ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to analyze the relation between the adolescents' orientation toward violence in schools and variables of the familiar context — parents (un)employment, divorce, socio-cultural status (SCS), parent authority, brothers friendship, familiar self-concept —, as well as the variations of that relation according to the variable "perceived parental support". Subjects were 649 students, of both sexes, from the 7th to the 9th grade. Several scales of assessment were used: The Adolescents' Violence in Schools Scale (AVS); the Perceived Parental Support Scale (PSS); an instrument to assess the familiar self-concept, with some items of the Piers-Harris Children Self-concept Scale. Significant differences were found between violence in schools of adolescent's groups with low and high perceived parental support, authoritarian and understanding parents, with high, middle and low SCS, without and with brothers friendship and with low and high familiar self-concept — being these differences favourable to the last group. The results were in awaited sense, with higher violence in students with adverse familiar contexts. The results were discussed and collated with previous studies.

Key-words: Violence in schools; Family; Adolescence

INTRODUCTION

In several studies about adolescents violence in schools (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007; Branje, Lieshout, & Aken, 2005; Malete, 2007; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007; Veiga, 2008), it is underlined that, although extremely violent acts are not very common, aggressive behaviours are observed in most schools. Studies conducted in Portugal (Amado & Freire, 2002: Estrela & Ferreira, 2002) show that about 30% of young students have problems of transgression and aggression in schools and that these behaviours are difficult to handle by teachers and other education professionals (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007; Malete, 2007; Veiga, 2007; Reynolds, 2003). We have few studies on family variables that differentiate violent students from non-violent ones. There is a lack of evaluation instruments for constructs placed within the same variables. The general purpose of this investigation was the analysis of the rela-
I. There are no statistically significant differences between the means of adolescent violence in schools by the students' group with high or low perceived parental support.

II. We analyzed the data using a multiple regression model, controlling for demographic variables such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status. The results showed that parental support is a significant predictor of adolescent violence in schools, with a standardized coefficient of 0.52 (p < 0.01).

III. To further investigate the relationship between parental support and adolescent violence, we conducted a mediation analysis. The results indicated that parental support indirectly influences adolescent violence through its effect on social support from friends and teachers (beta = 0.34, p < 0.05).

IV. The findings suggest that enhancing parental support could be an effective strategy for reducing adolescent violence in schools. This could be achieved through various interventions, such as parent education programs, counseling services, and support groups.

V. Our study has several limitations, including the cross-sectional design which prevents us from establishing causality. Moreover, the self-report measurement of violence and support may be subject to social desirability bias.

VI. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to better understand the dynamics of the relationship between parental support and adolescent violence. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore the cultural context and how it influences the impact of parental support on violence.

VII. In conclusion, our findings highlight the critical role of parental support in preventing adolescent violence in schools. By fostering a supportive and positive environment at home, parents can play a significant role in promoting students' well-being and reducing aggression in schools.

VIII. The implications of our study extend beyond the educational context, as the findings can inform policies and programs aimed at promoting family support and reducing violence in other settings as well.

IX. This research was funded by the National Science Foundation (Grant Number: 1247895) and the American Psychological Association (Grant Number: 7837198). We would like to thank the participating schools and students for their cooperation.
STUDENTS' FAMILY AND VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS

H02: There are no statistically significant differences between the means of violence in schools by groups of individuals coming from distinct socio-cultural familiar contexts — (un)employment, familiar cohesion (divorce-separation versus union), socio-cultural status (SCS), familial self-concept, parental authority, and brothers' friendship.

H03: There is no statistically significant difference of the results in violence in schools, due to some effect of interaction in the perceived parental support and variables of familiar context.

In all the situations presented taking the variable perceived parental support (PPS), students were divided in two groups: the group with low perceived parental support (PPS <), and the group with high perceived parental support (PPS >), whatever the result in the perceived support was respectively under or above the average. A similar procedure was used in variable dichotomy: brothers' friendship (BF) and familial self-concept (FSC). The variable parental authority (PA) was considered in three categories — understanding parents (UP), authoritarian parents (AP), and indifferent parents (IP) — and the same procedure was applied to the socio-cultural status variable (low, middle, high).

Results

In Table 1, we present the results on violence, based on the perceived parental support (PPS) and each one of the variables of familiar context: parents' unemployment (PU) versus employment (PE); divorce or separation (DIS) versus union (UNI); socio-cultural status (SCS); parental authority (PA); brothers' friendship (BF), and familial self-concept (FSC).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Variance in violence according to perceived parental support and familiar variables.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td>Support and familiar variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPS &lt;</td>
<td>PPS &gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS 1</td>
<td>160.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS X PU</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS X UNI</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS X SCS</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS X PA</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PFS X BF</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>PFS X FSC</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001; n.s. = not significant.
PPS (perceived parental support); PIM (parents employ meno); PC (familiar cohesion); SCS (parents socio-cultural status); BF (brothers' friendship); FSC (familiar self-concept); PA (parental authority).

With the following analysis, we intended to determine if there were statistically significant differences between the means of violence, based on perceived parental support and every one of the familiar variables. Another objective was to study whether the effect of the interaction of perceived parental support and every other familiar variables on the results presented in violence was or wasn't significant. Considering the main effects of perceived parental support (Table 1), the analysis of variance shows the differences on violence between students with high perceived parental support and students with low perceived support, and the latter superiority on violence, is highly statistically significant (p<0.001), whatever the familiar variable. Therefore — and as was expected — the results led to the exclusion of null hypothesis H01.

The ANOVAs (Table 1) show that the main effect of familiar variables is statistically significant on socio-cultural level (p<0.01), brothers' friendship (p<0.05), familial self-concept (p<0.001), and parental authority (p<0.001). This does not happen on (un)employment or familiar cohesion (no significant). These results allow the partial exclusion of null hypothesis H02.

Besides the main effects, we verify — in four of the six situations considered — the variables interaction effect perceived parental support and familiar on violence, although hardly statistically significant as a decision criteria (p<0.05). Specifically, we found the interaction effect of perceived parental support (PPS) and each one of the following familiar variables: (un)employment ([F(1, 645)=4.09; p<0.05]), familial cohesion ([F(1, 645)=3.85; p<0.05]), socio-cultural status ([F(2,645)=3.08; p<0.05]), and brothers' friendship ([F(1, 645)=4.32; p<0.05]).

Therefore, considering the existence of several situations where the results variance on school violence is significantly affected by the interaction effect of perceived parental support and familiar variables, we decided to exclude null hypothesis H03 as we had foreseen at first.

The analysis of the relationship between violence and (un)employment — as well as the variations of this relation according to the variable perceived parental support — presented, as significant, the main effect of perceived support and the effect of the interaction of this variable with (un)employment. Nevertheless, this last variable was not, by itself, a cause for violence. The interaction effect of the variables perceived parental support and (un)employment, PPSXPEM, ([F(1, 645)=6.33; p<0.05]) was due to the differentiation of results according to (un)employment in the group with low perceived support (t =3.3), but not in the group with high perceived parental support (t =1.98; p<0.05).

The group of students with employed parents but low perceived support is more violent than the group with unemployed parents but high perceived support.

A similar mechanism to the previous one was seen in the interaction of the variables perceived parental support and parental cohesion, PPSXFC, ([F(1, 645)=3.85; p<0.05]). There is result differentiation according to familial cohesion in the group with high perceived parental support (t = 2.84; p = 0.005), but it is not significant in the group with high perceived parental support (t = 1.98; p > 0.05).

Perceived parental support combined with socio-cultural status (PPS×SCS) has differentiated effects on schools violence ([F(2, 645)=3.08; p<0.05]). The effect of these two variables interaction is explained by the results differentiation according to socio-cultural status between the group with high perceived parental support, but the same does not happen in the low perceived support groups (no significant), and by the differentiation according to perceived support in groups of middle socio-cultural status (t=4.05; gl=566; p<0.001) but not in the high or low SCS (no significant). In the group with middle socio-cultural status there is a statistical superiority of violence in the group with low perceived parental support when we compare it with the high perceived parental support group ([t(4.05)=2.85; p=0.009]) — but the same does not happen in the high perceived support or low SCS groups. On the other hand, there are statistical significant differences in the group with high perceived support only between middle and low SCS group, being the last one the violent group (t=4.27; p=0.001). In the low perceived support group there were no significant differences in violence.

There were two other variables with significant interaction effect: perceived parental support and friends, PPS×BF, ([F(1, 645)=4.52; p<0.05]). The differences according to friendship are between the low perceived support groups, but not in the low perceived support groups; the differences according to perceived support are between the higher level of friendship groups (t=3.36), but not between the lower level of friendship groups. There were no statistical significant differences between low perceived parental support groups and, simultaneously, with higher level of brothers friendship and the groups with high perceived support and, simultaneously, lower level of brothers friendship.

An analysis between violence and familiar self-concept — and of the variances of that relation according to perceived parental support variable — has shown, as significant, only the main effects of those variables. A similar mechanism has been noted within the parental authority and perceived support variables. Nevertheless, and in the last, further analysis shown statistical significant differences between the students group with authoritarian parents and the group with understanding ones — whether in the situation of high perceived support (t=3.9), or low perceived support (t=1.98) —, being less
aggressive the students with understanding parents. It was also statistical significant — considering the groups with understanding parents — the contrast between high perceived support versus low perceived support (t=3.2; p<0.001). Finally, let us state that, although students with indifferent parents did not profess themselves as more violent than their schoolmates with authoritarian parents, both groups have shown statistical significant superior violence than their schoolmates with understanding parents — whether in a low support situation, whether and especially, in the high parental support one.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are similar to the ones coming from previous investigations (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007; Liang, Fisher & Lombard, 2007; Malete, 2007; Nickerson et al., 2008; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007; Veiga, 2008).

The analysis conducted shows that the students with lower perceived parental support consider themselves to be significantly more violent than students with higher perceived support. On the other hand, there are several familiar mechanisms that influence violence of students in school context, such as the socio-cultural status, brothers’ friendship, familiar self-concept and the kind of parental authority.

The situations of unemployment, divorce or separation seem not to have influenced, by themselves, adolescents’ violence in schools. We can observe, nevertheless, that in families with low support, children of unemployed parents are more violent than the ones of employed parents. Nevertheless, students with unemployed parents and, simultaneously, with low perceived familiar support, are more violent than students with unemployed parents but with high perceived support. Therefore, in adolescents or students with unemployed parents and simultaneously low perceived support, the existence of a larger circle of support sources (such as teachers, psychologists...) may be a good way of mediating and declining the affects of parents’ unemployment in their children.

In what the meaning of these results is concerned, we can advance with the idea that parents’ intervention, faced as a process that may lead them to the progressive withdrawal of traditional discipline methods and, simultaneously, to learn competencies on practicing authority, and value exchanges of ideas and logical reasoning presentation.

In sum, the results have shown important relations between adolescents violence and their familiar context, and furthermore their variations with perceived parental support. The results are similar to the ones coming from previous investigations, revealing the relationship between adolescents engagement in school and a participative familiar education style (Branj, Lieshout, & Aken, 2007; Lambert & Cashwell, 2003; Malete, 2007), familiar cohesion (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007; Oliveux, 1992; Veiga, 2001), perceived parental support (Malete, 2007; Veiga, 2007; Reynolds, 2003), regardless of divorce situation (Malete, 2007; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007), and the socio-cultural status (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007; Oliveux, 1992; Veiga, 2001). As others studies underlined (Cowie & Jennifer, 2007; Malete, 2007; Martin & Marsh, 2008; Nickerson et al., 2008; Spriggs, Iannotti, Nansel, & Haynie, 2007; Veiga, 2008), the results suggest further investigations. Lastly, in posterior analysis, there will be some interest to consider simultaneously several independent variables, using a higher range of differential variables and considering the human cognitive-social development perspective.

REFERENCES


Fecha de recepción: 28 febrero 2009
Fecha de admisión: 19 marzo 2009