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PEER VIOLENCE IN SCHOOL, DIFFERENCES BASED ON GENDER

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Abstract

Nowadays, school violence is a hidden problem which concerns about 150 million adolescents between 13 and 15 years old according to Unicef. The purpose of this study is to determine if the level of violence experienced by teenagers differs depending on their gender. Regarding the methodology, it is based on a quantitative approach with a non-experimental design; it is cross-sectional with a correlational scope. We worked with a population of 10th grade teenagers (N= 1644) from Ibarra's public high schools. There were 824 male and 820 female students. The variable was measured using a Likert scale assessing the level of violence suffered by adolescents. It includes 11 items to evaluate the physical violence and 15 items related to the psychological peer violence. The instrument also includes information such as gender, ethnicity, religion and nationality. Index a is equals to 0.963 which indicates that the instrument is reliable. The results were obtained applying the student statistic t to independent samples, the results of the different types of violence between men and women were correlated and the statistic gave the result $t=-6,45$ with $p<0,05$ for school violence. This statistical evidence shows that both physical and psychological violence are more frequent towards women. We can conclude that there are violent behaviors in schools especially against women which can be viewed as a consequence of a discriminatory and patriarchal social and cultural system.

Keywords: Adolescentes, school violence, physical violence, psychological violence.

1. Introduction

School violence is a growing problem in many aspects. According to Unicef data, about 150 million adolescents between 13 and 15 years old have suffered from violence at school (Andrés et al., 2015). At the World Education Forum in 2019 in London, Unesco showed that 1 student out of 3 has suffered of peer bullying at least once. However, the study also shows that in almost half of the 71 concerned countries school violence has decreased which indicates that governments and schools have tackled the problem significantly.

School violence is a social problem taking place in various educational environments. Di Lorenzo (2012) defines it as the mistreatment suffered by some students. It involves a bully and a bullied, where the bully puts various type of pressure on the bullied to create conflict and keeps repeating such behavior without having to face consequences. It can be said that violence results from conflicts caused by someone against someone else and also by the reactions they trigger. Aggression tends to repeat itself because of a conflictive environment. Aggressive behaviors at school are very common; Machillot (2017) says that bullying occurs when a student becomes the victim of an aggressor demonstrating repetitive violent behaviors. Someone suffering from aggression is already considered a victim, therefore, repetitive violent actions can have serious consequences and may even put the life of the victim at risk.

School aggressions can take different forms. Martínez-Ferrer, Musitu-Ochoa, and Buelga (2016) refer to the different ways bullying may exist, including physical and psychological aggressions. The authors mention that psychological aggression is more frequent and often disregarded because it doesn't leave any visual evidence, on the other hand physical aggression is given more importance because it is more visible and it often triggers strong reactions. Among the forms of school violence mentioned above, they are classified according to some specifications.

1.1. Physical and Psychological Violence

Violence has been classified based on how it takes form. Physical violence is the most common and the most visible expression according to Ayala-Carrillo (2015) as it leaves immediate traces. This form of violence can have serious consequences, such as injuries, bruises, fractures and even manslaughter. It is mentioned that physical aggression is recurrent and usually its intensity is not progressive but constant. It involves the use of force to injure the victims.

School violence also includes psychological violence. According to Ramírez Muñoz, Hidalgo Moya, and Manosalva Mena (2013), this type of violence is more complex and harder to identify since the victims' level of resistance is higher when mistreatment starts. The author states that as violence continues, the mental state of the victims deteriorates and eventually it may result to physical somatization.

According Ramirez, Hidalgo, and Manosalva (2013), the use of some words and behaviors leads the victim of psychological violence to feel deprecated, disregarded and terrorized. Such words and behaviors can be passive or active. Minor things like giving "nicknames" for fun and making jokes are considered as passive actions since the bully does not mean to alter the bullied emotional state, instead the intention is usually to make a joke. However, Pescador, and Domínguez (2001) mentions that active actions are intense forms of psychological violence in which the purpose of the bully is to intentionally harm his victim. They

including mocking, humiliation and demeaning the victim's physical, intellectual or emotional state. Such behaviors intending to hurt and denigrate the victim can take place in the classroom or in cyber space making it difficult to uncover. As victims do not feel secure to talk about it, they usually withdraw into silent and may eventually commit suicide.

1.2. School violence by gender

Mingo (2010) states that "Being a woman or a man defines the type and level of aggression of which one may be a victim or not" (p.26).

School violence is common among male students as it is thought that aggression is a way of demonstrating strength to peers. Bully students tend to have a chaotic school life, they are often repeaters with low grades, belonging to dysfunctional families and/or single parent families. However, such form of violence may also impact women who have grown up in an environment characterized by physical, verbal or sexual abuse whereas women who have never been exposed to such violence are less likely to suffer from it.

Most cases of homicide are usually committed by men. They perpetrate it against other men or against women to show power and control over the other gender. It is both worrisome and important to understand why such situations appear; how the environment and the culture influence it; and what personal problems may lead a man to commit such tragic act?

According to UNICEF, in Ecuador, the occurrence of bullying does not depend on the gender. That is to say that the statistical figures of bullying are similar across gender, however, school violence takes different forms.

Gender stereotypes are deeply marked in this society. Women often feel guilty of being victims of some type of violence because it is still believed that men have the right to exercise power over them and women are expected to behave in a quiet and docile way. However, if a man is assaulted, he is more likely to react with violence because he thinks that he has to be respected due to his gender (Bascón Díaz, Saavedra Macías, & Arias Sánchez, 2013; Díaz-Aguado, 2005).

In most social groups both gender stereotypes are deeply rooted and both women and men have to respect a specific role defined by society. If either a man or a woman diverts from these existing rules he or she may expose himself to violence and suffer from rejection for breaking established parameters of behavior.

Usually, in their daily life, women have better adaptation and problem solving skills than men because it is easier for them to relate with other and to create social relationships. For men though, it goes differently as they are expected to behave in an aggressive and violent way making inter-gender relation harder and more conflictual. In school, both genders will defend their points of view, generating competition and even school violence (Lozano, 2018).

2. Problem Statement

School violence is clearly a major social issue because it is a worldwide problem and it occurs independently of economic and social status as it is rooted into basic power structures.

The purpose of this study is to analyze school violence in tenth grade and whether there is a difference across gender.

3. Research Questions

Have tenth grade pupils ever been victims of school violence?
Which gender does suffer the most from school violence?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the level of school violence is high and that it impacts differently male and female pupils. We used a non-experimental cross-sectional approach with a descriptive and comparative correlational scope. The objective is to identify the significant differences across gender in perceived school violence.

5. Research Methods

We used a non-experimental cross-sectional approach with a descriptive and comparative correlational scope. The objective is to identify the significant differences across gender in perceived school violence.

5.1. Participants

For this study, we selected an intentionally non-probabilistic sample of 1644 participants, made of 820 females and 824 males. Participants are in 10th grade Ecuadorian pupils aged X = 14.38 with S.D. = 0.74.

5.2. Process

Once the project approved by high schools' boards, data were collected during class hours over a three-month period. Before being submitted to the questionnaire, the students were explained the objectives of the research and asked to sign a letter of informed consent. Data were stored in a database created with SPSS 22.0 software used for descriptive correlational statistical computation, as well as the drawing of respective tables and graphs.

5.3. Instrument

The instrument is a questionnaire about perceived school violence. It is made up of a Likert scale evaluating the level of violence experienced by adolescents. It includes 11 items evaluating physical violence and 15 items related to psychological violence between peers. It also contains information such as gender, ethnicity, religion and nationality. The instrument is considered as reliable as the scale value a is equal to 0.963.

6. Findings

The findings found in the study variables were the followings:

6.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the average age and the standard deviation of the pupils, the average of the general scores related to perceived school violence, as well as physical and psychological violence.

Table 01. Descriptive statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Standard deviation
Age	1644	11	19	14,38	0,748
Peer Violence	1644	27,69	122,31	93,7240	7,41112
Physical Violence	1644	11,00	96,00	51,8307	4,97676
Psychological Violence	1644	15,00	75,00	69,9370	6,27501

School violence perceived by pupils reaches high figures (X=93.72 and S=7.4). Indeed, the average number is close to the maximum value, this means that aggressions in schools are very common. Students report that they have been bullied in all the ways suggested by the instrument and surprisingly enough in a repetitive manner. Psychological violence is the most frequent case of bullying (X=69.93 and S=6.2), while physical violence is less predominant (X=51, 83 and S=4.9). As stated by the authors, psychological violence is not emphasized enough because it is less visible even though it represents the most frequent case of bullying across the population studied.

6.2. Comparative and Correlation analysis

Results from table 2 show that women report more violence than men. Even though, men seem to suffer less from each form of violence than woman, average figures for both genders are relatively close.

Table 02. Comparison of averages

	Gender	N.	Average	Standard deviation	Standard error
Peer Violence	Men	824	92,6119	7,62439	0,27058
	Women	820	94,9426	6,79380	0,23960
Physical Violence	Men	824	51,0459	5,22694	0,18411
	Women	820	52,7037	4,25063	0,14935
Psychological Violence	Men	824	69,2751	6, 33072	0,22285
	Women	820	70,6556	6,10858	0,21424

In order to determine whether there is a significant difference between men and women related to all forms of perceived school violence, we applied the student t statistic to independent samples (see table 3). The figures for the different types of violence between men and women were correlated and provide the following statistical result: t=-6.45 and p<0.05. There is a statistical evidence showing greater violence against women, both physical and psychological. Correlating physical violence provides statistical evidence

(t=-6.99 and p<0.05) showing that there is greater physical violence towards women. The same applied to psychological violence which provides statistical evidence (t=-4.46 and a p<0.05) showing that men perceive less psychological bullying than women.

Table 03. Correlation of violence between men and women

		F	Sig.	t.	gl	Sig. (bilateral)	Mean difference	Standard error
Peer Violence	Equal variances	17,200	0,000	-6,453	1596	0,000	-2,3307	0,36116
	Unequal variances			-6,449	1570,56	0,000	-2,3307	0,36142
Physical Violence	Equal variances	25,824	0,000	-6,996	1614	0,000	-1,6578	0,23695
	Unequal variances			-6,993	1546,62	0,000	-1,6578	0,23707
Psychological Violence	Equal variances	6,635	0,000	-4,466	1618	0,000	-1,3805	0,30909
	Unequal variances			-4,466	1614,99	0,000	-1,3805	0,30913

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the study variable "School Violence" shows that the development of a culture of peace, adaptability skill and emotional stability must be promoted in high schools. Clearly, school violence can directly affect children' personal and academic development. Both physical and psychological violence reported by pupils are indicators of the state of the society and the environment in which adolescents grow up. The figures clearly show that in our culture abuse, violence and intimidation are more common towards women. This statement is also supported by the growing number of femicides in the country.

As a social problem, school violence is a reflection about our cultural behavior patterns; it generates emotional, personal and social changes that alter the harmony of adolescents' interpersonal relationships. Therefore, education in the culture of peace and conflict resolution takes on great importance; it is necessary to apply preventive strategies in school violence. In addition, greater emphasis should be given to psychological violence. Indeed, even though this type of violence is invisible and hard to spot, it is not less important. The victims of such violence bear emotional damage, become vulnerable and may develop behavior not appropriate to new social groups.

School violence concerns more women than men, so it is important to take bold actions to change cultural patterns which are not generating gender equity behaviors and tend to depreciate women as they keep them in a state of permanent vulnerability.

Based on these results, it seems important to encourage similar research studies in order to understand the vulnerability experienced by adolescents when they are victims of either physical or psychological school violence. Finally, let's mention the urgency of establishing intervention and prevention programs to reduce the levels of violence in schools.

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