Factors Associated with School Violence:
A Systematic Review

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Authors' contributions

*All authors appearing in the article have actively participated in its preparation. Each of them was in
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Article Information

Review Article

ABSTRACT

Purpose: To offer the scientific community the studies which identify risk factors influencing or
causing school violence.
Methods: The literature related to factors influencing school violence or violent behaviour
(psychosocial, family, individual, environmental, etc.) published in the Spanish language from 2000
to the present was systematically reviewed. A search done in the largest Spanish language
database, Dialnet, and the CSIC-ISOC platform resulted in a selection of 122 articles. Of these,
only those related to the origin of or factors in violent behaviour were included. Duplicates were
rejected, leaving 110 valid articles, of which only 19 met inclusion criteria.
Results: Publication dates of the articles reviewed reflect an increase in research on the factors
influencing or causing social problems in recent years. The contributions of various authors were
analysed based on a series of variables, such as personal (self-esteem, age, sex, etc.), family
(punishment, abuse, conflicts etc.), school (low performance, lack of norms, etc.) and
environmental (communications media, internet, etc.). Most of the contributions are concerned with

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family and school, which are the most studied, leaving environmental factors with a low rate of contributions.

Discussion: School violence cannot be attributed to any single cause. Most authors agree on a pattern of possible causes, in which the interaction of all of them leads to their interpretation, and thereby to possible intervention and prevention models.

1. INTRODUCTION

Coexistence in schools is affected by several variables which interact daily in the classroom. One of these variables is the classroom climate, which is understood by Polo, León and Gonzalo [1] as the image students create of their lives in them. That is, the classroom climate is a fabric woven of individual and collective behaviours, which are involved in one way or another. The interaction between this conduct and behaviour depends on interpersonal relationships formed in the classrooms [1,2]. The various episodes of school violence usually emerge from these relationships which are established and others which are not. Positive socio-affective dynamics can exert an important role in the social development of individuals, in addition to being present in other processes, such as affective, emotional and cognitive development [3].

The school is a place where most of the social skills acquired are put into practice. Students experience for themselves what relationships are like with groups of peers and with their teachers in the school. It is also in the classroom where students` behavior can be observed most accurately [4].

In society, adolescents are influenced by different agents or groups. The family is the main source of socialisation, and therefore, the most influential in young people. The behaviour and attitudes they develop are mostly interpretations of what they observe, and therefore, aggressive behaviour patterns sometimes are too.

Many studies have concentrated on coexistence and school violence [5,6,7]. At the present time, there is a great need to go deeper into factors related with school violence and its causes, because since Olweus [8] began his pioneering studies in this issue in school and society in the seventies [9], disruptive behaviour in schools has been growing, and not only in number, but the intensity and frequency with which such conduct appears in the classroom [10].

There is not only a need to delve deeper into the factors that emerge from the different contexts in which we live [11], but also to analyse the causes of the phenomenon. As many studies in the field have justified, there is no single cause associated with school violence [12], just as no single factor can be found that is predictive of whether an individual will become aggressive [12,13], because there are a great number of factors (which go from what is nearest the individual to what is farthest from him), individual, family, social, environmental communications media, etc., which could be contributing to the progress of this issue [14]. In other words, it is through interaction among all these variables where the risk of exerting aggression against others grows [11,15]. These variables place individuals in positions where they feel insecure, weak, etc., when faced with positions of violence [16], and see themselves as vulnerable, and therefore, the probability of peer abuse increases.

As we have just seen, a series of factors are attributed to school violence that may be influential in this type of phenomenon's appearing. Scientific literature in this area has found that knowing more about each of these factors as a function of certain variables could be very useful, and in recent years they have been a subject of strong interest for research, so there are many publications attempting to clarify the subject. Thus the purpose of this review is to identify and analyse the influential or causal risk factors of school violence, according to the studies of several different authors. Therefore, all the publications discussing this issue were compiled.

2. METHODS

The systematic review carried out in this study provided information from current articles related to influential or causal factors in school violence. A search was done in the Dialnet and CSIC-ISOC (Education and Psychology) databases to select any documents discussing the factors that could influence or cause school violence. The

search was done using the keywords "factors in bullying" and "factors violent behaviour".

The first database where the search was done was Dialnet, where in addition to the keywords, we filtered for journal articles as the type of document. However in the CSIC-ISOC database, only the filter for complete text was included. The time for documents was limited to the year 2000 to date.

To recognize all the articles that contribute information on the subject of our study, all the abstracts were subjected to review, and those that did not meet the criteria set were discarded. In this study, the criteria for document selection were the following: a) the study had to be from the year 2000 to date b) be written in Spanish c) discuss factors (psychosocial, family, individual, environmental, etc.) related to school violence or violent behaviour d) discuss the origin of violent behaviour.

The document search done in the databases resulted in identification of 122 articles (79 from Dialnet and 43 from the CSIC-ISOC), of which 110 remained after discarding duplications (12 documents). The abstracts of these 110 documents were reviewed and 91 were discarded because they did not meet the criteria for inclusion and did not contain information on the origin or factors related to school violence or violent behaviour, and in the end 19 articles were selected because they met the criteria for document selection. It is a systematic qualitative review. The information taken from the studies was the following: 1) Year, author/s, title, location; 2) Variables influencing school violence, personal, family, school and environmental. 3) Factors for explaining violence in the school

examining personality and other individual, family, school, peer group and social factors.

3. RESULTS

The information on year, author/s, title and location of these documents is given in Table 1.

The dates of publication of the articles reviewed in this study according to the criteria for selection should be mentioned, since they reflect the growing interest in research in the field of school violence, and specifically, in the factors that influence or cause such situations, in recent years. As shown in Fig. 2, there is an increase in studies devoted to this subject starting in 2005.

To present the results on risk factors influencing school violence based on the studies and contributions of different authors (see Table 2), they were analysed based on a series of variables, such as: personal (self-esteem, age, sex, etc.), family (punishment, abuse, conflicts, etc.), school (low performance, lack of norms, etc.) and environmental (communications media, internet, etc.).

The personality factors that can be considered to explain school violence are, according to several authors, impulsiveness, low self-esteem [12,16,18,30,31], and little or no empathy [24]. Other individual factors that could show risk of future aggressive behaviour are a facility for frustration and opposition to certain conflicts, as suggested by Benítez and Justicia [18]. In addition, according to Cerezo [32], lack of self-control could be one of the more important risk factors in adolescents.
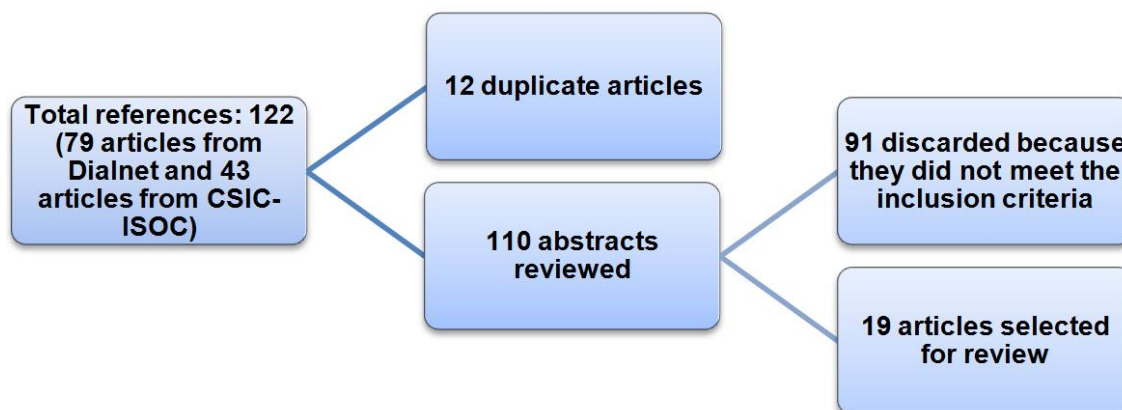

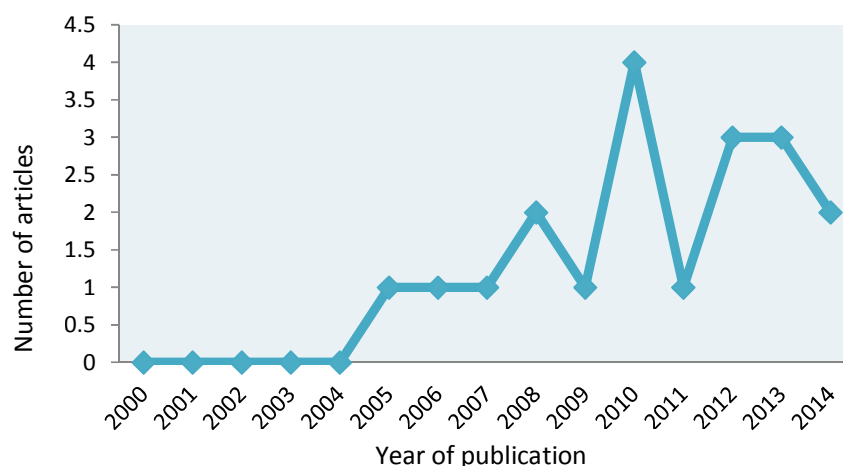**Fig. 1. Selection process for articles published up to March 2015**

Fig. 2. Evolution of numbers of articles

Table 1. Articles selected for review

Year	Author/S	Title	In
2005	Prieto [17]	*Violencia escolar y vida cotidiana en la escuela de secundaria* [School violence and daily life in high school]	Revista Mexicana de Investigación Educativa, vol.10, nº27
2006	Benítez and Justicia [18]	*El maltrato entre iguales: descripción y análisis del fenómeno* [Peer abuse: Description and analysis of the phenomenon]	Revista Electrónica de Investigación Psicoeducativa, vol.4, nº9
2007	Estévez, Murgui, Moreno and Musitu [10]	*Estilos de comunicación familiar, actitud hacia la autoridad institucional y conducta violenta del adolescente en la escuela* [Styles of family communication, attitude toward institutional authority and violent behaviour of the adolescent in school]	Psicothema, vol.19, nº 1
2008	Gázquez, Pérez, Lucas and Palenzuela [19]	*Percepción del alumnado universitario sobre el origen de la violencia escolar* [Perception of university students of the origin of school violence]	European Journal of Education and Psychology, vol. 1, nº1
2008	García & Orellana [20]	*Variables psicológicas moduladoras de la autodefinición del perfil en procesos de acoso escolar: el papel del género y el curriculum escolar* [Modulating psychological variables in profile self-definition in bullying: the role of gender and school curriculum]	European Journal of Education and Psychology, vol. 1, nº2
2009	Irurtia, Avilés, Arias & Arias [16]	*El tratamiento de las víctimas en la resolución de los casos de bullying* [Treatment of victims in solving cases of bullying]	Revista Amazónica, vol. 2, nº1
2010	García, Pérez & Nebot [21]	*Factores relacionados con el acoso escolar (bullying) en los adolescentes de Barcelona* [Factors related to adolescent bullying in Barcelona]	Gaceta Sanitaria, vol.24, nº2
2010	Rodríguez & González [12]	*Agresión entre alumnos en planteles educativos: ¿qué variables la explican?* [Aggression among students in schools: What variables explain it?]	Capítulo Criminológico, vol. 38, nº 3
2010	Méndez & Cerezo [22]	*Bullying y factores de riesgo para la salud en estudiantes de secundaria* [Bullying and health risk factors in secondary students]	European Journal of Education and Psychology, vol. 3, nº2.
2010	Gázquez, Pérez & Carrión [14]	*Factores familiares, individuales y sociales que influyen en el origen y desarrollo de la violencia escolar según nuestros mayores* [Family, individual and social factors influencing the origin and development of school violence according to our elders]	Revista Galego-Portuguesa de Psicoloxía e Educación, vol.18, nº2

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Year	Author/S	Title	In
2011	Sánchez & Cerezo [23]	Estatus social de los sujetos implicados en bullying. Elementos para la mejora de la convivencia en el aula [Social status of subjects involved in bullying. Elements for improving coexistence in the classroom]	Revista Española de Orientación y Psicopedagogía, vol. 22, nº2
2012	Arroyave [24]	Factores de vulnerabilidad y riesgo asociados al bullying [Vulnerability and risk factors associated with bullying]	Revista CES Psicología, vol. 5, nº 1
2012	Aguilar-Cárceles [25]	*La influencia del contexto familiar en el desarrollo de conductas violentas durante la adolescencia: factores de riesgo y de protección* [Influence of the family context in development of violent behaviour during adolescence: risk and protection factors]	Revista Criminalidad, vol.54, nº2
2012	Cerezo & Méndez [26]	*Conductas de riesgo social y de salud en adolescentes. Propuesta de intervención contextualizada para un caso de bullying* [Adolescent social and health risk behaviour. Proposal for contextualized intervention for a case of bullying]	Anales de Psicología, vol.28, nº 3
2013	Palacios, Polo, Felipe, León & Fajardo [11]	*Tipología familiar y dinámica bullying/ciberbullying en educación secundaria* [Family typology and bullying/cyberbullying dynamics in high school]	European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education, vol.3, nº2
2013	Polo, León, Gómez, Palacios & Fajardo [13]	*Estilos de socialización en víctimas de acoso escolar* [Socialisation styles in bullying victims]	European Journal of Investigation in Health, Psychology and Education, vol.3, nº1
2013	Carpio, Tejero & García [27]	*Análisis de los factores influyentes en un ambiente escolar con violencia y dificultades de convivencia* [Analysis of factors influencing a violent school environment and difficulties for coexistence]	Revista Española de Orientación y Psicopedagogía, vol. 24, nº3
2014	Arce, Velasco, Novo & Fariña [28]	*Elaboración y validación de una escala para la evaluación del acoso escolar* [Design and validation of a scale for evaluating bullying]	Revista Iberoamericana de Psicología y Salud, vol.5, nº1
2014	Picazo-Zappino [29]	*El suicidio infanto-juvenil: una revisión* [Child-youth suicide: a review]	Actas Españolas de Psiquiatría, vol.42, nº3

Looking at family factors, all the authors recorded in Table 2 may be seen to agree on abuse and authoritarian teaching models employing punishment, coercion, etc., as possible causes. Funk [33], Campart and Lindstrom [34], Levinson [35], Díaz-Aguado [36], Ohsako [37], Irurtia, Avilés, Arias y Arias [16], Prieto [17], Olweus [38], Furlan [39,40] and Muñoz [41] emphasize lack of love, attention and communication, that is, little family attachment, and little time shared as one of the causal factors of violent behaviour. Intraparental conflicts [24,41], separation, divorce or absence of parents [17,33,34,35,36, 37,38,39,40] may be related to the causes of violence. Poverty and unfavourable situations would also have to be stressed [14,17,38,39,40]. Another of the most predominant factors that occur in violent situations is a negative climate [12] and continuous stress [14] in the family. Irurtia, Avilés, Arias and Arias [16] add education outside society, that is, limited family life, as causes.

In general, almost all the authors are observed to name factors related to the family, each of them concentrating on describing a series of traits, but all of them roughly agreeing on most of the causes that lead to the phenomenon, and therefore complement each other. Muñoz [41] suggests stressful family events, large family size and adolescent parents as possible causes.

Not all the authors discuss school factors, but most of them do. It has been demonstrated that lack of attention [16,18], student and teacher absenteeism, academic failure [17,18,38,40,42], improvisation of classes, hostile attitude, and lack of norms and educational values [17,36,37] may lead to promoting school violence. In other cases, organizational problems and punishment and penalization strategies are the causes according to Fernández [42]. Low academic performance would have to be added to all of this [24]. Finally, the socio-affective structure of the group/classroom is also a clear risk factor according to Sánchez and Cerezo [23].

Table 2. Risk factors by variables

Authors	Risk factors			
	Personal	**Family**	**School**	**Environmental**
Funk [33], Campart & Lindstrom [34], Levinson [35], Díaz-Aguado [36], Ohsako [37]	----	-Lack of love, attention and communication -Separation, divorce or absence of parents -Being the only child -Poverty and privation -Unstable and aggressive or permissive education -Lack of control due to work schedule	-Hostile environment in the institution -The quality of student-teacher relations	-Communications media: Computer games, movies, television programmes, news, etc. Internet
Irurtia, Avilés, Arias & Arias [16]	-Poor or absence of empathy -Low self-esteem -Impulsiveness -Egocentrism -Use of alcohol and drugs -Psychopathological disorders: Behaviour disorders, impulse control disorders and adaptive disorders	-Wrong parenting practices: Authoritarian, negligent -Education outside of society. Limited family life -Abuse from within the family -Poor or scant communication channels -Dysfunctional family -Little time shared with the family	-Educational policies that apply inappropriate penalties -Absence of value transfer -Inappropriate stereotype transfer in educational practices -Lack of attention to cultural diversity -Psychological vulnerability of teachers. Lack of adequate class control methods -Little self-control -Absence of character model in the teacher -Lack of social recognition of the teaching profession	-Presentation of models lacking in values -Low educational and cultural quality of programming -Frequent presence of violent content both in media programming and game marketing -Social reinforcement of violent, terror, individual survival, and risk-seeking games -Little or no reinforcement of choice of educational, training and cooperative games -Sensationalist treatment of news with violent content
Benítez & Justicia [18]	-Inflexible temperament [43] -Easily frustrated and distracted -Impulsive -Conflicts of opposition -Behaviour disorders	-Destructured family -Abuse and violent model in the family -Parenting methods with restrictive practices and sometimes punishment -Lack of affect between spouses	-Low verbal quotient -School absenteeism -Expulsion from school -School failure -Lack of attention	-High levels of violence in communications media -Consumption of aggressive prosocial programmes
Estévez, Murgui, Moreno & Musito [10]	----	-Authoritarian teaching model using violent behaviour -Rejection and lack of parental support [44, 45, 46, 47] -Negative communication	-Negative teacher-student interaction -Negative student self-concept [48, 49]	----

Rodríguez & González [12], Ahmed & Braithwaite [30], Baldry & Farrington [31]	-Lower self-esteem -Unfavourable self-concept -Low self-control [32]	-Negative family climate -Authoritarian parents -Punishments, coercion and strict parenting styles	----	----
Prieto [17], Olweus [38], Furlan [39, 40]	----	-Lack of love, attention and communication -Separation, divorce or absence of parents -Poverty and privation -Unstable, aggressive education, or the opposite, permissive -Lack of control during the workday	-Lack of norms and educational values -Recurrent teacher absenteeism -Improvisation of classes -Lack of teacher control -Segregation and harassment -Failure and repeating year	-Communications media: Computer games, movies, television programmes, music, news, etc. -Internet must be analysed separately, because children and youth can have access in seconds to any type of information -In aggressive groups or disruptive behaviour
Fernández [42]	----	----	-Absence of common references among teachers -School organization problems -Punishment and penalization strategies	----
Gázquez, Pérez & Carrión [14]	----	-Family stress -Parental punishment -Unfavourable situation -Physical and mental abuse	----	----
Muñoz [41]	----	-Criminal parents and child abuse -Inappropriate parenting patterns -Family attachment -Marital conflicts -Stressful family events -Separation of parents -Adolescent parents -Large size of family	----	----
Arroyave [24]	-Lack of sensitivity -Little solidarity -Little empathy -Severe harassment	-Parental conflicts -Violence between parents -Parental breakup -Abuse in the home -Distant parents -Lack of family cohesion -Inconsistent and physical punishment	-Low academic performance -Inappropriate learning about how to reach goals	----

There are very few opinions on environmental factors. Few authors discuss them, although we could see that most coincide in emphasizing communications media and peer group among the causes of school violence.

Funk [33], Campart and Lindstrom [34], Levinson [35], Díaz-Aguado [36], Ohsako [37], Benítez and Justicia [18], Prieto [17], Olweus [38] and Furlan [40] discuss the high levels of violence in communications media, such as computer games, movies, television programmes, music, news, etc., especially programmes with prosocial content [18]. However, Irurtia, Avilés, Arias and Arias [16] add that the low educational and cultural quality of programming, social reinforcement of games of violence, terror, individual survival and risk-seeking. They also discuss the scant or absence of reinforcement of choice of educational, training and cooperative games. Internet is another medium which must be analysed in depth, because its wide range of information may have many drawbacks related to violence [17,33,34,35,36,37,38,39,40].

Groups of friends are important social risk factors, due to insertion in groups which are aggressive and have high disruptive behaviour levels, which favours the violent, aggressive climate in peer relations [17,38,39,40]. Peer groups definitely, as Elliot [50], Dishion, Andrews and Crosby [51] show, heavily influence students toward development of violent behaviour.

Finally, unemployment [52] and poverty [53] would have to be emphasized as possible causes, since they incite individuals to delinquency and antisocial conduct. According to Albores-Gallo, Sauceda-García, Ruiz-Velasco and Roque-Santiago [54], Kumpulainen [55] and Stenbacka, Moberg, Romelsjö and Jokinenque [56] there is a higher risk of violence when the socioeconomic level is lower.

4. DISCUSSION

School violence is a socially relevant issue, risk factors or causes of which must be identified for its aetiology to be studied, although they cannot be interpreted without knowing the real interaction among them [12]. The existence of these factors is acknowledged and described in many studies [14,19,20,22,27,29,41,43, 57,58,59,60]. Most authors form categories based on variables to describe the causal factors of the phenomenon, which according to Pelegrín and Garcés de Los Fayos [60], can be classified as personal, family, school and environment.

According to several authors, the most predominant factors in the origin of school violence are related to family, school and personal environment, with environmental factors, on which there are fewer publications, remaining on a second plane, although they are no less important. As the factors most studied are related to the first basic sources of socialization, there are more studies related to primary and secondary socialization.

The study by Farrington [58] backs the results found with respect to personal factors, as he shows that the elements included in the personality variable, that is, certain personal characteristics, such as impulsiveness or sociability are predictors of certain behaviours. But this was already demonstrated in the study by Brier [43] where he had previously found a close relationship between violent behaviour and vehemence.

In the school climate, there are several elements in the results, one of which is the student-teacher relationship [61]. This relationship and the one among individuals in the same class/group, have been studied, and it has been demonstrated that if the association between the two agents is negative, disruptive behaviours occur [62,63]. We also found several longitudinal studies, such as those by Moffit [64] and Eron and Huesmann [65] which found that there is a relationship between low school performance, low problem-solving skills and risk of aggressive action.

In view of the results, that "lack of love and attention, detachment, interparental conflicts and physical and psychological abuse" may be considered the family variables which affect the school violence phenomenon the most. These results can also be compared with some studies suggested family influence as a risk factor for violent behaviour [58,66,67]. More specifically, in the study by Baldry and Farrington [31], we found that lack of family control and supervision can cause risk situations.

In conclusion, this review is a contribution to scientific literature in the field, since it briefly assembles most of the factors involved in school violence according to different variables. And after seeing the results, it may be deduced that the authors agree on a series of school violence prediction factors which are organized based on

variables. Therefore, the existence of the phenomenon of school violence cannot be attributed to a single cause, and those factors which develop this issue must be observed and evaluated for their later intervention and design of preventive models. It may definitely be said, however, that violence is the nexus of an individual's internal processes with his surrounding environmental and social conditions.

Finalizing our discussion, this systematic review could be put into practice for designing an intervention proposal, in which the main purpose is not only to find out who is responsable for certain disruptive behavior and punish or penalize them, but go beyond conflict-resolution intervention techniques. That is, it should seek the causes or factors that have transformed the behavior of the subjects considering their classification according to the variables in Table 2.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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