Article

Validation of a Scale for Assessing Bystander Responses in Bullying

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Abstract

Background: This study sought to analyse the metric properties of the scores obtained with an adaptation of the Student Bystander Behaviour Scale (SBBS; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) in Spanish primary-school students and to examine the types of responses students reported as witnesses to school bullying, along with their relationship to empathy. **Method:** The Spanish adaptation of the SBBS and a self-report questionnaire about empathy were given to 1108 primary-school students, aged 9-11 years old (48.4% girls) in Asturias (Spain). The students were from 29 schools, selected by simple random sampling from all of the primary schools in the region. **Results:** Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis indicated that the adapted version, like the original SBBS, measured three types of witness response to school bullying: defender, passive, and pro-bully. Most students reported that they defended, or would defend, the victim. This trend was more marked in those who had not witnessed bullying. The type of response to bullying was related to empathy, positively with defender responses, and negatively with passive and pro-bully responses. **Conclusions:** The scores from the adapted version of the SBBS demonstrated metrics of reliability and validity suitable for identifying the type of response to school bullying from primary-school students.

Keywords: scale, bystander, bullying, primary education, Spain.

Resumen

Validación de una Escala para Evaluar la Respuesta de los Testigos Ante el Acoso Escolar. **Antecedentes:** los objetivos han sido analizar las propiedades métricas de las puntuaciones obtenidas con una adaptación de la Student Bystander Behaviour Scale (SBBS; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) en estudiantes de Educación Primaria de España, examinar el tipo de respuesta ante el acoso escolar más habitualmente informado por el alumnado como testigo y la relación de esta respuesta con la empatía. **Método:** se aplicó la SBBS adaptada y un cuestionario de autoinforme sobre empatía a 1.108 estudiantes de Primaria, de 9 a 11 años (48,4% niñas) de Asturias (España), pertenecientes a 29 colegios seleccionados mediante muestreo aleatorio simple de entre el total de centros de Primaria de la región. **Resultados:** análisis factoriales exploratorios y confirmatorios señalan que las puntuaciones obtenidas con la SBBS adaptada permiten medir, al igual que la versión original, tres tipos de respuesta como testigo ante el acoso escolar: defensora, pasiva y pro-bully. La mayoría del alumnado informa que defiende o defendería a la víctima, tendencia aún más marcada entre quienes informan no estar presenciando acoso escolar. El tipo de respuesta ante el acoso se relaciona con la empatía: positivamente con respuestas defensoras y negativamente con pasivas y pro-bully. **Conclusiones:** las puntuaciones obtenidas con la versión adaptada del SBBS han mostrado garantías métricas de fiabilidad y validez, lo que sugiere que es una escala apropiada para medir el tipo de respuesta hacia el acoso escolar en estudiantes de Educación Primaria.

Palabras clave: escala, testigo, acoso escolar, Educación Primaria, España.

A school climate of respect and getting along together encourages student learning and proper socio-emotional development (Wang et al., 2020). Primary school is a particularly important stage for setting the foundation of both a solid education and appropriate socio-affective development. It is the first stage of the compulsory school system in Spain, which brings together a broad section of society. Also, children acquire new cognitive abilities that allow them to relate to each other in new ways. It is a fundamental stage in learning the rules of how to coexist, the development of values and social skills, such as empathy, and the construction of a positive self-concept (Feldman, 2020).

Although the quality of school climate in primary schools varies across schools due to several factors (e.g., socio-economic differences, school leadership, classroom management), a good school climate has generally been reported in Spanish primary schools (Córdoba-Alcaide et al., 2016; Lázaro-Visa & Fernández-Fuertes, 2018). However, co-existence always produces conflicts and, in this educational stage, the first problematic signs of rejection and integration problems can appear, even leading to incipient situations of bullying.

One fundamental factor in the outcome of school bullying is the role of classmates who witness the bullying, the bystanders. According to the participant role approach (Salmivalli, 1999, 2014; Salmivalli et al., 1996), there are four bystander roles that witnesses of bullying can adopt: defender (directly stepping in, seeking help, or comforting the victim), outsider (not taking sides with anyone, remaining passive and uninvolved, which, in the end, supports the bully), reinforce (cheering or laughing, displaying

approval such as smiling or laughing along), and assistant (assisting and joining the bully). Assistants and reinforcers both encourage bullying by siding with the bully, and could thus be conceptualized as pro-bully bystanders (Nocentini et al., 2013). This has also been confirmed in previous factor analyses (Jungert et al., 2016; Sjögren et al., 2021; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013; Thornberg et al., 2017). An outsider who remains passive or neutral is also referred to as a passive bystander (Pozzoli & Gini, 2010; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013; Thornberg et al., 2017). Thus, bystanders of school bullying can respond in three main ways: defending, passive bystanding, and pro-bully.

The few studies done so far in Spain about the frequency of these responses to bullying have shown that, although most students reported defending—or that they would have defended—the victim, a significant proportion of students reported acting—or that they would have acted—in support of the bully or passively (Cabrera et al., 2020). This is important, because both passive and pro-bully responses contribute to an increased likelihood of bullying and its persistence (Kärnä et al., 2010; Nocentini et al., 2013; Salmivalli et al., 2011; Thornberg & Wänström, 2018). Hence, students need to be aware of their role in these types of situations and adopt bystander responses that benefit the victim (Salmivalli et al., 2011; Salmivalli, 2014), either by acting directly or telling an adult. Some of the highly effective anti-bullying programs rely on enhancing bystanders' awareness, empathy and self-efficacy to support bullied classmates instead of reinforcing the bullies' behaviour (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

Empathy is a fundamental variable in the response as a witness to bullying (for a meta-analysis, see Zych et al., 2019). Children and youth who defend the victims of bullying are higher in empathy than those who do not (for a meta-analysis, see Nickerson et al., 2015); and children low in empathy are more inclined to remain passive bystanders or display pro-bully responses (Lucas-Molina et al., 2018; Nickerson et al., 2008; Troop-Gordon et al., 2019).

When it comes to preventing bullying at school, it is important to know how students who witness bullying behave in order to detect and put a stop to inappropriate responses that encourage bullying. It is, however, also important to know how students who have not yet witnessed bullying report that they would respond, as this will allow us to identify possible predispositions towards inappropriate bystander behaviour, and to adapt it before students have to deal with a situation of bullying.

To do this, it is important to have rigorous evaluation instruments available. Having instruments for the evaluation of the different attitudes and behaviours towards bullying will allow us to understand how often they occur and are problematic, guide interventions for improving them, and also determine the effects of these interventions. Moreover, validation of these instruments will contribute to the definition of the construct, and thus allow us to be more precise about the types of bystander responses to school bullying, as well as their more representative observable indicators.

The most commonly used data collection technique for this purpose is the self-report questionnaire. In recent years, various questionnaires have been published, with each making a notable contribution to the field of study. For our study, we used the *Student Bystander Behaviour Scale* (SBBS; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013), which, of those we reviewed, used the fewest items to validly and reliably measure the three types of bystander behaviour (defender, passive, and pro-bully). The length of the test is important, as

these types of questionnaires are usually applied along with others as part of a test battery. There are other interesting but longer questionnaires which measure the three types of bystander responses, such as the *Tipo de Espectador de Violencia entre Pares* [Peer-Violence Spectator Type] (TEVEP; Quintana et al., 2014), the *Bullying Participant Behaviors Questionnaire* (BPBQ; Demaray et al., 2016), and the *Participant Roles Scale* (PRS; Salmivalli et al., 1996). All of these have subsequent versions that are different from the originals due to their application in different contexts and for different research objectives. As far as we are aware, to date there are no published validated questionnaires for Spanish samples that would allow the measurement of the three basic types of behaviour/attitudes towards bullying (defender, passive, and pro-bully). It is worth noting the *Cuestionario Multimodal de Interacción Escolar* (CMIE-IV) [Multimodal Questionnaire of School Interactions (MQSI-IV)], designed and validated by Caballo et al. (2012), and the adaptation of the *Participant Role Scale* (PRS) for a Spanish sample by Lucas-Molina et al. (2014). However, neither of those produces a specific measure of pro-bully bystanders.

Given the lack of a validated questionnaire in Spain for evaluating the three basic types of students' bystander responses to bullying (defender, passive, and pro-bully), the main objective of this study was to validate an adaptation of the *Student Bystander Behaviour Scale* (SBBS; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) in a sample of primary school students in Asturias (Spain). The factorial structure of the scores produced by the adapted SBBS is expected to match that of the original scale (defender, passive, and pro-bully responses), and the scores are expected to be reliable and valid. The analyses to be performed to validate the scale scores involve descriptive analysis in terms of frequencies and percentages, as well as the relationship with a variable that previous studies have shown to be clearly associated with the type of response to bullying, empathy. These two are secondary objectives. Bearing in mind the scant evidence to date in Spain (Cabrera et al., 2020), in relation to the first of those secondary objectives we expect most students to report defender responses, although significant numbers of students are expected to recognize that they exhibited—or would have exhibited—passive or pro-bully behavior. In terms of the second secondary objective, we expect to find a positive relationship between empathy and the defender response, and a negative relationship between empathy and passive or pro-bully responses (Lucas-Molina et al., 2018; Nickerson et al., 2015; Troop-Gordon et al., 2019).

Method

Participants

The data for this study were collected from 1,108 students (48.4% girls) in the fourth year of Primary Education (9-11 years old; $M = 9.39$, $SD = 0.54$) from 29 schools in Asturias (Spain). The schools were selected by simple random sampling from all of the primary schools in Asturias, in order to try to ensure the heterogeneity of the sample in terms of rural or urban context and socioeconomic status. However, in line with the characteristics of the population, the selected schools were predominantly located in urban areas and from the middle socio-economic class.

To identify the factorial structure of the scores produced by the adapted SBBS, a cross-validation was performed, in which the overall sample was randomly split into two subsamples: an estimation sample, with 25% of the total ($n = 277$), for exploratory

factor analysis, and a validation sample, with 75% of the total (*n* = 831), for confirmatory factor analysis. A larger share was taken for the validation sample because the estimation method used (AGLS), which is the most suitable for the items used (dichotomous responses), requires large samples. The estimation and validation groups did not differ statistically significantly, either by sex (χ^2 = 0.006; *p* = 1) or age (*F* = 0.856; *p* = .355).

Instruments

Spanish adaptation of the "Student Bystander Behaviour Scale" (SBBS; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). The adapted scale which was finally applied is provided in the Table 1. This is a self-report for students which aims to assess students' bystander responses to bullying. It first presents a definition of bullying and asks the student directly whether in the current school year they have been present during any bullying of students in their class. This is a dichotomous item (Yes/No). Then, it presents the adapted scale, which is the object of validation in this study. This self-report scale asks the student how they responded when they saw one of their classmates being bullied by others or, if they had not been present at any bullying, how they would respond if they were present. It has 10 items which, in line with the starting theoretical model, aim to measure the type of bystander responses shown by the student towards bullying suffered by their classmates: defender, passive, and pro-bully. The response format is dichotomous (Yes/No). In

the Procedure section we describe the modifications we made to the original questionnaire. In the Results section, we describe the psychometric properties of the scores obtained with the adapted test, applied to the Spanish sample in this study.

Empathy Scale. We used a scale created *ad hoc* based on one which had been designed and used previously in studies by our research group (Álvarez-García et al., 2019). We made some changes to fit the scale to the participants' ages. The scale we ultimately used has six items about the extent to which a respondent believes that they are capable of identifying with others and sharing their feelings. We kept four of the original items of the scale ("If a classmate is teased, I feel bad thinking about what is happening to him/her", "I am patient with people who do things worse than I do", "When I see that a friend is sad, I also become sad", and "I am happy when something good happens to someone I know") and added two more ("I worry when someone I know or someone in my family has problems" and "When I see someone do something bad, I try to understand by putting myself in their shoes"). The student is asked how true they think each statement is, with a Likert-type response (from 1 = *completely false*, to 4 = *completely true*). The internal consistency of the scores of the sample in our study was moderate (α = .63), similar to that found with the previous version in secondary-school students (α = .67; Álvarez-García et al., 2019).

Procedure

We designed a Spanish version of the *Student Bystander Behaviour Scale* (SBBS; Thornberg & Jungert, 2013). This adaptation retained most of the items from the original questionnaire, but we made a few adjustments to match our purpose. The original scale asks the student how they usually react when they see a student being bullied by others. In contrast, our adapted version also includes participants who have not witnessed bullying during the schoolyear in addition to those who have. In other words, in our questionnaire, students are asked how they *did* react or how they *would* react. Secondly, we modified and added items, providing a scale with 10 items rather than the original 8. We increased the number of items in the two factors which were only represented by two items in the original. So, for the *Defending* subscale in the original, the original item, "I tried to get the bully/ bullies to stop", was split into three more specific items ("Talk to the bully later to get them to stop", "Encourage the victim to tell an adult (family member, teacher) what is happening", and "Talk to other classmates to try to stop what is happening"). We added an inverse item to the original *Passive Bystanding* subscale, "Step in to defend my classmate and get the bully to stop doing it" to avoid the potential effects of response pattern biases. In the original "Pro-Bully Behaviour" factor, we removed the item "I took the bullies' side and joined in the bullying", as it was very similar to another item that we retained in the questionnaire due to its greater factorial loading in the original validation ("I join in and also begin to bully the student"). We also modified the response format, making it dichotomous (Yes/No) rather than using the Likert-type scale of the original (from 1 = *never*, to 5 = *always*). We decided this following an initial validation of the test using a pilot sample, which demonstrated little discriminative or informative value in differentiating between the four response options that mean that the subject did or would do the action the item refers to (options 2 to 5). Table 2 shows the distribution of each item in each factor, according to the initial theoretical model.

Table 1

Adaptation of the "Student Bystander Behaviour Scale" (SBBS)

Bullying is the term used to describe a situation in which a student is the victim of different kinds of aggression over time in school, performed by other students. This may include making fun of someone, insulting them, threatening them, rejecting them, hiding their belongings… In situations of bullying, the victim is in a weaker position than their aggressors (for example, they may be shyer or have fewer friends).

In this school year, have you seen any of your classmates being bullied?

Yes □/ No □

If you have observed someone being bullied in your class this school year, indicate below what you did when it happened.
If you haven't seen anyone being bullied in your class this school year, please indicate what you would do if you did see someone being bullied.

Yes □/ No □

1. Step in to defend my classmate and get the bully to stop doing it [Meterme, para defender al compañero y que el acosador deje de hacerlo].
2. Talk to the bully later to get them to stop [Hablar con el acosador en otro momento, para que deje de hacerlo].
3. Tell a teacher [Decírselo a un maestro o a una maestra].
4. Encourage the victim to tell an adult (family member, teacher) what is happening [Animar a la víctima para que diga a un adulto (familia, profesorado) lo que le ocurre].
5. I join in and also begin to bully the student [Unirme y comenzar a meterme con el compañero yo también].
6. Talk to other classmates to try to stop whatis happening [Hablar con otros compañeros, para intentar que deje de ocurrir].
7. Nothing. I go on doing whatever I was doing because I think that what's happening has nothing to do with me [Nada. Seguir tranquilo con lo que esté haciendo, porque entiendo que la cosa no va conmigo].
8. I stay away [Mantenerme alejado].
9. Watch, because it is funny and entertaining [Mirar, porque es divertido y entretenido].
10. Laugh and cheer the bullies on [Reírme y hacer comentarios que animan a los acosadores a seguir haciéndolo].

Factor	Items
Passive	1, 7 and 8
Pro-bully	5, 9 and 10
Defender	2, 3, 4 and 6

Once the test was designed and the schools were selected, we sought authorization from the management teams of each school to apply the questionnaire. Given the age of the participants, we sought consent from their parents or guardians. Before they completed the questionnaire, the children were also told about the aims of the study and that it was anonymous, confidential, and voluntary. The questionnaire was administered by members of the research team as a paper-pencil questionnaire, during class times. The procedure was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Principality of Asturias (Project Ref. 105/19).

Data analysis

The data were entered in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 25). First, we analysed missing values or values outside the scale. All the items were completed validly by more than 99% of the participants (Table 3), so none was eliminated for this reason for the final analysis of the test. Nor were any participants removed, as none of them left more than one answer blank or responded inappropriately to more than 1 item (10% of the total).

We performed a descriptive analysis of the students' responses to the adapted version of the SBBS in terms of percentages and correlations. We examined the percentage of students who responded yes or no to each item in the test. Then we compared the responses of students who had reported witnessing bullying with those who had not. We used chi-square and Cramer's V to determine whether the association between the classification variable (witness or not) and the response for each item in the questionnaire was statistically significant, along with the magnitude of that association.

Subsequently, we examined the correlations between the scores in each item in the adapted SBBS questionnaire. We calculated the tetrachoric correlation matrix using the EQS software (Version 6.2), given the dichotomous nature of the responses (Savalei et al., 2015). Because the descriptive analysis confirmed that Item 1 was inverse, we inverted the item response in the spreadsheet to continue with the subsequent analyses.

We examined the construct validity of the adapted version of the SBBS using EQS 6.2. First, exploratory factor analysis was carried out with the estimation sample, using the Direct Oblimin rotation method. Subsequently, the model produced (which agreed with the starting theoretical model) was tested via confirmatory factor analysis with the validation sample. The variables (10 items) were defined as categorical. The estimation method used was AGLS, which is the most suitable method for categorical variables, but which needs large sample sizes (Brown, 2015; Freiberg et al., 2013; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). Missing values (0.27% of the total dataset) were dealt with using only the complete cases (Listwise deletion).

The factor weights and standard errors of each item were found. Usually, factor weights greater than .30 are considered acceptable (Izquierdo et al., 2014).

The discriminant validity of the model was examined by analysing the correlation between its factors. Very high correlations ($r \geq .85$) warn of possible collinearity or redundancy between factors and, therefore, poor discriminant validity (Brown, 2015). Following that, we analysed the reliability of the scores of the test. The reliability of each factor was assessed with Jöreskog's rho (Composite reliability) and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), using SEM Stats 1.3 (Korchia, 2010). Normally Jöreskog's rho is considered acceptable if it is greater than .70; and AVE, if it is greater than .50.

We also examined the Squared Multiple Correlations (R^2) of the scores for each item, using EQS 6.2. This is an indicator of the proportion of variance in the item explained by the latent variable and, therefore, a measure of the item's reliability when measuring that variable (Bollen, 1989).

Finally, we analysed the criterion validity of the test, using SPSS 25.0. To that end, we calculated the Spearman correlation

Table 3

Percentage of students responding to each response option in the adapted SBBS and the extent to which the response depends on having or not having witnessed bullying

	Total sample (N = 1108)			Students who had witnessed bullying (n = 403)			Students who had not witnessed bullying (n = 705)			χ^2	p	V
	Yes	No	NR	Yes	No	NR	Yes	No	NR			
1	81.7	18.2	0.1	72.5	27.5	0.0	87.0	12.9	0.1	36.71	<.001	.182
2	66.2	33.0	0.7	51.1	48.4	0.5	74.9	24.3	0.9	67.02	<.001	.247
3	82.3	17.3	0.4	63.8	35.5	0.7	92.9	7.0	0.1	147.16	<.001	.365
4	77.3	22.5	0.2	62.3	37.5	0.2	86.0	13.9	0.1	81.99	<.001	.272
5	3.5	96.3	0.2	6.5	93.3	0.2	1.8	98.0	0.1	16.06	<.001	.121
6	74.5	25.3	0.3	58.3	41.2	0.5	83.7	16.2	0.1	85.78	<.001	.279
7	10.5	89.4	0.2	16.6	83.1	0.2	7.0	92.9	0.1	25.68	<.001	.152
8	14.5	85.2	0.3	16.9	82.6	0.5	13.2	86.7	0.1	2.88	.093	.051
9	2.3	97.4	0.3	3.0	96.3	0.7	2.0	98.0	0.0	1.14	.306	.032
10	1.4	98.4	0.2	1.7	97.8	0.5	1.3	98.7	0.0	0.39	.603	.019

Note: NR = Blank or no response; V = Cramer´s V

coefficients between the scores in each of the factors in the adapted version of SBBS and the scores in the empathy scale. Previous evidence has shown that empathy correlates with the three types of attitudes to bullying, as noted in the introduction, positive relationships with defender responses and negative relationships with passive or pro-bully responses. The same result in this study would be further evidence that the scale measures what it aims to measure (in other words, another evidence of its validity).

Results

Descriptive analysis

Most of the students reported that they defended, or that they would defend, the victim. This trend was stronger in students who reported not having witnessed bullying (Table 3).

The correlation matrix of scores for each item (Table 4) suggests that none of the items were redundant. In addition, the correlations were consistent with the initial model (Table 2). The items about pro-bully (5, 9 and 10) were moderately to strongly positively correlated with each other. Items about defending (2, 3, 4 and 6) were moderately positively correlated with each other. The items about passive bystanding (1, 7 and 8) were moderately correlated with each other, although Item 1 correlated negatively with Items 7 and 8, showing that it was an inverse item.

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The results of the exploratory factor analysis with the estimation sample are shown in Table 5.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The model produced by the exploratory factor analysis with the estimation sample (Table 5), which agreed with the initial theoretical model (Table 2), demonstrated a good fit to the empirical data in the validation sample: $\chi^2 = 68.977$; $df = 32$; $\chi^2/df = 2.16$; MFI = .977; AGLS Fit Index = .992; AGLS Adjusted Fit Index = .986; IFI = .939; CFI = .938; SRMR = .100; RMSEA= .038, 90% CI [.025, .050]. All the factor loadings of each item on each factor were greater than .30, with values between .62 and .89 (Figure 1).

Discriminant validity

As Figure 1 shows, passive bystanding was positively correlated with pro-bully, and both factors were negatively correlated with defending. All of the correlations between factors were statistically significant, medium or large, although none were over .85, which suggests that no factors were redundant.

Reliability

The reliability indices for each item and factor are shown in Table 6.

Table 5
Factorial loadings from the exploratory factor analysis with the estimation sample (n = 277)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Comunal.
I_1	**.481**	.068	-.148	.257
I_2	-.115	.064	**.627**	.410
I_3	.169	.019	**.725**	.554
I_4	-.120	-.169	**.463**	.257
I_5	-.235	**.717**	-.086	.577
I_6	-.076	.093	**.670**	.464
I_7	**.735**	.219	-.054	.591
I_8	**.834**	-.176	.041	.727
I_9	.169	**.701**	.105	.532
I_10	.092	**.833**	-.003	.702

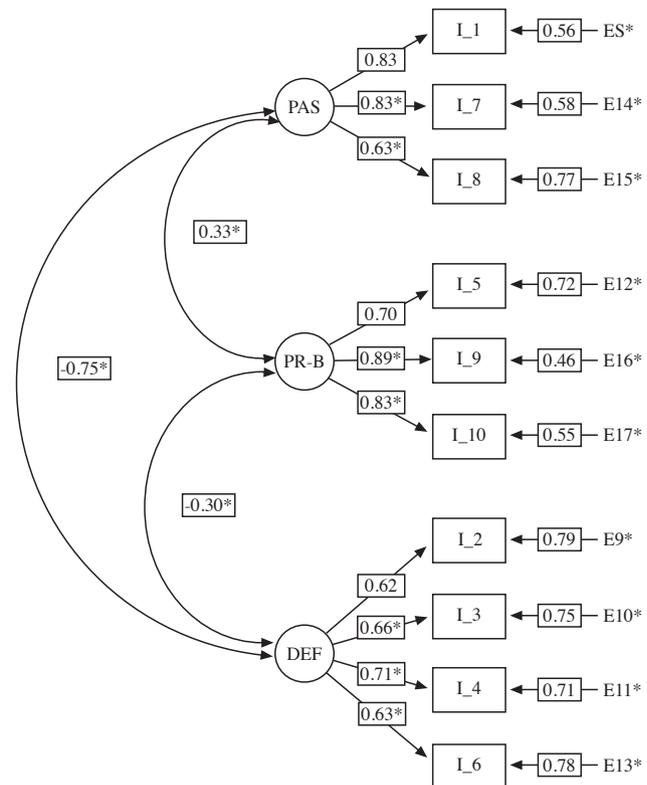*Note:* Rotation method: Direct Oblimin

Figure 1. Factorial structure of the adapted version of the Student Bystander Behaviour Scale (SBBS).
Note: PAS = Passive; PR-B = Pro-Bully; DEF = Defender

Table 4
Tetrachoric correlation matrix between discrete variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2	.475								
3	.181	.334							
4	.400	.278	.468						
5	-.103	.006	-.073	-.182					
6	.342	.448	.420	.336	-.026				
7	-.507	-.304	-.290	-.429	.218	-.326			
8	-.479	-.233	-.092	-.272	-.074	-.179	.608		
9	-.150	-.214	-.251	-.260	.564	-.088	.477	.207	
10	-.192	-.145	-.274	-.201	.695	-.174	.467	.092	.762

Table 6
Reliability of each item and factor in the validation sample (n = 831)

Factor	Item	Factor reliability		Item reliability	
		ϱ	AVE	CR	R²
Passive		.807	.586		
	1			–	.690
	7			12.784***	.667
	8			10.670***	.402
Pro-bully		.851	.657		
	5			–	.487
	9			7.335***	.786
	10			6.577***	.694
Defender		.751	.430		
	2			–	.381
	3			9.542***	.430
	4			10.494***	.501
	6			10.386***	.398

Note: ϱ = Jöreskog's rho (Composite reliability); AVE = Average Variance Extracted; CR = Critical Ratio
*** $p < .001$

Criterion validity

Using the total sample, we calculated the Spearman correlation coefficients between the scores in each of the factors of the adapted SBBS and the scores in the empathy scale (Table 7). We used the Spearman correlation coefficient due to the non-normal distribution of the scores, particularly in relation to the Pro-bully factor ($M = 0.07$; $SD = 0.33$; Skewness = 5.69; $ET_{Skewness} = 0.07$; Kurtosis = 37.96; $ET_{Kurtosis} = 0.15$).

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to analyze the reliability and validity of the scores obtained using an adaptation of the SBBS (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) in a sample of primary-school students in Asturias (Spain). As expected, the factorial structure agreed with that found for the original scale (defending, passive, and pro-bully responses), and the scores produced demonstrated good indicators of reliability and validity.

Confirmatory factor analysis, as well as discriminant validity and reliability analysis, suggest that the initial theoretical model appropriately represents the response to the questionnaire of the analysed sample: students in the fourth year of primary school in Spanish schools. This means that the results support the idea of the multidimensional nature of the bystander construct, as set out

Table 7
Spearman correlation coefficients between empathy and the three bystander responses (N = 1108)

	Empathy
Passive	-.19***
Pro-bully	-.14***
Defender	.26***

*** $p < .001$

in previous studies (Caballo et al., 2012; Demaray et al., 2016; Jungert et al., 2016; Quintana et al., 2014; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Sjögren et al., 2021; Thornberg et al., 2017). In other words, we can identify different types of bystander responses to school bullying. And more specifically, our results suggest that the structure found in the original validation of the scale (Thornberg & Jungert, 2013) –defending, passive bystanding, and pro-bully– is replicated in other contexts and other educational levels.

In our study, passive bystanding was positively correlated with pro-bully, and both factors were negatively correlated with defending. This result is in line with previous studies (e.g., Caballo et al., 2012; Lucas-Molina et al., 2014; Quintana et al., 2014) and supports the idea that being passive harms the victim and benefits the bully's action.

The second objective of the study was to analyze the frequency of each type of response in the sample we examined. The results were consistent with the scant evidence available so far for the Spanish population (Cabrera et al., 2020). Most students reported defender responses, although a significant proportion of the students recognized that they had exhibited, or would have exhibited, passive or pro-bully behavior. One novel aspect of the present study compared to others published previously in Spain is the analysis of the difference between students who reported having been present at bullying and those who had not. The trend of indicating a defender response was more marked in students who had not witnessed any bullying than in those who had. Students who reported having witnessed bullying reported defending the victim less than those who said they *would* defend the victim if they were present. One possible reason may be response biases due to overestimating one's morality, agency or capacity (cf., the attitude–behavioural gap). It is easier to be moral in a hypothetical/imagined situation than in a real-life situation, which may be related to risks, fear, costs and constraints (cf., Dovidio et al., 2006; Strindberg et al., 2020). Another possible reason may be the role of subjective norms, which can affect students' attitudes, which ultimately affect their behaviour (Breinbauer & Maddaleno, 2005). Subjective norms refer to whether students think that their behaviour would meet with their peers' approval. So, if there were students who were bullies or pro-bullies in a class, it is more likely for their classmates to be influenced or pressured to think or behave in the same way. Even if a student's attitude is to be a defender, they may ultimately act passively or as a pro-bully in the face of the social pressure of their peers' possible negative opinions of their behaviour.

The third objective of the study, related to analyzing the criterion validity of the test, was to examine the relationship between the type of response to bullying and empathy. In agreement with previous evidence, our results suggest that bystander response to bullying correlates with students' levels of empathy, positively in the case of defending, and negatively with passive bystanding and pro-bully (Lucas-Molina et al., 2018; Nickerson et al., 2015; Troop-Gordon et al., 2019). Although the relationship between empathy and the three types of bystander response was statistically significant, the magnitude tended to be small. This means that the variability of the scores in each type of bystander response did not only depend on empathy, but also on other variables that were not considered in the study.

This study contributes to the understanding of school bullying, as well as to its prevention and treatment. To our knowledge, it is the first validated questionnaire in Spain that provides a measure of the three main bystander responses to school bullying (defending,

passive bystanding and pro-bully), and we invite researchers and practitioners in other countries to translate and validate the measurement for use in educational research as well as in school-based bullying prevention and intervention efforts. The following implications are worth highlighting. From a theoretical perspective, the results offer empirical evidence about three main types of bystander responses to school bullying among schoolchildren, as well as representative, observable indicators. From a practical point of view, it provides researchers, educators and other school professionals with a short, valid, reliable tool for identifying or anticipating inappropriate bystander responses, and for evaluating the effectiveness of intervention programs designed to decrease pro-bullying and passive bystanding and to increase defending in bullying situations. One of the most effective lines for prevention or intervention in bullying is to encourage students who witness bullying to feel empathy and support towards the victims rather than being passive or supporting the aggressors (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

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