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Is There a Single Profile of a Victim of Workplace Bullying? The Prevalence of Workplace Bullying in the Educational Sector in Spain and Its Consequences for Teachers' Health

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Abstract: Dysfunctional work environments are characterized by the presence of psycho-social risks, such as workplace bullying (WB): hostile, systematic, and planned behaviors toward other workers in order to get them to leave the organization they work for. The aims of this study are (1) to analyze the prevalence of WB in a sample of teachers and (2) to determine the relationship between socio-demographic and socio-labor variables in relation to three study groups: teacher victims of WB, violent behaviors, and null or low violence. The sample consists of 3442 teachers working in publicly regulated educational centers located in the province of Valencia (Spain). Estimated frequencies, cross-tabulations, and effect sizes were analyzed using SPSS 24. The following results were obtained: (1) 12.26% were potential WB cases, and (2) potential victims of WB were not influenced by the socio-demographic and socio-labor variables proposed. The results obtained did not make it possible to determine a single profile of a teacher victim of WB. It is recommended that training protocols be developed to help teachers recognize and manage WB more effectively. This will improve their health, well-being, and performance in educational centers.

Keywords: psychology of work; psycho-social risks; workplace bullying; decent work; occupational health; well-being at work; sustainable development



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1. Introduction

The current work environment is characterized by increased technology and a certain ambiguity and uncertainty (Bal 2020; Ortega-Maldonado 2020). This occupational stage often presents new challenges in terms of competitiveness and person–environment fit (Dominguez et al. 2020; Prado-Gascó et al. 2020). Organizations must anticipate and adapt to changes in order to avoid detrimental consequences for workers' health (Llorca-Pellicer et al. 2021; Montalvo et al. 2020). Currently, one of the most studied psycho-social risks is workplace bullying (WB) (Acquadro et al. 2021; Bernardes et al. 2020).

WB has been defined as unethical and hostile behaviors systematically carried out by one or more individuals toward mainly one individual who is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position until he/she leaves the organization in which he/she works. These actions should occur at least once a week and over a long period of time, lasting at least six months (Leymann 1996).

WB has severe negative consequences on employee physical (psychosomatic disorders) and psychological health (depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder) (Herrán et al. 2020; Nielsen and Einarsen 2018), social context (Carriel 2017; Verkuil et al. 2015) and organizational performance, absenteeism, and sick leave processes (Vveinhardt and Sroka 2020).

WB represents the highest percentage of violent acts in the work environment, including physical violence and sexual harassment (Ansoleaga et al. 2017). In this sense, it is

considered interpersonal workplace aggression performed by individuals to harm others with whom they work.

Worldwide, [Alfano et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Nielsen et al. \(2010\)](#) estimated the average prevalence of WB at 14.6%. Depending on the measurement method used, this figure can range from 11.3% to 18.1% ([Conway et al. 2022](#)).

In the Sixth European Working Conditions Survey, the Social Environment Index indicates that 5% of workers have been subjected to bullying/harassment in their workplace in the last twelve months, making WB the most reported form of adverse social behavior in the usual work environment in a total of 28 European countries ([Eurofound \(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions\) 2016](#)).

These figures are exceeded in the educational setting. Several authors have reported a high prevalence of WB cases in this sector, ranging from 10% to 55% ([Aguilera 2021](#); [Hodgins and McNamara 2019](#); [Konda et al. 2020](#); [Musu-Gillette et al. 2018](#); [Wei et al. 2013](#)).

In Spain, the estimated average prevalence of WB cases based on studies conducted in the last twenty years ranges between 5% and 30% of cases ([Arenas et al. 2015](#); [Escartín et al. 2013](#); [Figueiredo-Ferraz et al. 2015](#); [León-Pérez et al. 2014, 2019a](#); [Meseguer et al. 2008](#)). This figure is highly worrying, as it exceeds the average prevalence figures for WB worldwide and in Europe.

Despite the lack of prevalence studies in this sector in Spain, several studies show that teachers are highly exposed to psychologically violent behaviors ([Melanda et al. 2021a](#); [ILO \(International Labour Organization\) 2019](#); [Stapleton et al. 2020](#); [Zapf et al. 2020](#)). The teaching profession represents an occupationally highly vulnerable profile to psycho-social risks, especially due to emotional and intellectual demands ([Eurofound \(European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions\) 2019, 2021](#)). In the Spanish educational sector, teachers are highly exposed to the following psycho-social risks: heavy workload, lack of autonomy, role conflicts, role ambiguity, and interpersonal conflicts with colleagues, the institution, and students ([Montoya et al. 2021](#); [von Muenchhausen et al. 2021](#)). This type of risk can lead to tense situations between teachers that can result in WB.

Spanish regulations (*Estatuto de los Trabajadores* and *Ley Orgánica 3/2007 para la igualdad efectiva de mujeres y hombres*) require schools to have a protocol against WB. Despite this, this protocol does not always exist or is not adequately applied in schools, and teachers are unaware of it.

The inability to cope adequately with these risks can have consequences for the health and well-being of teachers, as it is perceived as a situation of inequity toward the organization, a lack of personal accomplishment, and a lack of professional development opportunities ([INSST \(Instituto Nacional de Seguridad y Salud en el Trabajo\) \[National Institute for Safety and Health at Work\] 2020](#); [Sanchez et al. 2019](#)).

In addition, WB is influenced by the cultural and socioeconomic traits of each country. In Mediterranean countries (Spain), time pressure, work overload, and excessive bureaucratic tasks may influence the behaviors of the harasser ([Salin 2021a](#)).

Furthermore, in Spain, the distribution of teachers according to sex is not balanced. According to [United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization \(UNESCO\) \(2020\)](#) and [Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional \(2020\)](#), in the education sector, more than 65% of teachers in the pre-university stage are women.

Another important aspect of WB research is the characteristics of its victims. Although socio-demographic and socio-labor variables could indicate an a priori tendency to suffer WB or the existence of a victim profile, the literature does not offer empirical evidence, and the results are inconsistent ([Alfano et al. 2021](#)).

However, some studies are considering the need to take into account the influence of socio-demographic and socio-labor variables in the study of WB. [Salin \(2021b\)](#) concludes that the prevalence of WB cases is higher in women than in men. [Muñiz \(2017\)](#) states that the perception of WB is different depending on the age of the victim. [Melanda et al. \(2021b\)](#), [Zapf et al. \(2020\)](#), [Zapf and Einarsen \(2020\)](#), [Hoel and Cooper \(2000\)](#), [Dujo \(2021\)](#), [Féliz \(2019\)](#), and [Olson et al. \(2019\)](#) point to the existence of differences in the perception of

WB by victims depending on socio-labor variables such as the following: type of contract, seniority in the profession, seniority in the position, type of workday, education level, development of functions other than teaching, and job stability. All these variables can contribute to determining a more specific profile of teaching professionals who are victims of WB.

Delimitation of profiles of WB victims allows the identification of specific groups of teachers at risk, especially those vulnerable and prone to suffering psychologically violent behaviors in their workplaces. Several authors have determined these profiles in their studies (Aguilera 2021; del Pino 2020; Mazzone et al. 2022; Ng and Chan 2021).

The objectives and hypotheses to be achieved through the present study are as follows:

Objective I. *To examine the prevalence of WB among professionals in the educational sector in the province of Valencia (Spain) who teach in the field of non-university formal education.*

Hypothesis 1. *The prevalence of WB cases in the sample under study is expected to be similar to that found in previous studies conducted in the educational sector over the last fifteen years, ranging from 10% to 55% of cases.*

Objective II. *Determining the relationship between a series of socio-demographic and socio-labor variables with the established levels of workplace violence toward teachers (WB, violent behaviors, and null or low violence).*

Hypothesis 2. *Statistically significant differences are expected to be found between the prevalence levels of teachers who are victims of WB and violent behaviors and the following socio-demographic variables.*

Hypothesis 2.1. Sex. *Women will present higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than men.*

Hypothesis 2.2. Age. *Teachers belonging to the ≥ 41 age group will show higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors compared to teachers ≤ 40 years of age.*

Hypothesis 3. *Statistically significant differences are expected to be found in the prevalence levels of teachers who are victims of WB and violent behaviors based on the following socio-labor variables.*

Hypothesis 3.1. Type of contract. *Teachers with tenured status (civil servants or fixed-term employees) will present higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than those with temporary employment status (temporary civil servants or temporary employees).*

Hypothesis 3.2. Seniority in the profession. *Teachers with 10 or more years of experience in their profession will present higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than those with less than 10 years of experience.*

Hypothesis 3.3. Seniority in the position. *Teachers with ≥ 10 years of seniority in their position will present higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than those with less than 10 years of seniority.*

Hypothesis 3.4. Type of workday. *Teachers who work full-time at the same workplace will present higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than those who work at different schools.*

Hypothesis 3.5. Education level. *Teachers with a Master's degree or PhD will present higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than those with academic degrees at the Bachelor's degree level or lower.*

Hypothesis 3.6. Other functions. *Teachers who carry out additional functions in educational centers, such as members of the pedagogical team, tutors, or others, will present higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than those who are part of the management team of the centers (principals or heads of studies).*

Hypothesis 3.7. Job stability. *Teachers with a more stable employment situation (tenured position) will show higher levels of prevalence of WB cases and violent behaviors than those with a less stable employment situation (temporary assignment).*

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

The initial sample consisted of a total of 5709 teachers working in public non-university educational centers located in the province of Valencia (Spain). In the end, 3442 participated in the study, with a response rate of 60.3% (39.71% missing cases). In terms of sex, 2587 participants (75.2%) were women, and 855 (24.8%) were men (rate similar to population). Their average age was 44.71 years ($SD = 9.1$; range: 22–67). In total, 2836 participants (82.4%) were civil servants, and 606 (17.6%) were non-civil servants. Their average seniority in the profession was 17.5 years ($SD = 9.3$, range: 0–47), and the average length of time in their current position was 8.6 years ($SD = 7.9$, range: 0–44). Regarding the type of center, 2108 participants (61.2%) worked at centers for kindergarten and primary education, 671 (19.5%) at secondary education centers, and 663 (19.3%) at centers of another category. Finally, 3281 participants (95.3%) worked full-time at the same center, while 161 (4.7%) worked at more than one center.

2.2. Instruments

Workplace bullying variable (WB) was assessed using the Mobbing-UNIPSICO scale (20 items) ($\alpha = 0.90$) (Figueiredo-Ferraz et al. 2012; Gil-Monte et al. 2024). These items measured the frequency with which subjects experienced negative actions at work in the last six months, using a five-point Likert scale (0 “Never” to 4 “Every day”). Items deal with (1) effects on the victim’s opportunities to communicate adequately (5 items; e.g., “Being shouted at or spoken to loudly to intimidate you”), (2) effects on the victim’s opportunities to maintain social contacts (2 items; e.g., “Being ignored, excluded, ostracized or made to feel invisible”), (3) effects on the victim’s possibilities of maintaining his or her personal reputation (7 items; e.g., “Having small or unimportant errors unfairly exaggerated or dramatized”), (4) effects on the victim’s occupational situation (4 items; e.g., “Being ordered to do work below your professional abilities or level of competency”), and (5) effects on the victim’s health (2 items; e.g., “Being the victim of intimidating behaviors, such as invading your personal space, shoving, blocking your way”).

In addition, a further item was added referring to the length of time of the negative actions suffered, assessed with a scale containing seven possible responses: 0 “Less than six months ago” to 6 “Ten years ago or more”.

The full version of this scale, as well as its procedure for use, is available in a recent publication by Gil-Monte et al. (2024).

On the other hand, the socio-demographic and socio-labor variables included in the study were measured using a single-item measure.

2.3. Procedure

This study was part of a psycho-social risk assessment carried out in various educational centers by Instituto Valenciano de Seguridad y Salud en el Trabajo (INVASSAT). The instructions determined by the regional government (Generalitat Valenciana) were followed. Data collection took place in 2018 by the technical staff members of INVASSAT.

The sample was non-randomly selected, and participation was voluntary. The inclusion criteria were (a) being employed at the time, (b) working at a school in the province of Valencia that was not a university, and (c) agreeing to participate in this study. Prior to

the evaluation, the Ethics Department of INVASSAT concluded that the research did not require review by the bioethics committee.

During this study, the fundamental principles of the Declaration of Helsinki ([World Medical Association 2013](#)) were respected, with special attention given to anonymizing the data collected, as well as ensuring confidentiality, privacy, and the absence of any kind of discrimination against participants.

In each of the selected centers, the management team, worker representatives, and staff were consulted by the technical staff of the Occupational Risk Prevention Service on the use of the questionnaire and to explain the procedure. Copies of the questionnaire, which were to be filled out individually, were distributed to each participant and subsequently returned to INVASSAT technicians.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

2.4.1. Initial Processing of the Sample and Creation of the Variable WB

Participants were grouped into three ordinal categories: Group 1, “First cycle or others” (from secondary education to Bachelor’s degree); Group 2, “Second cycle” (Master’s degree); and Group 3, “Third cycle” (doctorate [PhD]).

Subsequently, the variable WB was created following the definition and criteria established by [Leymann \(1996\)](#). To qualify a situation as WB, two criteria had to be simultaneously met: 1. Frequency of harassment actions: at least once per week. 2. Duration of harassment actions: at least six months.

Based on these criteria, the WB variable was divided into three groups:

Group 1, “Null or low violence”: Individuals who did not meet either criterion (frequency and duration = 0) or only met the second criterion (frequency = 0, duration = 1). This means they either never experienced WB actions in their workplace or occasionally experienced them for less than six months.

Group 2, “Violent behaviors”: Individuals who only met the first criterion but not the second (frequency = 1, duration = 0). This indicates they experienced WB actions in their workplace at least once per week for less than six months.

Group 3, “Workplace bullying”: Individuals who simultaneously met both criteria (frequency and duration = 1).

2.4.2. Data Analysis Procedure

First, an analysis of the estimated frequencies was conducted, calculating the prevalence levels in each of the three categories of the WB variable.

Subsequently, the cross-tabulation procedure was used to determine how the sample was distributed across the different categories (null or low violence, violent behaviors, and WB).

Next, several statistics recommended for working with qualitative variables (nominal and ordinal) were calculated ([de la Fuente 2011](#)) to establish if there were statistically significant differences between the prevalence figures obtained by the groups of WB and Violent behavior victims based on the socio-demographic and socio-labor variables.

First, Chi-Square statistic value and other estimators were calculated, providing a more robust additional measurement that helped to overcome Chi-Square biases ([Manzano-Arrondo 2009](#)). Subsequently, Cramer’s *V* estimator was calculated to determine the actual intensity of the statistically significant differences obtained ([Rivera 2017](#)).

All analyses were conducted using SPSS v24. The data and codes used are available with restrictions upon request by the authors (see Data Availability Statement at the end of this article).

3. Results

3.1. Results—Objective I

Figure 1 shows the prevalence results for the three categories of WB. There were 2956 cases of null or low violence (85.88% of the total sample), 64 cases of violent behaviors (1.86% of the total sample), and 422 potential cases of WB (12.26% of the total sample).

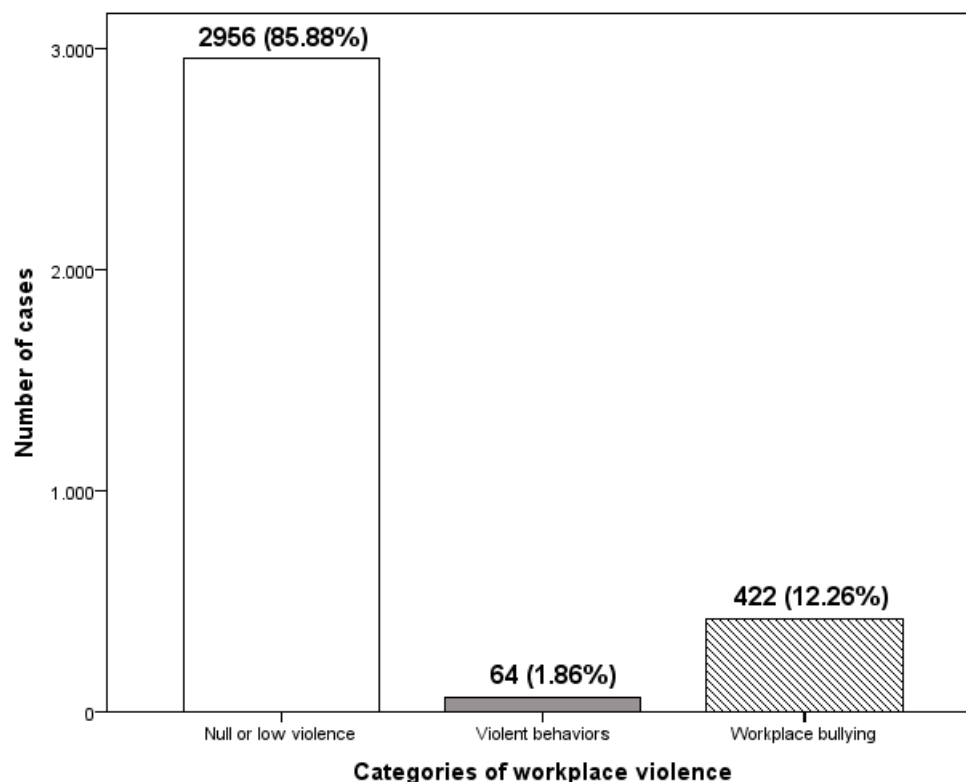


Figure 1. Prevalence of subjects in different workplace violence categories.

Results—Hypothesis 1

Results obtained supported Hypothesis 1, as the total prevalence of potential cases of WB found (12.26%) was within the range obtained in previous studies conducted in the educational sector over the last fifteen years (10% to 55%).

3.2. Results—Objective II

To answer Objective II of this study, three types of statistics were calculated:

Type 1: Chi-Square (χ^2). The Chi-Square value was calculated to check for statistically significant differences between the prevalence levels of victims of WB and violent behaviors based on the proposed socio-demographic and socio-labor variables, using the criterion of p -values. The value of this statistic (Chi-Square) is highly sensitive to the sample size and to the number of categories of the variables under study (Manzano-Arrondo 2009). Therefore, the values obtained, despite their significance, are not sufficient to conclude that there exist true relationships between the analyzed variables, given the bias of this statistic and the size of the sample used ($N = 3442$ subjects). To correct this bias and to achieve a more robust and unbiased measurement, type 2 statistics were calculated.

Type 2: Chi-Square correction statistics. Several statistics recommended for the treatment of qualitative variables (nominal and ordinal) were calculated (Hernández et al. 2014): contingency coefficient (C), Phi (ϕ), Cramer's V (V), uncertainty coefficient (I), Gamma (γ), Somers' d (d), and Kendall's Tau-b (τ_b) and Tau-c (τ_c). The first four estimators are applicable to nominal and ordinal qualitative variables, while the remainder are only applicable to ordinal variables (de la Fuente 2011).

Type 3: Cramer's V (effect size index). Finally, the effect size index was calculated to quantify the intensity of the differences obtained previously with type 1 and type 2 statistics (Rivera 2017). Cramer's V statistic is recommended as a measure of the effect size observed in studies with qualitative variables (Dominguez-Lara 2018).

Manzano-Arrondo (2009) and Rivera (2017) propose the following cut-off points for Cramer's V : null or negligible effect [0.00 to 0.09], low effect [0.10 to 0.29], medium effect [0.30 to 0.49], and high effect [≥ 0.50].

Table 1 presents the results. Statistically significant results are highlighted in light gray. In addition, results related to Cramer's V (effect size) are highlighted in dark gray.

Table 1. Values of the statistics calculated for the socio-demographic and socio-labor variables included in the study and for WB.

Groups of Variables	NOMINAL and ORDINAL Variables Statistics						ORDINAL Variables Statistics			
	Chi-Square (X^2)	Degrees Freedom (g)	Contingency Coefficient (C)	Phi (ϕ)	Cramer's V (V)	Uncertainty Coefficient (I)	Gamma (γ)	Somers' d (d)	Kendall's Tau-b (τ_b)	Kendall's Tau-c (τ_c)
Sex $\times$ WB	13.44 **	2	0.06 **	0.06 **	0.06 **	0.00 **	-	-	-	-
Age $\times$ WB	18.41 *	8	0.07 *	0.07 *	0.05 *	0.01 **	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.01
Type of contract $\times$ WB	5.20	6	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.00	-	-	-	-
Seniority in the profession $\times$ WB	12.10	8	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.02	0.01
Seniority in the position $\times$ WB	11.20	8	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.00	0.07	0.02	0.03	0.01
Type of workday $\times$ WB	0.78	2	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.00	-	-	-	-
Education level $\times$ WB	44.56 ***	4	0.11 ***	0.11 ***	0.08 ***	0.01 ***	0.26 ***	0.07 ***	0.10 ***	0.05 ***
Other functions $\times$ WB	12.44	6	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.00 *	-	-	-	-
Job stability $\times$ WB	11.95	8	0.06	0.06	0.04	0.00	-	-	-	-

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Statistically significant scores and the value of the observed effect size are shown in attenuated gray and dark gray, respectively.

3.2.1. Results—Hypothesis 2

Table 1 shows that the Chi-Square value was statistically significant for sex ($X^2 = 13.44$, $p = 0.001$) and age ($X^2 = 18.41$, $p = 0.02$).

As observed in Table 1, the significance levels obtained in type 2 statistics reveal the existence of statistically significant differences between the prevalence levels of victims of WB and violent behaviors based on sex and age variables. However, the absolute figures of the calculated statistics were all very low and close to zero, suggesting independent relationships between the variables analyzed, despite the significance obtained with the estimators initially calculated: sex and WB ($C = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$; $\phi = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$; $V = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$) and age and WB ($C = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$; $\phi = 0.07$, $p < 0.05$; $V = 0.05$, $p < 0.05$).

Regarding the sex variable, the group of women showed higher levels of prevalence of WB and violent behaviors (8.43% and 1.25%, respectively) compared to the group of men (3.83% and 0.61%, respectively), with these differences initially being significant (see Table 1). However, upon checking the intensity of these differences, it was observed that they actually corresponded to a null or negligible effect ($V = 0.06$, $p = 0.001$).

Regarding the age variable, the highest prevalence levels for the two categories of WB were concentrated in the groups of teachers aged between 30 and 60 years (ranging from 3.78% to 4.36% for WB and from 0.50% to 0.84% for violent behaviors), being much lower in the age range below 30 years (0.20% for WB and 0% for violent behaviors) and above 60 years (0.12% for WB and 0% for violent behaviors). However, the observed effect size was again null or negligible ($V = 0.05$, $p = 0.02$) (see Table 1).

Therefore, after conducting the analyses, it is confirmed that Hypothesis 2 and its derived sub-hypotheses were not supported.

3.2.2. Results—Hypothesis 3

Table 1 shows that the Chi-Square value was only statistically significant for education level ($X^2 = 44.56$, $p < 0.001$). For the remainder of the socio-labor variables proposed, Chi-Square results were not significant ($p \geq 0.05$).

As observed in Table 1, the significance levels obtained in type 2 statistics reveal the existence of statistically significant differences between the prevalence levels of victims of WB and violent behaviors based on the education level variable. However, the absolute figures of the calculated statistics were all very low and close to zero, suggesting independent relationships between the variables analyzed, despite the significance obtained with the values initially calculated: education level and WB ($C = 0.11, p < 0.001$; $\phi = 0.11, p < 0.001$; $V = 0.08, p < 0.001$; $\gamma = 0.26, p < 0.001$; $d = 0.07, p < 0.001$; $\tau b = 0.10, p < 0.001$; $\tau c = 0.05, p < 0.001$).

Contrary to what was hypothesized, the highest prevalence levels for the two analyzed categories of the WB variable were found, from highest to lowest, in teachers with academic studies of the first cycle (Bachelor's degree or lower) (6.53% for WB and 1% for violent behaviors) and the second cycle (Master's degree) (5.35% for WB and 0.73% for violent behaviors), followed at a distance by those with third-cycle studies (doctorate) (0.38% for WB and 0.10% for violent behaviors). Once again, the intensity of the differences obtained was that of a null or negligible effect ($V = 0.08, p < 0.001$), thus ruling out the existence of true relationships between these two variables (education level and WB) and their different categories (see Table 1).

Finally, regarding Hypothesis 3, none of the sub-hypotheses derived from it were supported. In most of the hypothesized socio-labor variables, the previously calculated statistics (type 1 and type 2) were not significant, initially ruling out the existence of relationships between them and the WB variable.

Therefore, based on the results obtained, none of the socio-demographic and socio-labor variables included in the study influenced or had a significant weight in categorizing teachers as victims of WB.

Finally, for the groups of variables analyzed in Objective II, the index of the observed effect size (Cramer's V) revealed that the actual intensity of the relationships initially detected between them was very low. These results suggest that these relationships were actually explained by the sample size and not by the characteristics of the analyses performed (test power).

4. Discussion

Results obtained for Objective I of this study support Hypothesis 1, as the figure of potential cases of WB found (12.26%) is within the range established in previous studies conducted in the last fifteen years in the educational sector (between 10% and 55%). Likewise, the results agree with the approaches of authors such as Dujo (2021) and Féliz (2019), which point to an average prevalence of WB cases in Spain ranging between 15% and 16%.

These figures are highly concerning in the educational sector in Spain. The high levels of exposure to psycho-social risks that teachers face (high levels of emotional demands, a continuous increase in quantitative and qualitative workload leading to time pressures, and unsustainable work rhythms) generate situations of withdrawal from work and continuous discomfort, raising a context that facilitates and drives the development of WB behaviors. This situation, combined with the lack of knowledge of psycho-social risk prevention regulations by school management teams, the lack of WB protocols, and the increase in violent behaviors in this sector in recent years, points to the possibility of an even greater deterioration of future working conditions in the field of education in Spain, which in turn could further increase rates of WB prevalence.

As shown in the meta-analysis conducted by Nielsen et al. (2010), the evaluation methods can yield disparate results ranging from 11.3% to 18.1%, which indicates the wide heterogeneity and divergence that exist in the results on the prevalence of cases of WB. Carretero (2011) and Dujo and González-Trijueque (2021) explain these differences based on theoretical and methodological discrepancies. There is no consensus on the theoretical concept and characteristics that define WB. Additionally, there are also significant empirical discrepancies stemming from the variety of methodologies for identification and evaluation: quantitative or operational (questionnaires and complementary statistical techniques)

(Leymann 1990, 1992; Mikkelsen and Einarsen 2001; Zapf et al. 2020), qualitative (subjective method and interview), and mixed (combination of both) (Nielsen et al. 2020).

On the other hand, studies should consider cultural, social, and contextual differences (Giorgi et al. 2015; Escartín et al. 2011; Salin 2021b). In this sense, Gil-Monte et al. (2024) indicate that the Mobbing-UNIPSCO Scale shows adequate psychometric properties for the study of WB in Spanish teachers. The scale provides evidence that supports the predictive validity of an alternative WB measure, taking into account the cultural difference between the Mediterranean and the Anglo-Saxon context.

León-Pérez et al. (2019b) highlight the current lack of studies on WB, coupled with the issue of over-representation of the healthcare sector in conducted studies. This raises the need to direct future analysis on this variable to different occupational sectors, aiming to enable comparisons between them, enhance the understanding of these processes, and facilitate the development of optimal strategies to effectively counteract them.

Regarding Objective II, results presented in the previous section do not confirm Hypotheses 2 and 3, nor do they confirm the sub-hypotheses derived from them based on the effect size index values obtained. The differences initially observed according to sex and age are not supported by the effect size, which was null or negligible. Initial results pointed to higher levels of prevalence of WB and violent behaviors in women and in the intermediate age group (30–60 years).

The study of the implications of the sex variable in WB processes generates great interest in the scientific community (Rosander et al. 2020; Salin 2021b). Several studies indicate that women experience higher levels of exposure to different forms of workplace violence than men (Forsell et al. 2017; Gil-Monte 2017; Rosta and Aasland 2018).

However, our results do not support a specific profile of the victim, but they do support what Alfano et al. (2021) propose, which is that experiences at work can determine the perception of WB. In this sense, historical-cultural factors of a sexist and stereotyped nature in relation to the role of women in the workplace should affect the perception of WB. Gender-related experiences of WB may be cultural and country-specific, so it is necessary to take cultural, social, and contextual differences into account. Eurofound (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions) (2019, 2021) and Stengård et al. (2022) have also highlighted the fact that women experience worse psycho-social conditions at work than men (higher quantitative and emotional demands).

Age also represents a socio-demographic variable of great relevance in the educational sector (Anastasiou and Belios 2020). Results concerning age differences have often been inconsistent. Muñiz (2017) and Piñuel (2001) emphasize its importance in determining individuals exposed to harassment behaviors. The literature provides several examples of studies reporting that middle-aged (40 to 60 years old) subjects are more likely to experience behaviors constituting WB (Barbosa et al. 2011; Fornés et al. 2008; Notelaers et al. 2011). In contrast, Pai and Lee (2011) found a higher incidence of WB cases in younger individuals (25 to 30 years old). Our results do not allow us to conclude that there is a higher prevalence of WB according to age group.

Regarding socio-labor variables, researchers have found significant results in their studies. Regarding the type of contract, Melanda et al. (2021b) point out that workers with temporary contracts have more precarious working conditions, which can increase the risk of experiencing psychological violence. However, Zapf et al. (2020) argue for the opposite position, stating that workers with permanent contracts are the most exposed to WB.

In terms of seniority in profession and position, type of workday, and job stability variables, Félix (2019) and Hoel and Cooper (2000) agree on indicating positive associations between full-time jobs (more stable) and higher exposure to WB behaviors, compared to workers with more unstable job conditions, who are less likely to be exposed to WB.

Regarding education level, Piñuel (2001, 2003) and Salin (2003) highlight that WB victims are usually highly qualified and committed individuals with a high level of education, traits that make them the focus of potential harassment behaviors by bullies (Zapf and Einarsen 2020).

Finally, regarding other functions, the authors suggest that this can be a determining variable in the prevalence rates of WB, which are higher in the group of teaching professionals who do not hold managerial positions compared to those who do (principals or heads of studies) (Dujo 2021; Ortega et al. 2009; Skogstad et al. 2008).

Thus, as observed in the studies conducted, the results on the roles of the analyzed variables and WB yield very disparate and heterogeneous results, indicating a lack of consensus among authors regarding the role these variables play in WB dynamics and processes. This suggests the need to continue developing and conducting this type of research in order to achieve greater uniformity in results, thus allowing for a deeper understanding of the variables that may be related to workplace harassment processes in the field of education.

Results obtained in the current study suggest that, given the independent relationships between WB and the proposed socio-demographic and socio-labor variables, intervention in WB cases detected in schools should focus more on the development of protocols and strategies that allow teachers to cope adequately with violent behaviors and WB, rather than focusing on socio-demographic and socio-labor variables.

Another appropriate preventative measure to reduce WB behaviors in the field of education is the implementation of mixed intervention programs (directed toward both the individual and the organization they work for), taking into account organizational and cognitive-emotional variables. These programs have shown greater long-term effectiveness (Awa et al. 2010).

The development and implementation of these interventionist strategies in the field of education constitute an effective human resources management policy in organizations. Such a policy aims to foster a work environment with healthier interpersonal relationships, thereby allowing for an approach toward a decent working environment that promotes well-being and sustainable employment. At the same time, it highlights and responds to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 and 8, as proposed by the Member States of the United Nations (UN) in 2015 within the 2030 Agenda.

5. Conclusions

First, the obtained figures of potential cases of WB are in line with previous studies conducted on this variable in the last fifteen years within the educational sector. Reference is made to potential cases, as it is up to the courts to confirm a specific case as WB based on legal criteria as established by Spanish legislation. In addition, the influence of the characteristics of the sample used in this study on the results obtained should also be taken into account (greater number of female teachers than male teachers in schools in Spain).

However, there is a significant theoretical–methodological disparity within the scientific community, both in the definition of WB and the associated behaviors, as well as in its empirical measurement. There is also an over-representation of the healthcare sector in studies on this variable. All of this makes it necessary to delve deeper into the study of WB, further defining its conceptual framework and proposing new research that uses samples from different occupational sectors.

Secondly, the results obtained confirm that the proposed socio-demographic and socio-labor variables did not influence the categorization of potential victims of WB, suggesting that interventions on WB in educational centers should be focused on the development of appropriate coping strategies against WB behaviors. It is necessary to carry out more studies on the role of socio-demographic and socio-labor variables in the perception of WB, as these variables could influence the perception of the BM and its effect on teachers' health.

However, it is also worth noting the lack of uniformity in previous research on this matter. As already mentioned, authors who found differences among WB victims, based on these types of variables, obtained heterogeneous and disparate results. Although it is not possible to determine an unchanging profile of WB victims that applies equally to all contexts, several authors point out that there seem to be certain variables that can facilitate or drive the process of identification of such victims, making it necessary to continue this

type of study in order to achieve a better understanding of the variables that can influence the configuration of the profile of WB victims.

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