, where 60% of participants in Sandžak scored higher than 9 assessing contact with Serbs, and 47% of participants from Belgrade scoring higher than 9 when assessing pleasantness of contact with Bosniaks. Significant differences were obtained between youth in Belgrade and Sanžak in assessing pleasantness of contact with other groups. Namely, participants from Belgrade reported having more negative contact with Albanians, more than 70% of participants scoring below 5, than those from Sandžak, while youth from Sandžak reported having more negative contact with Croats and Roma, where more than 60% of participants score below 5.

Table 1. *Contact with different ethnic groups - Belgrade region*

	Friends	Familiarity	Contact in school	Contact in neighborhood	Contact in free time	Contact pleasantness
Serbs	4.63/5	4.63/5	4.96/5	4.93/5	4.89/5	9.16/10
Bosniaks	1.61/5	2.55/5	1.76/5	1.92/5	2.22/5	7.76/10
Albanians	1.1/5	1.51/5	1.06/5	1.18/5	1.14/5	3.82/10
Croats	1.47/5	2.44/5	1.58/5	1.74/5	2.08/5	6.48/10
Roma	1.29/5	2.01/5	1.58/5	1.75/5	1.48/5	4.55/10

Table 2. *Contact with different ethnic groups - Sandžak region*

	Friends	Familiarity	Contact in school	Contact in neighborhood	Contact in free time	Contact pleasantness
Serbs	2.49/5	3.33/5	3.48/5	2.31/5	2.83/5	8.09/10
Bosniaks	4.50/5	4.79/5	4.84/5	4.80/5	4.81/5	9.81/10
Albanians	1.33/5	1.71/5	1.37/5	1.41/5	1.53/5	5.40/10
Croats	1.17/5	1.51/5	1.06/5	1.14/5	1.23/5	3.91/10
Roma	1.11/5	1.42/5	1.14/5	1.10/5	1.25/5	3.41/10

ACCEPTANCE OF OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

Group acceptance (as adapted in Žeželj, Milošević-Đorđević, Niekerk, & Pavlović, 2019). For the purpose of this research, group acceptance was measured by 4 items describing social distance, i.e., readiness to engage in relations of varying closeness with people from five ethnic groups. (e.g. *"I would not mind having a Serb/Bosniak/Albanian/Croat/Roma: as a neighbor/sharing a school desk with me/ as a close friend/ as a romantic partner"*). Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree, to 5 – strongly agree so that higher scores suggest higher acceptance of a relationship.

Figure 6 presents average responses to the question: *"I would not mind living in the same neighborhood with…"*, where participants showed preference for their own group, as expected. Besides this, Belgrade youth demonstrated relatively high acceptance of Bosniaks, followed by Croats, while demonstrating the least level of acceptance for Albanian and Roma members as acceptable neighbors. Similarly, besides their in-group members, Sandžak youth expressed the highest acceptance of Serbs as being their neighbors, followed by Albanians and Croats, while members of the Roma ethnicity were rated as the least acceptable neighbors.

A significant difference was found between Belgrade and Sandžak region in acceptance of Albanian ethnic group. Namely, participants from Sandžak were more ready to accept Albanians as neighbors. There is no significant difference in accepting Roma, where 30% of all participants scored less than 2. Also, there was no significant difference in accepting Croats, where 55% of participants scored higher than 4.
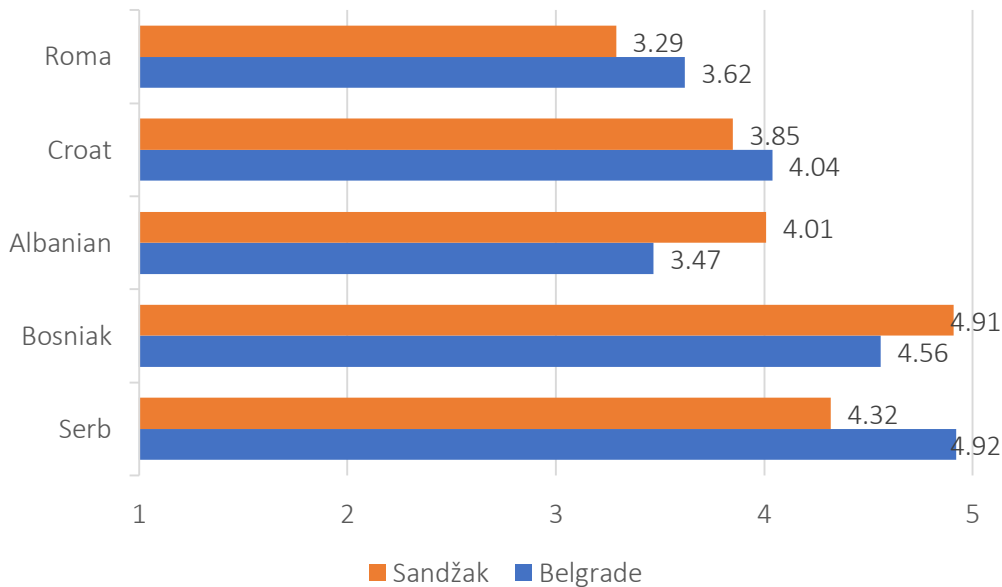
Figure 6. "*I would not mind living in the same neighborhood with...*"

The average responses for the question *"I would not mind sharing the school desk with…"* by regions are depicted in Figure 7. The preference for the in-group is constant, and the differences are similar to those found for the previous item. Namely, apart from members of their own ethnic group, Belgrade youth expressed the second-highest acceptance for sharing the same school desk with a Bosniak, followed by Croat, while members of Albanian and Roma ethnic groups were rated as the most undesirable. On the other hand, youth from Sandžak region expressed no differences between accepting sharing the school desk with members of their own ethnic group and Serbian classmates, followed by Albanian and Croat classmates while showing the lowest level of acceptance for members of Roma group.

Comparisons between regions revealed a significant difference between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak in acceptance of Albanians, where participants from Sandžak have shown higher acceptance for this ethnic group. On the other hand, no differences were found regarding the acceptance of members of Croat and Roma ethnic groups.
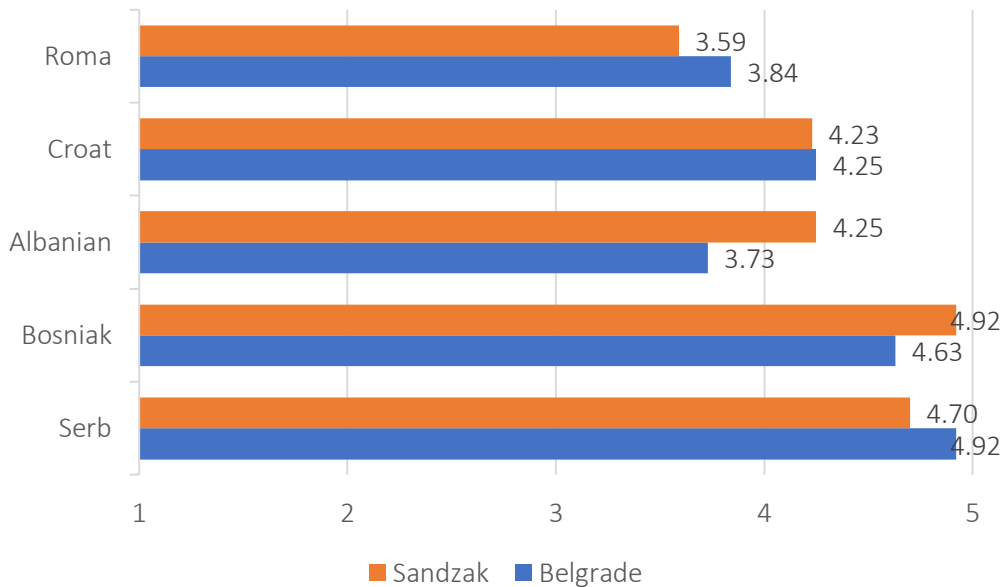

Figure 7. "*I would not mind sharing the school desk with..*"

The average responses to the question *"I would not mind having a close friend who is…"* are depicted in Figure 8. Again, the preferences of in-group members are found for both regions. Apart from that, participants from Belgrade would preferably have a Bosniak as a close friend, followed by Croat, then Roma, while the least desirable close friend would be the member of the Albanian ethnic group. Participants from Sanžak region wouldn't mind having a Serb as a close friend, followed by members of Albanian and Croat ethnic groups, while Roma would be the least desirable close friend.

However, significant differences between youth from Belgrade and Sandžak are found for both the acceptance of members of Albanian and Roma ethnic groups. Namely, youth from Belgrade expressed higher acceptance of Roma as a close friend than youth from Sandžak, who expressed higher acceptance of Albanians than participants from Belgrade. On average, every third participant from Sanžak would not mind having a Roma as a close friend, while every third participant from Belgrade would prefer not to have an Albanian as a close friend. No significant difference was found between regions in accepting members of the Croat ethnic group as a close friend.
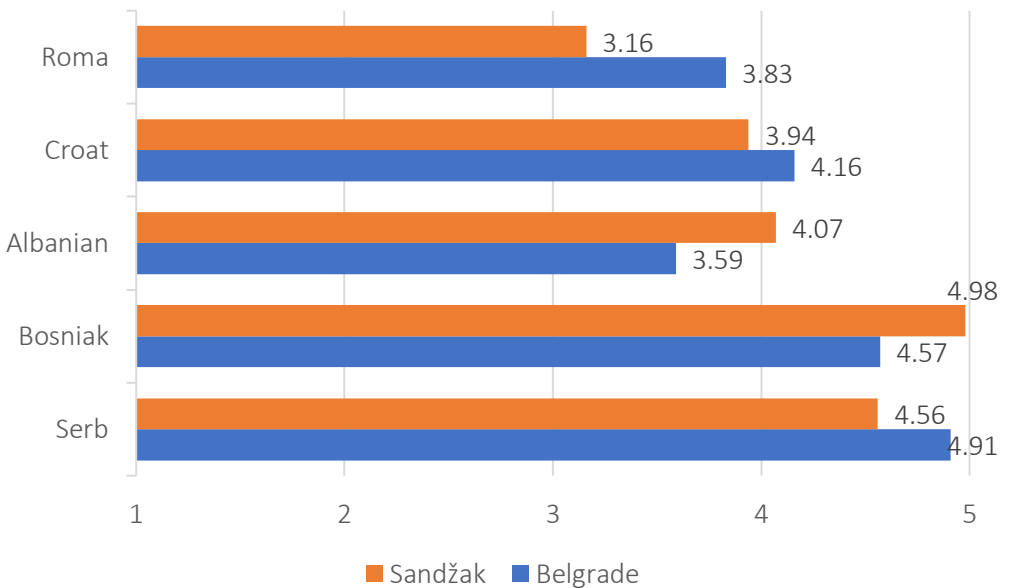

	Sandžak	Belgrade
Roma	3.16	3.83
Croat	3.94	4.16
Albanian	4.07	3.59
Bosniak	4.98	4.57
Serb	4.56	4.91

Figure 8. "*I would not mind having a close friend who is…*"

Figure 9 presents average scores of youth from Belgrade and Sandžak when asked: *"I would not mind dating a…"*. As expected participants from Belgrade and Sandžak showed a marked preference for their own group, but significant differences in acceptance of dating a person from other ethnic groups. Namely, youth from Belgrade would, before others, accept dating members of the Bosniak ethnic group, followed by Croats, and they would likely not have members of Albanian and Roma ethnic groups as romantic partners.

Youth from Sandžak was unlikely to accept dating Serbs, Croats, or Albanians (without significant differences), while refusing members of Roma ethnic group as potential dating partners.,
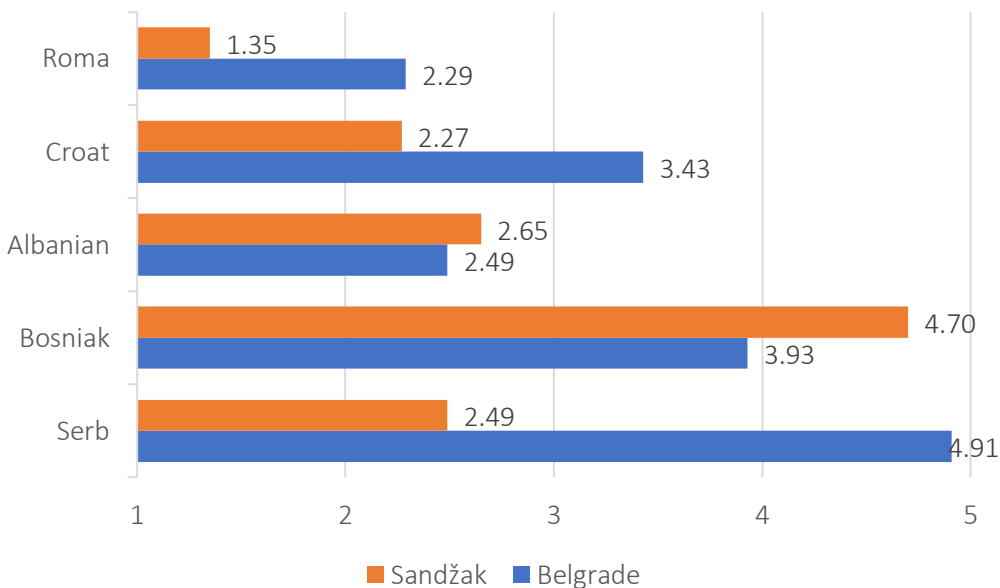

Figure 9. "I would not mind dating a…"

However, participants from Belgrade expressed significantly higher acceptance of all other groups compared to participants from Sandžak, except accepting dating Albanians, where youth from both regions expressed approximately the same level of acceptance. It should be noted that even though the acceptance of the majority of ethnic out-groups is higher among youth in Belgrade, the acceptance of both Roma and Albanians proved to be very low suggesting marked distance and rejection of this kind of relationship with the out-group members of these ethnicities.

Global social acceptance ratings, i.e., ratings aggregated across different level of closeness are given in Figure 10. Overall, within Belgrade youth, besides from in-group preference, the highest level of acceptance was found for Bosniaks, followed by Croats, while the lowest level of acceptance was found for Albanians and Roma.

Regarding Sandžak subsample, the second-highest level of acceptance was found for Serbs and Albanians for which no significant difference has been recorded, followed by somewhat lower acceptance of Croats, and the lowest level of acceptance being the one for members of the Roma ethnic group.
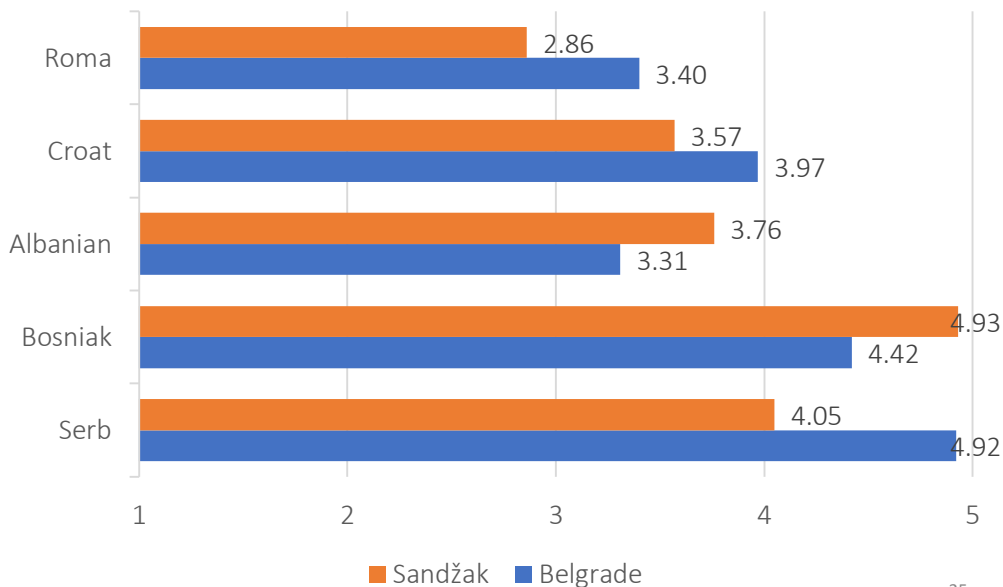

Figure 10. Global social acceptance

FEELINGS TOWARDS OTHER ETHNIC GROUPS

To measure feelings towards different ethnic outgroups, we adapted the so called "feeling thermometer" (Wilkox, Sigelman, & Cook, 1989). In this task, participants are requested to mark how they feel about members of each of the five aforementioned ethnic groups. Responses are given on a scale ranging from 0° (very cold) to 100° (very worm).

Results have shown the expected tendency of having warmer feelings towards in-group members compared to members of out-groups. As presented in Figure 11, youth from Belgrade has warmest feelings towards Bosniak group, followed by Croats and Roma, respectively, and the coldest feelings are expressed towards Albanian ethnic group.

In Sandžak region, the warmest feelings, after their own group, are towards Serbs, following Albanians and Croats, and the coldest feelings are expressed towards Roma ethnic group.

The only significant difference between the two regions is found regarding feelings toward Albanians, where the youth from Belgrade region reported experiencing colder feelings toward this group in comparison to youth from Sandžak. Namely, 85% of participants from Belgrade scored less than 50.
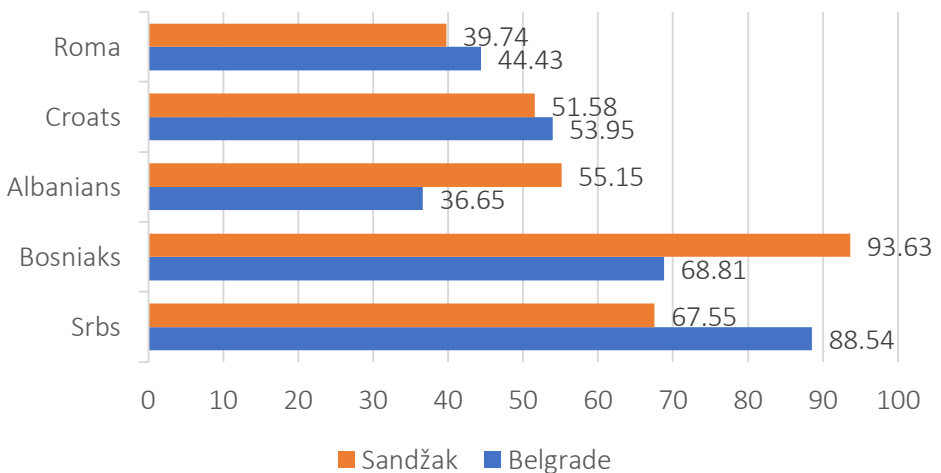

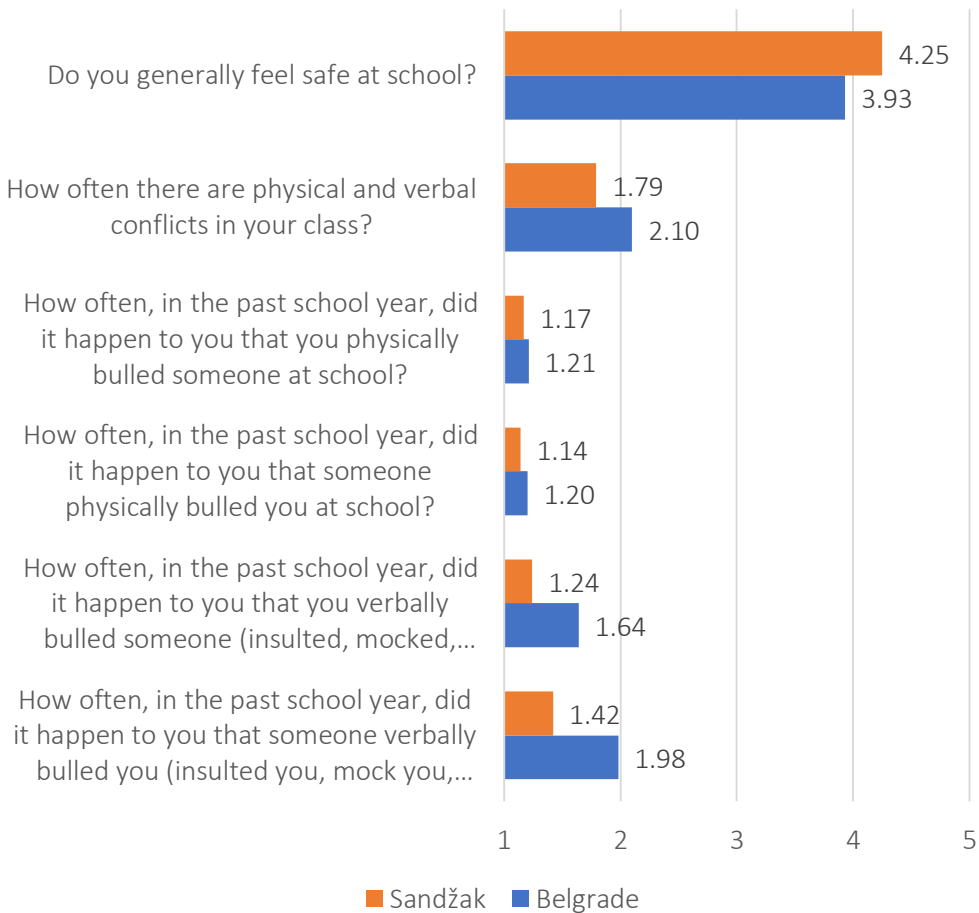*Figure 11.* Feeling thermometer

CONTEXTUAL RISK FACTORS

PEER ABUSE

To assess whether the youth has experienced peer-violence, we employed the **Peer abuse scale** (Olweus, 1996). It assesses the frequency of both verbal and physical bullying happening in a school in the past school year. Bullying is assessed using the two forms of items, one referring to being a victim of bullying and the other being a bully (e.g. *"How often did it happen in past school year that someone verbally bullied you (insulted you, made fun of you, etc.) at school"*; *"How often did it happen in past school year that you physically bullied someone at school?"*). The scale consists of 4 items, each one followed by a 5 - point Likert scale (1 – never, 2 – once or twice, 3 – two to three times a month, 4 – approximately once a week, and 5 – few times a week).

Two more 5-point scale items referring to the frequency of physical and verbal conflict in one's class were used, as well as the single-5-point item measuring the general feeling of safety in school (1 – I never feel safe at school to 5 – I always feel safe at school).

Figure 12 depicts the comparison between self-reported verbal and physical bullying and perceived overall safety in school. Results have shown that peer abuse is relatively low and perceived general safety is high among youth in both regions. However, participants from the Belgrade region reported being in a somewhat more hostile school environment as indicated by a lower feeling of safety in school as well as more frequent conflicts in their classes in comparison to their peers from Sandžak.

On the other hand, no differences in the frequency of physical bullying were observed between regions where youth from both Belgrade and Sandžak area reported very low frequencies of physical bullying. However, significant differences were found regarding verbal bullying. Namely, both being a victim of verbal bullying as well as verbally bullying peers were reported more often in the Belgrade region than in Sandžak.

Figure 12. Hostility of school environment

Chart data:

Question	Sandžak	Belgrade
Do you generally feel safe at school?	4.25	3.93
How often there are physical and verbal conflicts in your class?	1.79	2.10
How often, in the past school year, did it happen to you that you physically bulled someone at school?	1.17	1.21
How often, in the past school year, did it happen to you that someone physically bulled you at school?	1.14	1.20
How often, in the past school year, did it happen to you that you verbally bulled someone (insulted, mocked,…	1.24	1.64
How often, in the past school year, did it happen to you that someone verbally bulled you (insulted you, mock you,…	1.42	1.98

■ Sandžak ■ Belgrade

FAMILY DYSFUNCTION AND POVERTY

Family dysfunction and poverty were assessed using **Bad socialization scale** (Knežević, 2003). The scale consists of 10 items and two subscales: 1) *Poverty* that includes 4 items (e.g. *"There was never enough money in my family"*) and 2) *Family dysfunction* that includes 6 items (e.g. *"Physical and verbal conflicts happened often in my home while I was growing up"*). Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – completely false, to 5 – completely true.

On average, participants scored low on both scales, indicating that the majority do not perceive themselves as been financially deprived during childhood nor as been exposed to conflicts within the family, abused or neglected by their family members (Figure 13). However, significant differences between young people from different regions in Serbia were obtained in regards to poverty, with youth in Sandžak assessing themselves as being less exposed to poverty in comparison to youth in Belgrade. On the other hand, a trend-level difference was observed for the family dysfunction where Belgrade youth, on average, reported having more dysfunctional homes than their peers from Sandžak.
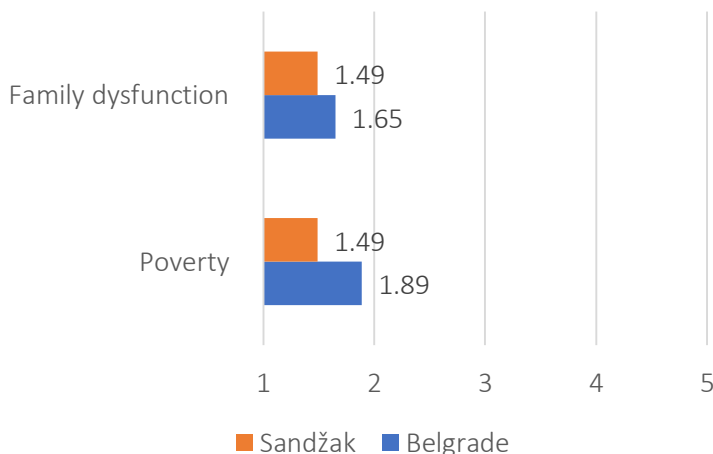

Figure 13. Family dysfunction and poverty scores

PSYCHOLOGICAL PROTECTIVE & RISK FACTORS

SOCIAL DOMINANCE ORIENTATION

Social Dominance Orientation (SDO) (Pratto et al. 1994; adapted in Todosijević, 2013) measures general attitude toward intergroup relations, accepting or opposing hierarchies as a natural world order. The scale consists of two subscales: 1) Group dominance (e.g. *"Some groups of people are just less worthy than others"*) and 2) Egalitarianism (e.g. *"All humans should be treated equally"*), both consisting of 5 items. Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – completely false, to 5 – completely true, where low scores on Group dominance scale and high scores on the Egalitarianism scale indicate attitudes supporting group equality.

Results have shown that youth in Serbia on average score relatively low on Group Dominance scale, with less than 5% of participants scoring above 4. In addition, they score high on the Egalitarianism scale, with only 5% of participants scoring below 2. No significant differences were identified between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak (Figure 14). These results indicate generally, youth in Serbia is predominantly supportive of intergroup equality, with equal rights and opportunities for all.
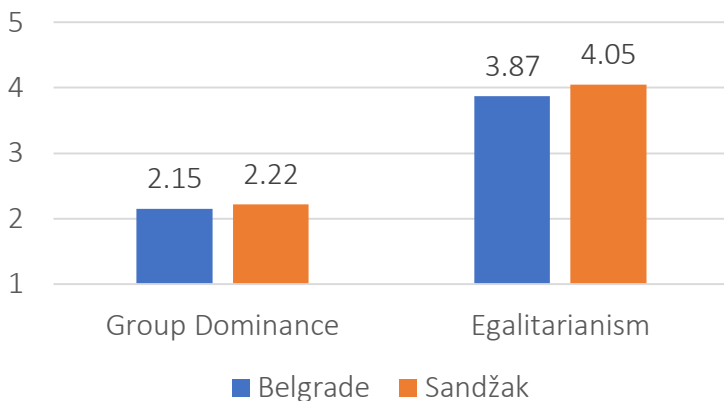

Figure 14. SDO scores

AUTHORITARIANISM

Right wing authoritarianism is a tendency to respect and obey authority and support conservative values. We measured it by RWA scale (Altemeyer, 1981, 1996; adapted in Todosijević, 2013). It consists of 9 items (e.g. *"The most important values that children have to learn are obedience and respect for authority"*). Each item is accompanied by a 5-point scale ranging from 1 – completely false, to 5 – completely true.

The results indicated that youth in Serbia demonstrates moderate levels of right-wing authoritarianism. A comparison between two regions (depicted in Figure 15) shows that youth in Sandžak exhibits significantly more pronounced right-wing authoritarianism attitudes than youth in Belgrade, although the difference was not substantial.
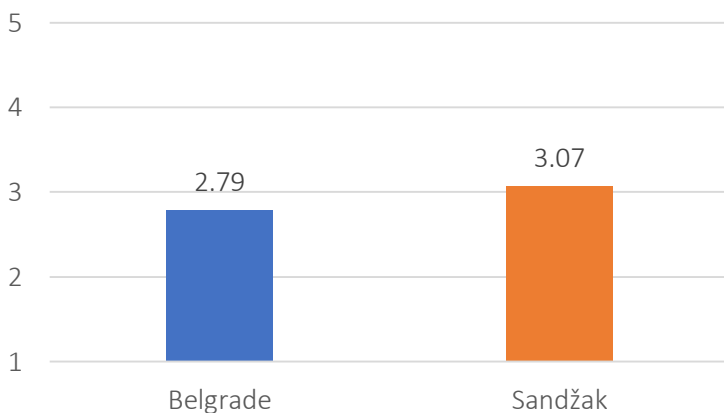

Figure 15. Right-wing authoritarianism scores

SELF-ESTEEM

Self-esteem was assessed by the **Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale** (Rosenberg, 1979), a widely used and cross culturally validated instrument. It consists of two subscales 1) *Self-liking* (e.g. *"I take a positive attitude toward myself"*) and 2) *Self-competence* (e.g. *"I am able to do things as well as most other people"*). Each subscale consists of 5 items and the overall score can be used as an indicator of *General self-esteem*. Each item is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree, to 5 – strongly agree.

Results indicated that young people in Serbia score very high on both subscales resulting in a high general self-esteem score (Figure 16) - this is a typical finding for this age-group. Sandžak youth demonstrated significantly higher general self-esteem compared to their peers from the Belgrade area mostly deriving from differences in self-competence ratings which proved to be higher in Sandžak youth; however, it needs to be noted that, although significant, these differences were not substantial. On the other hand, no differences between regions were found regarding the self-liking aspect of self-esteem.
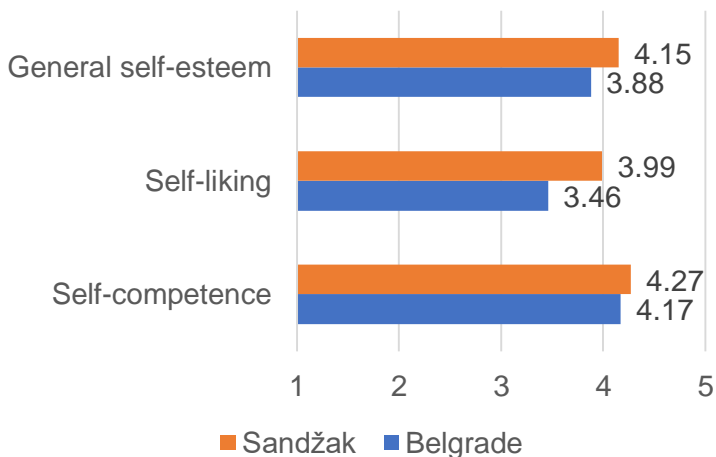

Figure 16. Self-esteem scores

INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

Intercultural sensitivity was assessed by the Serbian version of the short **Intercultural sensitivity scale (ISS)** (Petrović et al., 2015). The ISS consists of 15 items and four subscales: 1) *Interaction enjoyment* has four items that describe positive or negative reactions toward communication with people from different cultures (e.g. *"I get upset easily when interacting with people from different cultures"*), 2) *Interaction engagement* has four items referring to one's feelings toward people from different cultures (e.g. *"I enjoy interacting with people from different cultures"*), 3) *Respect for cultural differences* subscale includes four items describing tolerance and respect for people from different cultures and their opinions (e.g. *"I think people from different cultures are narrow-minded"* – reverse keyed item), 4) *Interaction confidence* has three items measuring one's confidence when interacting with people from different cultures (e.g. *"I am pretty confident in interacting with people from different cultures"*). Each item is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 – strongly disagree, to 5 – strongly agree.

Results depicted in Figure 17 indicated that youth in Serbia score the highest on subscales *Interaction enjoyment* and *Respect for cultural differences*, while scoring somewhat lower on scales measuring *Interaction engagement* and *Interaction confidence.* No significant differences were identified between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak on any of the subscales. However, a trend level difference was observed for the *Interaction enjoyment* subscale where Sandžak youth exhibited slightly higher enjoyment in interacting with people from different cultures than their Belgrade peers.
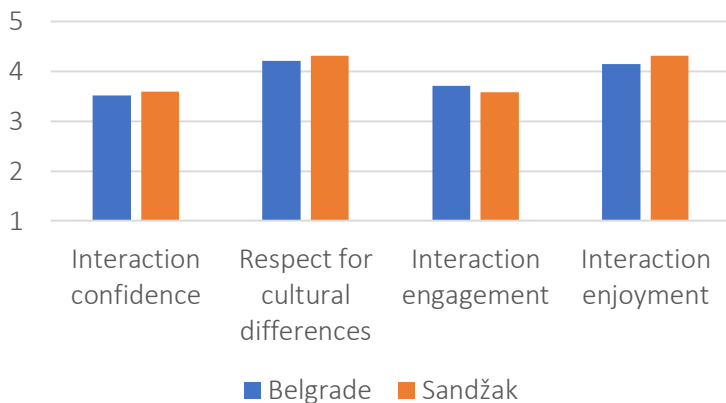
Figure 17. ISS scores

FEELINGS OF LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

Subjective feelings of loneliness and feelings of social isolation were assessed by the UCLA **Loneliness Scale** (Russel, Peplau, & Cutrona, 1980). It consists of 20 items (e.g. *"I lack companionship"*), accompanied by a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - never, to 4 - often.

Overall, participants on average scored relatively low on this scale (Figure 18), with less than 10% of participants scoring above 3, indicating that feelings of social isolation are to a lesser extent present among youth in Serbia. No significant differences were observed between youth in Belgrade and Sandžak area.
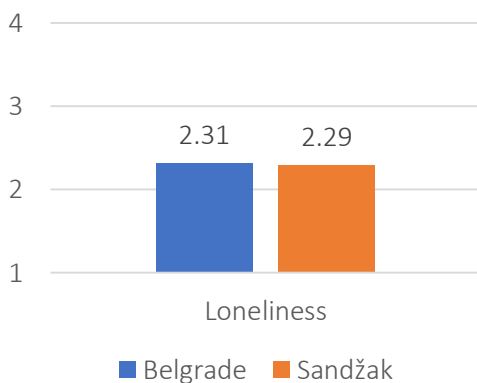
Figure 18. Loneliness scores

PERSONAL MEANING

A sense of personal meaning was assessed with **Personal meaning profile – PMP** (McDonald, Wong, & Gingras, 2012). For the purpose of this study, the 3-item subscale *Self-transcendenc*e was retrieved from the PMP scale. It was used for assessing interests that go beyond oneself and are related to meaning and purpose of life (e.g. "I believe I can make a difference in the world"). Each item is accompanied by a 5-point scale ranging from 1 - strongly disagree, to 5 - strongly agree.

Results indicated that young people in Serbia have moderately to highly present believes relevant for personal meaning overall. Namely, they predominantly believe that they can make a significant contribution to society, that they can make a difference in the world, and that they are trying to make this world a better place. As can be seen from Figure 19 the only significant difference between regions was obtained for the belief that they can significantly contribute to a society that proved to be more pronounced in Sandžak than in Belgrade youth.
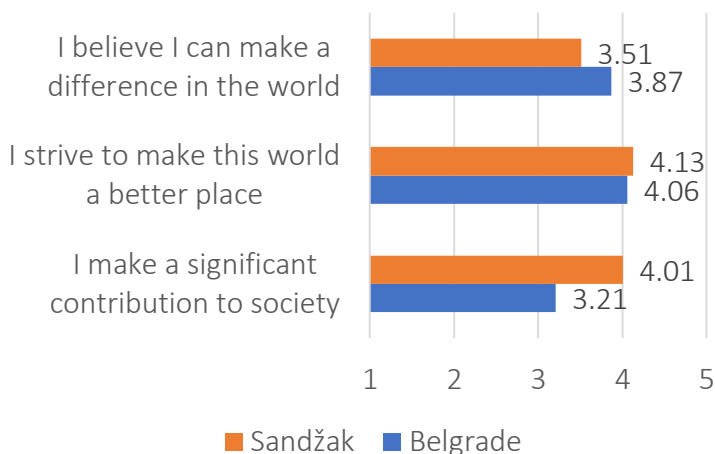

*Figure 19*. Personal meaning scores

RADICALIZATION & EXTREMISM

MILITANT EXTREMIST MINDSET

Militant Extremist Mindset - MEM was assessed via the revised MEM scale (Stankov, Knežević, Saucier, Radović, & Milovanović, 2018; Stankov, Saucier, & Knežević, 2010), consisting of 24 items that measure beliefs typical of the militant extremist thinking pattern. MEM items are grouped into the following subscales: 1) *Pro-violence* (10 items), referring to acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence in certain circumstances like revenge or to gain redemption (e.g. *"Armed struggle is the only way that youths can redeem themselves and their society"*), 2) *Divine Power* (8 items), assessing beliefs about heaven and God, role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures (e.g. *"At a critical moment, a divine power will step in to help our people."*), and 3) *Vile World* (6 items), referring to belief that there is something importantly wrong with the world we live in, that the present-day world is vile and miserable, and heading for destruction (e.g. *"The world is headed for destruction"*). Each statement is accompanied by a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 - strongly disagree, to 5 - strongly agree.

Results depicted in Figure 20 have shown that, in general, youth in Serbia scores low on Proviolence subscale, with less than 5% of participants scoring above 3, on a 5-point scale. When comparing regions in Serbia, it can be noticed that youth in Belgrade show significantly more proviolence tendencies then youth from Sandžak.

Results indicated that youth in Serbia to a moderate extent believe in divine power, with youth in Sandžak scoring significantly higher when compared to youth in the Belgrade area.

Additionaly, the results have shown that youth in Serbia, somewhat above average, perceive the world as vile, miserable, and as if it is heading for destruction, with approximately two-thirds of participants scoring above 3. This is particularly expressed among youth in the Belgrade area, who scored significantly higher on this subscale when compared to youth in Sandžak.
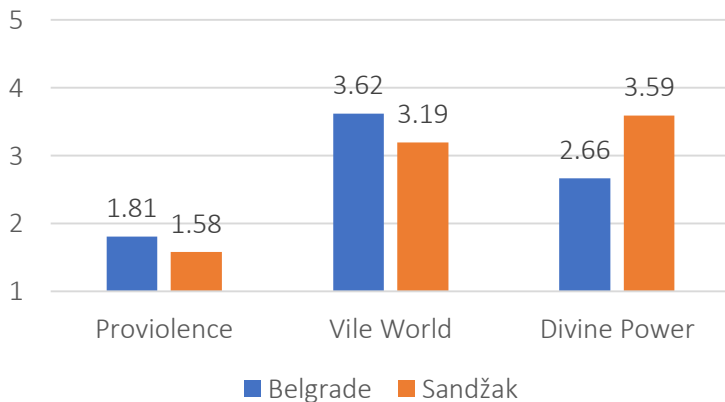
Figure 20. MEM scores

Figure 21 shows the comparison between average scores for items of the Pro-violence subscale in Belgrade and Sandžak.

Results have shown that Belgrade youth tend to agree more than Sandžak youth with statements: *„Armed struggle is the only way that youths can redeem themselves and their society", „Killing is justified when it is an act of revenge", „Our enemy's children are like scorpions; they need to be squashed before they grow up".* On the other hand, Sandžak youth, in comparison to youth from Belgrade, to a larger extent tended to accept statements: *„All problems can be solved through negotiations and compromise",* and *„A good person has a duty to avoid killing any living human being".*
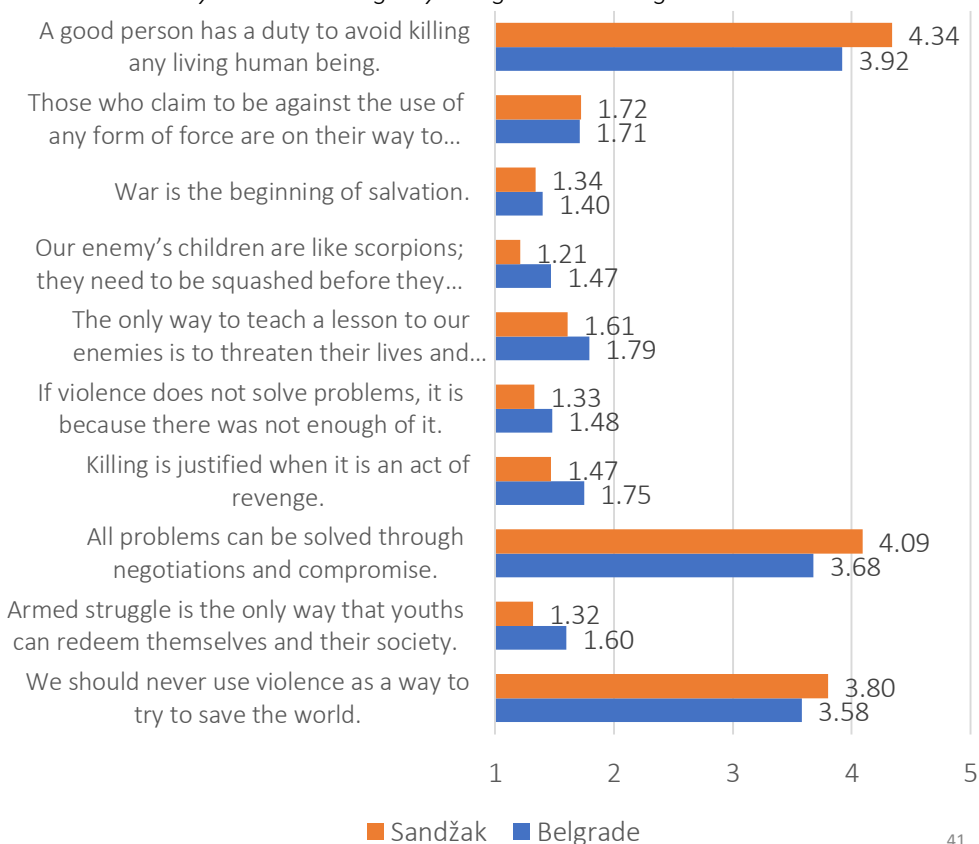

Figure 21. Pro-violence

Figure 22 shows the average scores for items of the Vile World subscale of MEM for Belgrade and Sandžak subsamples.

Results have shown that Belgrade youth scores higher than their peers from Sandžak on each individual item measuring the perception of the world as wile and miserable, except item „*Today the human race is on the edge of an enormous calamity*" for which high scores can be observed for both samples.
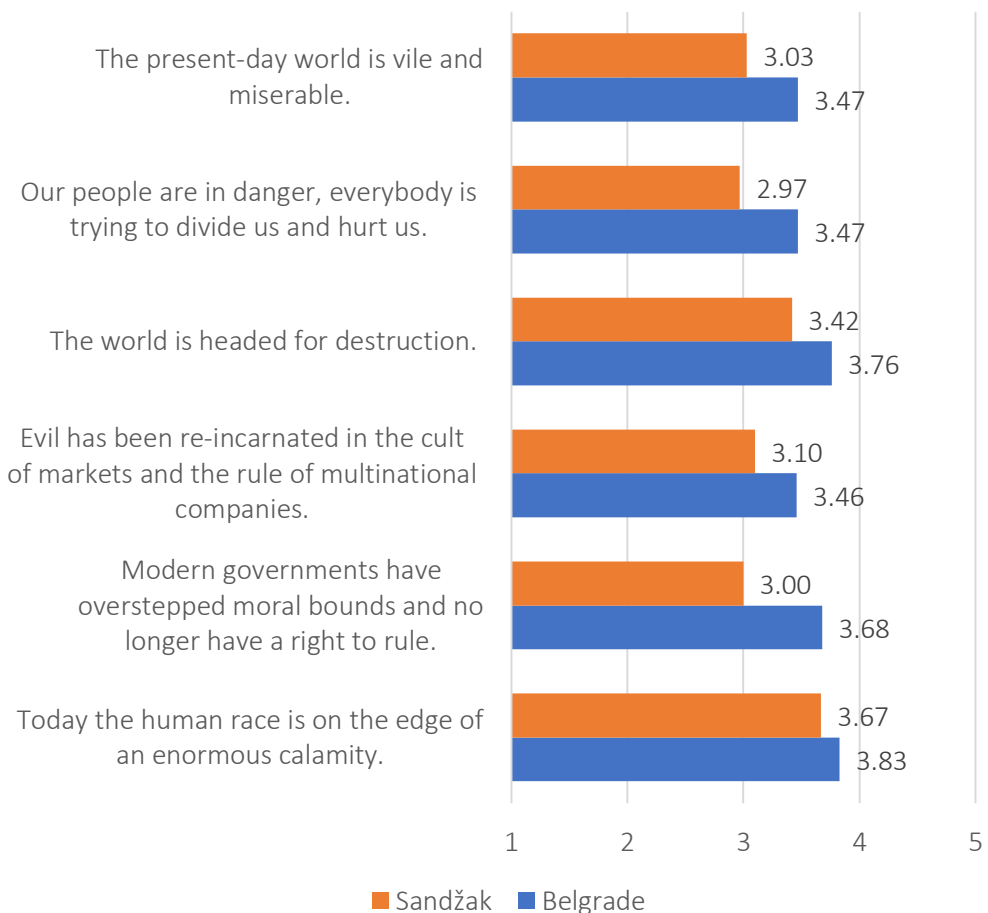
Figure 22. Vile World

Finally, figure 23 depicts participants' average scores for individual items measuring beliefs in Divine power, separately for Belgrade and Sandžak region.

Participants from the Sandžak region have shown a significantly higher level of beliefs in divine power intervention, the role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures for each individual item in comparison to Belgrade youth.

Figure 23. Divine power

PREDICTORS OF RADICALIZATION & EXTREMISM

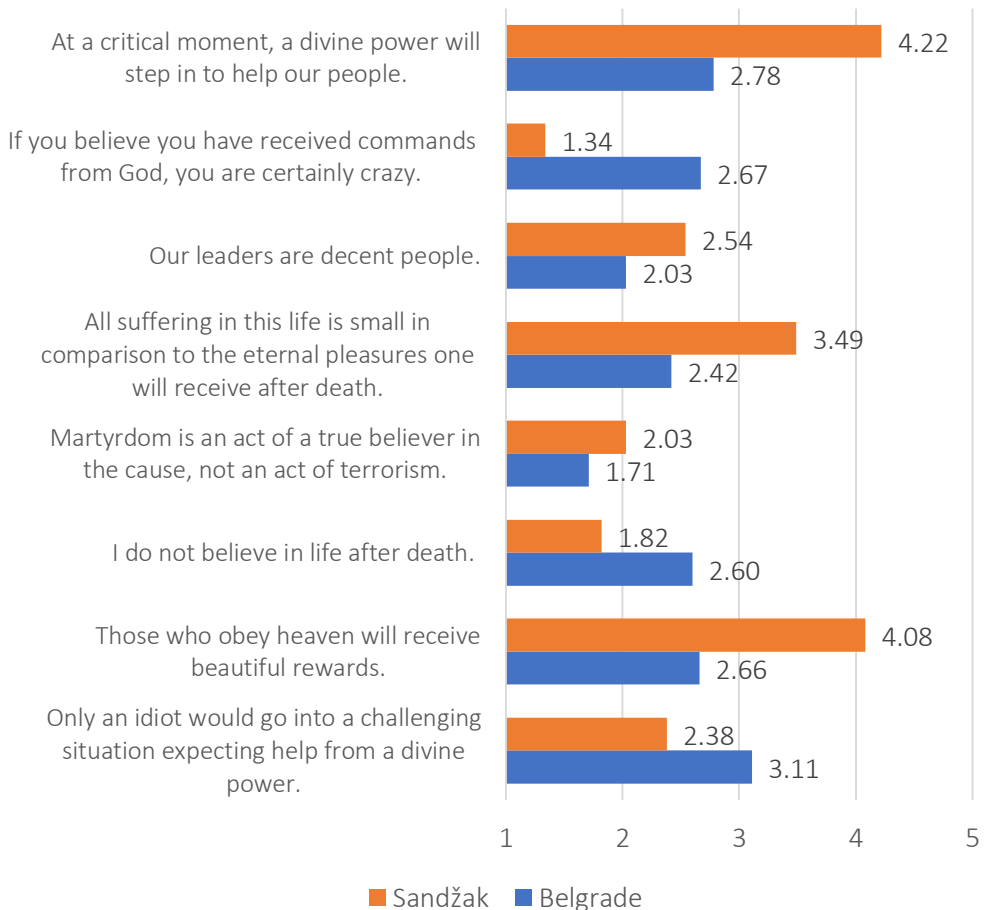Within the present study, two main clusters of risk/ protective factors for radicalization and extremism were conceptualized and explored in depth. The first group of risk factors is labeled as **contextual risk factors**, accompanying financial and socio-emotional deprivation, as well as schooling in a hostile school environment, operationalized by composite measures of poverty, family dysfunction, and ratings of feelings of safety, and frequency of verbal and physical bullying in school, respectively.

The second, very heterogeneous cluster is labeled **psychological risk/ protective factors** within which several psychological predictors of radicalization can be recognized, namely – self-concept and esteem-related factors (such as Self-esteem and Self-transcendence), ideology-related factors (Right-wing Authoritarianism, Social Dominance Orientation, Egalitarianism, and level of Religiosity), was well as interaction-related psychological factors (such as Intercultural sensitivity and feelings of social isolation and loneliness).

The first step in detection the best set of contextual and psychological predictors of different aspects of radicalization a correlation analysis was performed on the data obtained from all participants that took part in the study. Table 3 in the Appendix presents the intercorrelations between all the measures used in this study.

The three dimensions of the Militant-Extremist Mindset have shown low to non-existent correlations. Namely, the Pro-violence dimension showed a low positive correlation with the perception of the world as Vile, while none of these dimensions exhibited a significant relationship with the dimension of Divine power.

Additionally, the results have shown that aspects of MEM achieve differential relationships with different contextual and psychological factors and that MEM dimensions could to a varying degree be predicted using the given set of measures. The results of regression analyses are depicted in Figures 24, 25, and 26.

Namely, both sets of predictors accounted for 50% of the variance of the Divine power aspect of the MEM. As can be seen from Figure 24 this aspect of MEM proved to be by far best predicted by the level of religiosity one exhibits, followed by authoritarian tendencies. Egalitarian attitudes proved to be the last significant predictor with relatively low predictive power.
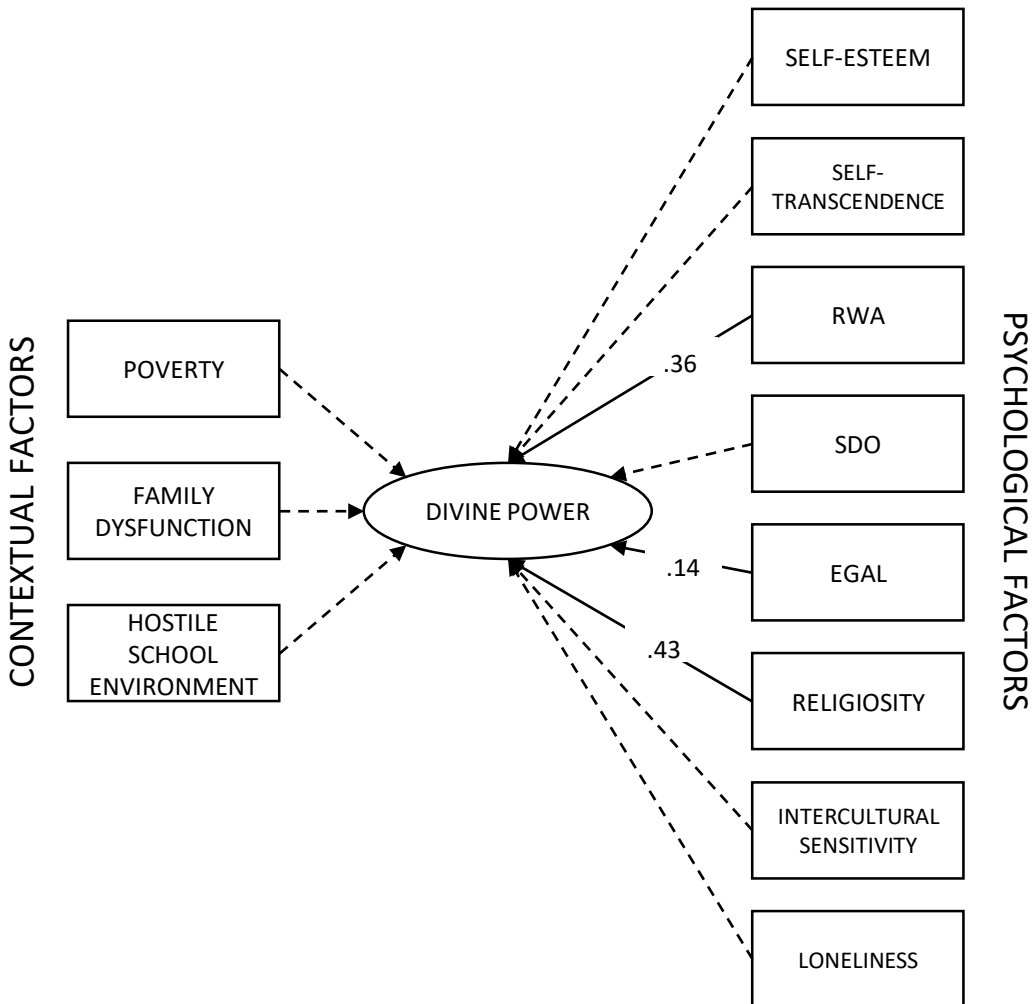

Figure 24. Prediction of Divine power
* Statistically significant regression coefficients are marked by full arrows

On the other hand, all the predictors used accounted for only 17.6% of the variance of the view on the world as vile. As can be seen from Figure 25 this viewing world as Vile and miserable can be predicted from both contextual and psychological factors. Namely, those individuals who come from dysfunctional families and hostile school environments exhibit more pronounced views on the world as vile. Among psychological factors, only Social Dominance Orientation proved to be a fair predictor of this aspect of MEM.
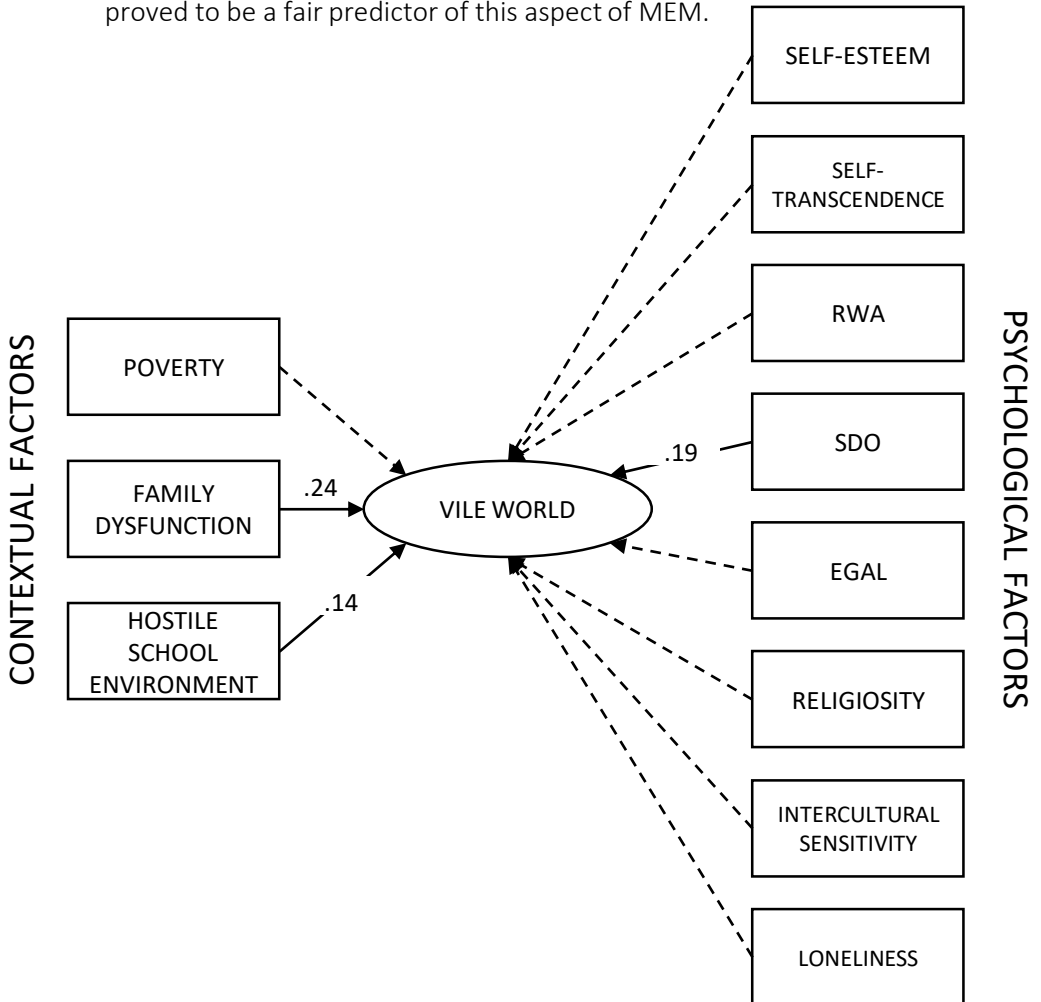
Figure 25. Prediction of Vile World
* Statistically significant regression coefficients are marked by full arrows

Finaly, contextual and psychological variables taken together accounted for 42.9% of the variance of the Pro-violent tendencies. However, none of the contextual variables proved to be significant predictor of Pro-violence. In other words, the exclusive contribution in prediction of this aspect of MEM proved to be psychological ones.
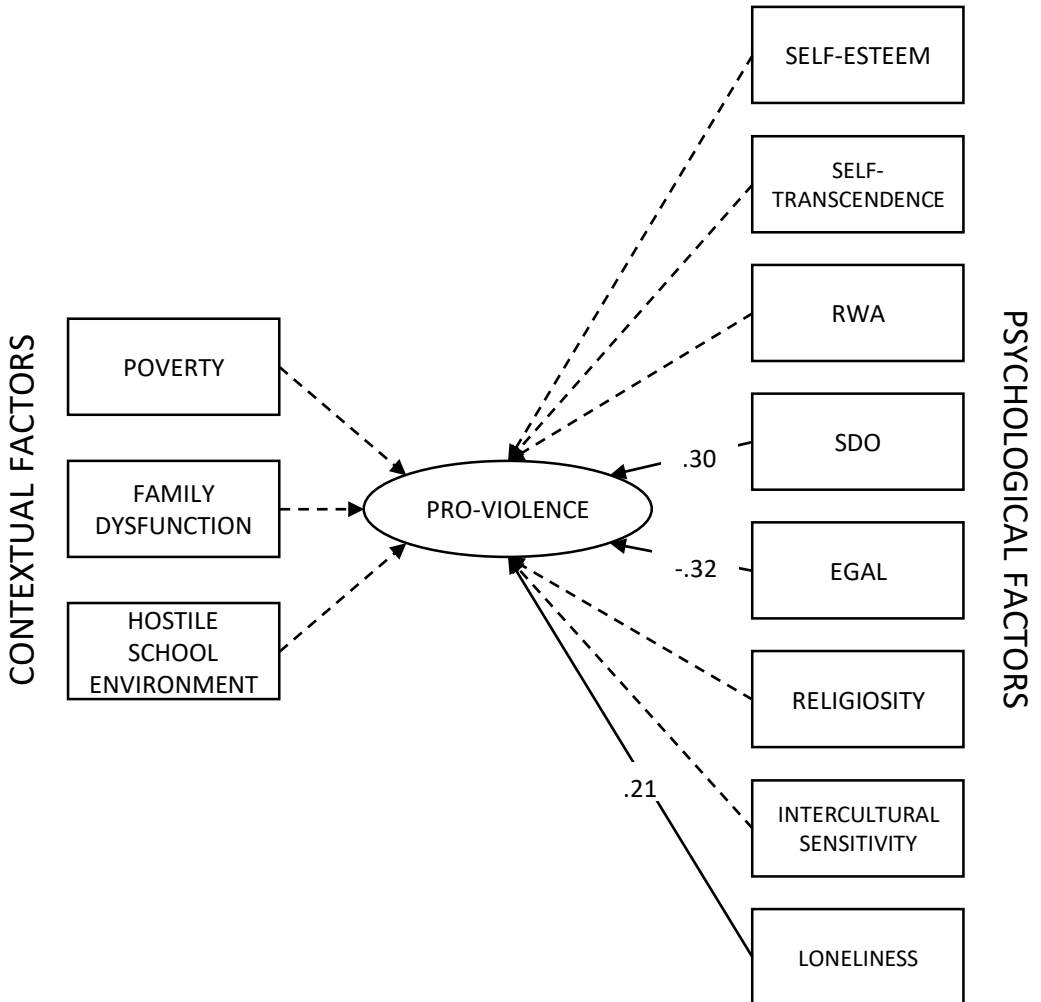
Figure 26. Prediction of Pro-violence
* Statistically significant regression coefficients are marked by full arrows

Namely, the best predictors of Pro-violence tendencies were the absence of Egalitarianism and the presence of attitudes typical for favorizing certain groups at the expense of other groups. Finally, the level of social isolation and loneliness proved to be the last psychologically relevant predictor of the acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to assess the potential for radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia, and to explore risk factors for these phenomena in order to provide evidence for data-driven programs aiming to reduce and prevent radicalization and violent extremism.

In line with main drivers of radicalization and violent extremism identified in previous studies, assessed risk factors were conceptualized in two clusters: 1) contextual risk factors, including financial and socio-emotional deprivation and exposure to violence and hostile school environment and 2) psychological risk factors including self-concept and esteem-related factors, ideology-related factors, and interaction-related psychological factors. In addition, interethnic perception and interaction indicating the potential for intergroup conflicts were assessed.

Study results indicated that participants from both regions predominantly interact with their own group, are most familiar with their own group, and show a preference for their own group. Global social out-group acceptance ratings, however, showed no extreme out-group distance or rejection. Among Belgrade youth the highest level of out-group acceptance was found for Bosniaks, followed by Croats, while the lowest level of acceptance was found for Albanians and Roma. Regarding the Sandžak area, the highest level of acceptance was found for Serbs and Albanians, followed by somewhat lower acceptance of Croats, while the lowest level of acceptance proved to be for members of the Roma ethnic group. Results thus reviled overall general positive attitudes towards Serbs and Bosniaks, with to a certain extent present distance towards Albanians among youth in the Belgrade area, and towards out-group members of Roma ethnicity in both regions.

In this study, radicalization and violent extremism proneness were conceptualized as three dimensional Militant-Extremist Mindset, which includes acceptance, justification, and advocacy of the use of violence in certain circumstances, beliefs in divine power such as heaven and God, role of martyrdom, and afterlife pleasures, and belief that there is something importantly wrong with the world we live in, and that the present-day world is vile and miserable, and heading for destruction.

Results indicated that, overall, youth in Serbia is not likely to accept, justify, and advocate for the use of violence. The young people moderately believe in divine power, however this is strongly related to religiosity. The most worrying tendency of youth is their relatively strong perception of the world as a vile and miserable place. Regional comparisons, although the differences are not dramatic, show that youth in Belgrade shows significantly more proviolence tendencies, to a larger extent perceive the world as vile and miserable, and less believe in divine power then youth from Sandžak.

Our results once again support the previous research showing that, although they tend to form a singular higher order construct, the three components of the militant extremist mindset have different psychological and contextual roots. As expected, believe in divine power proved to be by far best predicted by the level of religiosity, followed by authoritarian tendencies. In addition, results indicated that those who come from dysfunctional families and were exposed to hostile school environment exhibit more pronounced views on the world as vile and miserable, indicating the importance of contextual factors in shaping this world view. Those supportive of intergroup hierarchies and innate inequalities were also more prone to see the world as dangerous. Finally, psychological factors were the only ones contributing to *pro-violent tendencies* among youth in Serbia, whilst contextual factors were not very predictive in that regard. Acceptance, justification, and advocacy for the use of violence thus seem to be related to attitudes which support favorizing certain groups at the expense of other groups, and group inequality;. young people who reported feeling more socially isolated and lonely were also more likely to endorse violent solutions in intergroup relations.

Based on the results of the present study, four groups of interventions for the prevention and reduction of radicalization and violent extremism among youth in Serbia could be recommended:

1. The first one should address attitudes towards intergroup relations, including the promotion of intergroup equality and questioning attitudes favorizing certain groups at the expense of other groups. Based on study results, it could be assumed that this intervention might address radicalization and violent extremism both directly and indirectly.

2. The second group of interventions should address the experience of social isolation and loneliness, by both strengthening community networks and available social support mechanisms within the community, but also psychologically supporting youth in developing and strengthening meaningful relations with their families, peers, and community. According to study results, the more one feels accepted, socially connected and less isolated, less proviolent tendencies s/he will have.

3. The third group of interventions should address family functioning and school environments, aiming to decrease violence and hostile atmosphere. These groups of interventions should provide support to families in coping with difficulties and gaining communication and peaceful conflict resolution skills. In addition, intervention should address peer abuse, and lead to less violent and hostile, and more supportive school environments.

4. The forth group of interventions is related to a particularly alarming trend we identified in young people who tend to perceive the world as a dangerous, hostile place, and other people as untrustworthy and competitive. This cynical belief should be challenged through the examples of mutual trust and cooperation. That way, through building a more balanced worldview, they might be less vulnerable to any extreme ideologies, but also more ready to engage in different forms of civic activism.

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APPENDIX

CORRELATIONS BETWEEN MEASURES

Table 3. *Correlations between measures*

	VW	DP	EGL	SDO	RWA	SE	LON	ST	IS	POV	FD	HSE	REL
PV	.22	-.11	**-.45**	**.48**	.11	**-.14**	**.34**	-.01	**-.41**	**.24**	**.17**	**.36**	.03
VW		-.03	**.12**	**.22**	.04	-.11	.10	-.08	-.08	**.20**	**.32**	**.23**	-.08
DP			**.18**	.01	**.54**	**.18**	-.07	**.15**	-.03	**-.12**	.01	-.08	**.57**
EGL				**-.26**	.08	.05	-.11	**.14**	**.39**	-.10	-.00	**-.26**	.01
SDO					**.26**	-.01	**.15**	-.11	**-.33**	.11	**.14**	**.32**	.05
RWA						.10	-.00	.09	**-.18**	-.03	.10	-.00	**.38**
SE							**-.49**	**.22**	**.24**	**-.35**	**-.38**	**-.25**	.06
LON								**-.17**	**-.22**	**.32**	**.36**	**.32**	.05
ST									**-.22**	-.06	-.09	-.07	**.12**
IS										**-.17**	**-.17**	**-.37**	**-.13**
POV											**.51**	**.35**	-.01
FD												.35	.03
HSE													.04

Note. PV – Pro Violence; VW – Vile World, DP – Divine Power; EGAL – Egalitarianism; SDO – Social Dominance Orientation; RWA – Right-Wing Authoritarianism; SE – Self-esteem; LON – Loneliness; Self-Transcendence; IS – Intercultural Sensitivity; POV – Poverty; FD – Family Dysfunction; HSE – Hostile School Environment; REL – Religiosity; Statistically significant correlations are marked **bold**