

Ethnic discrimination among adolescents in Serbia - narratives about positive conflict resolution

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Ethnic discrimination poses a significant challenge in schools, related to serious adverse effects on psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships, identity development, academic achievement, and future opportunities of those impacted. Discriminatory practices take on different forms, which students may understand and deal with in different ways. The aim of this study was to explore how adolescents imagine potential outcomes of ethnicity-based discrimination in school and, more specifically, what positive conflict resolutions they see as viable options. A total of 184 adolescents, from seven secondary schools from diverse, multiethnic regions across Serbia, participated in the study. They were encouraged to read a vignette portraying a new student arriving at their school, encountering ethnicity-based discrimination and bullying. Then, they were asked to write about how they thought the situation would end – what happened, how the student reacted, and who else was involved. After excluding those with negative or unclear conflict outcome, 112 narratives were analyzed, and 147 coded segments were derived. Inductive thematic analysis showed 4 possibly successful conflict resolution strategies. First and most saturated was mediation by the school authorities (teacher, school counselor or principal), showing up in 79 narratives. Second was peer mediated resolution, present in 31 narratives. Third was resolving the conflict through personal resources (26) - standing up for oneself and holding strong boundaries or calling the friends outside of school for support. Finally, the least mentioned way was reaching to parents for support (11). Additional research could provide insight into the underlying reasons for selecting specific strategies over others.

Keywords: adolescents, ethnicity, discrimination, narratives, conflict resolution