




Impact of the peer group intervention in the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts to prevent gender violence from the school context

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Peer group intervention
Dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts
Coexistence
Schools
Gender violence

ABSTRACT

The peer group intervention has been found to be effective to address violence in schools and is also effective to address particularly gender violence. The dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts has as one main pillar the active positioning of the peer group as upstanders in front of any violence situation and has been found to be an effective approach to improve coexistence in schools and reduce violence. Less is known about how peer group intervention in the framework of the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts can contribute to prevent gender violence in the school context. Based on the analysis of qualitative data (interviews, focus groups and observations with a communicative orientation) collected in primary and secondary schools that are implementing the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts, this paper specifically addresses this gap. The conclusion of this study adds new evidence about the transformative potential of the peer group to prevent gender violence in schools that can be used to promote safer school spaces that protect from gender violence relying on the peer group.

1. Introduction

Each year up to 1 billion children experience some form of physical, sexual or psychological violence or neglect (WHO, 2019). Given this reality, preventing violence against children is squarely on the international development agenda. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.1 aims to eliminate all forms of violence against girls, while target 16.2 calls for ending all forms of violence against children. Both targets align directly with efforts to prevent school-related gender-based violence. Additionally, target 4.a, which promotes safe and non-violent learning environments, highlights the importance of addressing violence within schools. Together, these SDGs reinforce the urgency of exploring interventions to prevent gender-based violence and create safer educational spaces.

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to violence directed at an individual based on gender discrimination, role expectations, and stereotypes, or unequal power dynamics linked to gender (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016). School-related gender-based violence (SRGBV) encompasses sexual, physical, and psychological violence occurring in or

around schools, driven by gender norms and stereotypes (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016). SRGBV includes five significant forms: (1) bullying, both physical and verbal (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017; Gruber & Fineran, 2008); (2) corporal punishment (Peters et al., 2015); (3) sexual violence and child sexual abuse (Ward, et al., 2018; Miller, 2019; Johnson, 2004); (4) sexual harassment (Leemis et al., 2018; Cutbush et al., 2016); and (5) intimate partner violence or adolescent dating violence (Debnam et al., 2015).

SRGBV disrupts supposedly safe learning spaces, hindering students' ability to acquire knowledge, life skills, and personal growth (UNESCO, 2023). It affects not only isolated students but also those marginalized due to peer exclusion, as victimization leads to further isolation. Aggressors often belong to the "popular" group and are frequently supported or passively tolerated by bystanders (Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013, Clark, et al. 2020). Although research has explored gender-based violence in schools, gaps remain in understanding how peer group interventions within the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts can address SRGBV. Previous studies highlight that peer group interventions effectively reduce violence, including gender-based

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violence, in schools (Racionero-Plaza et al., 2021). However, limited research specifically examines their role within the dialogic model to prevent gender violence.

This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how peer group interventions, framed within the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts, can contribute to preventing gender violence in school contexts. The findings seek to enhance current prevention strategies and inform future interventions

1.1. Create a safe school environment

Previous research has detailed various vital successful factors. First, the intervention is integrated into the school to create a safe school environment (Mattebo et al., 2022). However, it is essential to base training and plans on considering scientific evidence from programs based on rigorous models that have demonstrated their impact (Rios-Gonzalez et al., 2023). To ensure these safe environments, quality training to overcome gender-based violence in the school context need to be followed by teachers (Ajdukovic et al. 2021; Rios-Gonzalez et al., 2023).

Another element highlighted in previous literature focuses on the participation of the active bystander (Midgett & Dumas, 2016; Crooks et al., 2019), student participation, dialogue, and co-creation to address situations of violence (Roca-Campos et al. 2021; IDEALOVE&NAM, 2015). To this end, some research highlights the importance of developing cognitive, social, and emotional skills used to cope with everyday life, known as life skills. According to the World Health Organization (2003), these skills include problem-solving, critical thinking, communication, decision-making, creative thinking, relationship skills, self-awareness building, empathy, and coping with stress and emotions. Developing these skills allows children to manage emotions, deal with conflict, and communicate effectively and non-aggressively, reducing the risk of violent behaviour (WHO, 2016; Vives-Cases, et al., 2019).

The literature emphasizes the role of bystander intervention in significantly improving coexistence (Ortega et al., 2004; Williams & Neville, 2017; Farley et al., 2020; Gallardo-Nieto et al., 2021). A common element in these programs is recognising that being an active bystander in the face of violence is crucial to overcoming it. Consequently, acting as an upstander fosters a sense of community, contributing to a more peaceful and respectful atmosphere in educational settings while also encouraging students and minors to support their peers (González-Alonso et al., 2020; Ortega et al., 2004).

The literature also highlights the importance of peer-to-peer interventions, which strengthen friendships and are recognized as a preventive factor against school violence (Midgett & Dumas, 2016). This violence often involves attacking upstanders who defend or protect victims of gender-based violence or violence targeting LGBTIQ+ individuals. Therefore, adopting upstanding attitudes or being an active bystander to support these upstanders is crucial for preventing such acts of violence (Iñiguez-Berrozpe et al., 2021; Gallardo-Nieto et al., 2021).

Studies also emphasize the importance of all educational agents being active and having the ability to recognize situations in which abuse or violence can happen and understand how to avoid potentially risky situations and where to find help (WHO, 2016). To create these contexts, it is essential to promote equal relationships. Social and cultural behaviour and stereotypes around, for example, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and disability, increase the risk of bullying and violence. Promoting political, religious, and ethnic tolerance is also likely to be important in preventing hate crimes as well as violent extremism and radicalization (Bellis et al., 2017).

1.2. Dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution for the overcoming of gender-based violence framed on the bystander intervention

The Dialogic Model of Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts (DMPRC) is a methodology aimed at reducing violence in schools by

promoting egalitarian relationships, preventing bullying, and empowering students through active participation in conflict resolution. This model emphasizes the importance of including students' voices in managing conflicts, which has been shown to reduce violence, strengthen friendships, and promote caring behaviour in the school community (Duque et al., 2021). Furthermore, the DMPRC contributes to students' well-being and healthy development by creating safe, educational spaces and providing quality emotional education that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals related to eliminating all forms of violence in childhood. When addressing gender violence in schools, the DMPRC can be adapted to specifically target conflicts arising from discrimination and violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, ensuring effective conflict resolution in cases of gender-based violence.

To address and overcome gender violence, it is essential to focus on the scientific studies of prevention and resolution of conflicts. In this vein, previous scientific studies highlight that the participation of the entire educational community (students, teachers, family members, guardians and policy makers and educational authorities) is essential for the success of preventive educational actions/interventions. The integrated research project INCLUD-ED, part of the European Commission's Sixth Framework Programme, has endorsed the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts as a successful educational initiative. The Dialogic Model is typically implemented in schools organized as 'Learning Communities' (Flecha, 2015) in Spain and other countries worldwide. Learning Communities are schools that welcome family and community participation and strive to promote academic success and social cohesion for all students. Within these schools, the Dialogic Model is embraced by the entire community and is especially relevant in dialogue spaces with students, such as Dialogic Literary, Musical, or Artistic Gatherings—where students debate humanity's greatest creations in various cultural and artistic fields—classroom assemblies, and mixed commissions with community members. Through these practices, students actively participate in identifying, rejecting, and seeking solutions to issues, becoming proactive 'bystanders' in preventing school violence.

DMPRC has as one central pillar the active positioning of the peer group as upstanders in the face of any violent situation and is an effective approach to improve coexistence in schools and reduce violence. In this line, the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts refers to the involvement of various community agents (Duque et al., 2021; UNESCO & UN Women, 2016). The implementation of the DMPRC has demonstrated (a) the transformative power of egalitarian dialogue as a mechanism to prevent violence, (b) the importance of including all community voices in resolving school conflicts, and (c) the significance of empowering children and adolescents to reject violence and support victims confidently (Padrós, 2014).

Education can play a decisive role as a catalyst for broader social change to break cycles of violence. The European Strategy for Gender Equality (2020–2025) stresses the role of education in reducing this gender-based violence by implementing preventive measures which could effectively eradicate this phenomenon. Ending gender-based violence in and through schools ensures that all children can learn in a safe and equitable environment and helps prevent violence. Ending sexual and gender-based violence requires a "whole school" approach that includes and considers the thoughts, ideas, and actions of each student when designing solutions and actions. Given previous evidence, this article focuses on the role of peer group intervention in preventing gender violence in the school context.

2. Study overview

This article presents partial results of the Project [SAFE. 'Impact of the Bystander intervention for a school culture that overcomes gender-based violence' (Programa Estatal de I+D+i Orientada a los Retos de la Sociedad 2021)]. Previous research has demonstrated the prevalence

of gender-based violence in schools around the world (Saini & Spear, 2024). The literature also shows the potential for preventing gender-based violence in the school context by analyzing different preventive factors (Whitten et al., 2024; Parkes et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2018). However, there needs to be more research on effective programs of preventive socialization based on evidence of social impact (Racionero et al., 2021). Specifically, this article focuses on preventing gender violence in schools by promoting safe school spaces that protect against gender violence by relying on the peer group. The existing literature is limited regarding peer group intervention within the framework of the dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts and specifically how the group can contribute to preventing gender violence in the school context. Therefore, this article aims to answer the research question:

How can peer group intervention, within the framework of the dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution, contribute to preventing gender violence in the school context?

The following section outlines the collaborative research approach used to answer this question through a co-creation process with the social agents involved in the study.

3. Methods

The study will be conducted using a communicative orientation (Gómez et al. 2010). This methodology emphasizes including the voices of end-users throughout the research process, from inception to completion. Reality is interpreted through egalitarian and intersubjective dialogue, where researchers provide academic knowledge on the subject, and participants offer their perspectives and interpretations (Gómez et al., 2011).

The communicative methodology is particularly suitable for studying gender-based violence in schools due to its participatory and transformative approach, this is backed by previous research and projects (e. g.: Duque et al., 2021; Racionero et al., 2021). This methodology promotes the inclusion of all stakeholders—students, teachers, families, and the broader community—in the research process, fostering an egalitarian dialogue that allows for a deep understanding of the dynamics of gender-based violence within educational settings. By engaging the entire educational community, it becomes possible to identify practices and beliefs that perpetuate violence and develop collective strategies for its prevention and eradication. Moreover, by focusing on communication and interaction, this methodology promotes safer and more equitable school environments, fostering relationships based on respect and equality. The specific features of the communicative methodology and its suitability for this project are detailed below.

3.1. Data collection

Following the communicative orientation, reality is interpreted through egalitarian and intersubjective dialogue between the researcher and participants. During data collection, the researcher integrates their accumulated scientific knowledge on the topic into the questions they formulate, allowing participants to connect this information with their own perspectives and practical experiences (Gómez et al., 2010, 2011). This article focuses on 5 case studies (five Spanish schools), composed of communicative observations and semi-structured interviews. On the one hand, 14 Communicative observations were conducted at the beginning and end of the academic year in each centre, focusing on Mixed Commissions that work on conflict prevention and resolution, as well as a class organised according to the MDPRC. These observations provide a rich understanding of the dynamics within the schools, including the interaction between students, teachers, and community offering context for the interview data. On the other hand, 23 Semi-structured interviews with communicative orientation were conducted with 11 teaching staff and 12 students. These interviews offer in-depth insights into personal

experiences and perspectives regarding gender violence prevention and conflict resolution, highlighting the subjective meaning participants attach to these processes. By combining both types of data, this study aims to provide a comprehensive view of the effectiveness and challenges of peer group interventions within the schools, where observations offer a broad contextual perspective and interviews reveal the personal and emotional aspects that influence the outcomes of these interventions. The techniques used in each case study are detailed below (see Table 1).

3.2. Data analyses

Communicative data analysis comprises two dimensions: exclusionary and transformative. The exclusionary dimension encompasses all the barriers that hinder the overcoming of social problems, and the transformative dimension refers to the opportunities to overcome those barriers. In this case, the exclusionary dimension will refer to all factors that hinder the prevention and resolution of conflicts, while the transformative dimension will refer to those contributions of the peer group as upstanders that make it possible to prevent gender violence. By differentiating between exclusionary and transformative dimension, the analysis can provide insights into how peer group interventions can either reinforce or challenge harmful gender norms. This distinction helps identify the specific mechanisms through which interventions can be designed to address root causes of gender violence, ensuring that strategies are not just reactive but proactive in fostering a more equitable and supportive school environment.

Qualitative data have been transcribed for further analysis. Once the interviews were transcribed, the members of the research team categorized the quotes and specified their dimension (see Table 2). Based on the literature review, some tentative categories that could guide the analysis were identified, which will be expanded and refined during data collection and analysis. Once the initial classification was completed, the entire team discussed the relevance of the categories and quotes, and their categorization was agreed upon.

3.3. Ethics

This article is part of the project: [anonymous for review]. The entire project development has ensured compliance with ethical requirements. The study was approved by the Statement by the Ethics committee concerning research into people, society and the environment (CEIPSA), ethics committee reference number: CEIPSA-2022-PR-0031.

All participants provided informed consent, which included key information about the project's results, activities, expected outcomes, and impact. Participants were given sufficient time to read the consent form and ask any questions. The researcher provided explanations when necessary and shared contact information for future inquiries.

Given the sensitivity of the topic, additional protections were implemented. These included strict confidentiality measures, secure data storage protocols, and de-identification of responses to protect privacy. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw without consequences and assured that no identifying information would be disclosed. These measures ensure participants' safety, dignity, and confidentiality throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

4. Findings

In this section we present and discuss the results of our study. They are structured in two main sections, in which, after the analysis carried out, we highlight the exclusionary and transforming aspects to respond to the impact of peer group intervention in the dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution to prevent gender-based violence in the school context. To this end, the first section analyses the relevance of not justifying violence in any context, working with the whole community to

Table 1
The concretisation of the fieldwork in each Case Study.

Case Study 1. Primary and secondary school		
Technique	Code	Specification
Observation	C1PA1O1	Class organised according to the MDPRC: 9–10 years. Brave Club
	C1PA1O2	Class organised according to the MDPRC: 8–9 years. Conflict resolution assembly
	C1PA1O3	School playground
Semi-structured interviews	C1PA1EA1	Student 8–9 years
	C1PA1EA2	Student 9–10 years
	C1PA1EP1	Teacher
	C1PA1R1	School leader
Observation	C1SA1O3	Joint Commission on Conflict Prevention and Resolution ESO
	C1SA1O1	Class organised according to the MDPRC
	C1SA1O2	School Playground secondary students
Semi-structured interviews	C1SA1EA1	Student 14–15 years
	C1SA1EA2	Student 13–14 years
	C1SA1EP1	Secondary teacher
Case Study 2. Primary school		
Technique	Code	Specification
Observation	C2PA1O1	Joint Committee on Conflict Prevention and Resolution
	C2PA1O2	Class organised according to the MDPRC.
	C2PA1O3	School playground
Semi-structured interviews	C2PA1EA1	Student 7–8 years
	C2PA1EA2	Student 10–11 years
	C2PA1EA3	Student 10–11 years
	C2PA1EP1	Teacher
	C2PA1R1	School leader
Case Study 3. Primary school		
Technique	Code	Specification
Observation	C3PA1O1	Mixed Commission on Conflict Prevention and Resolution (Coexistence Board)
	C3PA1O2	Class organised according to MDPRC - Assembly (7–8 years)
	C3PA1O3	School playground
Semi-structured interviews	C3PA1EA1	Student 8–9 years
	C3PA1EA2	Student 11–12 years
	C3PA1EP1	Teacher
	C3PA1R1	Head of studies
Case Study 4. Primary school		
Technique	Code	Specification
Semi-structured interviews	C4SA1EA1	Student – aged not collected
	C4SA1EA2	Student – aged not collected
	C4SA1EP1	Teacher
	C4SA1R1	School leader and head of studies
Case Study 5. Secondary school		
Technique	Code	Specification
Observation	C5SA1O1	Class organised according to the MDPRC.
	C5SA1O2	School playground
Semi-structured interviews	C5SA1EA1	Student – 12 years
	C5SA1EA2	Student – 12 years
	C5SA1EP1	Teacher and head of studies
	C5SA1R1	Teacher

Table 2
Coding scheme.

Category	Dimension	
	Exclusionary	Transformative
Coexistence - impacts	1	2
Bystander intervention	3	4
School culture of 0 violence	5	6
Other impacts	7	8

create safer educational environments. The second section focuses on solidarity networks to break the silence by facilitating spaces that improve coexistence through peer group intervention.

4.1. Whole community work together for guarantee dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution

The people interviewed widely identify situations of violence in the school context, but they also stress the importance of not normalising it and tackling it quickly. The participants in this research, both students and teachers, highlight that the agents of the educational community become aware of the need to defend violence from an early age. The five case studies have in common that they are Learning Communities, which is why they carry out the Successful Educational Actions and, specifically, the Dialogic Model of Conflict Prevention and Resolution, for which they have previously received training based on scientific evidence on which the model is based. When incorporating the DMPCRC in the school, one teacher points out: ‘At the beginning when we started it was a boom, the children came all the time (C2PA1R1)’. In other words, the children clearly identified that it was violence and took an

active part in tackling it. For this reason, the same teacher points out:

I remember at the beginning, I was in the first year of primary school, and a boy from another school came and one day in the playground he tried to touch the girls, then they came and said 'what is happening is very serious, he is doing gender-based violence', another example where a boy touches a girl's ass and we say 'that is gender-based violence'. From the start, families don't like it, they don't like it when you tell them that their child is doing gender-based violence (C2PA1R1).

However, despite the fact that gender-based violence persists, the fieldwork carried out shows how the children deal with the cases and report them, so that they do not justify the violence. The same teacher also explains how families are also clear about the principle of zero violence and how dialogue with families and the community is the key to addressing and overcoming these situations of vulnerability. In her words, the teacher points out:

The other day, they went camping one night, and immediately when they came back, a boy told his mother that another boy was saying, "I'm going to ***** all the girls" The mother told the teacher because you know that here everything is said. We immediately talked about it in class clearly. We also had a meeting with the family, and at first, the family didn't react well. Still, they rethought it, and now our phone conversations are delicate (the father is a prosecutor, and the mother is a judge, so imagine).

Through the interviews and the analysis of the quotes from the participants, the relevance of acting in situations of violence is demonstrated; where the educational community quickly addresses issues related to violence, it is shown that this is possible because of the dynamics of the school where the dialogical model is present throughout the school. Along these lines, one pupil describes how they dealt with a case of violence:

Yes, a story that had been told by Marta and Ailan, who was the other child who had come new. They were insulting each other on WhatsApp and it was a school group to talk, and the administrator of the group, who was Maria, immediately took Ailan out of the group and we told him that we didn't like him insulting Marta. We stopped him immediately, we took him out of the group and the next day we talked about it at school. We had a meeting, in inverted commas, and so we talked about it and we took him out of the brave club (C2PA1EA3).

The Zero Violence Brave Club is a concrete action within the Successful Educational Action: Dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution. One of the keys is to make non-violence attractive; therefore, those students who take a stand in situations of violence, i.e. people who help and take a stand on the side of the victim and against the aggressor, are brave. In contrast, those who do not take a stand are cowards. The "Zero Violence Brave Club" aims to address this perspective by shifting the attractiveness and prominence to those who treat their peers better, who are cooperative and respectful, and to prevent more attention from being paid to those who are mistreated and do not have a central role in the group. Therefore, these sensitised students had no hesitation in identifying the aggressor as a coward and acted by making it explicit that such behaviour was not tolerated in the group. Faced with this position, the pupil is aware of the impact it has on the bully himself, but also of how the class dynamics are conditioned; one pupil makes it explicit:

Yes, when the whole class explains to a child and takes a stand, the impact on the child is greater. He understood it better; what happened is that when the class finished, after a few days, the child forgot about it, but we insisted; in fact, one of the girls told him, "If this doesn't happen again, I'll make an effort, and we'll start from scratch". Up to now, it has been related in this way.

However, the fieldwork carried out also shows how children who develop DMPRC in their schools act, regardless of whether they belong to their group of friends or not. This is how they explain it:

Well, that they break the silence, that people treat them well, and that they feel like the person they are with. Generally, in my class, if something happens, they break the silence, and if you are their friend, their friend or their best friend, they break the silence anyway; they don't care because if a person who loves you mistreats them, it doesn't mean that they are essential. If it is a stranger who treats you well, then you can trust him, but if it is a very close relative and he mistreats you, then I do not recommend being with that person (C3PA1EA2).

The acquired awareness accompanies them beyond their school years. One teacher highlights how these values persist at later ages despite not being in the same school or spaces where the conflict prevention model is absent. One teacher exemplifies this:

I think that the change is deep down; also, in the children who come out of here high school, there is no need to name names, but in one girl who is now in a relationship, the question that the two colleagues asked her was, how does he treat you? This question may seem superficial, but in another space, this wouldn't be asked, and the next question was, won't you stop studying for him, right? They asked her many questions, but they were this to know we were there, and they asked her key questions so that she was empowered. This results from what has been done here [in the school] (C1PA1R1).

In other words, this persistent work overcomes the reproduction of gender roles while empowering boys and girls to have free relationships where they can choose who they relate to based on whether they are treated well or not, overcoming relationships of dependence on aggressive people. How the interviewees transmit this is possible because they know that the school does not allow violence and that it gives support to the victim and those courageous people who take a stand against violent attitudes, as well as that the whole educational community does not tolerate or justify violence, in short, egalitarian relationships are fostered that facilitate working towards the common goal of creating safer school spaces for all children.

4.2. Support and friendship networks to break the silence in the face of school-related gender-based violence

It is important to underline that the people interviewed emphasise that taking a clear stand against violence is possible with a solid network of solidarity that allows us to break the silence. It is not an isolated action of courage, but knowing that the community acts unanimously and that if you take a stand, you have support and will not be isolated. Therefore, the dynamics in these solidarity networks identified by the participants, which prevent bullying and empower students to actively participate in resolving conflicts, are specified below.

As an exclusionary element identified, the interviewees highlight situations of violence. However, the difference in other contexts is that a favourable environment of solidarity makes the problem visible and tackles it. In this line, one pupil highlights the support of a boy in her class:

In my class, it happens because there is a boy who is my friend too. Well, my class is divided into many groups. There is a group of girls, another of boys and another of those who like some things and others. Well, in the group of girls there is a boy who is the only one and well the group of boys and a lot of people, well they call him ***** for being with them and well because he doesn't like many things that let's say the group of boys likes. For example, the group of boys likes soccer, and he likes it, but not that much; he prefers, for example, dancing or painting because he is very good at painting. Well, some people respect him, but a lot of people, for instance, he

dyed his hair and his bangs purple, insulted him, saying that purple was for girls. And well, this has always happened to him since he was little, and well, he doesn't like it. He defends himself, and the group of girls also defends him, and thanks to the help of the girls, they ignore them or break the silence (C3PA1EA2).

The participants shared that they often doubted being able to face the attacks individually; however, when they felt the group's support, the positioning was much more accessible. When asked what they are asked when they see situations of violence, one student answers that they face these cases (C2PA1EA1):

Interviewee: Tell the teacher.

Researcher: You say it right away. Aren't you afraid to tell?

Interviewee: No.

Researcher: Why aren't you afraid?

Interviewee: Because three or four of us will tell the teacher.

Researcher: And when you tell it, it is solved, and nothing else ever happens to you?

Interviewee: We always discuss what happened when we returned from the playground.

Researcher: And then, is it better or worse?

Interviewee: Better.

The interviews with the students show how, through the dialogues in the classroom, they learn strategies to face violent situations collectively. The participants mentioned that solidarity and support for the victim are keys to friendship and to isolating violent attitudes. A case presented by the interviewees is a girl who felt uncomfortable because of the attitudes of a classmate. When the class saw inappropriate attitudes, they talked to him, showing that his actions were incorrect. This intervention by a group of equals managed to stop the situation, and now the boy no longer carries out attitudes that intimidate his partner, demonstrating the bystander intervention's impact. This situation is not isolated to these schools; for example, another case is exposed where the intervention was also key. Still, in this case, as it was more serious, they decided to approach the problem in another way:

Well, in the first term, a classmate at the beginning of the course felt uncomfortable with the comments and things that a classmate was doing. That fellow looked at the girl with an awkward look, told her that she was going to be his and that he wanted to be with her, and touched her. She logically told us, her friends, and we immediately said that we had to help and support her so that she would decide to claim that and do justice. We went to the administration and the headquarters and told the person who could take care of it. The truth is that measures were taken, first an expulsion, but he returned and didn't rectify much. There was a second expulsion (C4SA1EA1)

The acquisition of strategies is very present in all the interviews. Another case explained by the children themselves is how, when faced with an assault, they quickly assisted the victim and called the teacher. In other words, they did not support the aggressor's actions but isolated him, and he was left alone (C2PA1EA2):

Interviewee: While I was moving the girl away so she would not hit her again, I told her things to calm her down. And meanwhile, some second-year boys and a girl, who had also hit them, had run off to call a teacher.

Researcher: And the girl who was crying, do you think she felt well supported, calmer seeing that there were people who supported her?

Interviewee: Yes, I have seen that. In that second-year class, when I talked about it with my sister, well, you can see that she either told it

or did it because all her friends had gone to worry about her and see how she was, and I liked that.

However, the testimonies are not only from the students but also from the teachers, as the students explain (C2POA1O3):

They denounce together, and I, as a teacher, join in. We go and tell him that we will not allow it, that he will not be able to play. They clarify that they do not want to play with someone who acts that way. Their position makes the interventions in the game more equal, and the girls can play without feeling excluded and belittled.

The teachers and the community play a key role in ensuring the position persists. Therefore, it is key to talk about friendship. Along these lines, a teacher emphasizes that it is seen how the students are empowered (C1-P-A1-R1) as they acquire strategies to address violence. Along the same lines, another teacher details (C2PA1EA3):

Friendship—we talk about it a lot in class, and they are trying to investigate how to improve friendship. And I think that is very important because there are some friends who leave you there and do nothing, and there are others who, if they see you fighting or doing something, stop you and tell you that you have done wrong. I do like those, but those who leave you there and then do not come—I do not like them.

In short, they are boys and girls who exercise the principle of social justice for all their classmates by defending safe school climates.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This study presents qualitative evidence of the DMPRC's effectiveness in schools as Learning Communities. Educators trained in science-based interventions implement a bystander intervention approach to eliminating violence against children and fostering nonviolent learning environments. Peer group interventions have proven effective in addressing gender-based violence (Racionero-Plaza et al., 2021), and solidarity networks within the educational community are key to breaking the silence around violence. The fieldwork highlights how students and the community gain conflict resolution skills, emphasizing the role of socialization in promoting values that counteract violence (Jiménez-Barbero et al., 2016). Positive relationships among peers, teachers, and families are critical in preventing bullying (Rios-González et al., 2019; Veenstra et al., 2014), while community awareness fosters safe spaces for dialogue and learning (McCormick et al., 2015).

This paper shows the importance of continuing with the DMPRC, as some violent attitudes persist in certain schools. However, all interviewees showed an understanding of how to act and, generally, violence is unjustified. Instead, those who commit violence are socially isolated, while support for victims and actions to prevent or overcome situations of violence are valued. As the results demonstrate, it is crucial to maintain dialogue among all members. Teachers, families, and students share the same goal. The findings also show that, despite some parents' reluctance to acknowledge their children's violent behaviour, constant and equitable dialogue can help them accept and jointly implement measures. The transformation of schools goes beyond their walls. This study clearly exemplifies how the whole community must be involved in addressing gender violence, empowering everyone, and ensuring that they understand and act according to scientific principles. Previous evidence shows that a lack of friends increases the risk of victimization (Díaz-Aguado et al., 2013). The fieldwork clearly distinguishes between friends and acquaintances, but there is a commitment to act against violent actions in both cases. The conclusion of this study provides new evidence on the transformative potential of the peer group to prevent gender violence in schools, which can be used to promote safer school spaces that protect against gender violence, relying on the support of the peer group.

This research adds new evidence about the transformative potential

of the peer group to prevent gender violence in schools that can be used to promote safer school spaces that protect from gender violence relying on the peer group. While the findings highlight the program's strengths, some limitations should be addressed. First, the study is limited in scope, focusing on specific schools, which may affect the generalizability of results. The research relies mainly on qualitative methods, which, while insightful, could benefit from quantitative data to reinforce conclusions. Additionally, barriers such as resource constraints or stakeholder resistance to DMPRC implementation have not been fully explored. Longitudinal research would be valuable to assess the program's long-term impact and sustainability.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Aitor Gómez: Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation. **Jose Miguel Jimenez:** Writing – original draft, Investigation. **Ana Burgués:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation. **Sara Carbonell:** Writing – original draft, Investigation. **Carne Garcia-Yeste:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

This article is part of the project: 'Impact of the 'Bystander intervention for a school culture that overcomes gender-based violence (SAFE)' Reference project: **PID2021-124514OB-I00**. The entire project development has ensured compliance with ethical requirements. The study was approved by the Statement by the Ethics committee concerning research into people, society and the environment (CEIPSA), ethics committee reference number: CEIPSA-2022-PR-0031.

Meeting on 2/5/2023 (archive number 4/2023)

Acknowledgments

This research is part of the I+D+i SAFE project 'Impact of the 'Bystander intervention for a school culture that overcomes gender-based violence', which was funded by the State Programme for Research, Development and Innovation Oriented to the Challenges of Society (Ministry of Science and Innovation, Government of Spain) with reference number **PID2021-124514OB-I00**. The APC was funded by the State Programme for Research, Development and Innovation Oriented to the Challenges of Society (Ministry of Science and Innovation, Government of Spain) with reference number **PID2021-124514OB-I00**.

This article draws on the knowledge created by the coordinator team of the Impact of bystander intervention for a school culture that overcomes gender-based violence SAFE, State Programme for Research, Development and Innovation Oriented to the Challenges of Society (Ministry of Science and Innovation, Government of Spain) with reference number **PID2021-124514OB-I00**.

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