Multifactorial impact of family environment in bullying among boys and girls

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Abstract

Few studies have used path analysis in order to explore the magnitude of family factors associated with violence in schools. With the purpose of filling this gap in the literature, the objective of this research was to examine the effects of family conflicts, cohesion, adaptability, support, morality, family organization, norms, and communication in bullying. Path analysis showed that family norms and ethic-moral values promoted at home had the main impact on bullying among women. Likewise, parental support and parent-child communication were the factors that most influenced the experience of victimization among women. On the other hand, for male students, family conflicts had the strongest relationship with bullying. In the same way, communication with their parents, family cohesion and parental support were the three most important predictors in the experience of victimization.
Keywords: school violence; family relationships; adolescents.

Impacto multifacético del ambiente familiar en situaciones de violencia escolar en hombres y mujeres

Resumen

Habiendo pocos estudios que han empleado los análisis de trayectorias (Path Analysis) para examinar la magnitud de los factores familiares y su relación con la violencia escolar, el objetivo de esta investigación fue analizar los efectos de los conflictos familiares, la cohesión, la adaptabilidad, el apoyo, la moralidad, la organización familiar, las normas y la comunicación en la violencia escolar. Los análisis de trayectorias revelaron que las normas familiares junto con los valores ético-morales que se fomentan en el hogar tuvieron el mayor impacto en los actos de violencia perpetrados por las mujeres. Así mismo, el apoyo parental y la comunicación padres-hijos fueron los factores que más influyeron en la experiencia de victimización para las adolescentes. Por otra parte, para los estudiantes varones, los conflictos que se generan al interior de la familia tuvieron la relación más fuerte con la violencia escolar. De la misma manera, la comunicación con sus padres, la cohesión familiar y el apoyo parental fueron los tres predictores más importantes en la experiencia de victimización.
Palabras clave: violencia escolar; relaciones familiares; adolescentes.

Impacto multifacetado do ambiente familiar em situações de violência escolar em homens e mulheres

Resumo

Havendo poucos estudos que empregam as análises de trajetórias (Path Analysis) para examinar a magnitude dos fatores familiares e sua relação com a violência escolar, o objetivo desta pesquisa foi analisar os efeitos dos conflitos familiares, a coesão, a adaptabilidade, o apoio, a moralidade, a organização familiar, as normas e a comunicação na violência escolar. As análises de trajetórias revelaram que as normas familiares junto com os valores ético-morais que se fomentam no lar tiveram maior impacto nos atos de violência perpetrados pelas mulheres. Também o apoio parental e a comunicação pais-filhos foram os fatores que mais influenciaram na experiência de vitimização para as adolescentes. Por outro lado, para os estudantes masculinos, os conflitos que se geram ao interior da família tiveram a relação mais forte com a violência escolar. Da mesma maneira, a comunicação com seus pais, a coesão familiar e o apoio parental foram os três preditores mais importantes na experiência de vitimização.
Palavras-chave: violência escolar; relações familiares; adolescentes.

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Introduction

The family environment and the relationships that are established within it is very important to understand, from a poorly studied perspective, the phenomenon of school violence. In many homes, the need for power and dominance that the strongest family members exert over the weakest is expressed through physical and verbal acts of violence. Once they are acquired in the family environment, these guidelines are similar to those that the aggressor uses at school against his classmates.

The investigations that have been carried out in order to elucidate the impact that the family environment has on the prevalence of school violence have consistently found that the families of the aggressors lack warmth and closeness in interpersonal relationships focusing primarily on power and the dominion that family members can have among themselves (Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek, 2010). The functioning that some families have is related to the prevalence of school violence, being adolescents who have been victims of various school abuses and who have shown the poorest family functioning rates in comparison to their classmates who have not suffered acts of this type of violence (Rigby, 1994).

Since the first studies that were carried out in the 70's, the results of these investigations have been repetitive in finding a clear relationship between a wide repertoire of family dysfunctions and school violence. For example, Manning, Heron and Marshall (1978) found that children who are raised by dominant parents or with an over-control in their behavior tend to harass their classmates at school. Similarly, the same results have been found in other more recent studies showing that aggressors have families characterized by hostile interpersonal relationships and where the father-mother bond is dysfunctional (Vaillancourt, Miller, Fagbemi, Côté, & Tremblay, 2007). In the same way, other research revealed that the prevalence of school violence has been associated with dysfunctions in family functioning, restrictive discipline styles, conflicts between parents and unfavorable economic conditions (Côté, Vaillancourt, Barker, Nagin, & Tremblay, 2007).

Unlike these family contexts, other households in which parental supervision predominates, good communication between parents and children, parental support and involvement, as well as warmth and affection in interpersonal relationships are spaces where children acquire the resources and develop the necessary strategies to be free from becoming victims of school violence (Lereya, Samara, & Wolke, 2013). On the other hand, in families that have developed high levels of cohesion among their members, there is little chance of children being aggressors or victims. According to Berdondini and Smith (1996), cohesion is associated with optimal family functioning, and it is recurrent to find that aggressors tend to live in homes characterized by very low cohesion among family members.

Because of the repercussions it has on school violence, communication between family members is an increasingly studied factor. In a study with adolescents, the findings of this research showed that those students who resorted to violence as a way to reprimand their classmates had parents who supported and had communicated to their children the possibility of using violence whenever they wanted (Copeland-Linder, Jones, Haynie, & Simons-Morton, 2007). From another perspective, the presence of school violence between men and women has also been studied, and it is a constant finding that boys and male adolescents have higher rates of both aggression and victimization compared to girls and female adolescents (eg, Demaray & Malecki, 2003; Gofin, Palti, & Gordon, 2002). In the same way, in a study carried out in Sweden, the results showed that girls not only considered school violence and conventional transgressions as more inappropriate, but also used moral reasons to justify episodes of school violence in comparison with the boys (Thornberg, Pozzoli, Gini, & Hong, 2017). Likewise, two other investigations found that primary school children used school violence as a means to achieve more popularity among peers and thus gain an important place within the peer group (Pellegrini, Bartini, & Brooks, 1999). With a very similar pattern, Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Archer (2000) found that their peers considered the most aggressive children the most popular. On the other hand, it has been a constant finding that boys and teenage boys who are shy, impulsive, with few friends, emotionally dysfunctional, socially withdrawn and lacking the basic skills to deal with adverse situations are more likely to become victims of school violence (Berger, 2007; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001).

Based on this context, the present study examined the effects of family conflicts, cohesion, adaptability, support, morality, family organization, norms and communication in school violence. On the other hand, the inclusion of a trajectory analysis was aimed at measuring the influence that certain family factors have directly on the experience of violence and victimization within a school.

Method

Participants

Upper middle level adolescents who studied in a public institution participated in this research (N = 348). The characteristics of the sample are presented in table 1. At the time of the investigation, the students were in the first semester (n = 108), the third semester (n = 123) or the fifth semester (n = 117). The high school where they studied is located in an urban city in the center of the country (Mexico). By the public nature of the institution where the study was conducted, most of the students belong to the medium-low socioeconomic level.

Instruments

Some of the scales included in the study were created in the English language. These scales were translated

into Spanish by a researcher who has English proficiency. Subsequently, the Spanish version was translated back into English by another researcher who is bilingual. Once the discrepancies were adjusted to the original version of the instrument, the translation was accepted for use in data collection.

The conflicts that arise in the family were measured through Family Environment Scale (FES), Moos and Trickett (1984). Five reagents that expressly measure the prevalence of conflicts within the family nucleus were included. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) that this instrument has ranges from .82 to .93 (Moos et al., 1984).

Family cohesion and adaptability variables were measured using the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES III; Olson, 1985). The Spanish version that was used in this investigation contains 20 reagents. Internal consistency coefficients of between 0.83 and 0.89 have been reported (Olson, 1985).

Family support received by adolescents was measured through the Perceived Social Support from Family and Friend Scales (PSS-Fa & PSS-Fr; Procidano & Heller, 1983). Based on the objectives of this research, only the social support subscale of the family was included. The concurrent validity coefficients range between .23 and .48 (Domínguez, Salas, Contreras, & Procidano, 2011).

School violence was measured using the Adolescent Peer Relations Instrument (APRI,; Parada, 2000). This instrument has two subscales including 18 reagents in each that measure the aggressive behaviors committed by the stalker, as well as the violent behaviors the victim receives. The reliability of the instrument is within acceptable ranges (0.70 and 0.84) (Stop, 2000).

The variables of morality-religiosity, family organization and control of norms within the family were measured through the Family Environment Scale (FES; Moos, Moos, & Tricket, 1989). In this study, only the subscales of Morality-religiosity, Organization and Control were included. The reported internal consistency values have varied between 0.88 and 0.94 (Moos et al., 1989).

Communication between parents and adolescents was measured with the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS; Barnes & Olsen, 1985). This instrument includes 20 reagents divided into 2 subscales (problems in family communication and open communication between parents and adolescents). This scale has obtained values that support its internal consistency (0.73 and 0.91) and its temporary stability (0.47 to 0.88) (Barnes & Olsen, 1985).

Process

The data collection was carried out once the authorization of the school site managers was obtained. Because this research did not represent a danger to the physical and mental health of the participants and no toxic substances or surgical procedures were to be included, in Mexico it is not necessary to be endorsed by any ethics committee. Informed of the scope of the study, those students who expressed

their interest in participating received the instruments to be answered. The students answered the instruments in approximately 40 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was divided into two phases. Initially, a preliminary descriptive analysis, bivariate correlations, *t-tests* for independent samples and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed. In a second phase, a trajectory analysis was carried out with the objective of identifying the relationships between the predictors and the criteria variables seeking to clarify how various family factors are associated with school violence.

Results

The results obtained in this study are presented below divided into three sections. At first, the means and standard deviations of the study variables are shown, which are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Means, Standard deviations, Minimum and maximum values.*

Variables	M	SD	Minimum	Maximum
Cohesion	28.59	8.07	10	50
Conflicts	6.84	3.94	5	25
Adaptability	17.6	5.64	10	50
Support	10.77	3.96	0	16
Morality	5.02	1.33	0	9
Organization	5.55	1.34	0	9
Norms	4.66	1.29	0	9
Comumnication	73.55	7.98	20	100
Violence	18.42	4.17	0	72
Victimization	9.40	3.27	0	72

In a second moment, various analyzes were carried out by means of t-tests in order to compare differences between men and women. The results showed that women had greater cohesion with their family members (M = 29.84, SD = 5.42) compared to men (M = 21.85, SD = 4.43), t (346) = 4.16, p <.05. Similarly, women had a higher score (M = 18.28, SD = 2.08) in family adaptability than men (M = 12.50, SD = 2.28), t (346) = 2.98, p <.05. Regarding the experience of victimization, teenage girl reported lower scores (M = 5.84, SD = 3.39) compared to their male partners (M = 10.74, SD = 2.28), t (346) = 3.92, p <.05. In turn, women had higher scores in setting family standards (M = 7.73, SD = 2.78) compared to men (M = 3.74, SD = 1.29), t (346) = 3.72, p < .05. Finally, men reported higher scores on the scale of school violence (M = 22.83, SD = 5.26) when compared with

Table 2. *Correlations among study variables.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Violence	-									
2. Victimization	.49*	-								
3. Adaptability	-.06	-.03	-							
4. Cohesion	-.38*	-.42*	.23*	-						
5. Morality	-.33*	-.17	.12	.29*	-					
6. Organization	-.19*	-.14	.22*	.05	.23*	-				
7. Norms	-.48*	-.34*	.37*	.27*	.08	.24*	-			
8. Communication	-.40*	-.52*	.55*	.43*	.27	.48*	.34*	-		
9. Support	-.39*	-.39*	.55*	.41*	.04	.39*	.29*	.75*	-	
10. Conflicts	.23*	.25*	-.29*	-.42*	-.17	-.29*	.02	-.72*	-.67*	-

*p < 05.

those of their female classmates (M = 14.80, SD = 3.72), t (346) = 2.90, p <. 05. With the rest of the study variables, no statistically significant differences were found between men and women.

In the same way, through the analysis of variance (ANOVA) the students of the three school grades were compared. Only significant differences were found in relation to the variables of cohesion, violence and communication. The results showed statistically significant differences in the level of cohesion of students in First (M = 32.28, SD = 9.16), Second (M = 37.94, SD = 7.43) and Third (M = 28.51, SD = 7.32); F (2, 345) = 6.32, p <.05. In the same way, regarding the acts of violence committed against other students, differences were found among students in First (M = 11.73, SD = 2.75), Second (M = 15.47, SD = 4.10), and Third (M = 19.92, SD = 3.16). In this variable there was a statistically significant difference between the groups F (2, 345) = 25.17, p <.05. With respect to the communication they have with their family members, the averages of the students of First (M = 79.83, SD = 8.78), Second (M = 75.59, SD = 7.42), and Third (M = 68.72, SD = 7.07) were significantly different, F (2, 345) = 28.48, p <.05.

On the other hand, in order to determine the impact that predictors have on school violence, an analysis of bivariate correlations was carried out (see Table 2).

With respect to the last silver hypotheses, in a second stage the evaluation of the four proposed models was carried out using the AMOS statistical package. The analysis of tra-

jectory models was divided into two phases, one for women and one for men. The first model measured the impact of predictors on violence perpetrated by teenage girls. Because preliminary analyzes indicated that adaptability was not related to acts of violence perpetrated by women, this variable was eliminated *a priori* from the model analysis. Unique indicators represented all the variables that were included; therefore, each of them was measured directly without assuming measurement errors by means of a model of structural equations (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). This model did not lead to a significant adjustment, X2 (13, N = 188) = 29.14, p = .03, GFI = .88 and RMSEA = .08. Therefore, when reviewing the modification rates, it was determined to eliminate the family organization variable. The general goodness adjustment of this trajectory model is shown in Figure 1. The final model adjusted the data conveniently, X2 (8, N = 188) = 9.68, p = .78, GFI = .98 and RMSEA = .03.

The model with the predictors of support, norms, communication, morality, conflicts, cohesion, adaptability and organization as indicators of the experience of victimization for adolescent girls was examined in a second moment. A first analysis of the model did not lead to a significant adjustment, X2 (19, N = 188) = 36.45, p = .06, GFI = .73 and RMSEA = .07. Based on the modification indices, it was suggested to eliminate the trajectories between adaptability and the criterion variable, morality and the criterion variable, norms and the criterion variable, as well as the trajectory between organization and the victimization of women. As a result, the
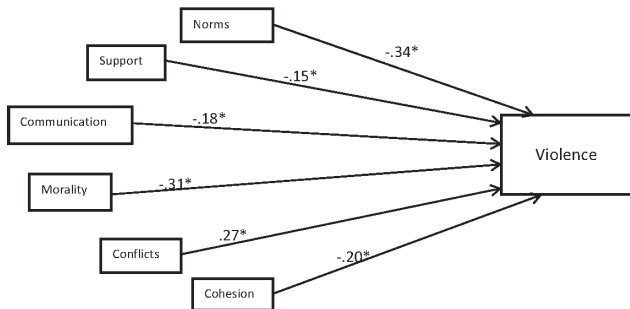
Figure 1. Trajectory Analysis of school violence for female students (only significant trajectories are presented).

* Standard coefficients of significant trajectories at level 5.

model is adjusted correctly to the data, X2 (1, N = 188) = 2.75, p = .69, GFI = .95 and RMSEA = .05. The final model is shown in Figure 2.
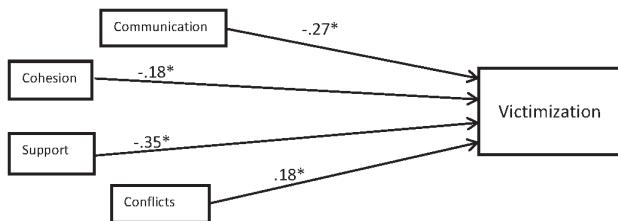

Figure 2. Trajectory Analysis of the victimization experience for female students (only significant trajectories are presented).

* Standard coefficients of significant trajectories at level 5.

Next, the two models for the men's group were examined. The third model included predictors of support, norms, communication, morality, conflict, cohesion, adaptability and organization as indicators of acts of violence committed by men. The first analysis did not yield a significant adjustment, X2 (19, N = 160) = 42.37, p = .07, GFI = .89 and RMSEA = .14. As a result, the modification rates were reviewed and the decision was made to eliminate the trajectory between adaptability and violence, as well as between organization and violence. The new model adjusted the data correctly, X2 (8, N = 160) = 15.92, p = .83, GFI = .99 and RMSEA = .02. This model is shown in Figure 3.
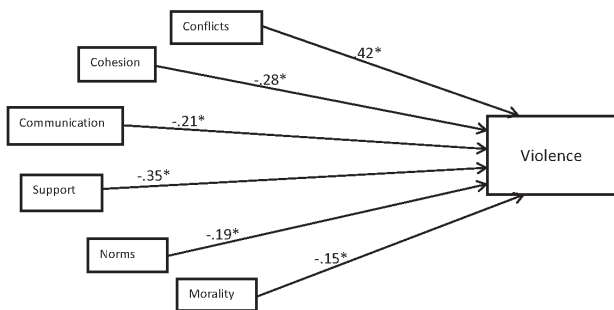

Figure 3. Trajectory Analysis of school violence for male students (only significant trajectories are presented).

* Standard coefficients of significant trajectories at level 5.

Finally, the impact of the predictors of support, norms, communication, morality, conflicts, cohesion, adaptability and organization on the victimization experience of male adolescents was analyzed. Preliminary results revealed that the predictors of morality and adaptability were not related to the victimization experienced by men; therefore, these variables were not included in the trajectory model. Statistics of goodness of fit indicated the need for a better fit between the initial model and the sample data of men. Based on the results obtained, it was determined to remove from the model the trajectory of organization to victimization because it is not significant. The statistics of the goodness of fit of the final model indicated a very good fit between the model and the sample data of men, X2 (4, N = 160) = 10.40, p = .36, GFI = .96 and RMSEA = .04 (see Figure 4).
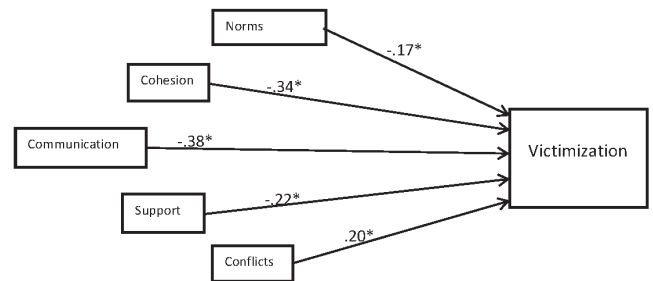

Caption: **Figure 4**. Trajectory Analysis of the victimization experience for male students (only significant trajectories are presented).

* Standard coefficients of significant trajectories at level 5.

Discussion

School violence is one of the worst experiences that a teenager can live and has become a matter of public health and great concern for Mexican society (Mercado, 2018). This research gives the scientific literature a different perspective of understanding the phenomenon of school violence. None of the studies that have been carried out in Mexico and very few internationally (e.g., Eksi, 2012; Kim, Yang, Barthelemy, & Lofaso, 2018; Roland & Galloway, 2002) had addressed the study of this type of violence using a trajectory analysis with the objective of measuring the effect that various variables inherent in the family environment have on the experience of victimization and school violence. Therefore, this is one of the most relevant contributions of this research.

As the results show, the family context can lead to risk or protection factors for adolescents. The family is not itself the generator of aggressors or victims of school violence and in most cases it is not primarily responsible for the prevalence of this type of violence. Although it is true that the scientific literature has documented the presence of important risk factors which when combined with other conditions are triggers of school violence, the family is also determining for the development of protective factors. Due to them, adolescents have more and better resources that prevent them

from inhibiting the presence of aggressive behavior. In this context, our purpose was to identify the factors that can have a positive and negative impact on the development of violent behavior within the school environment.

Since the first studies on school violence, the relationship between sociodemographic factors and school violence has been analyzed. Age can become a very important factor in the phenomenon of school violence. There is no consensus in the scientific literature regarding the impact that age has on the incidence of school violence. Some investigations such as that of Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Rouen, Simons-Morton and Scheidt (2001) have documented that the acts of violence perpetrated, as well as the victimization of students occur mostly in younger teenagers (between 11 and 14 years) compared to older teenagers (between 15 and 19 years old). On the contrary, other studies that have compared adolescents of different ages have found that school violence occurs mainly among older students (Bjorkvist, Lagerspetz, & Kaukiainen, 1992; Pepler et al., 2006). The results of the present study confirmed this second aspect by finding that there is a significant difference in terms of acts of violence being the fifth semester students who reported the highest levels.

In addition to age, adolescent sex is one of the variables that has been included most in investigations of this type of violence. After having statistically compared the participants 'responses regarding school grade and sex, a greater number of differences were found in the variables related to the participants' sex. Based on this and looking for the greatest scientific contribution, the construction of two models for men and two models for women was determined.

Due to the heterogeneity of the studies, it has not been possible to establish whether it is men or women who commit more acts of violence. Based on previous studies (e.g., Card, Stucky, Sawalani, & Little, 2008; Garandeau & Cillessen, 2006; Liang, Flisher, & Lombard, 2007), it was hypothesized that boys would commit more acts of violence in school compared with the women. Consistent with the findings found in these investigations, the results obtained in this study show that in the case of acts of violence and the experience of victimization, men reported higher scores than women.

Once we confirmed the presence of significant differences in the levels of violence and victimization between men and women, four models were designed with the objective of specifying the impact that each of the predictors had on the violence exerted and the experience of victimization for both groups. Specifically, the trajectory analysis of the first model showed that for women, the establishment of family norms as well as ethical and religious practices and values have the greatest impact on the acts of violence that are committed against the partners of school. Previously conducted studies had already identified a relationship between the lack of ethical-moral values and acts of school violence committed by children and adolescents (e.g., Arsenio & Lemerise, 2001; Hawley, 2007; Pornari & Wood, 2010).

In Mexico, religion, traditions and family norms have a great influence particularly on the belief system and behavior of women. This condition would partly explain the difference that occurred between men and women. Specifically, when comparing models that have school violence as a criterion variable, the most significant predictor for women was family norms followed by moral values. This was also evidenced in another study carried out with the objective of examining the indirect effects of parental styles on the prevalence of school violence among adolescents through disciplinary practices, the results showed that the parents of the adolescents employed more physical punishment in their disciplinary methods compared to men (Gómez-Ortiz, Romera, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2016).

The trajectory analysis corresponding to the second model showed that family support and communication were the predictors that had the greatest impact on victimization. This finding makes it possible to assume that the support provided by parents and other family members has a protective function for victims of school violence. The impact of this factor suggests that upon receiving adequate support from their family, adolescents who are attacked physically and verbally by their peers not only have more resources to avoid these attacks, but also to confront the aggressor.

Regarding the impact that the predictors had on the criterion variable in the third model, the results identified conflicts between family members and family support as the most influential factors in violence perpetrated by men. In the same previous research (eg, Baldry, 2003; Moretti, Obsuth, Odgers, & Reebye, 2006; Shields & Cicchetti, 2001; Voisin & Hong, 2012), the conflicts that are generated within the family have a positive relationship with the violence that occurs in schools. Based on the theory of social learning (Bandura, 1978), a possible explanation for this relationship is that adolescents who witness or suffer the consequences of conflicts between their parents, between parents and children, or between siblings, go gradually incorporating these aggressive behavior models. Children and adolescents who establish bad relationships with their parents generally have problems in developing their social skills, which in turn prevents them from establishing respectful, tolerant and harmonious interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, parental support continues to be a very important factor in the prevention of school violence. In the Mexican culture, the role of strength and autonomy that men must demonstrate inside and especially outside the home has been emphasized, which would suggest that adolescents require very little attention from their parents. However, the results showed that the support they receive from their parents is still very valuable for boys. This need to feel supported was also evidenced in a study that included the participation of Cypriot teenagers in which they expressed the importance of feeling supported, perceive that their needs are met and establish with their parents an adequate level of communication (Charalampous, 2018).

The last objective of this research was to explore the influence of family predictors on the experience of victimization that occurs among males. The trajectory analysis showed that family cohesion and communication are the factors that had the greatest impact on victimization. Previous studies had documented the effects that lack of cohesion

among family members has on school violence (e.g., Duncan 1999; Steven & Joyce, 2002). One possible explanation for this relationship is that by not having enough family cohesion, adolescents are more vulnerable to being harassed by their own partners.

In addition to this factor, communication plays a priority role in the containment or expansion of the victimization experience. Studies examining the effect that communication has on the presence of school violence have documented that lack of communication with children often prevents parents from knowing that their children are victims of school violence (Fekkes, Pijpers, & Verloove- Vanhorick, 2005). On the other hand, parents communicate to their children direct and indirect messages about their position regarding the use or not of school violence, which are internalized by them and set in their ways of thinking and acting, which they can reproduce, in their daily life (Farrell, Henry, Mays, & Schoenhy, 2011).

Derived from the results found, we propose a series of suggestions that parents can implement in living with their children. First, it is important that parents clearly establish family standards, promote moral values within the home and examine the degree of support they provide for their children. On the other hand, together with parental support, the results showed the importance of parent-child communication. It is necessary for parents to maintain a level of communication that allows them to learn about their children's school life, thereby influencing the possible involvement of their children in acts of school violence. Finally, parents should be aware of the negative effects that couple of conflicts have on the emotional stability of their children.

This research is a pioneer in having analyzed various family factors associated with school violence through a trajectory analysis. However, its limitations have to be considered. First, because there are no studies previously carried out in Mexico with the objective of determining through a trajectory analysis the impact of family factors on school violence, it is necessary to replicate in other samples the models that were analyzed in this research in order to confirm and expand the findings found. Another of the limitations of this study is the homogeneity of the sample, which was reflected mainly in regards to the socioeconomic level of the participants and the geographical area in which they live. The inclusion of more heterogeneous samples will help measure and compare the impact of family factors in other populations. A third limitation is related to the lack of mediating effects. One of the advantages of trajectory analysis is the possibility of measuring the mediating effect of the variables. Subsequent studies should include mediating variables with the objective of measuring the direct and indirect effects that family factors have on school violence.

Conclusion

From a poorly studied perspective, the present research contributes new findings to the scientific literature. Specifically, trajectory analyzes revealed that men committed

more acts of violence and reported more episodes of victimization than women report. In the same way, higher levels of school violence were found among older students. The two models that were built to assess the behavior of women showed that family norms together with the ethical-moral values that are promoted at home had the greatest impact on acts of violence. In turn, family support and communication were the most important predictors of victimization experience. Thus evidencing the importance of the family as a generator of protective factors against school violence. On the other hand, for male students, the conflicts that are generated within the family had the strongest relationship with school violence, as well as communication for the experience of victimization.

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