

## Bullying and Psychological Dating Violence: The Relation Between two Aggressive Peer-Behaviours

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### Abstract

**Background:** Previous research has suggested that bullying could be related to teen dating violence; there may be a psycho-developmental transition between bullying and other forms of violence during adolescence as an evolution of the aggressive pattern. This study attempts to identify the role of bullying as a risk factor for psychological violence in adolescents' dating relationships, and the relationship between these two aggressive behaviours. **Method:** The participants were 3,144 adolescents from Valencia (50.6% girls), enrolled in Primary Education (50.4%) and Secondary Education (49.6%). **Results:** The results showed rates of involvement in bullying as high as 46.2%, while the rates of psychological dating aggression were 31.4%. The multinomial logistic regression analysis identified aggression in bullying as a predictive variable for psychological aggression during dating, while the predictors of victimization were also linked to those for victimization in bullying. After analysing the interactions, the results showed that particularly in boys, previous experience of indirect perpetration of bullying is a risk variable of later psychological dating aggression, and that this kind of experience in Primary School is a significant predictor variable for both aggression and victimization in dating. **Conclusions:** The results are discussed in terms of the psycho-developmental pattern of these aggressive behaviours.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, bullying, victimization, violence, romantic relationships.

### Resumen

**Bullying y Violencia Psicológica en el Cortejo: Relación Entre dos Comportamientos Agresivos Entre Iguales. Antecedentes:** trabajos previos apuntan a una posible relación, como transición psico-evolutiva, entre el bullying y otras formas de violencia durante la adolescencia, en términos de evolución en la manifestación del mismo patrón de comportamiento agresivo. Este estudio trata de identificar el rol del bullying como factor de riesgo para la violencia psicológica en las relaciones sentimentales adolescentes y la relación que se da entre ambos comportamientos agresivos. **Método:** 3.144 jóvenes valencianos (50,6% chicas) de Educación Primaria (50,4%) y Secundaria Obligatoria (49,6%) participaron en el estudio. **Resultados:** las tasas de implicación en bullying alcanzaban el 46,2% y las de violencia psicológica en el cortejo el 31,4%. Análisis de regresiones logísticas multinomiales identificaron como variable predictora de la perpetración psicológica en el cortejo la agresión previa en bullying, mientras que las predictoras de la victimización fueron las relacionadas con la victimización en bullying. El análisis de las interacciones muestra que la experiencia previa en perpetración indirecta de los chicos es una variable predictora de la perpetración psicológica, así como la experiencia en Primaria es una variable predictora significativa para ambas formas de implicación. **Conclusiones:** estos resultados son discutidos en términos del carácter psicoevolutivo del comportamiento agresivo durante la adolescencia.

**Palabras clave:** jóvenes, perpetración, victimización, violencia, relaciones sentimentales.

Adolescence is a stage which involves changes on many levels (Bjorklund & Blasi, 2011; Hall, 1904). During these years, the peer group is of paramount importance and constitutes one of the main reference points in the process of constructing a social identity. Erotic-sentimental relationships play an important role in this process, although both boys and girls find them challenging: the skills required to handle interpersonal relationships between friends or colleagues have to be transferred to these new relational contexts, in which the search for support and intimacy can end

up in conflict, patterns of aggression which are already present in society to varying degrees and pre-learned risk dynamics which can now be exacerbated by the important developmental task of building intimate relationships (Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Viejo et al., 2018; Zych et al., 2019).

The violence which sometimes occurs at the beginning of the courtship process among adolescents and young people – known as *dating violence* – has been recognized as a well-defined phenomenon with prevalence data which, according to systematic reviews, varies considerably from 6-9% to 22-37% in boys and girls, respectively (Jennings et al., 2017). The phenomenon includes sporadic aggression of a relational, psychological, physical and/or sexual nature, which, in many cases, occurs bi-directionally and reciprocally (Nocentini et al., 2011; Rivas et al., 2014), and which can become part of the dynamics of the couple's relationship. The highest rates of involvement in psychological violence in

courtship occur among younger boys and girls (O’Leary & Step, 2003; Woodin & O’Leary, 2010), and it includes verbal, relational and/or emotional forms of abuse such as insults, threats, extortion, episodes of jealousy, among others (Fernández-Fuertes et al., 2006). Rates of aggression of around 93.5% in girls and 92.8% in boys have been recorded (Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2009), as well as victimization rates of 82% for girls and 76% for boys (Jackson et al., 2000). This psychological violence has been identified as a precursor of other forms of violence and as a trigger for an escalation in the severity of the violence (Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2014; Woodin & O’Leary, 2010).

Dating violence has been also identified as the evolution of other previous violent behaviours; particularly, as the evolution of previous involvement in violent episodes in other peers relationship contexts, such as bullying. *Bullying* has been defined as a violent, multi-causal phenomenon which can be expressed in diverse ways (Zych et al., 2015): it can either be direct, through acts of physical aggression such as hitting, pushing, etc. or verbal aggression such as threats, insults, taunts, etc.; or indirect/relational, through social exclusion and/or rejection, by spreading false gossip, cold-shouldering, manipulating the victim’s friendships, and so on. Both forms of violence, direct and indirect, are very closely correlated with each other and are occasionally exerted simultaneously; direct bullying is more commonly carried out by boys than girls, with involvement rates of around 36.3% for boys and 21.3% for girls, whereas studies into indirect bullying have found no differences by gender, with extremely high involvement rates of around 71% (Avilés-Dorantes et al., 2012; Iossi et al., 2013).

Both, dating and bullying, are antisocial behaviours prevalent in adolescence, and both emerge in the evolving peer group (Conolly et al., 2000; Ureña et al., 2015; Zych et al., 2019). The relationships between peers make progress during pre-adolescence and adolescence becoming more and more complex (Dunphy, 1963). These relationships cover support, intimacy, and closeness necessities and evolve from friendship to close-friends and dating relationships (Kochendorfer & Kern, 2020). The effectiveness in the social development linked to these relationships require the improvement of social competencies such as negotiation, empathy, and communication skills. Bullying and the violent behaviour which takes place in adolescent courtship have been interpreted as two different ways of exhibiting patterns of violent behaviour in the development of peer group (Conolly et al., 2000; Foshee et al., 2013; Zych et al., 2019) but could be overlapping at the beginning of dating. Recent meta-analysis has found robust evidence of continuity between friendship qualities and romantic relationship qualities (Kochendorfer & Kern, 2020). According to the explanatory models, the pattern of aggressive behaviour is internalized and, after being used as an effective form of interaction in interpersonal relationships, is transferred to other contexts of social relationships; that is, the use of patterns of aggressive behaviour among peers leads to increased status and social recognition for those who employ them, and are therefore internalized as a valid form of relationship and used in other types of relationships (Ellis & Wolfe, 2015).

Foshee et al. (2013) showed how involvement in aggressive behaviour in direct bullying was closely related to later physical violence in romantic relationships. Variables such as lack of empathy, craving for power and control, as well as deficient anger management have been identified as triggers for later implication in violent acts (Haynie et al., 2001). In particular, males who

show antisocial or violent behaviour with their peers have been shown to have problems with social adjustment and starting intimate romantic relationships as adults (Benítez & Justicia, 2006; Connolly et al., 2000); with girls, previous history of this type of aggressive behaviour seems to predict lower quality indicators in communication with their partner as adults (Cava et al., 2015).

Recent studies stress that there is a direct relationship not only between perpetration of bullying and violence in dating, but also between victimization in both phenomena, and that this relationship is more prevalent among girls (Zych et al., 2019). Similarly, there seems to be a link between perpetration in bullying and victimization in dating violence, albeit more tenuous. This link could be influenced by the very consequences of the bullying phenomenon, since the girls and boys involved in victimization are identified as people with higher rates of internalizing behaviour, negative emotionality and specific personality traits which make them vulnerable to other people, which may be an obstacle to starting new relationships and making the first move (Kochendorfer, 2004). Along the same lines, a number of studies have emphasized that the kind of violence displayed by an aggressor is related to the kind of violence this subject has been previously exposed to (Sears et al., 2007). Therefore, exposure to indirect violence could lead to a higher probability that this type of violence will occur in other contexts (Krug et al., 2003; Woodin & O’Leary, 2010). This study aims to advance along these lines of research by addressing two main objectives: 1) analysing the violent behaviour of boys and girls in early adolescence towards their peers and in their first romantic relationships; and 2) identifying the relationship between bullying and dating, considering bullying as a risk factor for young people’s involvement in psychological violence in their first romantic relationships.

## Method

### Participants

3,144 students aged between 10 and 14 years old (mean age = 11.66 years; D.T = 1.28) from Valencia (Spain) participated in this study; an incidental sampling was carried out (Moreno et al., 2000), weighing the sex (49.4% boys; 50.6% girls) and the school level to which the subjects belonged. They were enrolled in 5th and 6th grade of Primary Education (50.4%) as well as in 1st and 2nd year of Obligatory Secondary Education (49.6%) in 34 schools. Of the boys and girls who took part, 3.1% stated that they had a boyfriend/girlfriend, 4.9% that they were just starting a relationship, 3.3% were dating someone although ‘things were not serious’, 26% stated they were not dating anybody at the time but there was a boy/girl that he/she liked or who he/she was trying to approach, 24.3% had no partner at present but had had one previously and 38.4% had never dated anyone before (see Table 1).

### Instruments

Socio-demographic data were collected from the participants using open questions (gender, age, school they studied at, school year and some characteristics of their family environment). Two questionnaires were also used to measure bullying and dating violence experiences:

- To measure the bullying, the *Florence Bullying Scales* questionnaire (Palladino et al., 2012) was used, consisting

Table 1  
Romantic situation: gender and educational level differences

	Gender		Educational level		Total
	Boys	Girls	Primary S.	Secondary S.	
I am flirting with someone, we are just starting a relationship	2.7% (85)	2.2% (70)	2.1% (65)	2.9% (90)	4.9% (155)
I am dating someone although "things are not serious"	1.9% (61)	1.4% (43)	1.5% (48)	1.8% (56)	3.3% (104)
I have a couple: he/she is my boy/girlfriend	1.6% (49)	1.6% (49)	0.8%* (25)	2.3%* (73)	3.1% (98)
I am not dating anybody now but there is a boy/girl that I like or who I am trying to approach	13.6%* (428)	12.4%* (389)	12.2%* (381)	13.9%* (436)	26% (817)
I have not a couple now, but I had in the past	12.7% (399)	11.6% (364)	10.3%* (324)	14%* (439)	24.3% (763)
I never have had a couple	16.9%* (532)	21.5%* (675)	23.5%* (741)	14.8%* (466)	38.4% (1207)

*N=3144; missing =0%*  
\* Significant differences

of three bidirectional scales measuring indirect ( $\alpha = .62$ ), direct verbal ( $\alpha = .72$ ) and direct physical perpetration ( $\alpha = .73$ ); it also measures indirect ( $\alpha = .74$ ), direct verbal ( $\alpha = .70$ ) and direct physical victimization ( $\alpha = .76$ ). Each factor, perpetration and victimization, contained 14 items asking how often in the past couple of months respondents have experienced the behavior. Each item was evaluated on a 5-point scale from "never" to "several times a week".

- To measure the dating violence, an adapted version of the *Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory* questionnaire was used (Fernández-Fuertes et al., 2006; Benítez & Bandera, 2014), made up of 9 bidirectional items measured on a 5-point Likert scale, which measures how often adolescents are involved in violent behaviour on a psychological level, both in perpetration ( $\alpha = .85$ ) and in victimization ( $\alpha = .87$ ).

*Procedure*

The study and set of questionnaires were approved by the ethics committee of the Valencia Regional Education and Research Secretariat. The schools selected from the sample were then contacted to ask for permission for us to visit the school and inform them about the study. The Declaration of Helsinki guidelines were followed, and the participants were informed that the data would be anonymous, that participation was voluntary, and that the data would be treated confidentially. Informed consent was duly obtained from all.

*Data analysis*

According with the authors, the *Florence Bullying Scales* questionnaire (Palladino et al., 2012), originally measured on a 5-point scale, was redesigned with 3 response options: not involved (original answer: 1 = never), involved occasionally (2 = once or twice) and involved frequently (3 = once or twice a month, 4 = once a week, 5 = several times a week). In the same way, as recommended by previous studies, the *Conflict in Adolescent Dating Relationships Inventory* questionnaire (Fernández-Fuertes et al., 2006; Benítez & Bandera, 2014) was rewritten with a 3-point scale: not involved (original answer: 1 = never), involved occasionally (2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes) and involved frequently (4 = many times and 5 = always). The level of peer and couple aggression and victimization were obtained from the mean of the

scores of the items that were part of each dimension; then these mean scores were reformulated to the 3-point scale.

Based on this scale of involvement in violence, we carried out frequency analyses to enable us to measure the involvement in bullying and dating violence, and Chi-square tests to measure the incidence of age and gender; adjusted standardized residuals were taken as a reference (values greater than 1.96 for a 95% of confidence and 2.54 for a 99% of confidence). In all cases, the size of the effect was tested for the contrasts of proportions (Phi and Cramer's V), which established the effect caused by the statistical tests on the sample in the study. The following reference values were taken: 0 - 0.10: no effect; 0.10 - 0.30: little effect; 0.30 - 0.50: medium effect; and 0.50 - 1.00: great effect (Cohen, 1992).

For the probabilistic analyses, two multinomial logistic regressions were carried out, with the dependent variables being the two forms of involvement in psychological violence in courtship: perpetration and victimization. The forms of involvement in direct and indirect bullying acted as independent variables in the first model, while in the second model, gender and educational level were added as control variables (as used in the previous analyses).

The analyses were performed using statistical software SPSS v.22.

Results

*Involvement of adolescents in violent behaviour with their peers and with their dating partners*

The first objective of this work was to analyse the violent behaviour shown by boys and girls in the early stages of adolescence to their peers and in their first romantic relationships. To achieve this, analyses of frequency and contrasts of proportion ( $\chi^2$ ) were performed on the adolescent's gender and educational level.

The results indicated an involvement in perpetration of direct bullying of 7.3%, while the figure for indirect bullying was 10%; the total rates for direct victimization were 10.2% and 18.7% for indirect victimization. As regards the frequency of the behaviour, the data showed that involvement was mainly occasional, with percentages ranging from 6.3% for indirect perpetration to 11.3% for indirect victimization; similarly, frequent involvement never exceeded in any case 7.4%, which was for indirect victimization. As for the form of involvement, the results showed that perpetration was mostly indirect (7.3% direct vs. 10% indirect), as was victimization (10.2% vs.18.7%).

*Table 2*  
Frequency of participation in bullying: total percentages (N), according to gender and educational level

		Gender		Educational level		Total
		Boys	Girls	Primary S.	Secondary S.	
Direct bullying perpetration	Not involved	88.5%* (1376)	96.6%* (1536)	93.1% (1474)	92.2% (1438)	92.6% (2912)
	Occasionally involved	9.7%* (150)	3.1%* (49)	5.9% (94)	6.7% (105)	6.3% (199)
	Frequently involved	1.8%* (28)	0.3%* (5)	1% (16)	1.1% (17)	1% (33)
Indirect bullying perpetration	Not involved	88%* (1368)	91.8%* (1458)	91% (1442)	88.8% (1384)	89.9% (2826)
	Occasionally involved	9.1%* (141)	7%* (112)	7.2% (114)	8.9% (139)	8% (253)
	Frequently involved	2.9%* (45)	1.2%* (19)	1.8% (28)	2.3% (36)	2% (64)
Direct bullying victimization	Not involved	86.4%* (1342)	93.1%* (1481)	88.3%* (1399)	91.3%* (1424)	89.8% (2823)
	Occasionally involved	11.3%* (175)	5.7%* (91)	9.4%* (149)	7.5%* (117)	8.5% (266)
	Frequently involved	2.4%* (37)	1.1%* (18)	2.3%* (36)	1.2%* (19)	1.7% (55)
Indirect bullying victimization	Not involved	81.3% (1263)	81.4% (1294)	79.7% (1262)	83% (1295)	81.3% (2557)
	Occasionally involved	11.6% (181)	10.9% (174)	12.2% (193)	10.4% (162)	11.3% (355)
	Frequently involved	7.1% (110)	7.7% (122)	8.1% (129)	6.6% (103)	7.4% (232)

*N=3144; missing data= 0.1%*  
\* Significant differences

Table 2 shows these results, taking into account the effect of gender and age. As for gender, the Chi-square statistic shows statistically significant differences between girls and boys in the direct [ $\chi^2$  (2, n = 3144) = 75.68, p = .000; V = .155] and indirect perpetration of bullying [ $\chi^2$  (2, n = 3143) = 16.37, p = .000; V = .072], as well as in victimization of direct bullying [ $\chi^2$  (2, n = 3144) = 39.53, p = .000; V = .112], with boys involved more than girls in all cases. As regards the educational level, statistically significant differences were only found in direct victimization [ $\chi^2$  (2, n = 3144) = 9.14, p = .010; V = .054], indicating that there were more victims among Primary school children than in Secondary.

Next, we looked at the involvement of boys and girls in violent behaviour of a psychological nature while establishing and maintaining romantic relationships. To do this, a selection of the sample was taken which enabled us to work only on those participants who had admitted to having had a romantic experience of some kind (n = 1937, 61.6% of the total N).

The results show that the prevalence of perpetration of psychological dating violence was 10%, with psychological victimization rates at 21.4%. The involvement in this kind of behaviour was mostly

sporadic, with percentages ranging from 16.2% for psychological perpetration to 33.5% for psychological victimization. The level of frequent involvement was only 1.2%, which corresponded to psychological victimization. As regards gender, we found no significant differences, while according to the educational stage, there were differences in psychological perpetration [ $\chi^2$  (2, 1937) = 33.11, p = .000; V = .131] and psychological victimization [ $\chi^2$  (2, 1937) = 24.02, p = .000; V = .111], with secondary school students involved the most (see Table 3).

*Relationship between the adolescents' violent behaviours*

The second objective was to find out whether involvement in bullying could influence the likelihood of the adolescents being involved in psychological violence later on during their first romantic relationships. To achieve this, bivariate correlations were carried out between the different forms of involvement (perpetration and victimization in violent behaviour among adolescents), in order to find out if there was any link between them. Then, multinomial logistic regression models including only

*Table 3*  
Frequency of involvement in psychological dating violence: gender and educational level

		Gender		Educational level		Total
		Boys	Girls	Primary S.	Secondary S.	
Perpetration psychological dating violence	Not involved	82.1% (839)	85.6% (783)	89.2%* (752)	79.5%* (870)	83.7% (1622)
	Occasionally involved	17.8% (182)	14.4% (132)	10.8%* (91)	20.4%* (223)	16.2% (314)
	Frequently involved	0.1% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	0.1% (1)	0.1% (1)
Victimization psychological dating violence	Not involved	65.5% (669)	65% (555)	71.2%* (600)	60.7%* (664)	65.3% (1264)
	Occasionally involved	33.6% (343)	33.4% (306)	27.5%* (232)	38.1%* (417)	33.5% (649)
	Frequently involved	1% (10)	1.5% (14)	1.3% (11)	1.2% (13)	1.2% (24)

*n=1937; missing data=0%*  
\* Significant differences

the significant forms of involvement were performed, with the aim of identifying the predictive value of the different variables of direct or indirect bullying for both perpetration and victimization of psychological dating violence. In both analyses, the previous selection of the sample was kept, which enabled us to work only on those participants who had admitted to having had a romantic experience of some kind (n = 1937).

The bivariate analyses showed that both types of bullying correlated significantly with psychological dating violence. The highest correlations were between perpetration in direct and indirect bullying and perpetration of psychological dating violence (.42 and .40, respectively), as well as between victimization in direct and indirect bullying and psychological dating victimization (.42 and .36, respectively) (see Table 4).

As regards the multivariate analyses, Table 5 shows the results for perpetration of psychological dating violence, showing the

adjusted odd ratios (AOR) with a confidence interval (CI) of 95%. In model 1, with an R2 = .49 (Cox & Snell), .49 (Nagelkerke), perpetration of direct bullying, victimization in direct bullying, perpetration in indirect bullying, and victimization in indirect bullying significantly predicts perpetration in psychological dating violence. Model 2 includes the four forms of involvement in bullying, the control variables - gender and educational stage - and the interaction between bullying, gender and educational stage. In this model, perpetration in direct bullying, victimization in direct bullying, perpetration in indirect bullying, and victimization in indirect bullying are still predictors of perpetration of psychological dating violence. As regards the control variables, the only significant associations are with the educational stage, where perpetration of psychological dating violence is more likely in primary school. Similarly, there is also a significant interaction between boys and indirect perpetration.

*Table 4*  
Correlation between different forms of violent behaviours

	Perpetration psychological dating violence	Victimization psychological dating violence
Direct bullying perpetration	.42**	.21**
Indirect bullying perpetration	.40**	.22**
Direct bullying victimization	.20**	.36**
Indirect bullying victimization	.19**	.42**

*\*\* The correlation is significant at 0.01 level*

*Table 5*  
Predictors of the perpetration of psychological dating violence

	Model 1	Model 2
Direct bullying perpetration	5.83 (3.97, 8.56) ***	6.51 (4.35, 9.75) ***
Direct bullying victimization	1.24 (.81, 1.88) *	1.36 (.89, 2.09)*
Indirect bullying perpetration	4.31 (3.07, 6.06) **	6.21 (3.76, 10.25) ***
Indirect bullying victimization	1.66 (1.17, 2.34) **	1.86 (1.31, 2.64) **
Boy (ref=girl)	-	1.18 (.85, 1.64)
Primary (ref=secondary)	-	.36 (.26, .49) ***
Indirect perpetration x Boy	-	.50 (.26, .96) *

*n=1937; missing data=0%*  
*\* The correlation is significant at 0.05 level*  
*\*\* The correlation is significant at 0.1 level*  
*\*\*\* The correlation is significant at 0.01 level*

*Table 6*  
Predictors of the victimization of psychological dating violence

	Model 1	Model 2
Direct bullying perpetration	2.26 (1.54, 3.34) ***	2.32 (1.56, 3.43) ***
Direct bullying victimization	2.60 (1.78, 3.80) ***	2.94 (2.00, 4.34) ***
Indirect bullying perpetration	1.51 (1.08, 2.11) *	1.44 (1.03, 2.03) *
Indirect bullying victimization	4.74 (3.60, 6.24) ***	5.09 (3.84, 6.74) ***
Boy (ref=girl)	-	.85 (.69, 1.06)
Primary (ref=secondary)	-	.47 (.38, .59) ***

*n=1937; missing data=0%*  
*\* The correlation is significant at 0.05 level*  
*\*\* The correlation is significant at 0.1 level*  
*\*\*\* The correlation is significant at 0.01 level*



Similarly, Table 6 shows the results obtained from the multinomial logistic regression performed for psychological dating victimization. In model 1, with an  $R^2 = .51$  (Cox & Snell), .51 (Nagelkerke), direct perpetration, indirect perpetration, direct victimization, and indirect victimization in bullying are all significant predictors of psychological dating victimization. In model 2, perpetration in direct bullying, direct bullying victimization, perpetration in indirect bullying, and victimization in indirect bullying all significantly predict psychological dating victimization. As regards school level, being at Primary School is a predictor of psychological victimization.

### Discussion

The main objective of this work was to analyse the violent behaviour of boys and girls in pre teenagers and early adolescence towards their peers and in their first romantic relationships. The results of this study show higher rates of indirect forms of aggression than direct ones, which supports the theory underlined by several studies: despite the fact that most studies in bullying do not focus on relational or indirect bullying, this is precisely the type of bullying with the highest indices of involvement (Avilés-Dorantes et al., 2012), as well as being the most difficult to identify. Boys are, in general, more commonly involved in this type of behaviour than girls, as reflected in the previous literature (Avilés-Dorantes et al., 2012, Iossi et al., 2013); however, both boys and girls have similar rates for indirect victimization, which suggests that girls at this stage are already being subjected to more subtle forms of peer violence. In primary school, involvement in direct aggression is more common, while indirect aggression is higher in secondary school (Coker et al., 2014).

In this study, the initial hypothesis was focused on the psycho-developmental framework of violent behaviours, assuming that violent dynamics among peers were transferred from the peer relationship to the contexts of emerging relationships, and in particular, to romantic relationships as different expressions of the same violent pattern. Indeed, the results show that, during pre-adolescence and adolescence, which is when the first erotic-sentimental interests arise (62% of the participants claimed to have had some romantic experience), one in ten participants admitted to having used aggressive behaviour of a psychological nature during courtship, and over two out of ten participants stated that they had been victims of dating violence. This seems to indicate that half of those who begin early dating or romantic relationships are involved in acts of aggressive behaviour which differ in severity but are clearly recognizable as psychological violence. This confirms the point made by a number of studies which indicated the presence of negative aggressive behaviour at the beginning and as adolescent romantic relationships develop, such as insults, threats, extortion, episodes of jealousy, among others (Fernández-Fuertes et al., 2006; Sears et al., 2007).

No differences were found according to gender for involvement in psychological violence in the starting phases of dating relationships (Jackson et al., 2000; Muñoz-Rivas et al., 2009). As regards age, however, which was measured by the educational level, some differences were observed: prevalence rates were higher among secondary school children. It seems, then, that during early adolescence, aggressive behaviour among boys and girls develops as part of their courtship process and dynamics, and according to the data, the prevalence rates are high. Here, recent research has shown how the psychoeducational variable accounts

for such high prevalence rates (Kochendorfer & Kerns, 2020); according to these studies, at this age, the process begins with a series of clumsy behavioural patterns, with occasional, rather awkward hints of erotic play, or aggressive patterns of behaviour accepted by both members of the budding teenage couple, which forms a social dynamic which is close to violence, but which could be superseded gradually as the couple learn better relationship skills (Viejo et al., 2018).

The second main objective of this study was to identify the predictive value of involvement in bullying for later involvement in psychological violence in the first romantic relationships. According to the results, involvement in bullying correlates significantly with the existence of aggressive behaviour, which could be of a psychological nature, in the process of starting a relationship or courtship in budding teenage couple: in other words, what the scientific literature identifies as 'dating violence' (Conolly et al., 2000; Foshee et al., 2013; Zych et al., 2019). Although all forms of involvement in bullying are linked to involvement in psychological and relational dating violence, it is the profile of the 'perpetrator of bullying' which is most notable during the processes of courtship and dating. Logically, it follows that it is the profile of the 'victim of bullying' which has the closest correlation with psychological victimization in the process of early courtship, as some authors have pointed out in previous research (Zych et al., 2019).

In particular, psychological dating aggression is predicted by a number of forms of involvement in bullying. Here, perpetration in direct bullying (i.e. being an aggressor) is the profile which shows the highest values, followed by the perpetration of indirect bullying. Similarly, psychological dating victimization is predicted, in most cases, by indirect victimization in bullying. If a young person has been an aggressor with their peers, there is therefore a greater likelihood that they will act as an aggressor with their future partner; in the same way, a young person is more likely to be the victim of psychological violence in their first romantic relationships if they have previously been a victim of relational bullying.

According to the analyses, including a cross-sectional study, we cannot establish a causal relationship between having been an aggressor towards one's peers in school bullying and showing psychological aggression towards one's partner and longitudinal studies would be needed; however, we can identify a significant correlation between having been an aggressor at school and showing psychological aggression in the first romantic relationships, as well as between having been a victim of school and becoming a victim in romantic relationships, particularly in relational and psychological forms of perpetration and victimization. Bullying, therefore, can clearly be identified as a risk factor for what has been termed 'subtle' or 'psychological' violence in romantic relationships (Ureña et al., 2015). We can confidently state that, these days, when the microculture of peer relations is still extremely influential, during a young person's first attempts at adolescent courtship, the presence of relational and psychological violence (spreading rumours, coercion, threats, insults and so on) seems to continue, with similar roles being played, as perpetrators or victims of psychological and/or relational violence. This matches the results of research which confirm the existence of a continuity in the roles in different episodes of violent behaviour occurring over a short period of time, which usually reveal a pattern of internalized behaviour (Ellis & Wolfe, 2015; Foshee, et al., 2013). This study represents, therefore, a step towards identifying the links between various types of violent behaviour in pre-adolescence and adolescence.

Ideally, raising the age ranges of the study to including an analysis of the characteristics of couples would allow us to study a larger number of subjects and look into the way they relate to their partner within the framework of a Systemic-Developmental model of developing relationships (Andrews et al., 2000). At the same time, it could help to overcome the difficulties and limitations imposed by the age of the boys and girls in this study, since pre-adolescence is a stage when their romantic experiences are only just beginning.

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