

Victims of school bullying are more prone to develop violent behavior in the future

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The student from the University of Cordoba Raquel Espejo, during her stay at the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge. Credit: Universidad de Córdoba

There is another pandemic that humans have been experiencing for a long time now and for which effective preventive measures have yet to be found: violence. This is shown in various ways in different aspects of life and continues to have serious consequences for society, the economy, our health and human relations. The onset of violent behavior can be observed from childhood and adolescence, so studying what aspects lead to the development of these kinds of behaviors and which curb them has become a necessary step in their prevention.

The University of Cordoba and the University of Cambridge have been collaborating for a long time now on research into aspects related to violence, thus helping decrease its risks and prevent it. In their latest piece of research, they studied possible risk and protection factors for violence and, in this way, they verified whether violent [behavior](#) can be predicted months or even years before it develops.

Specifically, the study focused on finding out if morality, victimization, empathy and social and emotional skills predict the expression of different violent behaviors in children and adolescents in different contexts, including at school and in a family setting. "These behaviors refer to, for instance, troubling behavior at home, including [physical violence](#) towards parents and siblings, at school, including physical violence towards teaching staff and schoolmates, and other settings, including bad behavior in public," explains Raquel Espejo Siles, doctoral student at the University of Cordoba who carried out this research during her stay at the Institute of Criminology at the University of Cambridge

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Raquel Espejo worked with Izabela Zych, Professor at the Psychology Department at the University of Cordoba and part of the LAECOVI (Study Laboratory on Coexistence and Violence Prevention) research group, whose line of research is this study's framework. The study also had the participation of David P. Farrington, Emeritus Professor of Criminology at the University of Cambridge, and Vicente J. Llorent, Professor at the Education Department at the University of Cordoba.

871 students between 10 and 17 years of age at different Andalusian educational centers took part in the research. They filled out two questionnaires, one in June 2017 and one in June 2018.

Interesting conclusions were drawn from the results. "We found that violence used directly towards people was related to a tendency to make impulsive decisions and to a blind motivation to accomplish one's aims, without regard for the disadvantages or negative consequences from using violence," reveals Raquel Espejo.

What is more, being a victim of bullying was detected as a risk factor for developing violent behavior at home against their family as well as at school. Likewise, those people who were violent in public or in class were shown to have higher scores in moral disengagement, meaning that they usually made excuses so that these acts would seem less serious than they really were.

At school, it was verified that higher scores for social and emotional competencies such as [social awareness](#), self-management, motivation and decision making are protection factors against violence. Therefore, these results support prevention initiatives based on the potential of learning social and emotional skills at home as well as at school.

The data show that reducing victimization in a school setting could be effective in decreasing violence in different contexts in the future. "It is important to prevent violence, both victimization and bullying, since the data found in this study and others indicate that violence is a vicious cycle. Being the aggressor or the victim entails a high risk of developing the opposite role, reinforcing and increasing violence both at school and outside of [school](#)," points out Espejo.

According to this research study, enabling teenagers to reassess their goals and the consequences of their violent behavior could have an impact on decreasing [violence](#) further down the road. In addition, teaching different strategies to resolve issues in a different way could help them to compare and see the high individual and social price to pay for [violent behavior](#).

More information: Raquel Espejo-Siles et al, Moral disengagement, victimization, empathy, social and emotional competencies as predictors of violence in children and adolescents, *Children and Youth Services Review* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.chidyouth.2020.105337](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2020.105337)

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