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TOGETHER



Ukraine

# Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution Programme in Ukraine

Impact Assessment of the Life Skills programme:  
The report on the Mediation programme in schools

# Acknowledgement

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

<b>GCA</b>	Government-Controlled Areas
<b>MoES</b>	Ministry of Education and Science
<b>ODD</b>	Oppositional Defiant Disorder
<b>PMCR</b>	Peer-to-Peer Mediation and Conflict Resolution
<b>PTSD</b>	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
<b>SCORE</b>	Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index
<b>SeeD</b>	Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development
<b>SEM</b>	Structural Equation Model
<b>UISR</b>	Ukrainian Institute for Social Research after Oleksandr Yaremenko
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VEI</b>	Vocational Educational Institutions

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## Key terms and Definitions

**Adolescents:** the term adolescents in UNICEF is used for young people aged 10 to 18 years. However, the adolescents that participated in the longitudinal study were aged between 14 and 19.

**Areas near the contact line:** defined as areas within 15 kilometres of the contact line in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Oblasts are administrative units within Ukraine.

**Externalising problems:** outward behaviours that have a negative impact for the individual and the society, such as oppositional defiance and aggression.

**Internalising problems:** internalising problems are defined in this study as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD).

**Life Skills:** UNICEF defines Life skills as psychosocial abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enables individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

**Peer Mediation:** Peer mediation is a student-led, preventative process, focusing on conflict resolution. It is run by a specialised third-party, called “the mediator”.

**School Connectedness:** In this study, the concept includes a sense of emotional connection to school and support from peers and teachers.

# 1. Executive Summary

In 2018, UNICEF and NGO “La Strada” in Ukraine commenced the implementation of the peer-to-peer mediation and conflict resolution (PMCR) programme in the eastern part of the country. For the majority part, the programme focuses on adolescent students who attend, mostly, vocational educational institutions (VEI), with the aim of preventing negative and violent behaviours and in increasing healthy conflict resolution competence. The main aim of the present study is to explore peer mediation and conflict resolution competence. Specifically, the current report aims to investigate the degree to which adolescent students make use of mediators as part of their support system when they are faced with challenging experiences, and to investigate the determinants and significance of healthy conflict resolution competence. To explore these aims, the Centre for Sustainable Peace and Democratic Development (SeeD) in collaboration with the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) implemented a large-scale quantitative study in the government-controlled areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine. The current report is based on cross-sectional data from 5,223 adolescent participants, gathered in 2018. Approximately 70% of the participants were students of Vocational Education Institutions (VEI), whereas the remaining were students attending general schools.

The first findings of the study first demonstrate which groups need more support and attention. For instance, boys scored significantly lower in measures of healthy conflict resolution competency, which signifies that males are in higher need for interventions which promote competency in healthy conflict resolution.

Then, the study sought to explore the different profiles of adolescents based on the conflict resolution support they utilise. Use of “informal support” corresponds to the help and guidance young people get from their close social environment (e.g., parents, teachers, friends), when they make “use of mediators”, they essentially get help and guidance from the trained mediators (e.g., peer mediators, adult mediators, CIRCLE). Analyses indicated that there are four different profiles of adolescents based on the conflict resolution support they make use. These are: (i) do not seek the help and guidance of neither people from their close social environment nor from the trained mediators; (ii) adolescents who seek out the support of mediators more than they seek out informal support; (iii) adolescents who seek out informal support more than mediator support; and (iv) adolescents who get help and support both from people of their close social environment and from the trained mediators. Interestingly, our findings show that when adolescents face challenging experiences, they prefer to make use of mediator support than getting support from other sources, such as teachers and parents. For instance, victimised adolescents make higher use of mediators (mean score = 1,3) than making use of higher informal support (mean score = 1,0). Overall, when students display high levels of maladjustment but want to get help and guidance, they prefer disclosing to mediators.

The study also identifies a number of factors that contribute to healthy conflict resolution competence, as well as, how it contributes to adolescent development. Since the current focus of the PMCR programmes in eastern Ukraine are in VEI, analyses were done separately for VEI and general schools. Hence, exploring and identifying what enhances or diminishes competency in conflict resolution is an important first step towards the design of effective programmatic interventions, customised to the specific needs of either VEI or general schools. The findings show that, in all adolescents, healthy conflict resolution competence positively predicts adolescents’ behavioural, emotional, social, and educational adjustment. In other words, adolescents who manage to solve their conflicts in healthy ways are less, for instance, likely to engage in bullying behaviours or experience negative emotionality. On the other hand, they experience more positive social relations and enhanced academic performance. Furthermore, the current study identified a number of important determinants of conflict resolution competence, where the most important ones are: (i) schools making use of adaptive conflict resolution strategies, and (ii) adolescents making use of mediators.

All in all, competency to resolve conflicts in healthy ways is an important skill to encompass. Resolving conflicts in an adaptive manner is helpful so that individuals do not suffer from negative

consequences. To further promote conflict resolution competence in adolescents in Ukraine, it is suggested to make efforts to institutionalise PMCR programmes across schools, to enhance schools' use of adaptive strategies when responding to school conflicts, and to incorporate life skills education in the curriculum focusing on the life skills found to better promote conflict resolution competence, such as negotiation skills, respect for diversity, and kindness.



## 2. Introduction

### 2.1. Adolescence in eastern Ukraine

It is now universally acknowledged and accepted that adolescence is a distinct and critical period in human development. It is a stage where numerous physical, cognitive, and behavioural changes take place, and where the young people get prepared for impending adulthood. Furthermore, adolescence is also a turbulent time of “storm and stress”<sup>1</sup>, where young people experience an inevitable turmoil and struggle to fit in with their fellow peers. One other notable change during adolescence is the increase in the prevalence of externalising and internalising problems, such as rule-breaking behaviour, anxiety and depression, somatic complaints, and attention problems<sup>2</sup>. As such, societies need to invest in promoting the behavioural and psychosocial adjustment of young people to ensure that they become well-adjusted and productive adults. Microsystemic factors, such as parental care and warmth, and a high-quality education system, are critical for young people’s positive adjustment<sup>3 4</sup>. In addition to the abovementioned, adolescents need a social environment that encourages and provides for their safety, social engagement, and social adjustment. Failure to do so may bring about maladjustment, with dire future consequences for the individual, his close social environment, and the society at large. One example of a challenging social environment that impacts adolescents’ development is the context of Ukraine. The ongoing armed conflict in the eastern part of the country negatively impacts many children and young people. While all children across Ukraine are, indirectly, affected by the conflict that takes place in the eastern part of the country, those who live in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts are, undeniably, exposed to much higher adversity, such as seeing armed soldiers or heavy military equipment, displacement, economic hardship, and loss of livelihood<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, empirical research with adolescents concludes that exposure to conflict in Ukraine increased behaviour problems (e.g. delinquency, substance use, and risky sexual behaviour), internalising problems (e.g. anxiety, depression, and self-harm), and their sense of well-being<sup>5</sup>. These findings are significant because, in turn, behaviour and mental health problems have devastating future consequences for the individual<sup>5</sup>.

Consequently, young people need positive experiences to develop into well-adjusted and productive individuals. They need, among others, positive familial and school experiences. They need effective referral systems to which they can turn to for support and guidance. They need to be equipped with the necessary skills to deal constructively with conflict situations. In Ukraine, numerous programmes are implemented with the aim of encouraging higher educational and psychosocial outcomes in young people. One such programme is the Safe and Child-Friendly School (SCFS) programme which was initiated by Ministry of Education and Science and UNICEF and aimed to ensure the rights and equal access of all children to high-quality education, and especially those who are disadvantaged as a result of the military conflict in eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, in schools, peer-to-peer mediation is an effective means through which students can gain support, help, guidance, and knowledge on how to deal with their challenging experiences. As such, the current study focused exclusively on conflict resolution and peer-to-peer mediation.

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<sup>1</sup> Hall, G. S. (1904). *Adolescence: In psychology and its relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion, and education* (Vol. I & II). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

<sup>2</sup> Risper, W. (2012). Late childhood and adolescent externalizing and internalizing psychopathology in rural public secondary and primary schools in Western Kenya. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3(6), 933-940.

<sup>3</sup> Symeou, M., Machlouzarides, M., Guest, A., Morin, H., Lordos, A., Fantì, K., & Dryga, A. (2020). *Adolescents and School Connectedness: How peer and teacher support, and emotional connection to school influence Ukrainian adolescents*. Ukraine: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

<sup>4</sup> Symeou, M., Sikki, M., Lordos, A., Morin, H., Guest, A., & Dryga, A. (2020). *The role of parenting for adolescents: A report on the significance of parent-adolescent relationships in Ukraine*. Ukraine: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

<sup>5</sup> Lordos, A., Morin, H., Fantì, K., Lemishka, O., Guest, A., Symeou, M., Kontoulis, M., and Hadjimina, E. (2019). *An evidence-based analysis of the psychosocial adaptability of conflict-exposed adolescents and the role of the education system as a protective environment*. Ukraine: United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).



## 2.2. The need for a peer-to-peer mediation programme in eastern Ukraine

Interpersonal conflicts are unavoidable in schools. Even though a large number of students are expected to co-exist in harmony, their different backgrounds, personalities, and experiences sometimes clash, which makes co-existence hard to achieve. Sometimes, even, these conflicts result in violence. Despite the schools' efforts to eliminate these maladaptive behaviours – usually through punitive measures (e.g., through suspension), only a few professionals would agree on their short-term or long-term effectiveness in teaching appropriate behaviours<sup>6</sup>. Students should learn to understand the dynamics of conflicts that occur with their fellow peers and to manage them constructively and effectively. Conflict resolution and peer-to-peer mediation programmes are proposed as an alternative means of addressing school conflicts. Mediation is a student-centred, preventative process that focuses on conflict resolution and is run by a trained third party, called “the mediator”<sup>7</sup>. In other words, peer-to-peer mediation is a structured process in which an impartial and specialised student works with other students who face conflict with one another and assists them in negotiating a solution that is welcome by all parties. Empirical studies have reported the effectiveness of peer mediation programmes. In a study conducted in three middle schools where student conflicts were noted, researchers concluded that in 95% of the cases referred to peer mediation, a mutually agreeable solution was reached between disputants<sup>6</sup>. Similarly, in another study, of the 444 student conflicts referred to peer mediation, 439 ended in agreement<sup>8</sup>. Finally, a meta-analysis of twenty-three peer mediation studies concludes that, of the 4327 mediations, 4028 (93%) ended in agreement<sup>9</sup>. Findings from all these studies indicate the effectiveness of mediation programmes in schools, which further adds support to the view that schools need to be equipped with effective referral systems to which students can turn to for support and guidance. Even if peer mediation programmes need quite a few years to become institutionalised and appreciated as a school activity, empirical findings demonstrate that such programmes facilitate students to manage their conflicts effectively. This has long-term benefits as well; ability to deal constructively with school-related conflicts can prepare young people with dealing effectually with more serious conflicts in the future.

In peer-to-peer mediation, disputants themselves are actively involved in the resolution of their conflicts

In Ukraine, the peer-to-peer mediation and conflict resolution (PMCR) programme in the eastern part of the country was implemented in 2018 by UNICEF and NGO “La Strada” as a part of the Life Skills acquisition programme. Focusing on adolescent students who attend, mostly, vocational educational institutions (VEI), the PMCR programme aims to empower youngsters with conflict resolution and non-violent communication. In other words, the programme seeks to prevent negative and violent behaviours and to increase healthy conflict resolution competence. At present, 60 educational institutions (general schools and VEI) in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts make use of the PMCR programme. Within the first year of PMCR programme's implementation, 1957 mediation sessions were held, with 823 conflicts being successfully resolved.

The present study which focuses on the PMCR programme, will explore peer mediation and conflict resolution competence. Specifically, the current report aims to investigate the degree to which adolescent students use mediators as part of their support system when they are faced with challenging experiences. Furthermore, the present report also aims to investigate the determinants and significance of healthy conflict resolution competence. This will allow stakeholders to identify

<sup>6</sup> Smith, S., W., Daunic, A. P., Miller, M. D., & Robinson, T. R. (2002). Conflict Resolution and Peer Mediation in Middle Schools: Extending the Process and Outcome Knowledge Base. *Journal of Social Psychology, 142*(5), 567-586.

<sup>7</sup> The Association for Conflict Resolution (ACR). (2007). *Recommended Standards for School-Based Peer Mediation Programs*. Washington, DC: Association for Conflict Resolution. [www.acrnet.org](http://www.acrnet.org).

<sup>8</sup> Turnuklua, A., Kacmaza, T., Turka, F., Kalendera, A., Sevkina, B., & Zengina, F. (2009). Helping students resolve their conflicts through conflict resolution and peer mediation training. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences, 1*, 639–647.

<sup>9</sup> Burrell, A., N., Zirbel, S., C., & Allen, M. (2003). Evaluating Peer Mediation Outcomes in Educational Settings: A Meta-Analytic Review. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly, 21*(1), 7-26.

how to design programmes that further promote young people’s ability to deal effectively and constructively with conflict situations. In particular, the aims of the study are threefold:

1. To investigate whether there are any gender, age, or school-type differences in terms of who makes use of mediators.
2. To explore the degree to which adolescents make use of mediators when experiencing challenging situations.
3. To identify the determinants of healthy conflict resolution competence.

### 2.3. Scope of the study

This report, developed by SeeD and UNICEF, is based on the analysis of data collected by UNICEF and NGO “La Strada”. The data collection took place in 2018, and the sample consisted of 5,223 adolescents living in the government-controlled areas (GCA) of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

The study aims to provide insight into the PMCR programme that is currently being implemented in schools in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In turn, the findings are expected to inform the Ministry of Education and Science and other key stakeholders on the importance of peer mediation programmes in schools, as well as on the significance of promoting healthy conflict resolution competence in adolescents. Findings which respond to each of the three research questions will inform school experts and key education stakeholders on specific aspects of the programme. Firstly, this report will shed light on whether there are any age, gender, or school type differences in peer mediation use. This will allow key policy experts to shift their attention to where it is needed. The study will also highlight which types of support adolescents make use of and whether they turn to mediators when faced with challenging situations. Finally, analyses will explore the significance and determinants of healthy conflict resolution competence by investigating its association with a multitude of factors, including family-related factors (e.g. parental monitoring), school-related factors (e.g. school connectedness and adaptive school conflict resolution), life skills, and use of mediators.

Analyses will provide very insightful findings on how students perceive peer-to-peer mediation during the initial implementation stage of the programme. Additionally, the current study will provide evidence of the benefits of promoting healthy conflict resolution competence in adolescents and how it can be further encouraged. As a result, the present study can contribute to the efforts of UNICEF and NGO “La Strada” by identifying the life skills and components through which adolescents can become competent in constructively resolving conflicts.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Instruments: Questionnaires

Numerous indicators were included in the final questionnaire of the survey that took place in schools in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. All participating schools implement PMCR programme. Each of the indicators in the questionnaire was measured by combining 2 to 5 items. Each item in an indicator measured a different aspect of the overall phenomenon that each indicator sought to capture, and was then aggregated to form a composite scale. Relevant to conflict resolution and peer mediation, the questionnaire included items that measure conflict resolution competence, and utilisation of conflict resolution support (see Figures 1 and 2, respectively). For instance, healthy conflict resolution competence was measured through four items – each item proposing a healthy way of responding to conflict situations, such as resolving the issue peacefully, contacting the intermediary, or notifying adults. Likewise, to measure utilisation of conflict resolution support, seven items were designed and used in the questionnaire. However, analyses demonstrated two distinct factors. In other words, in times of need, adolescents make use of two separate support systems; they make use of mediator support, or they make use of their friends, parents, teacher, or head of classroom (see Figure 2). Furthermore, other indicators in the questionnaire include adolescents' experiences of school connectedness, experiences of bullying or victimisation; quality of parenting (e.g. parental monitoring and parental involvement), life skills, externalising and internalising problems (e.g. conduct disorder, aggression, anxiety, and depression), and risky behaviours (e.g. substance use and unsafe sexual behaviours). In the design of the questionnaire, where available, internationally validated psychometric instruments that provide reliable measures of the indicators were used in the questionnaire, while in other cases original items were designed using best practices in psychometric scale construction. A full list of the indicators can be found in the appendix.



Figure 1. Conflict Resolution Competence, its constituent elements, and questionnaire items<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> The questionnaire included one additional item that measured Conflict Resolution Competence ("If you found your self part of a conflict... I would punish those who are guilty myself"). However, Factor Analysis indicated the existence of two separate factors (see blue boxes in Figure 1), wherein that item did not load onto any one of the two.



Figure 2. The utilisation of Conflict Resolution Support, its constituent elements, and questionnaire items.

### 3.2. Ethical considerations

The measures complied with UNICEF’s and national ethical considerations on conducting research using children. The research team thoroughly reviewed all ethical considerations to ensure the protection of children’s rights during the study. During the data collection, students were given information about the study, including its objectives, how the data would be used, that participation was on a voluntary basis, that not all the questions needed to be answered, and that they could withdraw at any time. Each student received a questionnaire and an individual envelope in which they sealed their completed questionnaire. Then all individual envelopes of the class were sealed by the interviewer in a second envelope prior to the return of the teacher in the room.

### 3.3 Data collection

The data was collected through a paper-and-pencil self-report questionnaire in the Ukrainian language in 2018. The sample consisted of 5,223 adolescents and young adults aged between 12-45 years old (mean age = 16.59 years) from educational institutions in GCA of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Both males and females were represented in the sample (see Figure 3). Boys represented 55.8% of the sample (2,916 males), whereas girls represented 44% (2,299 females) of the sample. Eight participants (.2%) did not provide any gender information. The majority of students attended Vocational Education Institutions (VEI); specifically, 3,680 (70.5%) were VEI students, whereas 1,543 (29.5%) were students attending general schools.

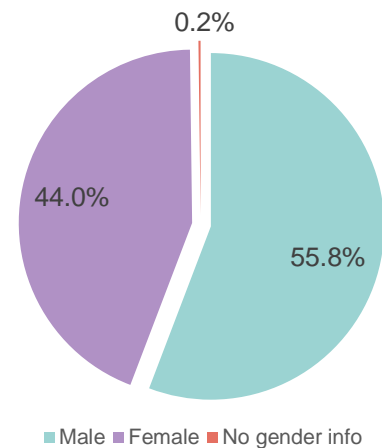


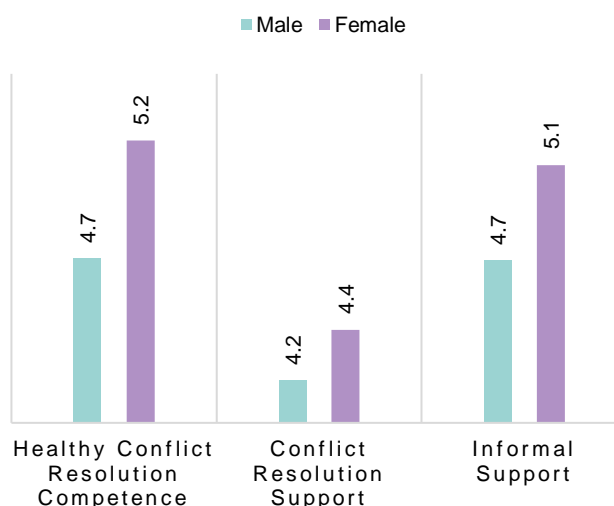
Figure 3. Gender Representation in the Sample

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Conflict Resolution and Peer-To-Peer Mediation

#### 4.1.1. Gender differences in conflict resolution competence and utilisation of conflict resolution support

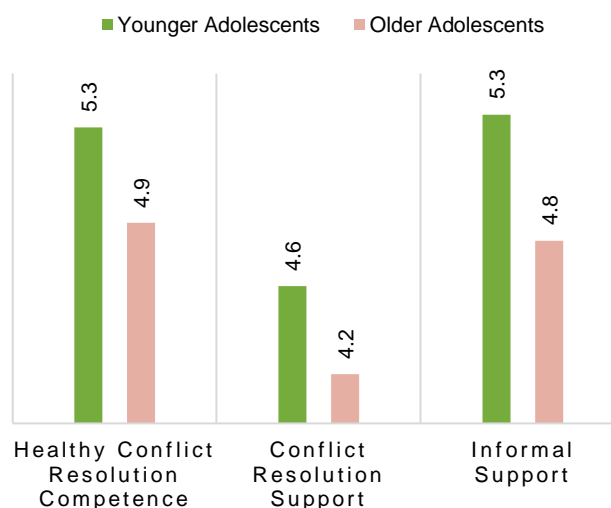
In the present study in eastern Ukraine, males scored lower in most measures examined. Boys were less competent than girls in resolving conflicts constructively without the use of violence and force. Specifically, boys obtained a mean score of 4,7 (on a 0-10 scale) on the “healthy conflict resolution competence” indicator, whereas girls obtained a mean score of 5,2. Furthermore, in times where they experienced conflict, they made use of support much less than girls did. As a result, our findings demonstrate that boys are at greater need for interventions aiming to enhance healthy conflict resolution competence. Interestingly, no gender differences were revealed for the “Use of Mediators” indicator; both boys and girls obtained a mean score of 3,5. In other words, both girls and boys turn to mediators for support for conflict resolution to an equal amount.



All scores on the graphs are out of 10, where 10 means the phenomena is observed strongly and prevalently, and 0 means it is not observed whatsoever

#### 4.1.2. Age differences in conflict resolution competence and utilisation of conflict resolution support

Analyses demonstrated that younger adolescents resolve conflicts in healthy and constructive ways more than older adolescents do. Younger adolescents (12-15 years old) obtained a mean score of 5,3 in “healthy conflict resolution competence”, compared to the mean score of 4,9 in older adolescents (16+ years old). This is in line with past empirical evidence in which 15–18-year-old adolescents reported higher rule-breaking behaviours than 11 – 14-year-old adolescents<sup>11</sup>. Consequently, it is safe to assume that adolescents who fail to adjust positively in their social environments, hence exhibiting negative outward behaviour, are also less likely to demonstrate competency in healthy conflict resolution. Likewise, younger adolescents are also more likely to seek the help of others when faced with conflict. The difference in scores between younger and older adolescents may have to do with the possibility that older adolescents are getting prepared with the responsibilities of impending adulthood. In other words, one possibility is that they stop utilising the support from their parents, teachers, or friends, in an effort gain independence and autonomy, and become able to solve problems on their own. All in all, our findings demonstrate the need to promote healthy conflict

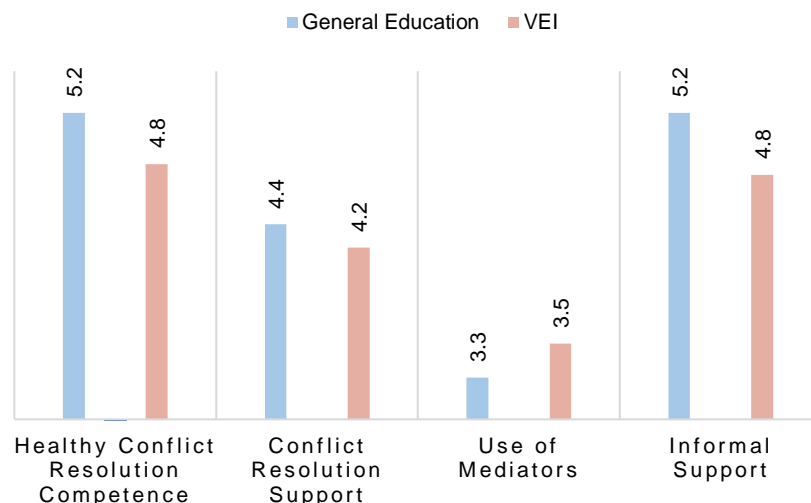


<sup>11</sup> Risper, W. (2012). Late childhood and adolescent externalizing and internalizing psychopathology in rural public secondary and primary schools in Western Kenya. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3(6), 933-940.

resolution competence from an early age. Doing so would be beneficial for young people. It provides them with the time to learn and fully adopt constructive ways of responding to conflict and challenging situations without experiencing the pressure of impending adulthood that is prevalent in older adolescents.

### 4.1.3. School-type differences in conflict resolution competence and utilisation of conflict resolution support

Analyses demonstrated that students who attend general schools are more competent than students of VEI in resolving conflicts in healthy and constructive ways. In other words, compared to general school students, VEI students use less often the options of solving conflict peacefully, contacting the mediator, or notifying responsible adults when having to solve conflict situations. Therefore, considering that the main interest when the PMCR programme was initiated in 2018 was in VEI, there is greater need to work with VEI students towards acquiring better



competency in healthy conflict resolution (see Sections 4.3 for a discussion on how to promote healthy conflict resolution competence in students of VEI). On the other hand, though, VEI students make use of mediator support (such as peer mediators, adult mediators, and CIRCLE) slightly more than students attending general schools (mean scores 3,5 and 3,3, respectively). Considering how the focus of PMCR programme is primarily on students who attend vocational institutions and has not been in operation for many years now, this is an encouraging finding.

**VEI students make use of mediator support slightly more than students attending general schools**

Overall, findings of the current study demonstrate towards which groups stakeholders should turn their attention to. Specifically, for healthy conflict resolution competence, boys scored significantly lower, signifying that males are in higher need for interventions aiming to enhance competency in healthy conflict resolution. Similarly, VEI students, despite turning to mediators for support more than students attending general schools, they exhibit less healthy conflict resolution competence. Thus, stakeholders could use these findings to enhance their efforts in vocational institutions.



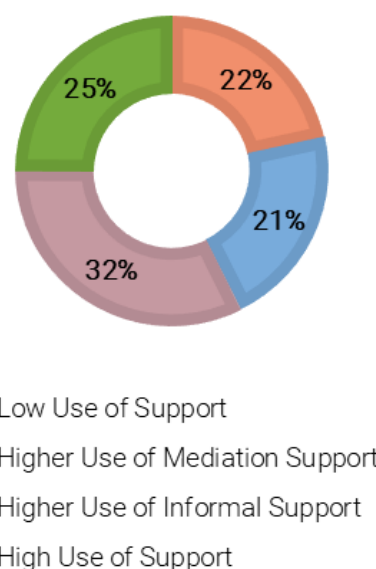
## 4.2. The importance of implementing “peer-to-peer mediation and conflict resolution” programmes

### 4.2.1. Profiles of adolescents based on utilisation of conflict resolution support

The current section of the report investigates the different profiles of adolescents based on the conflict resolution support they utilise. “Informal support” relates to the help and guidance young people get from their close social environment (e.g., parents, teachers, friends), whereas when adolescents make “use of mediators”, they essentially get help and guidance from the trained mediators (e.g., peer mediators, adult mediators, CIRCLE). Our analyses demonstrated that there are four different profiles of adolescents based on the conflict resolution support they utilise.

These are:

1. Low use of support: This subgroup refers to adolescents who do not seek the help and guidance of neither people from their close social environment nor from the trained mediators. Twenty-two per cent (22%) of adolescents who participated in the study belong in this category.
2. Higher use of mediation support: Adolescents who belong in this subgroup, when faced with challenging situations, seek out the support of mediators more than they seek out informal support. Twenty-one per cent (21%) of adolescents belong in this category.
3. Higher use of informal support: In contrast to the second subgroup, adolescents in this category, make more use of informal support when needed than getting support from the mediators. Almost one every three adolescents (32%) that took part in the study belong in this category.
4. High use of support: Adolescents who highly utilise support score high on both “informal support” and “use of mediators”. In other words, adolescents from this category get help and support both from people of their close social environment (e.g., friends, teacher, parents) and from trained mediators (e.g., peer mediators). Twenty-five per cent (25%) of adolescents belong in this category.



Understandably, adolescents make use of different means of support when faced with conflict and challenging situations. For instance, in certain cases, adolescents do not use any kind of support, whereas in other cases, adolescents utilise greater mediation support than informal support. This allows us to identify and understand under what circumstances adolescents use the guidance and help of the mediators.



### 4.2.2. Utilisation of conflict resolution support and Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence

Differences in healthy conflict resolution competence were uncovered. When adolescents are recipients of both informal support and support from mediators, they tend to have high competency in resolving conflicts peacefully and constructively. Even though informal support only, or support from mediators only do link with healthy conflict resolution, the combination of both produces the most favourable outcomes (see Figure 4).

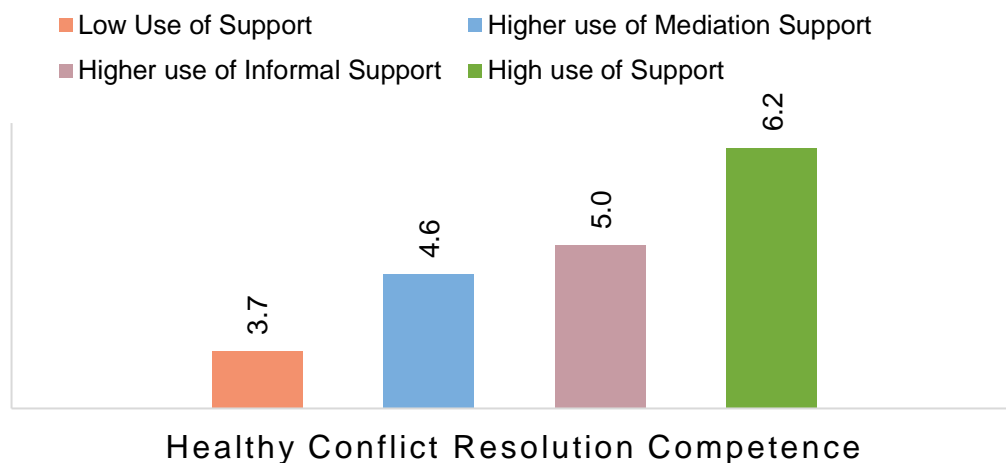


Figure 4. Utilisation of conflict resolution support and negative behaviours.

This shows that efforts should focus both on peer mediation, *in addition*, to support from the individuals' close social environment. Parents and teachers, albeit the fact that during the teenage years, appear to have less importance for adolescents, in reality, their significance should not be undervalued. Additionally, though, the scores when using informal support only help indicate the importance of mediators. There is a considerable difference in the scores between those adolescents who use informal support only (mean score = 5,0) and those who do it in addition to mediation use (mean score = 6,2). Because peer mediation programmes are focused on conflict resolution, students benefit a lot when they make use of them. Hence, adolescents need the guidance of mediators as well, from whom they can learn important skills for conflict resolution.

### 4.2.3. Utilisation of conflict resolution support and Negative Behaviours

Negative behaviours in adolescence can take different forms; it can be about adolescents exhibiting externalising problems, or engaging in bullying incidents and risky behaviours. Likewise, young people may experience negative emotionality, such as anxiety and depression, or they may become victims of bullying behaviours. Indeed, past research conducted in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts demonstrates that relational and verbal victimisation severely affects approximately 15 per cent of adolescents. While physical and cyber victimisation severely affect approximately 5 per cent of adolescents<sup>12</sup>. To this end, to help affected adolescents, identifying the sources of support young people utilise when faced with challenging situations is crucial.

<sup>12</sup> Lordos, A., Morin, H., Fanti, K., Lemishka, O., Guest, A., Symeou, M., Kontoulis, M., and Hadjimina, E. (2019). *An evidence-based analysis of the psychosocial adaptability of conflict-exposed adolescents and the role of the education system as a protective environment*. Ukraine: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Our analyses show that, when adolescents who display negative behaviours or experience negative emotionality want to get help and guidance from others, they make use of mediator help more than they seek the assistance of other support systems (see Figure 5). For instance, victimised adolescents make higher use of mediators (mean score = 1,3) than making use of higher informal support (mean score = 1,0). Similar findings were reported for all other indicators (see Figure 4). All in all, what the results demonstrate is how important PMCR programmes are for students who exhibit negative behaviours or experience negative emotionality. In cases where students display high levels of maladjustment but want to get help and guidance, they prefer to disclose and get support from alternative figures of support, such as mediators.

At-risk adolescents want to use help from mediators more than they seek the guidance of other support systems

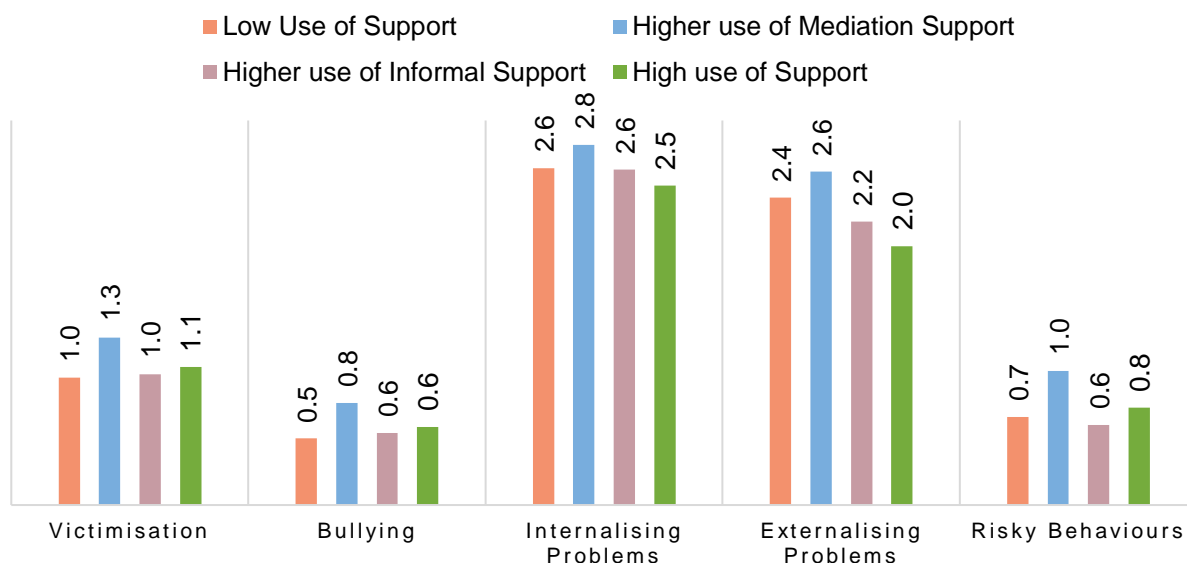


Figure 5. Utilisation of conflict resolution support and negative behaviours.

Our findings have significant theoretical and policy implications. Theoretically and empirically, parents and teachers are considered two of the most influential figures in children’s and adolescents’ lives. Their significance has been extensively documented. However, despite the importance of parents, teachers, and friends, this does not necessarily mean that young people disclose all their experiences or ask for their help. In some cases, youngsters who may bully others, be aggressive, or engage in risky behaviours, may choose to disclose less to parents or teachers, believing that they are best kept in the dark. Additionally, the punitive measures (e.g., suspension, curfew, excessive worrying) that teachers or parents may enforce to those who are involved in bullying behaviours or exhibit externalising problems and risky behaviours may discourage young people from disclosing in them and seeking their help. Even though traditionally, schools enforce punitive measures as a means of controlling students’ negative behaviours, most professionals would agree that these measures do not result in adolescents learning appropriate behaviours. For all the above-mentioned reasons, our analyses show a clear preference from adolescents to seek out the help and guidance from alternative sources of support. When adolescents face challenging experiences, they prefer using mediators more than they prefer other sources of support. Mediators may be preferred because of the many benefits they bring with them, such as:

- Mediators are not there to criticise students, and mediators *do not* criticise students.
- Peer mediation teaches adolescents important life skills, such as communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and respect for diversity.

- Peer mediation encourages collaborative conflict resolution; in other words, rather than fighting things out, peer motivation motivates young people to talk things out. Through peer mediation, young people learn to consider the other person's side and learn ways of solving disagreements constructively before they escalate into destructive and harmful actions.
- Peer mediation is preventive. In other words, because peer mediation involves the acquisition of healthy conflict resolution skills, this helps adolescents develop the abilities to resolve future conflicts they might encounter on their own.

Overall, our findings establish the need for schools to implement PMCR programmes. Considering how data were collected during the initial stages of the programme, this makes the results even more promising, because even during the first year of the programmes' implementation, mediation provided a safe haven for many adolescents to disclose their challenging experiences. This allows them to explore positive and constructive ways to respond and solve conflicts situations. Competency for healthy conflict resolution is an important skill to possess, both as an adolescent and as an adult. Within their lifetime, individuals will face countless of conflict situations in their personal life and in their professional life. Maladaptive responding to these situations (e.g. through force and violence), would undoubtedly have very negative short-term and long-term consequences. Subsequently, it is expected that the ability to deal constructively with conflict resolution would positively impact adolescents' future development.

### 4.3. Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence in students of Vocational Educational Institutions

#### 4.3.1. Outcomes of Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence

Healthy conflict resolution competence has numerous benefits for individuals, both during their adolescent years and later on during adulthood. Within their lifetime, people are exposed to countless situations of conflict at school, at home, or at work. They come into conflict with peers and siblings, teachers and parents, partners and colleagues. Inability to deal constructively with conflicts can have a detrimental impact on one's life, including suspension from school, singlehood, unemployment, and loss of friendships. Thus, preparing young people with dealing effectually with conflicts is essential both for the short-term and for the long-term.

To test the unique impact of healthy conflict resolution competence on adolescent development, structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed. Analyses aimed to investigate how being competent to solve conflicts in healthy ways contributes to adolescents' positive development.

Findings suggest that, indeed, conflict resolution competence is positively predictive of positive youth development (see Figure 6). Unsurprisingly, competence for healthy conflict resolution was negatively predictive of a number of negative behavioural outcomes. Specifically, adolescents who manage to solve their conflicts in healthy ways are less likely to (i) bully others; (ii) fall victims of bullying themselves; (iii) suffer from internalising problems, such as from anxiety or depression; (iv) exhibit externalising behaviours, such as being aggressive or defiant, or (v) engage in risky behaviours, such as using illicit substances or being sexually unsafe. Most of these maladaptive behaviours are the result of being consumed with negative feelings, differing opinions, and adverse experiences. Thus, youngsters with high competence for healthy conflict resolution manage to use adaptive methods for resolving whatever challenge comes their way, and so are less likely to resort to maladaptive behaviours.

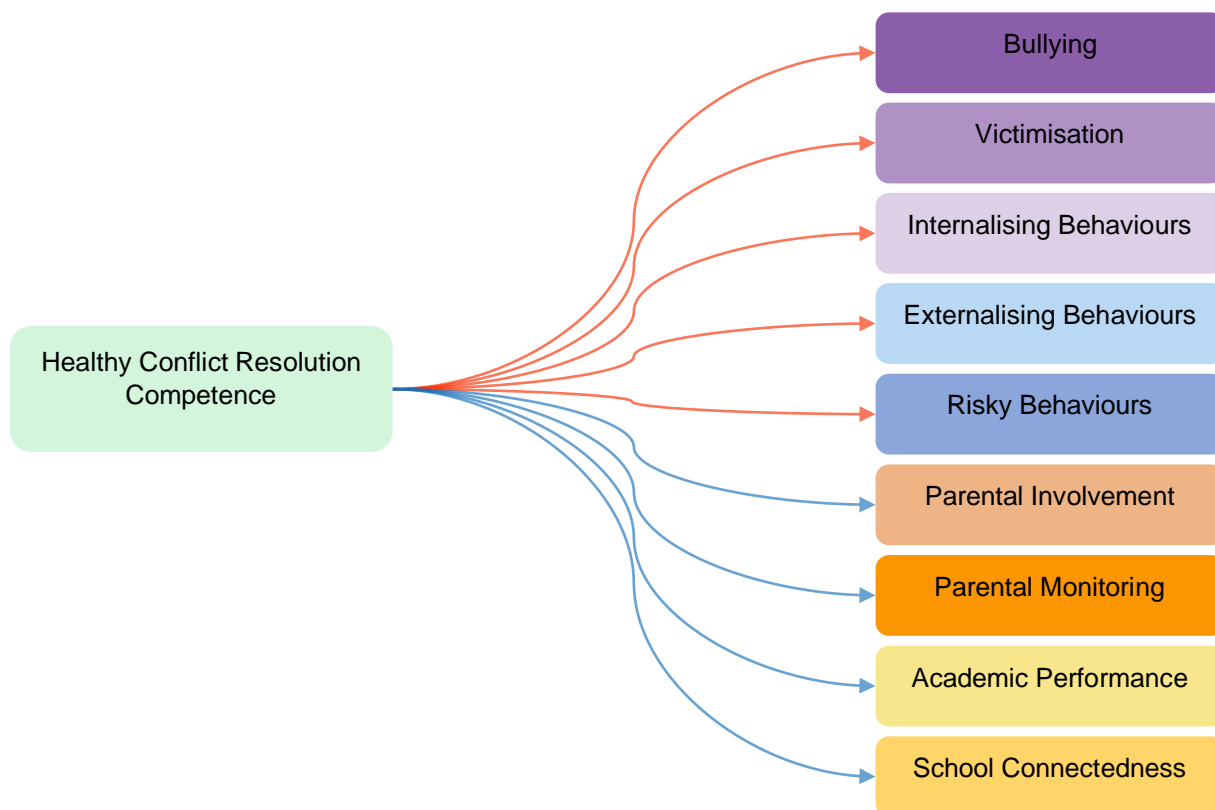


Figure 6. The Structural Equation Model for Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence as a predictor of developmental outcomes in students of VEI

(Note: Red arrows signify negative predictive relationships, whereas blue arrows signify positive predictive relationships).

Furthermore, conflict resolution competence is positively predictive of a number of adjustments indicators, such as academic performance and experiences of school connectedness. Overall, it seems that conflict that is handled in an adaptive and respectful way can provide opportunities for positive close social relationships. Our findings show that parenting practices and relations within the school were enhanced as a result of young people's ability to dealing with conflicts in healthy ways.

All in all, it seems that adolescents with the competence of constructively solving conflicts are more adjusted in their social environment; their academic performance is enhanced, their social relations are positive, and behaviour problems are minimised. Considering how maladaptive behaviours pose a threat both for the individual and for the society at large, and how positive parenting practices, academic performance, and school connectedness are empirically linked to positive development; then the significance of encouraging young people's abilities to diffuse conflict effectively cannot be ignored. The next section aims to investigate what contributes to the development of healthy conflict resolution competence in students who attend VEI. Identifying the drivers is an essential step to designing and implementing effective interventions.

#### 4.3.2. Drivers of Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence

Considering how conflict resolution competence is predictive of a multitude of positive outcomes in adolescents, educational experts and stakeholders should invest in the design of effective programmatic interventions that aim to enhance young people's abilities to deal constructively with conflict. So, what drives healthy conflict resolution competence in VEI students? What contributes to adolescents' abilities to deal constructively with conflict situations? Answering this question is vital, as it would allow for the design of relevant, effective programmatic interventions.

With the aim of investigating what contributes to the development of adolescents' conflict resolution competence in VEI students, an advanced analysis was performed. Figure 7 presents – by order of significance – the factors that contribute to the development of healthy conflict resolution competence. These are:

1. **Adaptive School Conflict Resolution:** The ability of schools to manage and resolve students' school-related conflicts in adaptive ways was measured using two items ("Teachers and staff at my school help in difficult conflict situations" and "Conflicts at my school are solved in a peaceful way, and every participant is content with the outcome"). Findings from advanced analyses demonstrate that this factor contributes the most to adolescents' competence in conflict resolution. This is a *very* crucial finding. Traditionally, schools usually apply punitive measures (e.g., detention, expulsion or curfews) as a means of controlling negative behaviour. However, our findings demonstrate that punitive measures do not help teach or encourage appropriate behaviours. Instead, to teach adolescents of healthy ways to respond to conflict, schools' use of adaptive conflict resolution strategies work best. In essence, when school teachers and staff are genuinely interested in helping students who experience conflict with others, and try to solve the issues in peaceful ways, they indirectly provide a model to adolescents as to how they should solve problems effectively without turning to violence or use of force.
2. **Use of Mediators:** The second most influential factor for the development of healthy conflict resolution competence is adolescents' making use of mediators. Mediators are not there to criticise students; instead, they encourage collaborative problem-solving, perspective-taking, self-management, and they teach the necessary skills that help students enhance their conflict resolution competencies. Considering how the use of mediators is among the two most important contributors to healthy conflict resolution competence, this highlights the need for peer mediation programmes to become institutionalised. In other words, schools should incorporate peer mediation programmes into their permanent school programming and can work in conjunction and with the support and added expertise of relevant NGOs.
3. **Use of Informal Support:** Adolescents who also make use of informal support figures – such as their parents, teachers, and friends – are also more likely to develop healthy conflict resolution competence. Reaching out for help to people from one's close social environment gives them the opportunity to appreciate how others solve problems constructively.
4. **Life Skills:** Adolescents with enhanced life skills are more likely to deal effectively with conflict resolution. Defined as psychosocial abilities that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, life skills are crucial for adolescents' abilities to resolve conflicts adaptively. Considering how (i) conflict resolution competence is a significant predictor of adolescents' well-being and adjustment, and (ii) how enhanced life skills contribute to this competence, investing in life skills education is essential. Section 4.3.4. explores which life skills should be promoted in VEI students to achieve healthy conflict resolution competence.
5. **School Connectedness:** Connected adolescents are more likely to resolve conflicts constructively. There are numerous benefits of school connectedness, and the findings of the current study provide evidence of how positive and supportive relations to teachers, peers, and the school itself can also contribute to how young people will respond to conflicts.

To promote healthy conflict resolution competence in VEI students, schools should apply adaptive conflict resolution strategies and implement peer mediation programmes.

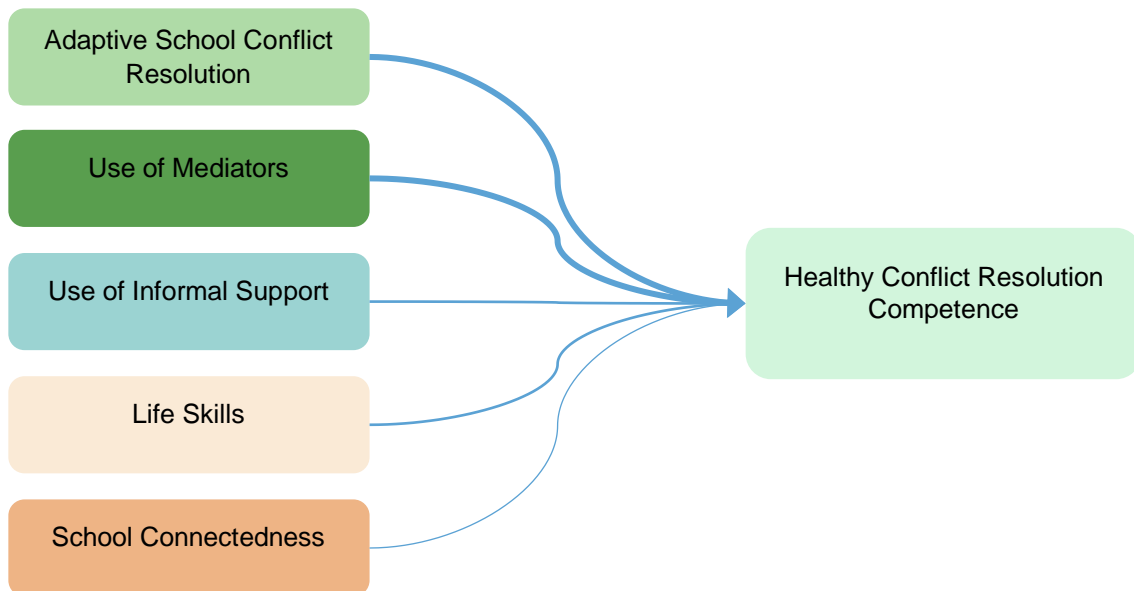


Figure 7. The Structural Equation Model exploring drivers of Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence in students of VEI

(Note: Blue arrows signify positive predictive relationships between the predictors and the outcome, and the thickness of the arrows signifies the power of relationships).

#### 4.3.3. Gender Differences

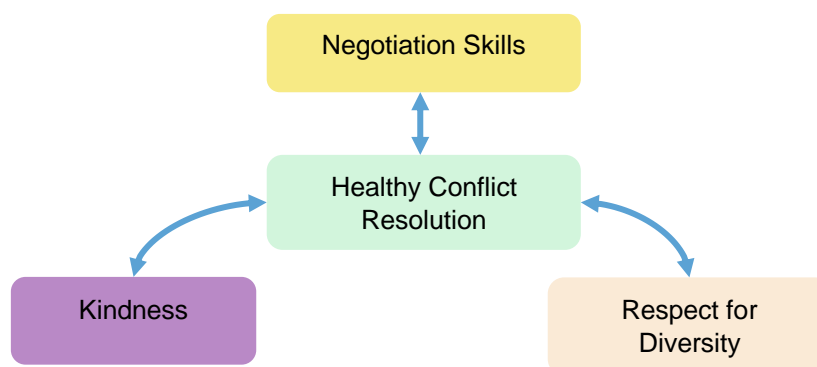
The present section, which explored PMCR programmes implemented in VEI in eastern Ukraine, found no gender differences in regard to the significance of healthy conflict resolution competence. In other words, both boys and girls benefit to the same degree from being competent in conflict resolution competence. This finding is of importance when school experts design programmatic interventions. For instance, if there was evidence that conflict resolution competence is more likely to predict fewer bullying behaviours in boys rather than in girls, educational experts who design anti-bullying programmes could use this finding and prioritise helping boys become more competent in resolving conflicts constructively. Thus, the fact that our study did not reveal any gender differences in how conflict resolution competence is associated to adolescent development demonstrates that programmes and interventions should be aimed towards both boys and girls.

Furthermore, analyses also investigated whether there are any gender differences as to what drives the development of conflict resolution competence. If such gender differences are revealed, then experts who develop evidence-based programmatic interventions are expected to customise programmes to the needs of recipients. Findings regarding VEI students demonstrated that, for both boys and girls, adaptive school conflict resolution, use of mediators, use of informal support, life skills, and school connectedness are all important predictors of conflict resolution competency. The fact that no differences were found suggests that the same programmatic interventions can be applied for both girls and boys attending VEI schools without gender affecting their effectiveness. In other words, intervention programmes implemented in VEI schools can follow the “one-size fits all” rule and still expect that both boys and girls will benefit equally.



#### 4.3.4. Associations of Life Skills and Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence

To investigate which specific life skills are associated with healthy conflict resolution competence, a correlation analysis was performed. Findings show that healthy conflict resolution competence in VEI students is highly associated with kindness, negotiation skills, and respect for diversity<sup>13</sup>. For instance, when faced with conflict, adolescents with high levels of negotiation



skills are better able to negotiate potential solutions where everyone involved is content. Likewise, kind adolescents, who feel bad when others around them suffer, are more likely to want to resolve

**To promote healthy conflict resolution competence in VEI students through life skills education, programmes should prioritise negotiation skills, kindness, and respect for diversity.**

their conflicts in ways that would not be hurtful to others. These findings can be used when designing interventions for enhancing conflict resolution competence through life skills. Whereas all life skills are positively associated to conflict resolution competence, our findings show that we need to prioritise skills that are traditionally undervalued in policy designs, such as respect for diversity and kindness. All in all, when customising life skills education programmes specifically for VEI students, with the aim of enhancing their competency in healthy conflict resolution, stakeholders should prioritise enhancing adolescents' negotiation skills, respect for diversity, and kindness.

#### 4.3.5. Conclusions on exploring Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence in students of Vocational Educational Institutions

Peer mediation programmes which are currently being implemented in eastern Ukraine focus on adolescent students who attend, mostly, VEI. The main aim of the programme is to prevent negative and violent behaviours and to increase healthy conflict resolution competence. Relevant to this, this section – which is specific to VEI students – should be considered as providing evidence of the important role of healthy conflict resolution competence for adolescents' adjustment and well-being. In particular, adolescents with competence in resolving conflict in constructive ways were more likely to be positively adjusted to their social environment. For instance, they were less likely to become bullies, engage in risky and negative outward behaviours, or experience victimisation or negative emotionality. Importantly, both boys and girls benefit from conflict resolution competence. In terms of policy design, this means that programmatic interventions would benefit all students equally, irrespective of their gender.

Furthermore, to enhance competency in healthy conflict resolution, our findings show the critical importance of schools applying adaptive conflict resolution strategies and the importance of students using support from mediators. Out of the five factors that significantly enhance conflict resolution competence, these two came out as the most important ones. This has important policy implications. Our findings demonstrate that for strengthening the conflict resolution competence, the encouragement of mediation use should be prioritized, as well as the implementation of adaptive school strategies in dealing with conflict resolution. Thus, there is a direct contrast with the maladaptive conflict resolution strategies that are traditionally enforced by schools, such as the use of detention or suspension. Healthy conflict resolution competence can be achieved first and

<sup>13</sup> Correlations between Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence and Life Skills were all significant. Included here are only the correlations with a coefficient of .2 and higher.



foremost when students are in a school environment where they feel that teachers and staff sincerely care to help them overcome their conflict, and when schools are equipped with effective referral systems to which students can turn to for support and guidance. These findings support the need for PMCR programmes to become an official school programme across schools, which can then be further supported from the expertise of local NGOs. In addition to these, life skills have also been found to promote healthy school conflict resolution competence, suggesting the need to invest in life skills education among VEI students as a means of promoting competency in healthy conflict resolution. Negotiation skills, kindness, and respect for diversity are highly associated to adolescents' competence in solving conflicts in an adaptive manner, highlighting the need to invest in those skills which are traditionally ignored or underappreciated. Interestingly, no gender differences have been revealed. This means that in designing programmatic interventions for VEI students, there is no specific need to customise the contents of the programmes to the needs of boys and girls, separately. Even if programmes use the "one size, fits all" rule, both boys and girls are expected to be equally benefitted.

## 4.4. Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence in students of GENERAL SCHOOLS

### 4.4.1. Outcomes of Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence

As already discussed in previous sections of the report, healthy conflict resolution competence is very beneficial for behavioural and psychosocial adjustment. Because conflicts are part of everyday life, competency in resolving them in healthy manners is crucial; otherwise, people would find it difficult to form or keep relationships and jobs. Whereas section 4.3 focused in students of VEI, the present section focuses of students of general schools.

To explore how healthy conflict resolution competence in students of general schools is associated with adolescent development, structural equation modelling (SEM) was performed. Similar to the previous section, it was expected that adolescents who were more competent to solve conflicts in healthy ways would exhibit less negative developmental outcomes and more positive adjustment.

Figure 8 illustrates the findings from the SEM for students attending general schools. Findings suggest that conflict resolution competence is an important determinant of adolescent adjustment. Competency for healthy conflict resolution negatively predicted the display of negative behaviours and emotions. Specifically, adolescents who attend general schools and manage to solve their conflicts in healthy ways are less likely to (i) be perpetrators of bullying; (ii) be victimised; (iii) experience negative emotionality, such as anxiety or depression; (iv) exhibit externalising behaviours, such as being aggressive or defiant, or (v) engage in risky behaviours, such as substance use or unsafe sexual behaviours. Usually, children and adolescents display maladaptive behaviours when they experience extreme negative feelings, adverse experiences, or differing opinions with others. Especially when they do not have developed adaptive strategies of responding to these negative feelings or adverse experiences. Thus, adolescents who are competent in resolving conflict in positive ways are more likely to explore adaptive means of reacting to their negative experiences and feelings and are therefore less likely to turn to maladaptive behaviours and negative emotions.

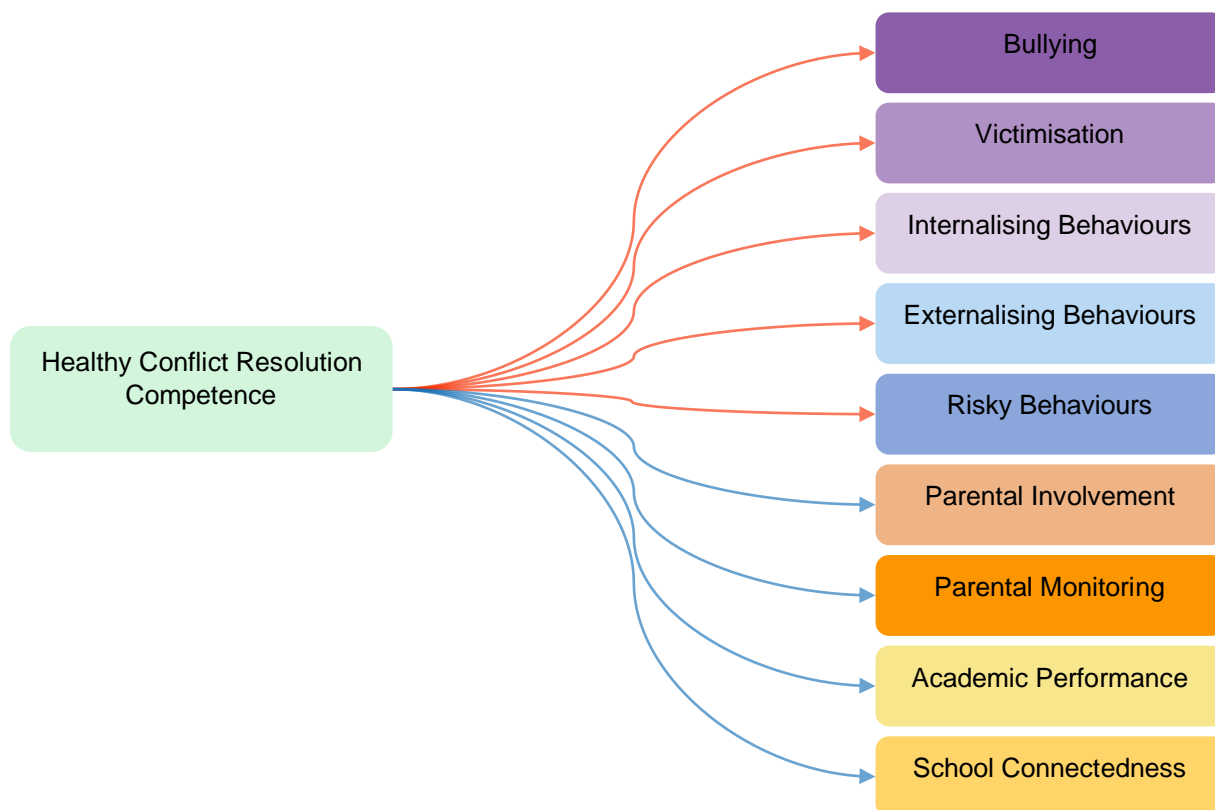


Figure 8. The Structural Equation Model for Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence as a predictor of developmental outcomes in students of General Schools

(Note: Red arrows signify negative predictive relationships, whereas blue arrows signify positive predictive relationships).

Also, conflict resolution competence is predictive of positive parental practices (parental involvement and parental monitoring), enhanced academic performance, and experiences of school connectedness. Because adolescents respond with healthy ways to conflict situations, close social relations are not compromised.

**Conflict resolution competence is predictive of positive parental practices, enhanced academic performance, and experiences of school connectedness.**

All in all, students who attend general schools benefit a lot when displaying healthy conflict resolution competence. Relations with their close social environment are positive, their academic performance is enhanced, and maladaptive behaviours and negative emotionality diminish. These findings are important, especially since most of these developmental outcomes significantly affect the individual, their close social environment, and the society at large. As a result, considering how conflict resolution competence is important for adolescents' behavioural, emotional, social, and educational adjustment, it is essential to encourage adolescents in developing competency for

conflict resolution.

#### 4.4.2. Drivers of Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence

Considering how conflict resolution competence predicts positive adolescent development, an important next step is to identify what drives competency in conflict resolution, so that educational experts can design and implement effective intervention programmes. Because VEI and general schools have considerable differences between them, the present subsection explores what

contributes to the development of conflict resolution competence in students attending general schools. Findings are expected to contribute to an understanding of the key areas where educational experts and stakeholders should invest so that programmatic interventions in general schools are effective.

To investigate the unique contribution of a number of factors on the development of adolescents' conflict resolution competence in students of general schools, structural equation modelling was conducted. Figure 9 presents – by order of significance – the factors that contribute to the development of healthy conflict resolution competence.

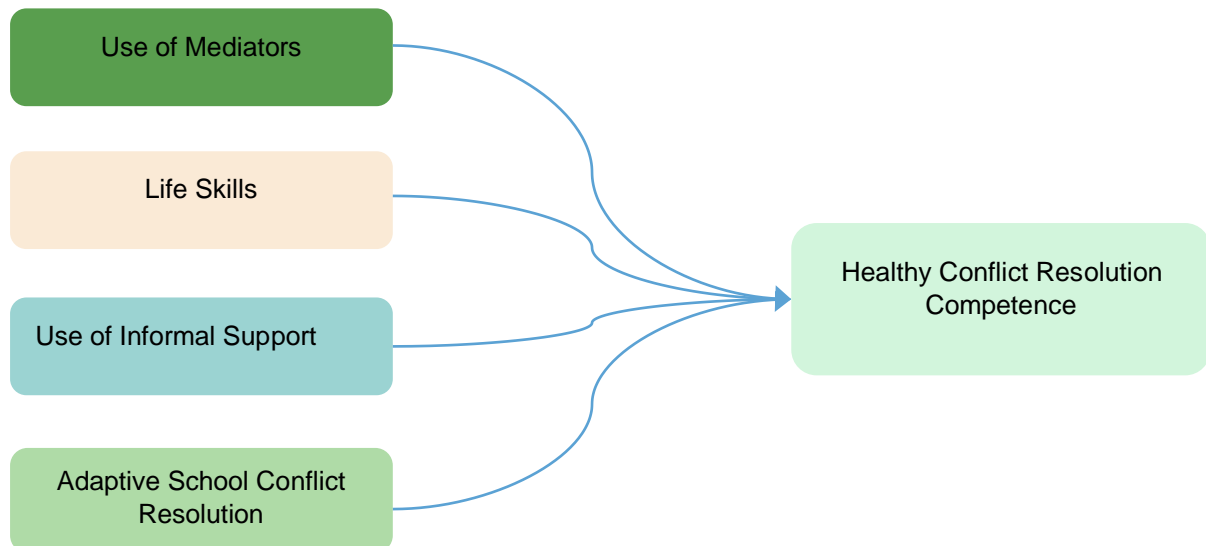


Figure 9. The Structural Equation Model exploring drivers of Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence in students of General Schools

(Note: Blue arrows signify positive predictive relationships between the predictors and the outcome).

From the figure above, we can see that a number of factors determine the degree to which adolescents would be competent to resolve conflicts in healthy ways. Specifically:

1. Use of Mediators: The most influential factor for the development of healthy conflict resolution competence is adolescents' making use of mediators. This is an important finding because most schools across Ukraine do not implement PMCR programmes, and yet, findings demonstrate that it is the first and most important determinant of conflict resolution competence. This highlights the need of schools to incorporate PMCR programmes into their permanent school programming. Undeniably, the effectiveness of such programmes would be most effective when implemented in collaboration with local NGOs who would provide their expertise and guidance. Even though PMCR programmes were initiated for VEI, our findings show the critical importance of students of general schools also using mediators as sources of support.
2. Life Skills: Enhanced life skills positively predict competency in healthy conflict resolution. In other words, adolescents with enhanced life skills are better able to resolve conflicts in an adaptive manner. Life skills are abilities that enable individuals to cope and deal with the demands and challenges of every day. Therefore, it makes sense that young people with high levels of life skills would be better equipped with positive strategies to responding to conflict situations. Thus, life skills education is crucial and should be part of schools' curriculum. Section 4.4.4. investigates which life skills are more strongly associated to conflict resolution competence. Consequently, stakeholders could use these findings and design relevant programmes in general schools by prioritising the most significant life skills.
3. Use of Informal Support: Adolescents who also make use of informal sources of support (e.g., parents, teachers, and friends) are more likely to develop healthy conflict resolution

competence. Hence, it is crucial to communicate to all related parties, that despite the critical significance that mediators play for conflict resolution competence, parents, teachers, friends, and head of classrooms contribute as well to how competent an adolescent will be in solving their conflicts.

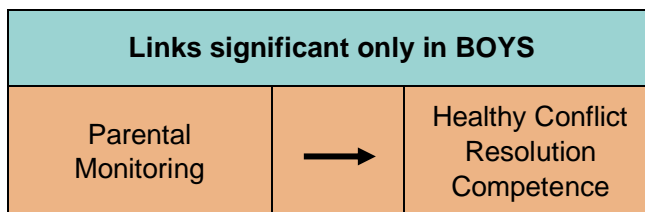
4. Adaptive School Conflict Resolution: The ability of schools to manage and resolve students' school-related conflicts in adaptive ways also contributes positively to how competent adolescents will be in healthy conflict resolution. This is an important finding. Even though most professionals would argue that punitive measures do not result in students learning appropriate behaviours, schools still apply punitive measures in an effort to control students' negative behaviour. However, our findings demonstrate that what schools can do to encourage healthy conflict resolution competence is to make use of adaptive conflict resolution strategies, such as trying to help students work out the conflict peacefully in a way that would make everyone happy and content.

#### 4.4.3. Gender Differences

In the present section, which explored PMCR programmes implemented in general schools in eastern Ukraine, no gender differences in regard to the significance of healthy conflict resolution competence were revealed. In other words, both boys and girls benefit equally from being competent in conflict resolution competence. This is an important finding because it demonstrates that programmatic interventions should be aimed towards both boys and girls.

Interestingly, some gender differences were revealed regarding the factors that contribute to the development of conflict resolution competence. Both girls and boys benefited from the use of mediation support and use of informal sources of support, from life skills, and adaptive school conflict resolution. Additionally, parental monitoring also came out as an important determinant of healthy conflict resolution competence, but *only* in boys. In other

words, boys whose parents closely monitor their behaviours (such as knowing who their friends are, their whereabouts, or what they do on the internet) are more likely to be competent in conflict resolution competence. This shows the active role of parents in influencing how boys will respond when faced with conflict. Among the many benefits of parental monitoring is that it gives parents the opportunity to have a more precise idea of their adolescent's life. Because parents who monitor their teenage son's friends, whereabouts, and behaviours are aware of what is going in their life, they can intervene when something gets out of control, and guide them towards appropriate behaviours.



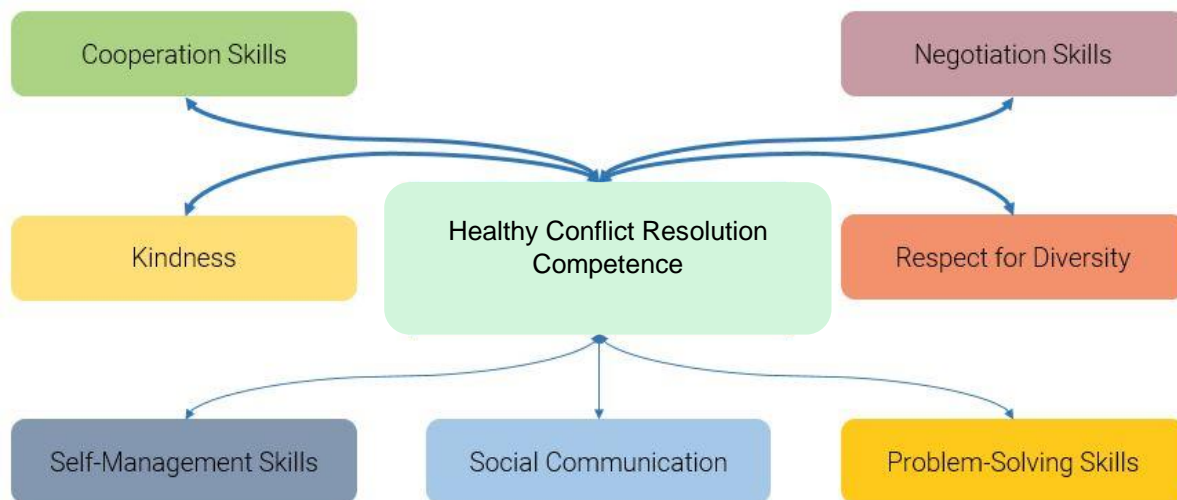
#### 4.4.4. Associations of Life Skills and Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence

To investigate which specific life skills are associated with healthy conflict resolution competence, a correlation analysis was performed. Findings show that numerous life skills are associated with healthy conflict resolution competence in students attending general schools<sup>14</sup>. Namely, cooperation skills, negotiation skills, kindness, respect for diversity, self-management skills, social communication, and problem-solving skills are all positively correlated with adolescents' competence for conflict resolution.

Similar to VEI students, negotiation skills, kindness, and respect for diversity also associate the most with conflict resolution competence in students of general schools. Overall, these findings can be used when designing life skills education programmes for enhancing conflict resolution competence. Programmes in general schools need to focus on a wide array of life skills such as self-management skills, problem-solving skills, respect for diversity and kindness. Kindness, for

<sup>14</sup> Correlations between Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence and Life Skills were all significant. Included here are only the correlations with a coefficient of .2 and higher (please note that thin correlation arrows signify coefficients between .2 and .3, whereas thicker correlation arrows signify coefficients of .3 and higher).

instance, is usually undervalued; yet the current findings show that it is essential when promoting conflict resolution competence. When faced with conflict, kind adolescents are more likely to solve their conflicts in ways that would not be hurtful to others. Problem-solving skills are also associated with conflict resolution competence. Life skills education should aim towards enhancing problem-solving skills, so adolescents become better able to consider the many possible solutions to a problem. Likewise, encouraging cooperation skills also benefits the development of conflict resolution competence because learning to cooperate does not only involve working in groups. Instead, cooperation also involves adolescents occasionally compromising to the needs of others, thus having to explore adaptive means of solving disagreements without compromising the teamwork.



#### 4.4.5. Conclusions on exploring Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence in students of General Schools

The present section of the current report focuses on healthy conflict resolution competence among students who attend general schools. Findings should be viewed as further evidence of the key role that healthy conflict resolution competence plays for adolescents' behavioural, socioemotional, and educational adjustment. In particular, both boys and girls with high levels of healthy conflict resolution competence were more positively adjusted to their social environments. They exhibited less externalising or internalising behaviours, and they engaged in less risky behaviours. Furthermore, they were more likely to experience higher levels of school connectedness or enhanced academic performance. These important findings demonstrate programmatic interventions would benefit all students equally, irrespective of their gender.

Relevant to the third aim of the study, namely to identify the determinants of healthy conflict resolution competence, once again, our findings show the critical importance of using mediators as a source of conflict support, life skills, and schools using adaptive means of conflict resolution. In terms of policy design, these findings have important implications. Intervention programmes need to prioritise the implementation of peer mediation programmes in schools. Peer mediation programmes need to become institutionalised so that with the additional support and expertise from local NGOs, students can trust the programme even more and refer more openly to mediators when facing conflict. Likewise, schools should focus on implementing adaptive school strategies in dealing with conflict resolution. This is crucial because it seems that healthy conflict resolution competence cannot be achieved when students feel that their teachers and staff do not care about helping them overcome conflicts. Finally, life skills education programmes need to focus on promoting certain skills which are highly associated with healthy conflict resolution competence. Correlation analyses using students attending general schools identified seven life skills which are highly associated with conflict resolution competence. Ranked from the highest association to the lowest, these skills are: (i) negotiation skills; (ii) cooperation skills; (iii) respect for diversity; (iv) kindness; (v) self-management skills; (vi) social communication skills; and (vii) problem-solving

skills. Interestingly, for most predictors of healthy conflict resolution support, no gender differences have been revealed. This means that in designing programmatic interventions for students of general schools, both boys and girls are expected to be equally benefitted. However, parental monitoring was found to be gender-sensitive in that it predicted conflict resolution competence but *only* in boys. Especially for boys, who disclose less to parents than girls, parental monitoring is necessary for promoting healthy conflict resolution competence. Hence, it is essential to communicate to parents of adolescent boys of the need to monitor their adolescent son's behaviours, whereabouts, and friends and peers. This would allow parents to identify how the adolescent responds to incidents of conflict and guide them through appropriate behaviours.



## 5. Summary of Main Findings

The present report explores the PMCR programme that is currently being implemented in eastern Ukraine. Specifically, the current study aims to investigate (i) whether adolescent students make use of mediator support when they experience challenging experiences; (ii) the significance of healthy conflict resolution competence for positive adolescent development; and (iii) what contributes to the development of healthy conflict resolution competence in adolescents. Gender differences were also explored to identify whether programmes should be modified to the specific needs of either boys or girls. Numerous important findings have been identified. Specifically:

1. **Girls are more likely than boys to turn to mediators when they experience challenging situations and are also more likely to seek healthier ways of resolving incidents of conflict.** Consequently, interventions should aim towards enhancing boys' competency in healthy conflict resolution and to encourage them into using the help of supportive figures more.
2. **Students of Vocational Educational Institutions use mediators as a source of support significantly more than students who attend general schools.** This is an encouraging finding considering how the focus of PMCR programme was primarily on students who attend VEI.
3. Findings demonstrate that adolescents who show the highest levels of conflict resolution competence make use of both informal support and support from mediators. Whereas adolescents benefit a lot from making use of informal sources of support, findings show that **the addition of mediators as a source of support gives the highest competency in healthy conflict resolution.**
4. Peer mediation programmes are very important for students who experience challenging situations (e.g., bullying, victimisation, or externalising behaviours). Findings demonstrate that **when adolescents display high levels of maladjustment and want to get help and guidance from others, they prefer disclosing and getting support from mediators** than from parents, teachers, or friends.
5. **Healthy conflict resolution competence positively predicts adolescents' behavioural, emotional, social, and educational adjustment.** Adolescents with high competency in conflict resolution are less likely to display negative behaviours or experience negative emotionality but are more likely to experience positive social relations and enhanced academic performance. No gender or school-type differences were identified, which means that **the benefits of healthy conflict resolution support extend to all adolescents, irrespective of their gender or which type of school they attend.**
6. **The two most essential indicators that contribute to the development of VEI students' competency in healthy conflict resolution were (i) schools making use of adaptive conflict resolution strategies, and (ii) adolescents making use of mediators.**
7. Analyses showed that to promote healthy conflict resolution competence in **VEI students** through **life skills education**, programmes **should prioritise negotiation skills, kindness, and respect for diversity.**
8. **The most important determinant of healthy conflict resolution competence in students who attend general schools is adolescents making use of mediators as a source of conflict resolution support.**
9. **Some drivers of healthy conflict resolution** competence in general schools' students **are gender-sensitive**; for instance, parental monitoring enhances competency to resolve conflicts in an adaptive manner, but only in boys.
10. To promote healthy conflict resolution competence in students attending **general schools** through **life skills education**, programmes **should prioritise negotiation skills, cooperation skills, kindness, and respect for diversity, as well as social communication skills, problem-solving skills, and self-management skills.**



## 6. Recommendations and Conclusions

Conflict resolution competency is an important skill to encompass; within our lifetime, people, undeniably, face a multitude of conflict situations. Hence, it is essential to be able to resolve conflicts in an adaptive manner so that individuals do not suffer from negative consequences. Hence, it is vital to promote healthy conflict resolution competence from an early age. Due to the fact that schools constitute one of the most important microsystems in a person's life, it is expected that through the implementation of relevant intervention programmes, schools enhance adolescents' competency in healthy conflict resolution competence. One way through which this can be achieved in schools is through the implementation of peer mediation programmes. The current study, which is based on cross-sectional analyses of data, confirm that there are a number of important factors that determine the degree to which young people would be competent in healthy conflict resolution, with the most important ones being the use of mediators as sources of support, life skills education, and schools' use of adaptive conflict resolution strategies (for a summary of the study's main findings, please see Section 5). Some recommendations that can be drawn from the study's findings include:

1. Make efforts to institutionalise PMCR programmes in schools across Ukraine. Their importance has been confirmed, as evidenced through the preference adolescents show towards using mediators when requesting help and guidance for their negative behaviours and emotions, as well as through their important contribution to the development of healthy conflict resolution competence.
2. Enhance schools' use of adaptive strategies when responding to school conflicts. Traditionally, schools respond to maladaptive behaviours through punitive measures. Nevertheless, our findings show that punitive measures do not promote or teach acceptable behaviours to adolescents; instead, positive strategies from schools do. Hence, it is suggested that schools should move away from using strategies such as suspension or detention as a means of controlling adolescents' negative behaviours. Instead, it is proposed that schools could work with students into finding solutions that is acceptable by everyone.
3. Prioritise and incorporate life skills education in the curriculum to encourage healthy conflict resolution support. The most important skills to be prioritised are negotiation skills, kindness, and respect for diversity. These can be achieved through different activities (e.g. role playing) where adolescents are given, for instance, opportunities to get "stuck" to certain situations so that they consider different options (with their advantages and disadvantages) that would help them get "unstuck". Kindness should not be undervalued, and it is proposed that stakeholders emphasise its importance in the design of programmatic interventions. Fun ways of promoting kindness can be to create a challenge that would promote kindness or encourage volunteerism.

## Appendix: Glossary of Adolescent Component indicators

Indicator	Indicator Description
<b>Academic performance</b>	Self-reported evaluation of one's school performance.
<b>Aggression</b>	Extent to which one is aggressive in daily life, such as frequently getting into fights and confrontations.
<b>Anxiety</b>	Degree to which one feels anxious and insecure to an extent that the person finds it hard to stop worrying and relax.
<b>Bullying</b>	Exposure – repeated over a period – to negative behaviour by one or other persons including in person or online harassment and physical violence.
<b>Conduct Disorder</b>	The display of disruptive and violent behaviours and, difficulty in following rules.
<b>Cooperation Skills</b>	The ability to work together with other people.
<b>Depression</b>	Degree to which one feels depressed or very sad.
<b>Healthy Conflict Resolution Competence</b>	One's ability to solve conflicts in healthy ways (that are not harmful to others or oneself).
<b>Kindness</b>	Being genuinely interested in helping and caring for other people, and doing good deeds.
<b>Life Skills</b>	Abilities that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life, including problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, and co-operation skills.
<b>Negotiation Skills</b>	Refers to a person's ability to discuss and claim his intentions/ requirements
<b>Parental Involvement</b>	Parental involvement refers to the amount of participation and connection a parent has when it comes to a child's social and academic life.
<b>Parental Monitoring</b>	Refers to parents being aware and supervising their adolescents' activities (at school, at home, with friends and peers) and communicating their concerns to their adolescent child.
<b>Parental Warmth</b>	Parental warmth is about parents providing their adolescents with regular support, speaking to them in a positive and friendly manner.

**Problem-Solving Skills** The ability to “think through steps that lead from a given state of affairs to a desired goal”<sup>15</sup>.

**Respect for Diversity** Appreciating and accepting the uniqueness and differences of different people.

**Schools Adaptive Conflict Resolution** Schools’ use of adaptive strategies for solving school-related conflicts.

**School Connectedness** The extent to which one feels connected to peers and teachers in the school context.

**Self-Harm** Thoughts of and attempts to injure oneself.

**Self-Management Skills** The ability of a person to regulate and control their lives.

**Social Communication** One’s ability to understand their audience and exchange ideas in an efficient and adaptive manner.

**Substance Use** Frequency of tobacco, alcohol or drug use.

**Unsafe Sexual Behaviour** Inclination to engage in unprotected sex with multiple partners.

**Victimisation** Directly experiencing bullying in the form of repeated physical, verbal or psychological attack or intimidation that is intended to cause fear, distress, or harm.

## Composite Indicators

**Bullying** Includes Physical, Relational, Verbal and Cyber bullying.

**Externalising problems** Includes Aggression, Conduct Disorder, and Oppositional Defiant Disorder.

**Internalising problems** Includes Anxiety, Depression, PTSD, Self-harm & suicidality.

**Life Skills** Includes Respect for Diversity, Kindness, Social Communication, Cooperation, Negotiation, Problem-Solving, Decision Making, Critical Thinking, Distress Tolerance, Self-Management, and Creativity

**Risky behaviours** Includes substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviours, and self-harm.

**Use of Informal Support** Includes use of support from parents, teachers, friends, or head of a classroom.

<sup>15</sup> Barbey, A., & Baralou, L. (2009). Reasoning and Problem Solving: Models. *Encyclopedia of Neuroscience*, 8, 35-43.

**Use of Mediators**

Includes use of peer mediators, adult mediators, or CIRCLE.

**Victimisation**

Includes Physical, Relational, Verbal and Cyber victimisation.

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