





# Influence of family and pedagogical communication on school violence

## Influencia de la comunicación familiar y pedagógica en la violencia escolar

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### ABSTRACT

School violence alludes to peer bullying and aggression in school. The field of communication has studied school violence by analyzing the influence of media and interpersonal relationships on aggressive behaviors. This article provides a perspective on school violence and concentrates on determining the influence of interpersonal communication with parents and teachers on adolescent aggressors and victims in school contexts. A non-experimental correlational-transverse design was used with a sample of 1,082 adolescents ( $M=15,61$ ;  $DT=0,90$ ). Three reliable scales were implemented to assess adolescent aggression and parental and pedagogical communication. Findings indicate that aggressions among adolescents at school and the interpersonal communication with parents and teachers present differences associated with gender ( $p=0,00$ ). At the family level, it was found that offensive communication among parents and children ( $\beta=0,225$ ;  $p=0,00$ ) predicts an increment on school victimization. At the pedagogical level, it revealed that teacher communication intended to discipline students ( $\beta=-0,297$ ;  $p=0,00$ ) and make them see the importance of school and learning ( $\beta=-0,120$ ;  $p=0,04$ ) predicts a decrease in aggressive behavior among adolescents and school victimization. These new findings in education evidence the need to strengthen students' interpersonal communication with their parents and teachers to obtain better results when implementing strategies to intervene and prevent school violence.

### RESUMEN

La violencia escolar hace alusión al acoso y agresión entre iguales en la escuela. A nivel comunicacional, se ha estudiado este problema analizando la incidencia de los medios y las relaciones interpersonales en las conductas agresivas. Este artículo aporta una perspectiva de la violencia escolar centrada en determinar la influencia de la comunicación familiar y pedagógica en adolescentes agresores y víctimas en la escuela. Se usó un diseño no experimental de tipo correlacional-transversal con una muestra de 1.082 adolescentes ( $M=15,61$ ;  $DT=0,90$ ). Se aplicaron tres escalas confiables que evaluaron las agresiones entre adolescentes y la comunicación parental y pedagógica. Los hallazgos indican que las agresiones entre adolescentes y la comunicación que estos tienen con sus padres y profesores presentaron diferencias asociadas al género ( $p=0,00$ ). La comunicación ofensiva entre padres e hijos ( $\beta=0,225$ ;  $p=0,00$ ) predijo el aumento de la victimización escolar. Pedagógicamente, se encontró que la comunicación del profesor orientada a generar disciplina en los alumnos ( $\beta=-0,297$ ;  $p=0,00$ ) y hacerles ver la importancia de estudiar y aprender ( $\beta=-0,120$ ;  $p=0,04$ ) predicen respectivamente, la disminución de los comportamientos agresivos entre adolescentes y la victimización. Estos hallazgos novedosos en materia pedagógica evidencian la necesidad de fortalecer la comunicación interpersonal de los estudiantes con sus padres y profesores para lograr resultados eficaces en la implementación de estrategias de prevención e intervención contra la violencia escolar.

### KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Violence, family communication, teacher-student communication, adolescent, school, teachers, family relationships, pedagogical practices.

Violencia, comunicación familiar, comunicación profesor-estudiante, adolescente, escuela, docentes, relaciones familiares, prácticas pedagógicas.

## 1. Introduction and state of the issue

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019) brought forth, at the 2019 World Education Forum, a report that reveals an increase in the cases of school violence worldwide, since one in three students have been threatened by peers, and a similar proportion have been subject to physical aggressions. School violence refers to any form of harassment or offense on a physical and psychological level among peers at school (Leganés-Lavall, 2013), and it is a troubling problem because it raises school dropout rates (Ruiz-Ramírez et al., 2018) and reduces the academic performance of students (Cerdeja et al., 2019).

Aggression and bullying behaviors among students can be generated on a face-to-face basis or online, through social media, and other types of internet-ready digital devices (cyberbullying). The reasons why school violence occurs are varied. Demographically speaking, for example, studies indicate that school violence has gender-related differences (Jain et al., 2018; Machimbarrena & Garaigordobil, 2018), whereby physical harassment is a common practice among boys, and psychological harassment is more frequent among girls (UNESCO, 2019).

Other studies have identified gender-related differences within the overlapping link between schools and cyberbullying (Baldry et al., 2017) and other related variables such as roles in cyberbullying, maternal communication, inductive discipline and psychological control (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2018). In general terms, family, media and school environments all influence school violence (Cid et al., 2008).

In the family context, empirical evidence reveals that family environment (Calvete et al., 2018; Labella & Masten, 2018; Xia et al., 2018), intrafamily conflicts (Ortega-Barón et al., 2016) and hostile communication between parents and children (Aguirre, 2018; Boniel-Nissim & Sasson, 2018; Castañeda et al., 2019; Romero-Abrio et al., 2019) all influence aggressive behaviors in adolescence.

In the field of media, Gentile et al. (2011) were able to demonstrate how children's exposure to violent content in the media predicted an increase in aggressive behaviors and a decrease in prosocial behaviors throughout the school year. Hence, Al-Ali et al. (2018) consider that it is important for parents to enhance their knowledge about media and broadcast content, so that they can play a protective role in their children's behavior.

Regarding the school environment, research indicates that school violence is related to school norms (Rey & Ortega, 2005) and students' social skills (Pérez, 2005). It has also been found that the school environment is associated with students' well-being (Varela et al., 2019), and the relationships they build in school (Jain et al., 2018; Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2018) help prevent school violence. In the case of cyberbullying, Ortega-Barón et al. (2016) detected that academic self-esteem is a predictor of victimization in adolescence.

Within the framework of intervention processes on school violence, experts have established the need for schools impacted by this issue to generate greater levels of confidence within the educational community to denounce peer victimization (Berger et al., 2017) and implement clinical care policies to support victims (Price et al., 2019). Accordingly, there are successful experiences such as the "Asegúrate" (Be Safe) program that focuses on strengthening the work of faculty against cyberbullying by intervening in strategic areas such as the modes of communication amongst students on social media, the communication network's coexistence rules, and the criteria towards setting up safe friendships (Del-Rey-Alamillo et al., 2018).

Other experiences suggest that school violence decreases when tolerance principles are promoted and coexistence is improved through the reinforcement of communication and interaction amongst students (De-los-Pinos & González, 2012). In any case, communication has proven to be an effective resource to develop alternatives to violence as long as it allows students to learn to resolve conflicts peacefully and to adequately express their tensions or discrepancies (Jalón, 2005).

Therefore, strengthening interpersonal communication between students is an essential strategy to prevent school violence. This is confirmed by Estévez et al. (2007) when they revealed that adolescents with lower levels of violent behavior at school are characterized by having positive communication with their parents and more favorable attitudes towards institutional authorities such as school administrators and faculty. Valdez-Cuervo et al. (2018), in turn, have indicated that teaching practices are related to peer violence at school due to their effect on the school environment and empathy. In other words,

teachers and the school, in general, play an important role in the prevention of school violence. Research by Dumas and Midgett (2018) precisely shows, at a pedagogical level, that a positive school environment fostered by faculty contributes to reducing victimization and harassment. It is known that the level of justice imparted by the faculty and their interaction with their students influence the relationship between unfairly treated victims' sensitivity and the altruistic behavior of students (Jiang et al., 2019). However, despite this high flow of literature, empirical evidence on the communicational role of teachers in the face of school violence is still scarce. In addition, studies on how communication between teachers and students (pedagogical communication) and between parents and children (family communication) can jointly influence over aggressive behaviors at school are in short supply. This article offers novel empirical evidence through two objectives that contribute to the analysis of school violence from a communicational perspective: 1) Identify whether school violence among adolescents and the interpersonal communication they have established with their parents and teachers show differences related to gender; 2) Determine the influence of family and pedagogical communication on aggressive adolescents and victims of school violence.

## 2. Methodology

The research carried out was exploratory and correlational; following a non-experimental, analytical and cross-sectional design.

### 2.1. Participants

The subject population of this study were adolescents at the secondary and middle school education levels in Colombia, which comes to approximately 4,709,538 students, according to Colombia's Ministry of National Education. A sample was selected by quotas of 1,082 adolescents ( $Z=1,96$ ;  $VM=0,25$ ) between 14 and 18 years of age ( $M=15,61$ ;  $SD=0,90$ ). These adolescents attended schools identified, per the work of Jiménez and Jiménez (2018), as institutions impacted by frequent cases of school violence.

Gender was the quota established to split the sample equally (50% men and 50% women), since, according to UNESCO (2019), this variable is associated with school violence. The selection of participants was made intentionally on a conglomerate basis, thus seeking representativeness in terms of both gender and age as well as levels of schooling. The sample size reflected the interest in reducing the error margin from 5% to 3%, due to the type of sampling carried out and the sociodemographic characteristics of this population.

### 2.2. Instruments

The information was gathered through a questionnaire comprised by three reliable scales: The School Violence Intensity Scale (VES) by Jiménez and Jiménez (2018), the Parent-Adolescent Communication Scale (PACS) by Barnes and Olson (1982) and the Student-Teacher Communication Scale (ECD) by Gauna (2004). The VES scale identifies, within a range of 1 (never) to 5 (very often), physical and verbal aggressions (for example, shoves, blows, mocking comments and insults) suffered by and generated against others in school. These attacks among adolescents explain, at a rate of 66%, the total variance of school violence. The overall internal consistency of this scale displayed an acceptable Cronbach's alpha of 0.75.

The PACS scale evaluates, within a range of 1 (never) to 5 (always), communication between parents and children. In this study, a version comprised of seven items was used, three of which evaluate offensive family communication (for example, «My parents tell me things that hurt me»), and the remaining four items evaluate open family communication (for example, «I can talk to my parents about what I think without feeling bad or uncomfortable»). The internal consistency of this scale was 0.71 for the offensive family communication factor, and 0.85 for the open family communication factor. Both factors explain parental communication by 61%.

The ECD scale has seven items that assess, within a range of 1 (totally disagree) to 4 (totally agree), the teacher's communication in the classroom (for example, «The teacher's communication with the students is based on the highlighting of achievements, not mistakes»).

The overall internal consistency of this scale was 0.78. The items explain, by 61%, the total variance of the verbal pedagogical communication perceived by adolescents. These scales were chosen based

on their reliability, and the original evaluation form was maintained. In the case of the VES Scale, its greatest advantage is that it has been adapted to the population under study (Jiménez & Jiménez, 2018). The PACS Scale, compared to others, was created for the adolescent population and has been used in studies on school violence showing good statistical behavior (Estévez et al., 2007; Castañeda et al., 2019; Romero-Abrio et al., 2019). The ECD Scale focuses on the teacher's pedagogical communication in the classroom, thus differentiating itself from other questionnaires that traditionally focus on the teacher-student interpersonal relationship (Zapata et al., 2010; Jiang et al., 2019), which has been widely studied.

### 2.3. Procedure

The information was collected with the informed consent of the parents and directors of each school. Adolescents were trained on how to fill out the questionnaire, and, in that process, all their concerns were tackled. The questionnaire was administered face-to-face. The data obtained were processed with the SPSS v23 statistical software.

### 2.4. Data analysis

To achieve the first objective of this investigation, the Student T test and the Mann-Whitney U test were applied in order to determine gender differences in school violence among adolescents, as well as in the communication they maintain with their parents and teachers. The levels of the aggressions suffered and generated by the adolescents in school were previously averaged, and the scores from the indicators of family and pedagogical communication were added. Similarly, three levels of communication (low, moderate and high) were set based on the minimum (MIN), and maximum (MAX) dispersion values as well as the thirty (P30) and seventy (P70) percentiles.

The second objective that determines the influence of family and pedagogical communication on offending adolescents and victims was achieved by applying Spearman's correlation test between the communication factors and the aggressions evaluated. A multiple regression analysis comprised of the variables that showed a significant correlation was implemented. The statistical procedure carried out matches the causality criteria set by Hill (2015), who claims that statistical association is the first requirement towards establishing causality. After applying collinearity tests, seven predictors were included. This number is appropriate for the sample size and for estimating medium-sized effects (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001).

## 3. Results

The findings achieved from the two objectives outlined in this study are laid out in this section.

### 3.1. Gender-related differences between school violence and family and pedagogical communication

This study found that 70% of adolescents had suffered physical and verbal aggressions at school and admitted to having assaulted their classmates at least once. The remaining 30% claimed to have never been the victim of physical or verbal attacks or having assaulted other peers at school.

Communication level	Open communication with parents	Offensive communication with parents	Verbal communication with teachers
Low	37%	38.3%	29.9%
Moderate	37.7%	34.3%	44.1%
High	25.2%	27.4%	26.1%
Reference Value (Scoring)	MIN=4; P30=12; P70=15; MAX=26	MIN=3; P30=5; P70=8; MAX=16	MIN=10; P30=20; P70=24; MAX=36

Upon implementation of the Student T test, significant differences were found between school violence and the adolescents' gender. Men were, on average, more frequent victims of physical and verbal aggressions in school ( $M=1,89$ ;  $SD=0,74$ ;  $p=0,00$ ; Cohen's  $d=0,28$ ) compared to women ( $M=1,69$ ;  $SD=0,67$ ). Likewise, men reported being more aggressive on average ( $M=2,35$ ;  $SD=0,92$ ;  $p=0,00$ ;

Cohen's  $d = 0,24$ ) than women ( $M = 1,93$ ;  $DE = 0,87$ ). Within the context of communication, the data in Table 1 indicate that the communication of parents and teachers with adolescents happens most frequently between low and moderate levels. The Mann Whitney U test identified significant differences between the gender of adolescents and the levels of family and pedagogical communication. In this case, the finding was that women scored significantly lower (64.1%) than men (35.1%) at the level of verbal communication with their teachers ( $p = 0,00$ ;  $r\text{-Rosenthal} = -0,08$ ).

In terms of offensive communication between parents and children ( $p = 0,00$ ;  $r\text{-Rosenthal} = -0,07$ ), women scored higher (57.6%) than men (42.4%). Regarding open family communication, although there were no significant gender-related differences ( $p = 0,09$ ;  $r\text{-Rosenthal} = -0,05$ ), adolescent women scored lower (47.6%) than men (52.4%).

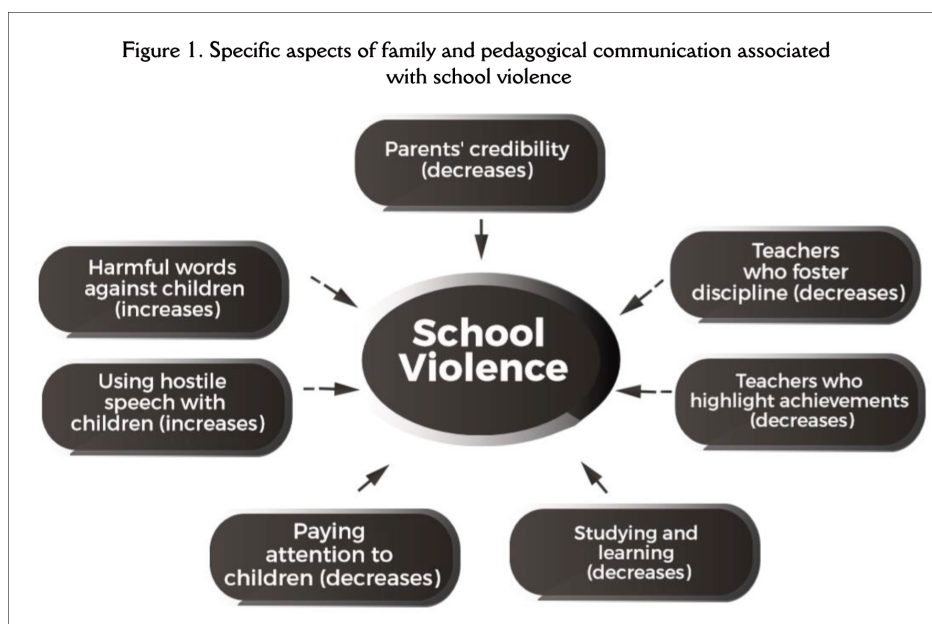
### 3.2. Influence of family and pedagogical communication on offending teenagers and victims

In the «Open Family Communication» factor, the credibility of parents correlated significantly ( $p = 0,00$ ) and negatively with the aggressions generated by adolescents against others in school. Within this same factor, it was found that parents' willingness to pay attention to their children correlated significantly ( $p = 0,00$ ) and negatively with the aggressions suffered (school victimization).

In the «Offensive Family Communication» factor, it was established that the act of speaking aggressively to children ( $p = 0,04$ ) and telling them harmful things ( $p = 0,00$ ) correlated significantly and positively with victimization.

In the educational setting, within the «Pedagogical Communication» factor, it was found that the use of communication by teachers in order to instill discipline in students within the classroom ( $p = 0,00$ ) correlated significantly and negatively with the aggressions caused. The use of communication by teachers to bring out students' achievements and not their mistakes ( $p = 0,04$ ) and to make them realize the importance of studying and learning ( $p = 0,04$ ) correlated significantly and negatively with victimization.

The following image (Figure 1) shows the indicators for the variables under study that correlated significantly with school violence.



A regression analysis applied to the above variables, which held a significant correlation, significantly allowed us to identify the predictors of family and pedagogical communication that influence school violence among adolescents.

**Table 2. Predictors of family and pedagogical communication associated with school violence**

Predictors evaluated	Aggressions generated (violent behavior)	Aggressions suffered (victimization)
I believe in whatever my parents tell me	$\beta=-0.08$	$\beta=-0.01$
My parents pay attention to me	$\beta=-0.04$	$\beta=-0.03$
My parents tell me harmful things	$\beta=0.00$	$\beta=0.22^{**}$
My parents speak to me in a hostile manner	$\beta=0.04$	$\beta=0.16^*$
Teacher communication with students in the classroom instills good discipline	$\beta=-0.29^{***}$	$\beta=-0.01$
Teachers' communication in the classroom is characterized by bringing out students' achievements and not their mistakes	$\beta=-0.08$	$\beta=-0.04$
Teachers' communication in the classroom highlights the importance of studying and learning	$\beta=0.02$	$\beta=-0.12^*$
Level of significance (Anova)	$p=0.00$	$p=0.00$
R <sup>2</sup> adjusted (variance explained)	8.5%	11.6%

Note. Standardized Coefficients ( $\beta$ =Beta): \*p-value < 0.05; \*\*p-value < 0.01; \*\*\*p-value < 0.001.

The values in Table 2 point out that family and pedagogical communication influences school violence among adolescents, predicting 8.5% of violent behavior and 11.6% of victimization. Specifically, it was determined that offensive communication between parents and children, characterized by saying harmful things ( $\beta=0.22^{**}$ ) and hostile speech ( $\beta=0.16^*$ ), significantly forecasts an increased victimization.

The regression analysis revealed, by the same token, that teachers' pedagogical communication focused on making adolescents perceive the importance of studying and learning ( $\beta=-0.12^*$ ) significantly predicts a decrease in victimizations. Communication between teachers and students aimed at instilling good discipline ( $\beta=-0.29^{***}$ ) was the only significant predictor that showed a reduction in violent school behavior.

#### 4. Discussion

The main objective of our study was to determine the influence of family and pedagogical communication on offending adolescents and victims of school violence. A discussion is hereinafter laid out between this study's own findings and those of other studies in order to point out similarities, contributions and empirical limitations.

In general terms, it was found that the communication of parents and teachers with adolescent students' ranges from low to moderate levels. That is, family and pedagogical communication is deficient within this context, which is affected by issues of school violence. For this reason, parents and affected schools need to improve interpersonal communication with students. The above is even more truthful when studies reveal that emotional ties between students and adults in school (Jain et al., 2018), communication aimed at teaching students how to peacefully resolve their conflicts (Jalón, 2005) and the involvement of families in the prevention of school violence (Valdez-Cuervo et al., 2018) effectively contribute to the reduction of peer aggressions.

On the other hand, we have identified that aggressions amongst adolescents in school and the communication they maintain with their parents and teachers displayed significant differences in terms of gender. In such a case, men were more likely than women to be offenders and victims. On the other hand, at the communication level, women were more likely than men to receive insults from their parents and to exert a lower level of communication with their teachers.

Our findings related to gender match those of various studies that reveal how school violence is exercised differently amongst men and women (Machimbarrena & Garaigordobil, 2018; Jain et al., 2018; UNESCO, 2019); such findings also show that gender differences permeate the field of family and pedagogical communication. Such aspects are present in Linares et al. (2019), who point to the manner in which family and cultural issues associated with sexism and gender inequalities coexist behind cyberbullying among adolescents. In this context, education in terms of equality is relevant as an essential value towards preventing gender violence (Gallardo & Gallardo, 2019), especially because gender is associated with the

roles played in harassment on both face-to-face and virtual interactions (Baldry et al., 2017) and intervenes in the relationship between adolescents' perception of parental practices and participation in cyberbullying (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2018).

In reference to the main objective, we have found a relationship between school violence and communication between parents and children. Significant correlations indicate that when family communication is open, victimization decreases, as well as the likelihood of adolescents adopting aggressive behaviors; however, when communication is offensive, the probability of victimization rises.

The regression analysis showed that offensive family communication is a predictor of victimization. This result is consistent with the study by Romero-Abrio et al. (2019) that associates victimization in adolescence with problematic family communication. Accordingly, this coincides with the works of Aguirre (2018) and Castañeda et al. (2019) that point out how open communication with both the father and mother correlates negatively with school victimization; while offensive parental communication correlates positively with victimization.

Research by Xia et al. (2018) enables a better understanding of our findings by showing that adolescents who were subject to domestic violence were more likely to accept violent norms and be exposed to peer aggressions, which increased the likelihood of aggression and victimization in their life. In this respect, Labella and Masten (2018) claim that the family is an adaptation system that affects violent behaviors in children or can prevent them if it provides warmth and healthy behaviors.

On the other hand, novel data were found to indicate that communication between teachers and students with a focus on generating discipline in the classroom is a predictor of reduced aggressive behavior in school. Discipline refers to the set of procedures, rules and norms that teachers implement to maintain order in the school (Valdés-Cuervo et al., 2010).

Various studies warn that, when discipline collapses, conflicts between students increase (Mayora et al., 2012) as well as antisocial behaviors at school (Pérez, 2005). Our findings reaffirm the essential role of discipline in counteracting school violence. In this particular regard, there are correlated studies that highlight coexistence rules (Del-Rey-Alamillo et al., 2018) and teachers' assistance as variables that reduce cyberbullying in adolescents (Ortega-Barón et al., 2016).

The work by Valdez-Cuervo et al. (2018) underscores the relevance of non-permissive teaching practices and the participation of teachers in strategies such as direct interventions and meetings with offenders as effective resources to curtail school violence.

Another novel pedagogical finding was that teachers' communication focused on bringing out students' achievements correlated significantly with a reduction in victimization. This is due to the fact that this type of communication contributes to improve academic self-esteem, which, in turn, reduces victimization (Ortega-Barón et al., 2016). Therefore, children with low self-esteem are more prone to become victims of harassment (Van-Geel et al., 2018).

Lastly, we established the fact that teacher communication in the classroom is a predictor that reduces school victimization as long as it leads students to realize the importance of studying and learning. This finding stresses the relevance of pedagogical communication to avoid school violence when it generates significant learning that makes students aware of the importance of education. This is related to what was claimed by Boggino (2005), who, addressing the prevention of school violence, proposed organizing teacher training to favor meaningful student learning by addressing specific and contextualized issues, active participation and the generation of concepts, values and social norms.

It is relevant to note that, although the influence of family and pedagogical communication on school violence was low (between 8.5 and 11.6 percent of the total variance), it is similar to that of other related studies confirming the multicausal nature of this phenomenon. From the above, the following stand out: the work of Boniel-Nissim and Sasson (2018) that shows how family communication predicts victimization at 4% of the total variance as well as that of Ortega et al. (2016), which points out the manner in which family cohesion, academic self-esteem, family conflict, assertiveness and teacher support predict cyberbullying victimization between 6.2% and 9.7%.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Our study contributes to the analysis of school violence from a communicational standpoint. The findings obtained allow us to conclude, firstly, that gender makes a difference in the way in which school violence is exercised among adolescents and in the type of communication students hold with their parents and teachers. We suggest, on the basis of the present study, new studies that explore the role of pedagogical communication against gender violence in schools. It is known that teachers' antibullying behavior is associated with low levels of victimization (Doumas & Midgett, 2018). In turn, school confidence increases when students notice that their teachers take corrective measures against gender violence on the basis of sexual orientation and abstain from making alienating comments (Berger et al., 2017).

Secondly, we conclude that family and pedagogical communication influences the victimization and aggressive behavior of adolescents in school. Empirical evidence leads us to infer that offensive family communication is a risk factor for school violence, whereas open communication by parents and teachers with teenagers actually serves as a protective factor to reduce or avoid such violence. This issue is related to the theories of Estévez et al. (2007), who assure that there is an association between parental communication and school violence, and between teachers' expectations and students' attitude towards institutional authority, which is strongly linked to violent behavior.

All aspects indicated in this study reveal the need to strengthen communication and the family-school relationship to accomplish better results in the implementation of prevention and intervention strategies for school violence, as confirmed by some successful intervention programs in this field (De-los-Pinos & González, 2012; Del-Rey-Alamillo et al., 2018).

Based on our findings and the research by Gentile et al. (2011), which indicates how mass media influence school violence, we suggest new studies to determine if open family communication intervenes as a protective factor in the relationship between children's exposure to violent media content and aggressive behaviors.

We propose, at the educational level, that a study is carried out to assess whether pedagogical communication is more effective as an intervention in school violence when mediated by the relationships between teachers and students, as well as by the justice dispensed by the teacher against acts of indiscipline. This proposal is based on the study of Jiang et al. (2019) that reveals how justice from teachers strengthens the bond with their students and influences the relationship between victim sensitivity and altruism.

We highlight, as a limitation of this study, the fact that only urban adolescents participated in the sample. For this reason, other studies that analyze school violence in rural institutions are required, since, in the Colombian case, the impact of the internal armed conflict has been different for those two contexts (Ospina-Ramírez et al., 2018). However, this article is one of the first empirical developments towards assessing, on a joint basis, the role of pedagogical and family communication against school violence.

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