School networks of positive relationships, attitudes against violence, and prevention of relational bullying in victim, bystander, and aggressor agents

This study analyzed how the relationships of adolescent students with their peers, the educational community, and their families, as well as their attitudes to school violence, influences becoming a relational bullying victim, a bystander, or an aggressor in a sample of 4,273 Spanish high school students, using Structural Equation Modelling. We applied multi-group analysis, separating girls (n = 2,022) from boys (n = 2,038). The results show that positive relationships serve as a protective factor against participation in situations of aggression and exert a significant influence on the acquisition of transformative attitudes toward violence. Such attitudes, in turn, significantly help prevent bullying. Slight differences were found between boys and girls: mainly in terms of the influence of relationships at school on attitudes toward violence, and the influence of attitudes toward violence on becoming a bullying aggressor, both scoring higher in girls.

Keywords: relational bullying, school networks, attitudes toward violence, structural model analysis

Introduction

Despite prevention campaigns, school violence continues to be widespread on a global scale. Within this type of violence, relational bullying appears to be the most common phenomenon both internationally (UNESCO, 2017) and in the Spanish case, where, according to Save the Children (2016), one in four adolescents admits to having carried out this kind of humiliation at some point on their peers, and one third admit to having been a victim. Although this type of aggression is due to various causes, participation therein may be preceded by a socialization that makes young people prone to violence (Orozco Vargas & Mercado Monjardín, 2019; Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2015; Puigvert et al., 2019). Due to this, positive relationships among peers, with

teachers and other educational agents, as well as with family members, paired with the rejection of any belief that advocates the tolerance of violence, are regarded as factors that play a significant role in preventing relational bullying among adolescents (Ríos-Gonzalez et al., 2019; Veenstra et al., 2014).

In this study, we applied a structural equation model based on previous scientific literature to a sample of 4,273 Spanish high school students. We aimed to analyze the joint influence exerted by these positive relationships and by the rejection of attitudes related to violence, such as the prevention of victimization, observation, and relational aggression. We applied multi-group analysis, separating girls from boys to consider the gender dimension in this problem.

Prevalence, agents, causes, and consequences of relational bullying

Bullying in schools is one of the most serious problems associated with violence today (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). In 2017, Spain saw 1,054 cases of bullying denounced to the police, representing an increase of 11.65% over the previous year. Of these cases, 53.4% involved boys and girls aged 12 to 14, and 36.4% involved young people aged 15 to 17; thus, the majority of cases occurred in secondary schools (Ministry of Education of Spain, 2019). This prevalence of violent attitudes in schools was already noted by the World Health Organization in 2012, which remarked that violence among adolescents and young people usually occurs in places that are supposed to be "safe", such as schools. In fact, according to UNESCO (2017, p.20), 75.5% of bullying cases occur within the school grounds.

Although school violence "includes physical violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, and bullying" and "is perpetrated and experienced by students, teachers and other school staff" (UNESCO, 2017, p.14), in this study, we focused on relational bullying that occurs among students. This type of bullying is subsumed under

psychological bullying, which includes "verbal and emotional abuse, including in the form of isolating, rejecting, ignoring insults, spreading rumors, making up lies, name-calling, ridicule, humiliation and threats, and psychological punishment" (UNESCO, 2017, p.14); these are behaviors specifically associated with relational bullying according to Fanti et al. (2019). Relational bullying is the most common type of bullying in the classroom (Cortés-Pascual et al., 2020): it can have particularly negative consequences in the stages of adolescence, youth (DeLara, 2019), and, later on, in adulthood (Copeland et al., 2013). According to these authors, relational bullying can lead to mental health problems in the victim such as depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal behavior.

In terms of the types of participating agents, research has traditionally focused exclusively on victims and aggressors (Herrera-López et al., 2017). In the case of victims, bullying affects more than just isolated and marginalized students, because the lack of friends favors the onset of victimization, and this increases isolation and, normally, aggressors belong to the "popular" circle, being supported, or, at least, not contested by bystanders (Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013). This is why recent studies advocate the inclusion of the bystander in analysis models, given the bystander's potential role as a permissive supporter of aggression, or, on the other hand, the conversion of the bystander into an upstander who supports the victim (Jouriles et al., 2019; Cortés-Pascual et al., 2020; Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2020).

With regard to gender, studies such as those carried out by Save the Children (2016) and UNESCO (2017) coincide in noting a higher prevalence of this type of violence in girls as victims and boys as aggressors, finding no significant differences in the case of bystanders. However, although those reports agree that this finding can be highly variable, publications such as Gereš et al. (2018) indicate that the association of

violence with the traditional masculinity model could indicate a higher prevalence of bullying in the case of boys, along with boys' tendency to assume attitudes related to violence. Specifically, in terms of relational bullying, although some meta-analysis has reported no relevant differences between boys and girls (Lansford et al., 2013), traditionally, literature shows that girls are significantly more relationally aggressive than boys (Björkqvist et al, 1992; Crick et al., 1997; Ostrov & Crick, 2007).

These three agents (victim, bystander, and bullying aggressor) were chosen as the endogenous variables in the hypothetical model presented below.

School networks of positive relationships, attitudes against violence, and prevention of relational bullying: a hypothetical model

The hypothetical model presented in this section has its origin in a model applied in a previous study by the authors of this article (Elboj-Saso et al., 2020); this previous study focused on sexual violence in secondary schools and analyzed the influence of the relationships in the school center as well as of the attitudes associated with gender violence on the three agents who can participate therein (victim, bystander, and aggressor). Given that the previous model displayed optimal goodness-of-fit and that the literature also confirms the influence of both variables on relational bullying, we propose a similar model for the current study, but adding a much larger number of variables observed in the constructs of attitudes associated with violence as well as bullying actions displayed by victims, bystanders, and aggressors. Our hypothetical model derived from a review of previous literature is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 near here

First, as an exogenous variable, we chose to test the influence of the school network of positive relationships as a factor in preventing relational bullying. Existing studies

indicate that different types of social support from peer groups or from adults with whom the students are in contact could cushion the negative consequences of bullying (Holt & Espelage, 2007; Yeung & Leadbeater, 2010; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019). According to authors such as Holt and Espelage (2007), the two main sources or types of support seem to be parents and friends, although different publications also include the relevant role of teacher support in mediating the negative effects of violence in this area (Flaspohler et al., 2009; Hellfeldt et al., 2019). According to Wachs et al. (2020), positive relationships with family members, teachers, peer groups, and other members of the educational community are a key factor in these groups' self-efficacy when intervening in bullying situations in support of the victim.

However, such a social network not only serves to cushion the possible consequences of instances of aggression protecting the victim but also to prevent them (Cortés-Pascual et al., 2020; Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2014; Rawlings, 2015; Olsson et al., 2017). In the case of the peer group, it is obvious that, to avoid violent relationships, a good general climate among classmates will serve as a preventive factor (Wachs et al., 2018; Wolgast & Donat, 2019; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019). On the one hand, classroom cohesion and self-efficacy in social conflicts are directly associated with students' willingness to intervene in bullying situations and protecting the victim (Wachs et al., 2018). On the other hand, having a strong network and feeling social support make potential bullying victims more resilient to face relationships at school (Wolgast & Donat, 2019).

The connection with adults should also be included at this point. According to Sieving et al. (2017), adolescents' perception of a good relationship with adults (parents, tutors, teachers) acts as a protective factor against various risky behaviors and promotes positive social behavior. In this sense, Foster et al. (2017), Farrell et al.

(2010), and Martínez Sánchez et al. (2019) show that the connection of potential

bullying victims or aggressors with the educational community serves as an essential

preventive factor and that those adolescents who feel closer to their parents are less

likely to participate in violent actions. Along the same lines but joining the two

variables, Brookmeyer et al. (2006, p. 504) argue that "parent and school connectedness

appear to work together to buffer adolescents from the effects of violence exposure on

subsequent violent behavior." It is for all these reasons that our hypothetical model

includes adolescents' relationships not only with their peers, but also with the entire

educational community (teachers, management personnel, and other professionals such

as service personnel, etc.), along with the relationship of their families with the

educational center.

Another construct we considered as a variable possibly related to being involved

in relational bullying as a victim, bystander, or aggressor is the one formed by attitudes

associated with violence, considered by the literature as one of the fundamental

explanatory predictors (Orozco Vargas & Mercado Monjardín, 2019). By attitudes, the

scientific literature understands the subject's psychological tendency to evaluate in

favor of or against a particular aspect (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Such attitudes, which

contain a cognitive and an emotional component, exert a direct influence on our way of

thinking, the judgments we make, and the decisions we make based on them:

particularly et al in cases of impulsive behavior such as violence (Jiménez-Barbero et

al., 2017).

In the case of school-age youth, authors such as Wang et al. (2015) highlight the

importance of the school as a sphere of socialization for the shaping of these attitudes

toward violence, such as the students' commitment to the norms that have been

established in their school, their relationships with their teachers, with their families,

and, of course, within the peer group (Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2015; Ríos-González et al., 2018). For example, Veenstra et al. (2014) highlight that attitudes of rejection of violence among students are much more evident, and conflicts are reduced, in educational centers where teachers have carried out specific actions to prevent abuse among classmates. This is why, in our model, attitudes toward violence are placed in the center as a variable that is dependent on relationships, since we hypothesize that a greater number of positive relationships will influence greater positioning against beliefs in favor of violent responses. In turn, as Orozco Vargas and Mercado Monjardín (2019) have shown, beliefs favorable to violence can be strong predictors of school violence in victims and aggressors – even in the case of bystanders, and these insights are reflected in our model as well. Following Machackova and Pfetsch (2016), bystander attitudes favorable to violence can favor behaviors that support aggressors; their rejection, conversely, leads the bystander to defend the victim.

In the case of Spain, the importance of positive interactions among all members of the educational community and the promotion of attitudes against violence has acquired a relevant presence in scientific research in Spain in the last 10 years (Elboj et al., 2009, Redondo et al., 2014; Gómez, 2015, among others). These investigations have fostered a boost to educational policies for the prevention of bullying in Spain. Following this research, in 2017, the Ministry of Education of the Government of Spain published the "Guide for the educational community for the prevention and support of victims of school violence," where it is proposed to teachers and families "to influence the socialization of boys and girls, promoting messages and dynamics that move away from the violence that is present every day" (p. 69).

We tested this hypothetical model taking the gender variable into account, because previous authors, such as Wienke Totura et al. (2009) and Hanish et al. (2004),

provide evidence suggesting that boys and girls may perceive their social environments (family and school) differently, and respond to them in a different way, which may put girls at a heightened risk of victimization and bullying. According to these authors, models that consider such differences between boys and girls are more explicative. Specifically, regarding the variables included in our hypothetical model, Wienke Totura et al. (2009) found that, since girls reflected more upon their social environments than boys, thereby consequently upon discord within families and school climates, the degree of school bonding and the degree of monitoring behavior of school staff was more salient for girls than for boys. Therefore, an increased positive assessment of adult monitoring as well as of school and family connections on the part of girls decreased their likelihood to be characterized as bullies to a greater degree than boys (Wienke Totura et al., 2009, p.594). Although in previous literature the relationship between attitudes toward violence and bullying was found to be more evident in boys (Kernsmith, 2005), a more recent study by Kernsmith and Tolman (2011) found that, in girls, the perceived acceptability of violence was significantly associated with their expectations of future use of violence. With a Spanish sample, Carrera-Fernández et al., (2013) showed that the inclusion of attitudes toward bullying in the predictors of a model designed to explain bullying behavior explained the 58% variance in girls, compared to 37% in boys.

Materials and methods

In this study, we followed a quantitative methodology stemming from statistical analysis of data derived from the responses of secondary education students of the Autonomous Community of Aragon to the questionnaire designed for this purpose. The nucleus of our analysis involved elaborating a structural equation model (SEM) to fulfill the objectives outlined in the previous section.

Participants

Information was collected from students enrolled in secondary school (in Spain: 1st-4th grades of *Educación Secundaria Obligatoria* [ESO], i.e., "Compulsory Secondary Education," comprising ages 12 to 16) in 20 public and private educational centers in the Autonomous Community of Aragon (Spain), taking into account the stratified representation of the provinces that make up the region (3 in Huesca, 2 in Teruel, and 15 in Zaragoza). Although it was not the objective of this study, some differences were found in the levels of bullying between the different centers, but these differences were not significant. Given the aforementioned criteria in the initial sampling phase, the selection of centers in the second sampling phase was random. A total of 5,028 participants between the ages of 12 and 16 ultimately completed the survey. However, for this article, only those cases that did not present missing values in the analyzed variables were selected, thereby leading to a final sample of 4,273 participants. Their characteristics are shown in Table 1. The majority were of Spanish nationality (91.0%), distribution by gender was equitable (49.8% girls and 50.8% boys), with an average age of 14.2 (SD = 1.4) and a well-balanced distribution across academic years (23.7% were in First Year ESO, 26.6% in Second Year, 24.9% in Third Year, and 22.0% in Fourth Year).

Table 1 near here

Instrument

For the research instrument, we resorted to a questionnaire designed by the researchers of the project "Study of coexistence in educational centers of Aragon," based on

batteries of questionnaires applied in previous studies on a regional and national level (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez-Arias & Martín-Bábarro, 2011, 2013). Once the selection of participating centers described in the previous section had been carried out with the assistance of the Government of Aragon, we sent out an invitation to the schools, along with information on the project's objectives and schedule. Once all selected schools had answered affirmatively, participation authorizations on the part of the students' families and/or tutors were collected. Data collection was carried out between March and April 2017 in school computer rooms during school hours, under the joint-supervision of local schoolteachers and the authors of this study. Anonymity and privacy of questionnaire answers were ensured by granting a random and unique access password to each student.

With regard to the instrument itself, four sets of questions were used for the present study. (1) A sociodemographic questionnaire featuring items concerning the students' gender, age, academic year, and nationality, and the same data regarding their parents, in addition to the educational level attained by the latter. (2) A questionnaire designed to evaluate the relationships between students and the rest of the educational community, specifically focusing on relationships among peers, as well as with teachers, directive staff, other service personnel, the family-school relationship, and, in general, the evaluation of relationships in the center; these six items were evaluated on a Likert scale of 1-4 (1: not at all satisfied; 4: very satisfied). (3) A questionnaire on attitudes associated with violence based on 11 items on which the participants were asked to express their degree of agreement or disagreement on a Likert scale of 1 to 4, featuring statements expressing tolerance toward certain types of aggression. (4) A questionnaire on relational or indirect bullying (participation in situations of exclusion or humiliation, evaluated using five items related to forms of relational aggression):

suffered (victim), witnessed (bystander), and/or perpetrated (aggressor). The list of all these variables and the contribution of observed variables to each latent variable can be viewed in Table 2.

Table 2 near here

Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .86 for the scale of attitudes associated with violence, over .80 in the relational bullying subscales (.85 for victims, .91 for bystanders, and .87 for aggressors), thereby yielding optimal results, and .71 for the relationships-at-school scale, thereby delivering an acceptable reliability coefficient. In addition, we carried out confirmatory factor analysis of the relational bullying scale to ensure the reliability and internal consistency of the subscales. The results, which can be consulted in Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al. (2020), showed positive structural coefficients between the observed and the latent variables, all of which were significant ($p<0.001$, Est./SE>1.96), and acceptable adjustment in all indicators used (RMSEA=.05; CFI=.92; GFI=.90). On the other hand, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was .44 and Construct Reliability was .80 for the subscale of bullying victims, .60 and .88, respectively, for bullying bystanders, and .50 and .81, respectively, for bullying aggressors.

Analysis

The analysis of results was carried out in two phases. In the first phase, we applied descriptive analysis of the means of the scales that had been used, differentiating by gender in order to carry out an initial exploration of results and to test whether there were differences between boys and girls.

In the second phase, we tested the hypothetical model of a causal structure by applying the SEM, since this technique allows for multiple dependent variables, thereby making latent variable constructs more reliable than the use of observed variables by

including errors of measurement and the possibility of reporting multiple measures of goodness-of-fit. In this technique, the adjustment of some data is compared to a previously established theoretical model, validating the adjustment of the same from various adjustment indicators. Another possibility of this procedure is to make comparisons between groups by applying the same procedure.

Our SEM, designed on the basis of our review of the previous literature and represented in Figure 1, was tested using the IBM-SPSS software and its AMOS extension (v.22). The latent and observed variables featured therein are shown in Table 2, and the relationships among them are shown in Figure 1. The estimation method chosen to test the measurement model was asymptotically distribution-free, which is recommended for scales that cannot be measured quantitatively and for which multivariate normality cannot be assumed (Brown, 2006; Byrne, 2010). Initially, correlations were obtained among all the factor scores of the variables in both the girls and boys subsamples. Then, a comparison was made between the two subsamples by applying Fisher's Z transformation of the correlation coefficient. The model's goodness-of-fit was tested using the χ2 test, as well as the normal and the $\chi2$ / degrees of freedom ratio (DCIM/GL in AMOS), by RMSEA and GFI indicators, by CFI, and by their critical levels as indicated by authors such as Schlermelleh-Engel et al. (2003), Vandenberg (2006), and Byrne (2010). We applied multi-group analysis to verify the hypothesis whether the interviewees of different sexes displayed significant differences in terms of influencing relationships. To make this distinction between models, we compared a series of nested models, the results of which are described in the Results section. To contrast the differences between groups, the models were compared by calculating the differences in χ2 and the AIC index (Byrne, 2010).

Results

Before testing the model, we carried out a preliminary descriptive analysis to analyze the participants' behavior on the three scales used in this study, along with the differences between boys and girls, specifically in the incidence of relational bullying in Victims (VB), Bystanders (BB), and Aggressors (AB); attitudes toward violence; and relationships at the center. In the statements about victimization, the percentage of boys was significantly higher in most of the variables analyzed, except in VB5 ("They talk badly about me"), where the percentage of girls exceeded that of the boys, corresponding to more than one-third of the female subjects. In the role of Bystander, the girls, in Variables BB1, BB2, and BB5, affirmed having witnessed such aggressions to a greater extent than boys, especially in the case of BB5 ("Talking badly about him/her"). With regard to the role of Aggressor, the boys were once again significantly more present in the majority of the variables analyzed (for example, more than one in ten affirmed AB4 ("Insulting, offending, or ridiculing him/her"), except, again, in the variable AB5 ("Talking badly about him/her"). With regard to Attitudes toward Violence (AT), in most of them, a significantly higher percentage of boys agreed or strongly agreed with the proposed statements. The most relevant differences were evident in the variables AT1 ("It is right to hit someone who has offended you"), AT4 ("It is justified to assault someone who has taken away what was yours"), and AT9 ("If you do not return the blows that you receive, the others will think that you are a coward"), much higher in boys in all cases. In the positive relationships vis-à-vis educational agents (Relationships at School), no significant differences between the sexes were observed.

Table 3 near here

Analyzing the relationship between being an Aggressor and having Attitudes toward

violence, in all the items analyzed, there was a positive and statistically significant relationship ($F_{1,3139}$= 258.81, p<.001, η^2=.076) between both variables, with a mean of 2.0 (SD=.73) for aggressors and 1.4 (SD=.47) for non-aggressors in attitudes toward violence. The same occurred in the positive and statistically significant relationship ($F_{1,3139}$=631.97, p<.001, η^2=.168) between being an Aggressor and being a Bystander (for more information on the relationship between bullying agents in this study, see Cortés-Pascual et al., 2020). The correlations among variables are presented in Table 4. In the sub-samples, the high correlation between the three variables of bullying stands out, especially between acting as an aggressor and acting as a bystander, and between acting as an aggressor and acting as a victim. However, the relationship between the roles of victim and bystander is less pronounced.

In terms of the correlations among the other variables, certain differences can be observed between the sub-samples. For example, Relationships at School (RS) had a lower and negative correlation and negatively so with Attitudes toward Violence (AT) in boys than in girls. In addition, Relationships at School (RS) correlated with bullying indicators, especially with being a Victim of Bullying (VB), increasing remarkably in the case of boys (r=-.430). Attitudes toward Violence (AT) also correlated with the bullying indicators in both sub-samples.

Comparisons of the correlations between girls and boys showed certain statistically significant differences; however, in the cases in which this occurred, the differences in size between them were very small, reaching statistical significance mainly due to the large size of the samples. Therefore, seemed reasonable to test the differences between boys and girls in the SEM.

Table 4 near here

The process of comparison between models and the detailed model results are included

in the section on supplementary materials. The result of this process reveals the fit of the data to the theoretical model, with significant regression weights in all cases (Figure 2), and with some small differences between boys and girls. Thus, in this model, the explained percentage of variance was 3.9% for Attitudes toward Violence (AT), 6.5% in the case of girls and 2.5% in the case of boys, being the perceived Relationships at School (RS), the only predictor with a higher weight for girls than for boys.

The model also predicted the frequency of being an Aggressor of Bullying (AB) or a Victim of Bullying (VB), explaining the 17.9% and 14.7% variance in the case of girls and 12.5% and 17.3% for boys. In both cases, it was found that Attitudes toward Violence (AT) were associated with a higher frequency of behaviors related to bullying, while positive Relationships at School (RS) were the opposite direction. Attitudes toward Violence (AT) were the main predictor of being an Aggressor of Bullying (AB) in the case of girls, with greater weight than in boys, and positive Relationships at School (RS) were the greatest predictor of being a Victim of Bullying (VB) for both sexes.

Finally, the model also predicted being a Bullying Bystander (BB), but with less precision than in Victims (VB) and Aggressors (AB), explaining the 4.5% variance for girls and 9.0% for boys. Once again, Attitudes toward Violence (AT) were the best predictor of this variable, with a less significant role of the positive Relationships at School (RS).

In summary, Attitudes toward Violence (AT) were associated with all three categories of bullying analyzed, that is, Aggressors (AB), Victims (VB), and Bystanders (BB) presented more favorable Attitudes toward Violence (AT). On the contrary, positive Relationships at School (RS) acted as preventive factors for all these situations. This role was especially important in the case of victims (VB), in which the direct

weight toward this variable in the model was very high. It is also worth noting that the indirect weight of the Relationships at School (RS) toward the actions as Aggressor (AB), Victim (VB), or Bystander (BB) through the lower Attitudes toward Violence (AT) reported by the participants with better Relationships at School (RS).

Figure 2 near here

Discussion and conclusions

Although previous studies analyzed the relevance of positive socialization in the prevention of bullying (Cortés-Pascual et al., 2020; Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2020; Hong et al., 2014; Rawlings, 2015; Olsson et al., 2017), as well as the influence of beliefs associated with violence on the occurrence of bullying in the roles of aggressor, victim and, even, bystander (Orozco Vargas & Mercado Monjardín, 2019; Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2015; Veenstra et al., 2014), no previously tested model had linked all these constructs together, and considering the differences between boys and girls. Based on a previous model we had tested in connection with sexual violence among adolescents (Elboj-Saso et al., 2020), we herein applied a structural equation analysis to explore the concurrence between positive relationships with the educational community, beliefs associated with violence, and participation in relational bullying attitudes.

We started by applying a descriptive analysis to explore the incidence of relational bullying among secondary school students. With regard to victimization, our scores in the majority of analyzed behaviors were generally lower than the national average (Save the Children, 2016), although one in four students admits to having been ignored by their peers. Generally, the proportion of boys is higher than that of girls,

both in the variables of aggression (as in the UNESCO, 2017 and Save the Children, 2016 reports), and of victimization, although the proportion of girls is most notable in the role of bystander. Favorable attitudes to violence are much more present in boys than in girls, a result aligned with the research by Orozco Vargas and Mercado Monjardín (2019). This may be due to an association between aspiring to fulfil the role of traditional masculinity and the violence associated with it (Gereš et al., 2018).

With regard to the model that we tested in this study, it is important to highlight the following: As shown in studies such as those by Foster et al. (2017), Farrell et al. (2010), and Martínez Sánchez et al. (2019), positive relationships with the educational community are a factor that helps to prevent participation in bullying on the part of the three agent roles analyzed herein, both for boys and for girls, with all coefficients testing negative and significant. In addition, such relationships with the educational community contribute toward avoiding the adoption of violence-related attitudes, as proposed by Jiménez-Barbero et al. (2017), Wang et al. (2015), Orozco Vargas and Mercado Monjardín (2019), and Veenstra et al. (2014). In our analysis, the following aspects stood out: the contribution to the construct of positive relationships, the evaluation that students generally made regarding their relationships at school (Wang et al., 2015), and the family-school relationship (Brookmeyer et al., 2006). Such aspects, however, often tend to be less addressed in action strategies designed to prevent bullying; they obviously deserve to be considered more seriously. In this same model, favorable attitudes toward violent behavior had a positive, significant, and highly relevant relationship with being a victim, a bystander, and, especially, an aggressor. This confirms results from previous studies, such as those by Orozco Vargas and Mercado Monjardín (2019). Finally, the role of a bystander also appears to be essential in the construction of relational bullying, as defended in previous studies (Jouriles et al.,

2019; Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2020); positive relationships and attitudes against violence both work in favor of supporting the victim in the role of an upstander.

The analysis of gender dimensions did not elicit strong differences between boys and girls; nevertheless, the multigroup model was more explicative than the one applied to the whole sample, thereby indicating that these differences should be considered in bullying analysis (Orozco Vargas & Mercado Monjardín, 2019; Wienke Totura et al., 2009; Hanish et al., 2004). In the case of girls, especially, our model confirmed that the network of positive relationships plays an essential role in their rejection of attitudes toward violence (Wienke Totura et al., 2009). A weaker connection with the school, mediated by attitudes towards violence, can lead to becoming a relational bullying aggressor more evidently in girls than in boys: this result is in line with previous research by Wienke Totura et al. (2009), Kernsmith and Tolman (2011), and Carrera-Fernández et al. (2013). In fact, in the study by Carrera Fernández et al. (2013), also carried out with secondary school students in Spain, the variance percentage of the model that specified only girls was higher than that of boys incorporating the variable "attitudes towards violence". This result may be due to the fact that, according to Carrera-Fernández et al. (2013), girls are more reflective regarding their interactions and their attitudes; when these are negative, their impact on violent behavior seems to become even more noticeable.

For all of these reasons, the promotion of positive student interactions with the entire educational community, including family participation in school, and attitudes that reject violence stemming from that socialization (preventive socialization of bullying), seem to act as key elements in the prevention of relational violence in schools in the case of boys as well as girls. This idea, that we explored previously in qualitative

studies (Elboj et al., 2009) was included in the recommendations of Spain's Ministry of Education, which specify that

> socialization agents (parents, teachers, peer groups) must be attentive to the interactions that influence the socialization of students: conversations in which prejudices are expressed, disputes in the courtyard or hallway, comments that influence gender stereotypes, that value some attitudes and ridicule others, etc. and give an immediate response" (Ministry of Education, 2017).

However, they not only act always and, in any case,, but also promote a "language of ethics" in the classroom and other school spaces, which identify negative attitudes toward violence, and make people with values of equality attraction and solidarity, who treat their peers well, reject beliefs that favor violence, and commit to overcoming inequalities. In this way, educational agents will be helping these people to be taken as the references to follow and with whom young people want to surround themselves. Finally, the Ministry of Education (2017) recommends favoring heterogeneous groupings in educational centers and promoting very diverse interactions (even with the participation of family members and people from the community in the school) in which the aforementioned language of ethics and against violence is promoted every day (Ríos-González et al., 2018). Our model can serve as the first quantitative evidence in Spain of the relationship between the constructs of relationships at school and attitudes toward violence that support these educational policies.

Moreover, our model can give light to the problem from a gender perspective. We have shown that the sensitivity of girls to both elements (relationships and attitudes toward violence), implies that educational policies should be paying even more attention to how their interactions can be managed in the classroom, and the messages they receive, promoting the aforementioned attractiveness of students who hold positive values (Puigvert et al., 2019).

In terms of limitations: although we strove to ensure our sample's diversity (public and private schools, both genders, migrant origin, natives, etc.), it can be considered slightly biased due to the fact that it only stems from a specific region (Aragon, Spain). Nevertheless, since our results are in line with previous studies, we find that it is permissible to generalize them. The students' subjective interpretation of their relationships and attitudes could somewhat limit the explanatory power of these results; nevertheless, the choice of variables used in this research may be justified, given that the Díaz-Aguado et al.'s (2011; 2013) questionnaire has already been validated and is the one most widely used in Spain to identify bullying. In terms of future lines of research, we consider that the multicausality of relational bullying requires new models that would explore contextual and personal variables not analyzed in this article; they should also explore novel realities, such as cyberbullying. Longitudinal studies would likewise need to be carried out in centers that have implemented measures seeking to apply the preventive socialization of school violence.

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