

6th International Conference on Intercultural Education “Education and Health: From a transcultural perspective”

Violence at school: a sample of young muslims and young valencians

Valentin Gavidia^a, Marta Talavera^a, Jalah Hamdan^a

^aUniversity of Valencia, Avda Taronngers, 4, Valencia, 46022, Spain

Abstract

Violence at school is considered to be an important issue in Spain, despite the fact that the majority of secondary education students reject it. Over the last decade awareness has been raised with regard to this problem. In this study we aim to analyze the perception of school violence held by two very different groups of secondary education students. A sample of young Muslims (n=88) and young Valencians (n=88) (aged between 12 and 18) has been used, all of whom live in the city of Valencia (Spain) and study in 12 secondary educational centers in the city. We observed significant differences in the perception that young Muslims and Valencians have of this violence. Both groups reject violence and take little part in it, with the former group perceiving it to a greater extent than the latter.

© 2014 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>).

Selection and peer-review under responsibility of HUM-665 Research Group “Research and Evaluation in Intercultural Education”.
Keyword: School violence; Immigrants; Muslims, secondary education

1. Introduction

School violence is an issue of growing interest worldwide given the adverse effects it brings about among students (Debarbieux, 2001; Guerra, C. et al. 2011). This is defined as such intentional behaviour by which harm is inflicted, either by action or omission (Serrano e Iborra, 2005) on a person related to the educational community, teaching staff, student body, other staff, etc. In Spain, it is also a significant problem, with its own set of peculiarities associated with national characteristics (Ombudsman, 2006).

Many are its causes (Martínez-Otero, 2005), as there are many possible causes of aggressiveness and violent behaviour in humans: A repressive social setting, genetics, brain metabolism, a base instinct that makes up part of the fight for survival, a reaction to frustration, a consequence of the oppression of social structures, etc. (Palomero, 2001) but not all of us perceive this violence in the same way and nor do we take the same part in it. Violent behaviour is acquired or disappears depending on the consequences that stem from it, so that rewards and

acknowledgement reinforce this type of behaviour and punishments weaken it (Skinner, 1953). Aggressiveness, as behaviour, is learned in a similar way and takes place at an early age. Therefore school is one of the places where these behaviours are learned, along with input from the family setting, and so should act as a place for inter-group interaction, counteracting images from other institutions and instructing in values of equality and acknowledging differences (Checa, 2011).

Bandura (1984) speaks of learning by modelling or by imitation so that the fact of seeing an aggressive behaviour may increase aggressiveness in children who witness it, and subsequently the child not only reproduces this aggressive behaviour but also invents new forms of aggression, thereby contributing to generalize the situation. The generalization of this behaviour to other situations encourages the person to be violent or aggressive (Geen, 1990). Hence the importance of the educational environment's role in training and monitoring.

But we must add to this the capacity of certain social structures for generating violence. We are talking about indirect, cultural and structural violence (Galtung, 1998). In every society there is a dominant culture and the rest are, to a greater or lesser extent, marginalized. This situation is uncritically circulated by the mass media highlighting rivalries and confrontations, undesirable situations, in many of which violence exists. In this sense, many of the heroes offered to society have the sole quality of using violence and young people might make note and adopt it to their manner of behaviour as they see it as a means of problem-solving. On the school level, some studies have shown that there is a clear relationship between the individual's social reputation, and his or her tendency towards violence, particularly among adolescents. (Moreno, 2009)

Aggressiveness is also present in school, this being another part of society. School based violence is a reflection of indirect violence stemming from structural injustice. Pupils are exposed to violence coming from other classmates, from the teaching staff, from the school institution itself, at the same time as they themselves may generate violence, towards teaching staff, other classmates, etc. This work will focus on bullying among peers that usually consists of persecution and physical, psychological or moral aggression repeatedly carried out by a pupil or group of pupils and inflicted on another, completely at a disadvantage (Palomero, 2001). This abuse is manifested in different ways: insults, aggressions, social isolation, etc. are the most frequent, and to these we refer when using the concept of bullying or abuse at school.

This work aims to analyse the perception of school violence held by secondary education pupils, from between the ages of 12 and 18 in the city of Valencia (Spain), who belong to two very different groups. One of the groups is made up of local pupils and the other is made up of young Muslim pupils of the same age, whose parents are immigrants and Muslims from other countries.

We are of the opinion that a situation of violence at school is experienced differently by each group since immigration could imply a risk factor with regard to violence, by making the children of recent immigrants feel that they are in greater danger of becoming victims or aggressors, due to a lack of roots brought about by leaving local references behind such as family, friends, neighbourhood, by the difficulties involved in developing the support networks necessary for building up one's own identity, and by the fact that they are perceived as different, and in the case of Muslims as conflictive, particularly after terrorism-linked events.

2. Material and methods

2.1. Participants

A sample of young Muslims (n=88) and Valencians (n=88) has been used with ages from between 12 and 18 years old who live in the city of Valencia and are schooled at one of the city's 12 secondary education centres

To obtain the sample, contacts were established with the Education Authority and with the city's Mosques. The former provided a list of young foreign students attending secondary education centres in the city of Valencia and those centres with three or more Muslim pupils were approached. In the same centres the sample of Valencia pupils was obtained from a proposal by the school's administration and chosen at random, but always from the same class, age and sex as the young Muslims.

2.2. Instrument

The information was collected using as an instrument part of a questionnaire designed by Bueno et al (1995) and repeated on another two occasions (Valderrama, et al. 1997, and Gavidia & Talavera, 2000) that has been adapted for this study (Annex I). Information collection was agreed with the schools' administration, so that in some cases information was collected by the class tutor and in other cases by members of our team. The wishes of the governing board of Secondary Education Centres were observed at all times. Presentation and confidentiality letters for the data collection were sent out to the parents of the pupils involved in the research.

The questionnaire has been validated by a group of experts made up of three lecturers from the Department of the Didactics of Experimental and Social Science and a lecturer from the Department of Social Work, both from the University of Valencia. Likewise, it was also presented to a group of young students to check if their responses measured what we intended them to measure. The data obtained have been analysed using statistical package SPSS (Vs.15).

3. Analysis and results.

The information obtained from the sample's responses to questions from the questionnaire, was the following:

3.1. Sample description

A large proportion of Muslim students had been born in Spain or came to Spain when they were very small, but a significant group arrived from Morocco, Algeria, Palestine, and other parts of the Muslim world. The majority lives in the parental home, with married parents, several siblings and middle to upper-middle class, some of their parents are university educated although they work in business or in the building industry. At the same time, the majority of mothers are housewives although their academic level is quite high.

The Valencia sample is also made up of 88 adolescents of both sexes, with the same features as the Muslim sample. That is to say it is an identical sample of classmates from the same class. All are children of Spanish parents. The majority lives in the parental home with married parents, and belongs to middle class families.

3.1.1. Age and sex: The questionnaire was answered by both Spanish and Muslim young people, aged between 12 and 18 years old. The highest percentage was of young people aged 14 whereas those aged 18 were the minority. With regard to sex, the percentage of males (52,3 %) was higher than that of females (47,7 %).

3.1.2. School years: Table 1 presents the frequency of the range of school years attended by these pupils.

Table 1. Distribution of School years of the young people surveyed

School Year	Frequency	Percentage
1st yr European Baccalaureate	8	9,1
1st yr Secondary Education	20	22,7
2nd yr European Baccalaureate	5	5,7
2nd yr Secondary Education	23	26,1
3rd yr Secondary Education	19	21,6
4th yr Secondary Education	10	11,4
Vocational Training	3	3,4
Total	88	100,0

3.1.3. Nationality to which young Muslims feel they belong: The majority says they feel Spanish with a percentage of 23,9 %, 15,9 % feel Moroccan and 11,4 % Algerian. Significantly, the feeling of Palestinian

nationality was 10,2 % and 8 % Pakistani. We should highlight that a group of 10% feel they belong to two nationalities at the same time, Spanish and that of their parents' origin.

3.1.4. Length of time in Spain: According to the responses, the majority of pupils have lived in Spain for more than 7 years. The extreme values have low response percentages. Predominance is to be found among pupils who have lived in Spain for 12 years (17,0 %), followed by those who have lived in Spain for 13 years (10,2 %). The average is of 10,22 years.

3.1.5. Habitual Residence: The great majority of Muslim pupils (96,6 %) live in the family home, the rest being very unusual options (with other relations, student flat or others, with one response in each case). In the case of young Valencians, 94,3% live at home with their parents, and the rest of options are similar to the Muslim group.

3.1.6. Parental family status: The majority of Muslims (92%) responded that their parents are married, as in the case of Valencian pupils, although with a lower percentage (69,3%). There is a low percentage of divorced and separated parents, 4,5% and 2,3% among Muslims, respectively, according to responses, but the Valencians' responses were greater in number regarding this aspect, 20,5% and 6,8% of parents were divorced or separated.

3.1.7. Number of family members: We observed that among Muslims the highest percentage was of families with more members, specifically 60,3 % of families consisted of five members or more. The most common family size was 5 members (28,4%) followed by families of 6 and 7 members in a similar proportion (17% and 15,9%). Only 5,7% of families had 8 members and 6,8% had 9 members. In contrast with these data, the majority of young Valencians indicated that their families were smaller, 50% are families with 4 members, and 21.6% with three members, although there are others with 2, 6 and 7 members but these are a minority.

3.2. Relationship with classmates

Over half the young Muslims (59.1%) pointed out that the relationship they had with the rest of their classmates is very good and for 34.1% it is good. For the majority of young Valencians the relationship is good (54,5%) and 35,2% consider it to be very good.

In general, the relationship between adolescents and their classmates, in both populations, is qualified as good or very good. However, there is a significant difference between both populations ($P=0,016$) that could be due to the degree of satisfaction with these relationships. (Table 2)

Table 2. Relationship with classmates in both populations

Relationship with classmates	Muslims	(N (%))	Valencians	(N (%))	P
Very good	52	(59,1)	31	(35,2)	0,016
Good	30	(34,1)	48	(54,5)	
Indifferent	5	(5,7)	8	(9,1)	
Poor	1	(1,1)	1	(1,1)	
Total	88	100	88	100	

3.3. Violence at school:

The majority of young Valencians and Muslims (96,6%, 77,3% respectively) state the existence of violent behaviours amongst pupils at their school. Young Valencians and Muslims agree that these episodes of violence are occasional for 73,8 % of Valencian and 66,4% of Muslims, whereas 27,3 % of adolescent Valencians and almost 16 % of adolescent Muslims, consider it as an everyday reality.

The statistical analyses reveal a significant association (P value=0,003) in the perception of violence amongst classmates (Table 3)

3.3.1. Participation in violence: With regard to participation in these events we are able to split the student body into three groups: Witnesses, Aggressors and Victims. Muslim pupils feel themselves to be witnesses in 65.9% of occasions, with 4.5% identifying themselves as perpetrators of the aggression on their classmates. 4.5% stated they had been a victim of a physical attack and a further 4.5% of pupils reported having been publicly humiliated. In the case of Valencian pupils 79,6% stated having been witness to but not a participant in an attack on a classmate, although 8,6% admitted to having taken part in an attack on a classmate and 6,5% admitted to having taken part in forms of humiliation. A minority reported having been physically attacked (2,1%) or humiliated (3,2%). Statistical analyses confirm the existence of significant differences between Valencian and Muslim adolescents in terms of participation in school violence. (P value=0,029). (Table 3)

3.3.2. Feeling about violence in your school: For 14.8% of Muslim pupils this school violence situation makes them afraid, whereas 20.5% are indifferent. Over half (61.4%) are against school violence. Valencian pupils feel the same way with regard to this issue, 68,2% are against school violence, 18,2% are indifferent, whereas there is a percentage of 13,6% who are afraid of school violence. The statistical analyses do not reveal significant differences between the feelings of Valencian pupils and their Muslim counterparts with regard to violence at school. (P value = 0,810). (Table 3)

Table 3. Responses to school violence

	Muslims (N (%))	Valencians (N (%)	P
Violence at your school is			0,003
An everyday occurrence	14 (15,9%)	20 (22,7%)	
An occasional occurrence	54 (61,4%)	65 (73,9%)	
Doesn't exist	20 (22,7%)	3 (3,4%)	
Violence at your school (participation)			0,029
I have been a witness but was not involved	58 (65,9%)	74 (79,6%)	
I have taken part in attacking my classmates	4 (4,5%)	8 (8,6%)	
I have been physically attacked	4 (4,5%)	2 (2,1%)	
I have been involved in humiliating my classmates	0	6 (6,5%)	
I have been humiliated	4 (4,5%)	3 (3,2%)	
Violence at your school....			0,810
Frightens me	13 (14%)	12 (13,6%)	
I don't think it's right	54 (61,4%)	60 (68,2%)	
I don't care	18 (20,5%)	16 (18,2%)	
No answer	3 (3,4%)	0	
Total	88 (100%)	93 (100%)	

4. Discussion and conclusions

We took two similar samples of pupils studying Secondary Education in state schools in the city of Valencia, one composed of young Muslim students and the other composed of young Valencian students. Both have been conditioned by the premise of finding a minimum of three young Muslim immigrants in the Education Centre.

Before analysing the perception held by both collectives on possible school violence, we wanted to check the degree of camaraderie between classmates, as well as the opinions they have of each other. The outcomes of the questionnaire enable us to say that relationships between classmates are good or very good, and even in the sample of young Muslims it is better than amongst Valencians and that the desire to be well thought of is general in all cases. This is the equivalent to acting as a shield with regard to peer violence and means that the perception they

express about school violence is not determined by personal or group squabbles, something very common in these adolescent ages.

There are only a very small percentage of pupils who stated that violence did not exist. In one way or another, either habitually or occasionally, the existence of violence at school was acknowledged. We observed significant differences in the perception held by young Muslims and young Valencians of this violence since young Muslims acknowledge its existence but to a lesser extent. The Ministry of Education's School Violence Observatory pointed out, in 2008, that 30% of young people in Secondary Education stated that violence was an everyday reality. This data does not match the data we obtained, 16% and 23% in Muslims and Spaniards, either because there has been a three year gap between the two surveys, or rather because the environment is not the same. In any event, our interest is focused not just on a sociological study of the existence or not of school violence, but rather to check the different outlooks of two groups of young people, living in the same school environment, with regard to the issue of violence.

With regard to involvement in these episodes, we found significant differences between young Muslims and Valencians. In order to facilitate the study we split the pupils into three groups: Witnesses, Aggressors and Victims. The majority of Valencian and Muslim young people belong to the witness group (79,6% and 65,9% respectively). In the group of Aggressors, that is those who have taken part in a physical attack on their classmates or their humiliation, the male sex is predominant in both groups although to a greater extent in the former, that is the Valencian group. This phenomenon does not exist for Muslim girls. The third group are the victims, girls/boys who have been physically or psychologically attacked by their classmates, and represent 9% of young Muslims and 5,3% of Valencians.

A report by the Ombudsman, Fernando Álvarez de Miranda, delivered to the Spanish Parliament (2006) concluded that 4,1% of pupils (based on a survey of 3.000 secondary education students) reported having been victim of a physical attack; and the data from the Ministry of Education's School Violence Observatory (2008), pointed out for all secondary education students that 80,2% had been a witness, 2,4% had been an aggressor, and 3,8% of students had been a victim. These two studies show similar percentages, with regard to witnesses, to our group of young Spaniards, that is 79,6%, but it is a different case for the Muslim results as these are lower at 65,9%. This means that young Muslims do not perceive the existence of violence in the same way as the rest of young people. With regard to the percentages of aggressors and victims, the general results do not match the data we obtained which are 8,6% and 2,1 respectively for Spaniards and 4,5% and 4,5% respectively for Muslims.

With regard to the feelings invoked by violence at school, the majority of both groups and with similar percentages close to 80%, reject this phenomenon and are against it, to the point that some students experience feelings of fear.

School violence can be considered as an increasingly important issue, despite the fact that it is rejected by the majority of Secondary Education students. In the past decade awareness has been raised regarding problems such as bullying. Scientific studies carried out on the incidence of this issue reflect that over the course of school life, all students seem to have had some contact with peer violence, either as victims, as aggressors, or as mere onlookers, the latter being the most frequent situation (Díaz-Aguado, 2005). However, the perception held by young Valencians and young Muslims living in Valencia and studying secondary education is somewhat different. Whilst both groups reject school violence and are scarcely involved in it, the former perceive it as closer to them than the latter group, and they also detect it to a greater extent, despite both groups studying in the same schools.

Although violence has many causes (Grupo SI(e)TE Educación, 2010), some social factors, such as belonging to different family models –among the Muslim population families with more than 5 members are more common – could explain these different perceptions, since the authors of several studies (Musitu, Román y Gutiérrez, 1996; Musitu, 2004) state that a basic feature of the family is its capacity to generate relationships based on affection and support, with a clearly positive effect on the psychological wellbeing of all its members, which would also be reflected on a better perception of the relationships formed in the classroom, more positive for the Muslim group.

As reflected in other reports (Serrano, 2005), immigrant schoolchildren suffer violence in the classroom to a greater degree than they use it, thereby overturning the stereotype that being an immigrant is a risk factor of aggressive behaviour at school, as reflected in the results when immigrant students are asked about their participation in violent acts.

We might think that as young Muslims are an immigrant population at greater risk than the Spanish population, the way they perceive violence at school differently is perhaps a defence mechanism in the face of a non-desirable and despicable act that is however present.

Acknowledgements

This work has been financed by Conselleria de Sanidad Valenciana and FEPAD.

References

- Bandura, A. (1984). *Teoría del aprendizaje social*. (Madrid) Espasa Calpe.
- Bueno, F. J., Gavidia, V., Gómez, J., Salazar, A., Sieres, J. & Valderrama, J.C. (1995). Hábitos de salud de la juventud de Valencia. Ajuntament de València. Programa Municipal de drogodependencias.
- Byrne, B. M. (2008). Testing for multigroup equivalence of a measuring instrument: A walk through the process. *Psicothema*, 20, 872-882.
- Checa, J. C & Arjona, A. (2011). Españoles ante la inmigración: el papel de los medios de comunicación. *Comunicar*, 37 (XIX), 141-149
<http://dx.doi.org/10.3916/C37-2011-03-06>
- Debarbieux, E. (2001). Violencia escolar: un problema mundial. Correo de la UNESCO. Retrieved from:
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001222/122266s.pdf#122268>
- Defensor del Pueblo. (2006). *Violencia escolar: el maltrato entre iguales en la educación secundaria obligatoria 1999-2006 (nuevo estudio y actualización del informe 2000)* <http://www.oei.es/oeivirt/Informeviolencia.pdf>
- Díaz-Aguado, M. J. (2005). El desarrollo de la tolerancia y la prevención de la violencia desde la educación. V Congreso Estatal de Intervención Social. *Calidad y responsabilidad compartida: retos del bienestar en el cambio de siglo*. Tomo I. pp. 207-222. Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales.
- Galtung, J. (1998). *Tras la violencia, 3R: reconstrucción, reconciliación, resolución*. Bilbao: GernikaGogoratz.
- Gavidia, V., Sieres, J., Gómez, J., Valderrama, J. C. & Bueno, F. (1996). Evolución de los conocimientos, actitudes y conductas de la juventud valenciana con respecto al problema de drogadicción. *Didáctica de las Ciencias. Experimentales y Sociales*, 10, 3-9.
- Geen, R.G. (1990). *Human aggression*. Pacific Grove: Brooks/Cole.
- Grupo SI(e)TE Educación (2010). Violencia, Convivencia y Educación: Claves para la intervención pedagógica en la escuela. *Revista de Investigación en Educación*, 8,6-23
- Guerra, C., Alvarez-García, D., Dobarro, A, Núñez, J.C., Castro, L. & Vargas, J. (2011). Violencia escolar en estudiantes de educación secundaria de Valparaíso (Chile): Comparación con una muestra española. *Revista Iberoamericana de Psicología y Salud*, 2 (1), 75-98.
- Instituto Nacional de Estadística. Encuesta Nacional de Salud 2006. Retrieved from:
<http://www.msc.es/estadEstudios/estadisticas/encuestaNacional/encuesta2006.htm>
- Martínez-Otero, V. (2005). Conflictividad escolar y fomento de la convivencia. *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*, 38, 33-52.
- Metroscopia (2006). *La Comunidad Musulmana en España*, Madrid: Ministerio del Interior.
- Moreno Ruiz, D., Estévez López, E., Murgui Pérez, S. & Musitu Ochoa, G. (2009). Reputación social y violencia relacional en adolescentes: el rol de la soledad, la autoestima y la satisfacción vital. *Psicothema*, 21 (4), 537-542
- Musitu, G. & García, F. (2004). Consecuencias de la socialización familiar en la cultura española. *Psicothema*, 16, 288-293.
- Musitu, G., Román, J.M., & Gutiérrez, M. (1996). *Educación familiar y socialización de los hijos*. Barcelona: Idea Books.
- Observatorio Estatal de Convivencia Escolar. (2008). *Estudio sobre convivencia escolar*. Ministerio de Educación, Política Social y deporte. Madrid.
- Palomero, J. E. & Fernández, M.R. (2001). La violencia escolar: un punto de vista global. *Revista Universitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, 41, 19-38.
- Serrano, A. & Iborra, I. (2005). Informe violencia entre compañeros en la escuela. España. Valencia: Centro Reina Sofía para el estudio de la violencia.
- Skinner, B.F. (1953). *A science and human behavior*. New York: Mac Millan.
- Talavera, M. (2003). Cambios en los estilos de vida de los jóvenes de la ciudad de Valencia. Un estudio diacrónico. Trabajo de investigación. Valencia.
- Valderrama, J. C., Sieres, J.; Salazar, A., Gómez, J., Gavidia, V. & Bueno, F.J. (1997). Evolución de los hábitos de salud en la juventud de Valencia (1994-1996). Valencia: Ayuntamiento Valencia. Programa Mpal. de Drogodependencias. Plan Nacional de la Droga