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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Victimization, loneliness, overt and relational violence at the school from a gender perspective



Amapola Povedano^{a,*}, María-Jesús Cava^b, María-Carmen Monreal^a,
Rosa Varela^c, Gonzalo Musitu^a

^a Universidad Pablo de Olavide, España

^b Universidad de Valencia, España

^c Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Morelos, México

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Abstract This ex post facto study analyzes both the direct relationships between victimization and overt and relational violent behavior of students adolescents as the indirect relationships between these variables through the classroom environment, the loneliness, the nonconformist ideal reputation and transgression of social norms. The sample consisted of 1,795 adolescents (48% females) aged 11 to 18 years ($M = 14.2$, $SD = 1.68$). We used a structural equation model to analyze the effect of classroom environment and victimization in violent manifest and relational behavior. The results found that a direct positive relationship between victimization and relational violent behavior and a direct negative relationship between classroom environment and overt violent behavior. In addition, classroom environment and victimization were indirectly related to overt and relational violence through its relationship with loneliness, nonconformist ideal reputation and transgression of social norms. Multigroup analysis results indicated that the relationship between loneliness and relational violent behavior was significant for boys but not for girls. Finally, we discuss the results and their practical implications in the school context. © 2014 Asociación Española de Psicología Conductual. Published by Elsevier España, S.L.U.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Adolescencia;
Conducta violenta en
la escuela;
Victimización;

Resumen Este estudio ex post facto analiza tanto las relaciones directas existentes entre la victimización y la conducta violenta manifiesta y relacional de adolescentes escolarizados como las relaciones indirectas entre esas variables a través del clima escolar, la soledad, la reputación ideal no conformista y la transgresión de normas sociales. La muestra está compuesta por 1.795 adolescentes (48% mujeres) de edades comprendidas entre 11 y 18 años ($M = 14,2$;

* Corresponding author. Departamento de Educación y Psicología Social, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales. Universidad Pablo de Olavide de Sevilla, Ctra. de Utrera, km. 1, 41013 Sevilla (España).

E-mail address: apovedano@upo.es (A. Povedano).

Género;
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$DT = 1,68$). Se utiliza un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales para analizar el efecto del clima escolar y la victimización en la conducta violenta manifiesta y relacional. Los resultados indican una relación directa y positiva entre la victimización y la conducta violenta relacional y una relación directa y negativa entre el clima escolar y la conducta violenta manifiesta. Además, el clima escolar y la victimización se relacionan indirectamente con la violencia manifiesta y relacional a través de sus relaciones con la soledad, la reputación ideal no conformista y la transgresión de normas sociales. Los resultados del análisis multigrupo indican que la relación entre la soledad y la conducta violenta relacional es significativa para los chicos pero no para las chicas. Finalmente, se discuten los resultados obtenidos y sus implicaciones prácticas en el contexto escolar.

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The term school violence refers to different types of adolescent behaviour at school: violence towards classmates, violence towards adults, damage to property, vandalism and bullying (Ortega-Ruiz, 2010). This study focuses on violence towards peers at school, that is to say, violence which involves the victimization of a student or group of students by another student or group. Victimization in school is defined as the experience of being subjected to physical, verbal and psychological violent behaviour by peers in the school context, particularly in spaces with little supervision from adults (Graham, 2006). School violence involves both overt violent behaviour in the form of hitting, insults or name calling, and relational violent behaviour through social exclusion, the spreading of rumours or the exclusion of victims from a group (Buelga, Musitu, & Murgui, 2009; Little, Henrich, Jones, & Hawley, 2003).

The aggressor-victim dynamic is composed of an interpersonal relationship model with serious consequences for the psychosocial adjustment of victims (Guterman, Hahn, & Cameron, 2002). Numerous studies in the scientific literature show a strong relationship between victimization by peers and internalising problems such as strong feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem and high symptoms of depression (Hawker & Boulton, 2000), but very few studies have viewed victimization as a risk factor relating to externalising behaviour such as, for example, school violence.

Recent research has transferred the explanatory model developed by Emler and Reicher (2005) on the relationship between victimization and youth criminal and antisocial behaviour (Estévez, Jiménez, Moreno, & Musitu, 2013) to the school context. According to the results of this study, adolescent victims of violence at school trust adults in authority to protect them. However, the law of silence which prevails among students as regards school violence means that often adults do not detect victims and are unable to offer them suitable protection (Cava, 2011). This can lead to the adolescents being disappointed by these adults, and also distrusting the social norms and having a heightened perception of their loneliness (Estévez, Jiménez, & Moreno, 2011). Following the theory put forward by Emler and Reicher (2005), adolescents may try to use self-protection strategies such as seeking a reputation at school based on the transmission of a social image that is non-conformist, rebellious or

anti-social, that is to say, a non-conformist social reputation. In order for this strategy to be efficient, adolescents often disobey social coexistence norms at school or become involved in overt and relational violent behaviour. This conduct towards their peers aimed at transmitting a message about themselves: I am also violent and I do not wish to be victimized.

In order to prevent this type of behaviour at school it is important to take the adolescents' perception of the classroom environment into consideration. Adolescent perception of a positive climate in the classroom, that is, one in which they are involved in the activities and tasks proposed in the classroom, perceive classmates as friends and have a positive perception of the teacher as an adult they can count on for reference and for help, is a key factor for the social adjustment of adolescents, prevents school violence and is an important source for the construction of their identity (Estévez & Emler, 2011; Wentzel, 2010). Conversely, adolescents victimized at school show a negative perception of the social climate in the classroom, feel unsatisfied with their life at school and feel less attached to school (Martínez, Povedano, Amador, & Moreno, 2012).

Another important aspect of the research on violence and school victimization is the gender of the adolescents. Scientific literature shows that boys are more overtly violent and suffer more overt victimization at school than girls (Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008). We could say that there is a general pattern which shows that boys and girls use relational violence in a similar way, despite the disparate research results (Card et al., 2008), although girls suffer more relational victimization than boys (Putallaz et al., 2007). In addition, girls who suffer victimization at school, both overt and relational, demonstrate greater feelings of loneliness and social anxiety than boys (Storch & Masia-Warner, 2004).

The study of relational violence has not been fully taken into account in research when attempting to explain why some victims are also violent towards their classmates in the school context. However, it is highly probable that victimized students with a social and psychological profile characterised by high levels of loneliness and symptoms of depression and low self-esteem (Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2007) have greater involvement in relational

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