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The Effectiveness of Cyberprogram 2.0 on Conflict Resolution Strategies and Self-Esteem



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 A B S T R A C T

Purpose: In recent years, the problem of youth violence has been a cause of increasing concern for educational and mental health professionals worldwide. The main objective of the study was to evaluate experimentally the effects of an anti-bullying/cyberbullying program (Cyberprogram 2.0; Pirámide Publishing, Madrid, Spain) on conflict resolution strategies and self-esteem.

Methods: A randomly selected sample of 176 Spanish adolescents aged 13–15 years (93 experimental, 83 control) was employed. The study used a repeated measures pretest–posttest design with a control group. Before and after the program (19 one-hour sessions), two assessment instruments were administered: the questionnaire for measuring conflict management message styles and the Rosenberg self-esteem scale.

Results: The analyses of covariance of the posttest scores confirmed that the program stimulated an increase of cooperative conflict resolution strategies, a decrease in aggressive and avoidant strategies, and an increase of self-esteem. The change was similar in both sexes.

Conclusions: The study provides evidence of the effectiveness of Cyberprogram 2.0 to improve the capacity for conflict resolution and self-esteem. The discussion focuses on the importance of implementing programs to promote socioemotional development and to prevent violence.

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IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTION

The study provides evidence of the effectiveness of Cyberprogram 2.0 to improve the capacity for conflict resolution and self-esteem (protective factors related to bullying/cyberbullying). The results allow us to emphasize the importance of implementing programs during childhood and adolescence to promote socioemotional development, improve coexistence, and prevent/reduce violence.

In recent years, the media regularly report cases of bullying with negative consequences, especially for the victims, but also for the aggressors. Other forms of bullying currently emerge, such as cyberbullying, using information and communication technologies, mainly the Internet and cell phones, to bully classmates. In the same vein as authors [1,2], we define cyberbullying as a means of bullying in which electronic media are used to insult, threaten, harass, or intimidate a peer.

Peer violence is closely related to the difficulty resolving conflicts constructively and to self-esteem. Previous studies with adolescents [3] have confirmed that those involved in bullying/

cyberbullying situations (victims, and aggressors) used significantly more aggressive conflict resolution strategies. On the other hand, the link between victimization and low self-esteem levels has been widely studied, and some studies verify the protective role of self-esteem [4]. Findings confirm the deterioration of both self-esteem and self-confidence of students who are the targets of their classmates' continued bullying/cyberbullying. Studies show that cybervictims and cyberaggressors generally have lower levels of self-esteem [5,6].

Taking into account the results of these studies and the practical implications of positive conflict resolution strategies and self-esteem in the prevention of violence, the need to elaborate programs that contribute to their development seems desirable. Accordingly, in recent years, anti-bullying programs have been developed that have stimulated an increase in the use of positive-cooperative strategies to cope with conflicts [7–9], to

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the detriment of negative strategies used when facing a conflictive situation [10,11], programs that have contributed to improving self-concept/self-esteem [12–14]; increasing prosocial behaviors [15]; helping the victims [11]; increasing social competence [16], a sense of safety, and general self-efficacy [17]; and decreasing aggressiveness [18] and the prevalence of bullying and exclusion by peers [19]. Regarding gender, many programs promoting socioemotional development for the prevention of violence have stimulated a similar change in both sexes [20–23] although some anti-bullying interventions have confirmed a greater increase of helping behavior in females [24].

Multiple forms of victimization are negatively associated with adolescent well-being, and cyber-victimization can influence adolescents above and beyond traditional victimization [25]. Although many studies suggest that there is a decline in various types of peer victimization among school children [26], bullying remains a problem in schools today. The considerable prevalence of bullying/cyberbullying in the Basque Country [3] and its harmful effects reveal the need for programs to prevent this type of violence. Moreover, recent studies have shown an increase in online harassment [27]. Few evidence-based prevention interventions have been published despite the need for school-based prevention programs to improve peer relationships and reduce bullying/cyberbullying.

Within this contextualization, the study aims to assess the effects of an intervention program (Cyberprogram 2.0) on the capacity to resolve interpersonal conflicts and on self-esteem (protective factors related to victimization and perpetration). Although Cyberprogram 2.0 was designed to prevent and reduce peer bullying/cyberbullying [28], this work focuses specifically on interpersonal conflict and self-esteem. This study is part of a wider investigation that implemented Cyberprogram 2.0 and assessed its effects on many dependent variables. In previous evaluations, it has been confirmed that the program decreases bullying/cyberbullying behaviors [29,30], and the present study now attempts to reveal the important role played by the capacity to resolve conflicts constructively and by self-esteem in the efficacy of an anti-bullying program and the inhibition of bullying/cyberbullying. Regarding this goal, we propose the following three hypotheses: (H1) the intervention will increase the use of cooperative conflict resolution strategies based on dialogue and cooperation, decreasing the use of aggressive and avoidant strategies; (H2) the program will increase self-esteem; and (H3) the intervention will stimulate a similar change in both sexes.

Methods

Participants

This study was carried out with a sample of 176 adolescents, aged between 13 and 15 years, who studied compulsory secondary education; 77 (43.8%) were male, and 99 (56.3%) were female. Of the total sample, 93 (52.8%) were randomly assigned to the experimental condition and 83 (47.2%) to the control condition. No significant sex differences were found between experimental and control participants; $\chi^2 = .26$, $p = .607$. The sample was chosen using a random sampling technique applied to the list of schools in Gipuzkoa (Basque Country, Spain) and the type of center (public–private). Block randomization was performed with a computer-generated random-number list of schools prepared by the Department of Education of the Basque Government. The sample was recruited from three schools

(socioeconomic levels: low, medium, and high). The sampling unit was the school class. In each center, the classrooms were numbered and randomly assigned to the groups (experimental or control). To determine sample size, we also carried out a prior power analysis, presuming a low-medium effect size ($f = .25$), with a power of .90 ($\alpha = .05$, $1 - \beta = .90$) for the univariate F tests among the dependent variables. The required minimum sample size was 171 participants.

Procedure

The study used a repeated measures pretest–posttest design with a control group. The procedure was divided into phases as follows: (1) a letter was sent to the directors of the randomly selected schools from the list of educational centers in Gipuzkoa, explaining the project and requesting their collaboration; (2) an interview was held with the directors who agreed to collaborate to present the project and distribute the informed consent forms for signing by parents of the study participants; (3) after receiving the parents' consent, the pretest was administered to the experimental and control participants, using two assessment instruments to measure the dependent variables that the program was expected to affect (September); (4) subsequently, the intervention program was applied with five experimental groups (19 one-hour sessions), whereas the four control groups received the usual tutoring classes of their center (October–May); and (5) after the intervention, during the posttest phase, the same instruments were administered as at pretest to the experimental and control groups (June). The study complied with the ethical principles for research with human beings (Helsinki Declaration) and received the favorable report of the Ethics Committee of the University of the Basque Country (CEISH/112/2012).

Measures

To measure the effects of the intervention before and after the program, we administered two assessment instruments with psychometric guarantees of reliability and validity.

Conflictalk. Conflictalk is an instrument for measuring youth and adolescent conflict management message styles [31]. The test measures three conflict management styles: (1) aggressive or self-oriented (wanting to do everything one's own way, being aggressive and authoritarian when dealing with conflict); (2) cooperative or problem-oriented (being interested in finding the cause of the conflict and specifically identifying the problem in collaboration with the other, the focus is on finding the best solution and cooperative action); and (3) avoidant or other-oriented (thinking that conflict is always bad, dealing passively with conflict). The questionnaire presents 18 sentences that people might use in a conflictive situation, and the adolescents are asked to rate each sentence on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*I never say things like that*) to 5 (*I almost always say things like that*). The internal consistency of Conflictalk is adequate (Cronbach's alphas: problem-oriented $\alpha = .87$; self-oriented $\alpha = .81$; other-oriented $\alpha = .63$), and this was confirmed with our sample ($\alpha = .94$, $.74$, and $.81$, respectively). Validity studies with the Spanish version [32] have found positive significant correlations between communication skills and cooperative conflict management style and negative correlations with aggressive conflict management style.

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