Polyvictimization and the effects of peer bullying in a Brazilian sample

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Abstract

The most common kind of violence in schools is bullying practiced by peers. This study aims to investigate the association between this form of victimization and other forms of violence and risk behaviors. 510 Brazilian adults between 18-59 years participated in the current study (M = 30.64; SD = 10.47), 77.3% female. Individuals answered MAES and a sociodemographic questionnaire. 47.8% reported having suffered bullying, and this victimization was associated with higher rates of all types of violence within the family, lower perception of social support in childhood and in adolescence, earlier alcohol use, suicidal ideation and physical victimization as an adult. Being a victim of bullying is related to other forms of violence and risk behaviors, with weaker social support environments possibly playing a role in polyvictimization. Protective strategies, family and school interventions may help to avoid future risk behaviors.

Keywords: bullying; risk behaviors, childhood adverse experiences, polyvictimization, social support.

Resumo

Polivitimização e efeitos do bullying por pares em uma amostra brasileira. O tipo de violência mais comum nas escolas é o *bullying* praticado por colegas. Este estudo tem como objetivo investigar a associação entre essa forma de vitimização e outras formas de violência e comportamentos de risco. Participaram do presente estudo 510 brasileiros adultos entre 18-59 anos (M = 30,64; DP = 10,47), 77,3% do sexo feminino. Os indivíduos responderam ao MAES e a um questionário sociodemográfico. Quarenta e sete vírgula 8 por cento relataram ter sofrido *bullying*, sendo esta vitimização associada a maiores taxas de todos os tipos de violência intrafamiliar, menor percepção de apoio social na infância e na adolescência, uso precoce de álcool, ideação suicida e vitimização física na idade adulta. Ser vítima de bullying está relacionado a outras formas de violência e comportamentos de risco, com menor rede de apoio social possivelmente desempenhando um papel na polivitimização. Estratégias protetivas, intervenções na família e na escola podem ajudar a evitar comportamentos de risco futuros.

Palavras-chave: bullying, comportamentos de risco, adversidades na infância, polivitimização, suporte social.

Resumen

Polivictimización y efectos del acoso entre pares en una muestra brasileña. El tipo de violencia más común en las escuelas es el acoso por parte de los compañeros. Este estudio tiene como objetivo investigar la asociación entre esta forma de victimización y otras formas de violencia y conductas de riesgo. Un total de 510 adultos brasileños de 18 a 59 años (M = 30,64; DT = 10,47) participaron en este estudio, 77,3% del sexo femenino. Los individuos respondieron el MAES y un cuestionario sociodemográfico. El 47,8% refirió haber sido acosado, y esta victimización se asoció con mayores tasas de todo tipo de violencia intrafamiliar, menor percepción de apoyo social en la niñez y adolescencia, consumo temprano de alcohol, ideación suicida y victimización física en la edad adulta. Los entornos de apoyo social más débiles posiblemente desempeñen un papel en la polivictimización. Las estrategias protectoras, las intervenciones familiares y escolares pueden ayudar a prevenir futuras conductas de riesgo.

Palabras clave: acoso escolar; comportamientos de riesgo; adversidades infantiles; polivictimización; apoyo social.

There are multiple definitions of school violence, and there is no consensus among researchers concerning that. This sort of violence can be described as multifaceted, and it involves physical and psychological actions (such as swearing, humiliation and exclusion) between teacher and student as well as peers. It is also seen as related to family and community violence which would be continued within social relationships in the school environment as well as outside it (Giordani, Seffner, & Dell'Aglio, 2017; Silva & Assis, 2018).

The first studies about school violence appeared in the 1950s in the United States and, since then, the dimensions of this phenomenon have changed. An example of that is the emergence of firearms, white weapons and the use of drugs in schools i.e., the school started reproducing part of the violence that surrounds it (Abramovay, 2002). Specifically, in Brazil the location of the schools in drug dealing territories and organized crime adds one more dimension of violence to this setting (Silva & Assis, 2018).

Nowadays peer bullying is the most common sort of violence within the school setting among children and adolescents (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). According to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), in a report published in 2018, half of the students between 13 and 15 years old around the world claims to have suffered from some kind of violence at school, and data suggest that one out of three students is a victim of intimidation by peers or bullying. In addition, the impact on victims' well-being and learning is similar in rich and poor countries, and although victimization risks exist for both sexes, girls are more subjected to psychological intimidation and boys are more commonly victims of physical violence and threats (Chzhen, Gromada, Rees, Cuesta, & Bruckauf, 2018).

Bullying is seen as a sort of adversity, a concept which comprises experiences which are potentially harmful to children and adolescents' development, such as abuse and negligence (McLaughlin, 2016). The inclusion of bullying in the studies about adversities as an adverse event was necessary because of the relative concurrence of intrafamilial and community risk factors. In addition, this inclusion was relevant considering that most studies about adversities analyzed specific populations or samples, often with high education levels or in developed countries (Cronholm et al., 2015; Mersky, Janczewski, & Topitzes, 2017).

According to the definition by Olweus (2013), bullying is a type of aggressive behavior that comprises repeated, intentional aggressive attitudes of one or more students against others in an unequal relationship of power which takes place for no apparent reason; this behavior is characterized by intentionality, frequency, and power imbalance between perpetrator and victim. Studies on bullying indicated that this phenomenon can occur in all sorts of schools (public, private, rural, urban, elementary and high school), regardless of socioeconomical conditions (Schultz et al., 2012).

A study carried out in public schools in Porto Alegre shows that about one third of students has already been a victim of verbal violence and around 10% has undergone physical violence by peers (Giordani & Dell'Aglio, 2016). In addition, there was an increase in the incidence of bullying in Brazil's capitals, in which the prevalence increased from 5.4% in 2009 to 6.8% in 2012 (Malta, Mascarenhas, Porto, Barreto, & Morais Neto, 2014). The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2018 (The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019) interviewed 2,447 basic education teachers and 184 directors of Brazilian schools. According to TALIS 2018 (OECD, 2019) 28% of Brazilian school principals reported witnessing bullying or bullying among students, twice the OECD average. Brazil is among those with the highest rates in the world, which have remained stable in recent years.

Data from National School Health Survey [PeNSE] (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2016), which comprised over a hundred thousand teenagers in the 9th grade of elementary school enrolled all over the country, report that 7.4% of Brazilian students always or almost always felt humiliated by provocations at school and that 19.8% of them have already practiced some sort of bullying. In this study, mocking, scorning, intimidating and making fun of classmates was considered bullying. Regarding the exposure to physical violence among peers, data from PeNSE (IBGE, 2016) show that 23.4% of students interviewed mentioned having been involved in fights during the years before the study. Differences between sexes were found: among boys this figure reached 30.3% of involvement, as opposed to 16.8% among the girls who reported getting involved in fights. In this setting, it is important to highlight psychosocial factors related to bullying which increase not only the risk of victimization, but also revictimization and polyvictimization, such as the early and abusive consumption of alcohol, suicidal ideation and the perception of social support.

Victims of bullying are more subject to early and abusive use of alcohol than victims of other forms of violence by peers and adolescents (Maniglio, 2016).

Also, another study showed that bullying and cyberbullying increased the odds of using alcohol and tobacco (Washington, 2020). On the other hand, adolescents with abusive alcohol behavior have a higher risk of suffering as well as practicing community violence (Moreira et al., 2008). Among those who witnessed violence, there was 49% more probability for the use of alcohol (Horta, Lisboa, Teixeira, Wendt, & Horta, 2015). Based on this, it is possible to perceive that the abusive use of alcohol may reinforce school violence, forming a kind of victimization cycle. In addition, the abusive use of alcohol by the violence victims may be considered a coping mechanism and self-medication, once the effect of alcohol avoids, reduces, interrupts or relieves negative internal feelings (such as painful feelings, affection, memories and cognitions) associated with the victimization experienced (Maniglio, 2016).

Being a victim of bullying in childhood and adolescence may cause harm on the mental health and quality of life of subjects in the long run, since the consequences of victimization are not limited to its occurrence (Camodeca & Nava, 2020; Takizawa, Maughan, & Arseneault, 2014; Winding, Skouenborg, Mortensen, & Andersen, 2020). There is evidence for a causal relationship between bullying victimization and anxiety and depressive disorders (Jadambaa et al., 2020) with victims of bullying at school showing more internalizing symptoms (anxiety and depression) than those who are not victims (Arseneault et al., 2008) and frequent victims of bullying in adolescence showed twice as many odds of developing depression as adults and increased risk of mental disorders, low fulfillment, problems in social relationships and suicidal behavior (Bowes, Joinson, Wolke, & Lewis, 2015; Kubiszewski, Fontaine, Huré, & Rusch, 2013). Since suicide is the most severe outcome, it is important to understand the relationship between bullying and suicide, as literature shows that there are similar odds for the relationship between victimization by bullying and suicidal ideation and between victimization by bullying and suicide attempts (Barzilay et al., 2017; Brunstein Klomek et al., 2019). Also, there is evidence for differences in the type or bullying dimension, with physical victimization being more associated with suicide ideation, and relational victimization more associated with suicide attempts (Barzilay et al., 2017).

Taking this into consideration, the perception of social support arises as a possible protection factor against bullying victimization (Barzilay et al., 2017; Demaray & Malecki, 2003). This perception is understood as the perception of social support, i.e., knowing there are family members and friends they can count on. Therefore, having a social support network during childhood and adolescence is a determining factor for better adjustment at school and academic performance (Danielsen, Samdal, Hetland, & Wold, 2009), academic achievement and well-being (Kiuru et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the lack of social support causes higher risks of depression and emotional difficulties (Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, & Keppens, 2018) and, consequently, bullying victimization (Mishna et al., 2016). In addition, violence or other stressful events may difficult young people to benefit from their existent social support network (Rueger, Malecki, Pyun, Aycock, & Coyle, 2016).

Considering the factors described, the possibility of poly and revictimization must be considered and assessed, based on the hypothesis that being intimidated by peers during childhood may cause more abuse from classmates or adults, forming the first stage of a victimization cycle that may remain within situations as time goes by (Fisher et al., 2015). Polyvictimization can be defined as having experienced different forms of multiple victimizations, such as sexual abuse, physical abuse or bullying, emphasizing different kinds of victimization, rather than just multiple episodes of the same kind of victimization (Finkelhor, Turner, Hamby, & Ormrod, 2011).

Thus, considering the importance of understanding factors associated with bullying, the aim of this study is to investigate the prevalence of the occurrence of physical and emotional bullying in childhood and adolescence in a sample of Brazilian adults, the association of this victimization with other forms of violence and psychosocial aspects, specifically the perception of social support, use and abuse of alcohol and suicidal ideation in adult age.

Method

This is a cross-sectional quantitative study, and its data collection was carried out online as well face-to-face, by convenience.

Participants

Five hundred and ten individuals between 18 and 59 years old participated in this study (M = 30.64; SD = 10.47), of both sexes (77.3% female). Among the participants, 57.5% were single and 21.6% married. As to education, more than one third of the sample was taking or had finished post-graduation, and 18.4% had only finished high school.

Instruments

Sociodemographic Form. Used to collect data not included in the other scales used, showing biosociodemographic aspects of participants (such as sex, age, educational level), as well as those related to education, social support, use of alcohol.

Maltreatment and Abuse Exposure Scale (MAES) (Kluwe-Schiavon, Viola, & Grassi-Oliveira, 2016). The MAES scale is comprised of 52 items that assess the level of exposure to 10 kinds of abuse: emotional negligence, emotional non-verbal abuse, parent physical abuse, parent verbal abuse, peer emotional abuse, physical negligence, sexual abuse, testimonial of interparental violence and testimonial of violence against siblings. For the analysis of peer violence, the subscales "physical peer bullying" and "peer emotional abuse" were used. Indeed, this study uses this differentiation among the forms of perpetration. In order to carry out some of the analyses, the subscale scores for physical bullying and peer emotional abuse of MAES scale were combined, and a peer victimization score was calculated, ranging from 0 to 20, in which the higher the number, the more reports on the occurrence of bullying.

Ethical Considerations and Procedures

The ethical aspects that ensure the integrity of participants were carried out according to Brazilian legislation (Resolução n° 510/2016). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Psychology Institute at Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul. Volunteers were invited to participate in the study and were informed of the confidentiality of personal information as well as the possibility to drop out at any moment. Part of the questionnaires was applied face--to-face in groups of young students in public schools of Porto Alegre, and the remaining ones were applied online via survey – for approximately 60 minutes. The research team provided students with assistance in case any participant needed support during the data collection. During the online questionnaire, participants could interrupt at any moment and require assistance in case they felt uncomfortable with any of the questions. Participants were asked to sign an Informed Consent.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential analyses were carried out, according to the aims of the study. In order to investigate differences in means of sociodemographic and bullying victimization, the *t* Student test was used. To verify the odds ratio and the association between different forms of adversities and bullying victimization, a binary logistic regression was used. Besides that, chi-square test was also used to verify differences regarding the perception of social support.

Results

Considering physical and emotional bullying, 47.8% of participants reported having suffered peer bullying during childhood, and 20.6% suffered both types of violence. Emotional abuse seems to be more common, present in 42.4% of reports, as opposed to 26.1 of physical bullying reports. As to differences in the bullying victimization due to sex, there were significant differences for peer physical abuse t (df) = 2.589, p = 0.05, d = 0.29, but not in the cases of emotional abuse. The scores of the physical bullying subscales were higher among boys (M = 2.36, SD = 2.68) than among girls (M = 1.64, SD = 2.31).

In order to investigate polyvictimization, the associations between bullying and other forms of adversities in childhood were analyzed. The score of victimization per each typology of intrafamilial adversities were higher in the bullying victims' cases, and all differences had significant scores. Table 1 shows the results of the comparison between the group that reported being victims of bullying and those who did not report this experience concerning the adversities and considering the age of first alcohol use.

Table 1. *Mean and standard deviation per group (non-victims and victims of bullying)*

		Non-victims of bullying	Victims of bullying	Student's *T-Test*	*d*
Emotional neglect	*M*	2.06	3.86	t=-7.222	0.643
	SD	2.51	3.06	gl= 470.90*	
Non-verbal emotional abuse	*M*	3.15	5.09	t= -9.692	0.860
	SD	2.14	2.35	gl= 491.95*	
Parental physical maltreatment	*M*	3.32	5.00	t= -7.298	0.649
	SD	2.48	2.69	gl= 508*	

Table 1. Continuation

		Non-victims of bullying	Victims of bullying	Student's *T-Test*	*d*
Parental verbal abuse	*M*	2.68	5.94	*t*= -10.621	0.956
	SD	3.36	3.46	gl= 508*	
Physical neglect	*M*	0.75	1.45	*t*= -4.262	0.343
	SD	1.52	2.45	gl= 388.718*	
Sexual abuse	*M*	0.84	1.77	*t*= -4.983	0.445
	SD	1.74	2.39	gl= 441.21*	
Witnessing Interparental Violence	*M*	0.87	1.66	*t*= -3.981	0.359
	SD	1.90	2.47	gl= 456.10*	
Witnessing Violence to Siblings	*M*	1.03	1.82	*t*= -4.546	0.405
	SD	1.72	2.16	gl= 463.81*	
Age of first alcohol use	*M*	15.73	14.90	*t*= 1.934	-
		5.04	3.46	gl= 413**	0.192

Note. *$p < 0.001$; **$p = 0.05$

Furthermore, the study observed the odds ratio of this polyvictimization still during childhood and adolescence. Data showed that the chance of being a victim of bullying increased significantly ($p < 0.001$) when the subject had been a victim of one of the intrafamilial abuse forms, and the odds are 3 times higher when emotional negligence had previously occurred, 4 times higher in physical abuse, 5.4 higher in non-verbal abuse cases and 4.5 higher in cases in which the individual was a victim of verbal abuse at home.

Regarding the perception of social support, χ^2 tests found differences between victims and non-victims of bullying in all age ranges studied. The study showed that, during childhood 29.5% of victims did not perceive they had people to count on in case of need, against 9.8% of non-victims that thought this way, and χ^2 (1, $N = 510$) = 31.92, $p < 0.001$, $\phi = 0.25$. During adolescence, these rates were 31.6% for the victims and 13.9% among the others, in which χ^2 (1, $N = 510$) = 22.83, $p < 0.001$, $\phi = 0.21$. Even during adulthood, among the individuals who reported being victims of bullying, 9% does not perceive their social support network, against 5.6% of the same perception among the non-victims, with χ^2 (1, $N = 510$) = 2.157, $p < 0.001$, $\phi = 0.06$.

Concerning other psychological aspects during adulthood, the study carried out analyses according to the bullying victimization score during childhood and adolescence, which comprehended both physical and emotional abuse. As far as physical violence is concerned, results pointed that 24.8% of the sample reported some kind of assault after 18 years old and these participants presented higher scores ($M = 9.60$, $SD = 5.86$) in bullying victimization during childhood and adolescence than those who were not victims as adults ($M = 6.60$, $SD = 4.90$), $t = -5.670$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0,58$. In addition, significant differences were found ($p<0.001$) in peer victimization scores in relation to suicidal ideation at some point in life, and the group that reported suicidal ideation ($M = 0.94$, $SD = 0.80$) showed higher bullying victimization scores than the one that reported never having thought about it ($M = 0.33$, $SD = 0.61$), with t = -10.45, $d = 0.94$.

Discussion

This study aimed at analyzing the prevalence of bullying victimization during childhood and adolescence in a sample of Brazilian adults and its association to other forms of victimization, perception of social support, early use of alcohol and suicidal ideation. This is a complex phenomenon with several factors involved. For this reason, it is necessary to contextualize it in order to understand its circular causality (Schultz et al., 2012). Regarding physical bullying, the study investigated whether their peers had ever threatened them in order to take money or personal belongings, forced them to do things they did not want to, pushed, grabbed, shook, pinched, slapped, punched or kicked them intentionally, or hit them hard enough to leave bruises, or hurt them in a way they needed medical assistance.

Emotional bullying comprehended situations in which peers threatened, insulted, offended them or called them by derogatory nicknames, said things that made the individual feel embarrassed or humiliated, posted humiliating messages or spread rumors about the person, intentionally excluded the person from activities or

groups or provoked fear. Almost half of the participants reported having experienced physical and/or emotional peer victimization, according to MAES subscales. Emotional demonstrations of peer violence were the most frequently reported, which corroborates the studies in this area. According to Marcolino and collaborators (2018), psychological bullying (spreading rumors, excluding, cursing, threatening, mocking) was reported as the most frequent kind of bullying in the school environment in Brazil, perceived as the most practiced and the most painful one. Furthermore, this kind of bullying causes more victimization in both sexes probably because it is considered the least serious type, reinforcing the naturalization of this sort of violence in schools.

As it was expected, there were differences between bullying victimization according to participants' sex. Men had higher scores of reporting physical bullying victimization than women. Official data (Waiselfisz, 2015) corroborate that and indicate that boys, especially adolescents, are more subjected to physical violence in all development settings. A study showed that boys had 0.53 more chance of being victims of physical bullying when compared to girls, and regarding bullying in general, boys also had 0.71 more chance of being victims (Marcolino, Cavalcanti, Padilha, Miranda, & Clementino, 2018). However, this study did not find differences concerning emotional bullying (peer emotional abuse), unlike the findings of literature in this area (Chzhen, et al., 2018; Maniglio, 2016), which suggests that girls are more susceptible to psychological violence.

Indicating a cycle of polyvictimization, this study found an association between being a victim of peers and a victim in the family context – of all sorts of violence. The chance of being a victim of peers always increased when any type of intrafamilial violence occurred. Revictimization in different contexts of development, especially during childhood and adolescence, has been observed in several studies. A systematic review that included 45 national and international studies between 2005 and 2010 showed that 35.5% of the studies pointed a domestic violence victim also as a bullying victim or a bully (Senra, Lourenço, & Pereira, 2011). Also, a study with 426 adolescents in Brazil identified that exposure to family violence could be one of the factors associated with higher school violence scores (Giordani & Dell'Aglio, 2016). In addition, studies indicate that polyvictimization victims show a tendency to feel unable to deal with distressing events, once they started to perceive them as uncontrollable/inevitable and experience high levels of emotional distress (Guerra, Pereda, Guilera, & Abad, 2016; Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2011).

Despite the relevance of studies on peer violence, school violence must not be analyzed as a kind of violence among young individuals, once this phenomenon reveals the intersection of several social factors - family, school, as well as individual characteristics (Abramovay, 2002). The understanding of this phenomenon crosses all these settings and the relationships established among them. Studies have already associated intrafamilial victimization and violence in the community with the occurrence of violence at school. Literature on the consequences of intrafamilial victimization within the school setting has been showing negative effects of coercive disciplinary strategies on children's development and their education (Patias, Siqueira, & Dias, 2012).

Furthermore, besides polyvictimization, this study also identified indications of revictimization. In this case, an individual who is a victim at a certain point of the vital cycle has more chances of becoming a victim at another moment. These results identified differences between adults who were victims of physical violence during adulthood and those who were not, and having been victims of peers during childhood and adolescence was associated with being a victim during adulthood.

Results indicated that the social relationships seem be impacted by this victimization, though the causality flow cannot be identified, i.e., if a smaller social support network brings more tendency to different forms of victimization, or if being a victim of peers is what interferes with the individual's perception of their social support. In any case, literature shows that, for those adolescents who are victims of bullying, not having a best friend could increase the psychological conflict towards this victimization (Barcaccia et al., 2018) and that the presence of this support from friends has been associated with lower levels of victimization by peers (Kendrick, Jutengren, & Stattin, 2012). Other studies observed that feeling socially integrated and perceiving few conflicts among classmates are also relevant and possibly protective factors, especially in situations of relational bullying, in which the victim is excluded, humiliated or insulted (Moyano, Ayllón, Antoñanzas, & Cano, 2019). Studies in this area reveal that the perception of social support – knowing that they have family members or friends to count on – has been associated with better psychological health among children, adolescents and young adults (Chu et al., 2010; Reid, Holt, Bowman, Espelage, & Green, 2016).

Current studies have been suggesting that encouraging and improving relationships among peers and stimulating positive family environments may benefit the psychological health of those young people who faced with adversity during childhood and/or bullying at school. Literature suggests that family support and friendship may reduce depressive symptoms in adolescents who faced with adversity during childhood in their families and violence among peers before 11 years old (Van Harmelen et al., 2016). Studies recommend interventions in individual, school and family settings with the bullying victims, although studies have been showing that little work has been done with the victims' families (Mann, Kristjansson, Sigfusdottir, & Smith, 2014). Family support is pointed as significant in order to minimize the long-term damages to victims of peer violence during childhood and adolescence. Victimization experiences may contribute to adaptation difficulties in adulthood, though these difficulties depend directly on the level of family support perceived by the adolescent (Isaacs, Hodges, & Salmivalli, 2008).

Results also showed that bullying and exposure to different forms of violence were associated with the earlier consumption of alcohol compared to the individuals who did not have being victims. Literature on this subject was partially summarized by a series of systematic reviews on the association between peer victimization and alcohol consumption (Collier, van Beusekom, Bos & Sandfort, 2013; Hong et al., 2014). Authors have been suggesting that bullying (or other forms of peer victimization) may promote substance use as a coping strategy or an attempt to self-medicate to deal with or to numb the stress related to victimization or negative feelings caused by this abuse (Maniglio, 2016). Nevertheless, this association is not unanimous in literature. The findings of another systematic review showed diverging results – some of them indicating inverse association and others indicating direct association – or no association – between these variables (Horta et al., 2015).

Moreover, this study showed that peer victimization is related to suicidal ideation at any point in life. The association between bullying and suicide has been widely investigated an discussed all over the world, which has been instigated by growing and alarming suicide rates among young people and by recent estimates indicating that suicide is the second cause of death of young people between 15 and 29 years old (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019). Recent studies have been associating peer violence during childhood and adolescence to the number of ideation and suicide attempts (Baiden, & Tadeo, 2020; Holt et al., 2015; Takizawa et al., 2014). From the results of this study, it is possible to suggest that being a victim of peer violence at school may be one of the factors associated with important damages in the student's mental health and those damages may last till adult age, becoming one of the risk factors for suicidal behavior during any phase of life.

Conclusions

This study aimed at verifying the associations between peer victimization during childhood and adolescence and other forms of victimization during childhood, adulthood and risk behaviors. Being a victim of bullying seems to be present in a cycle of violence and was associated with other childhood adverse experiences. Considering these analyses, it is important to highlight that a limitation of this study lies in the fact that it is a self-report study, being influenced by the respondent's bias. Furthermore, the scale used is focused on adversities in childhood in a broader sense, and not specifically on bullying. Two of the MAES' subscales investigate peer violence, both physical and emotional; however, the intentionality of the aggressor and the exact frequency of victimization could not be estimated. It is crucial that specific instruments should be used for more accurate data about these experiences - even with adults in relation to their childhood and adolescence, to identify long-term effects. Besides that, other possible variables related to polyvictimization were not included, such as other forms of intrafamilial violence, as well as possible mediators for the association of adversities and adulthood variables. Despite this, data indicate that polyvictimization, as well as revictimization are present in different ways among victims and non-victims of peer violence in childhood and adolescence.

The concern about the frequency and the effects of peer victimization during childhood and adolescence is reflected in the increased number of studies to understand its causes and consequences in order to develop appropriate strategies for policies and interventions. The recommendations of UNICEF (Chzhen et al., 2018) to face peer violence situations include the implementation of policies and legislation to protect students from violence at schools, strengthening prevention measures and response at schools. In this sense, the work of a school psychologist can be essential for the identification and intervention in cases of bullying and the promotion of healthy relationships and conflict management.

In Brazil, since 2019, there is a law (Lei nº 13.935/2019) that guarantees psychologist care to public school students, establishing that multi-professional teams should develop actions to improve the quality of the teaching-learning process, with the participation of the school community, acting in the mediation of social and institutional relations, including peer violence. School-based interventions, that psychologists could propose, appear to be effective both to reduce victimization and to expand bystander intervention (i.e., someone decides to defend a victim when witnessing a conflict) (Doumas, Midgett, & Watts, 2019; Fredrick, Jenkins, & Ray, 2020; Ingram et al., 2019). On top of that, two laws aim at preventing and intervening in cases of bullying in Brazil. Law 13,185 (Lei nº 13.185/2015) institutes the Program to Combat Systematic Intimidation (Bullying) and Law 13,663 (Lei nº 13.663/2018) (which amends the laws of Guidelines and Bases of Education in Brazil) includes the promotion of measures to raise awareness, prevent and combat all types of violence and the promotion of a culture of peace among the responsibilities of educational establishments. This legislation imposes an essential primary duty on schools, clubs and recreational associations, in the sense of developing preventive, awareness, diagnosis and combat measures against this type of systematic intimidation.

UNICEF (Chzhen et al., 2018) urged the communities and individuals to join students when talking about violence and to work in order to change the culture in classrooms and communities through more effective investments focused on proven solutions based on evidence that can help students and schools to remain safe. These outcomes and long-term effects highlight the need for effective intervention and prevention programs to reduce school-bullying amongst children and adolescents, as well as urgent intervention in cases of polyvictimization.

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Polyvictimization and the effects of peer bullying in a Brazilian sample

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