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Characteristics of the Dialogic Model of Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts That Help Address Gender Violence in the School Context: Case Studies Analysis of Its Implementation and Impact in Primary and Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The problem of gender violence is reaching girls at an early age. The school is one context where gender violence occurs and is also a context where it can be promoted or addressed. The dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts (DMPRC) has been demonstrated to improve coexistence and reduce violence and conflict in the school context. However, the way this dialogic model of coexistence contributes to addressing the issue of gender violence in schools has not yet been studied in depth. Four case studies of primary and secondary schools implementing DMPRC were conducted to analyse how the DMPRC contributes to preventing, reducing, and/or overcoming gender-based violence, as well as which specific characteristics contribute to it. The results show that bystander intervention and family and community participation are two key components of the DMPRC that facilitate the identification of situations of gender violence, a more active stance in front of these situations, and ultimately their reduction. These findings align with those of previous research that had identified bystander intervention and a community perspective as characteristics of effective interventions to address gender-based violence in the school context.

Keywords

gender violence, school, prevention, primary education, secondary education

Introduction

It is estimated that almost one in three women aged 15 and older has experienced physical or sexual violence at some time in their lives (WHO & UN Women, 2021). This matter not only affects adult women, but the problem of gender violence is reaching girls at an early age. In this context, the school plays a crucial role, as a context where gender violence occurs and is also a context where it can be promoted or addressed. This study aims to contribute to the existing body of scientific evidence on educational actions that help address gender-based violence in schools. Within educational programmes that scientific literature has already identified as effective in achieving this goal, two elements are identified as particularly conducive to positive impacts: the adoption of the bystander intervention approach and community participation. The present study builds on this foundation by examining a specific educational initiative: the Dialogic Model of Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts (DMPRC), with the aim of understanding how this model incorporates the perspective of bystander intervention and community participation in primary and secondary schools, and which are the contributions of these components in making the

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DMPRC an effective intervention in tackling gender-based violence in the school context.

The Problem of Gender-Based Violence in the School Context

According to the Plan International report "Victims of school" (Perrot, 2014), it is estimated that 60 million girls have experienced sexual abuse at school or on their way to school. Furthermore, it is estimated that one in four adolescents aged 15 to 19 has been subjected to physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some time in their lives (WHO & UN Women, 2021). Indeed, the existence of school-related gender-based violence has been specifically recognised (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016) as well as its particular and disproportionate impact on girls (Safe to Learn, 2023).

In the Spanish context, data from the *Macro-Survey on Violence Against Women* (Government Delegation against Gender Violence, 2019) shows that 24.9% of adolescent girls aged 16 to 17 reported experiencing psychological violence from a partner or ex-partner. The same study identified that 5.2% of young women (aged 16–24) reported being victims of sexual violence within an educational setting. In line with these findings, a meta-analytical study (Feijóo & Rodríguez-Fernández, 2021) on the prevalence of gender-based bullying in Spain reported observation rates of 77.3%, perpetration rates of 13.35%, and victimisation rates of 8.6%. This evidence indicates that gender plays an influential role in shaping the dynamics of violence within educational environments.

In addressing violence and bullying, scientific research has identified the effectiveness of carrying out comprehensive school programmes that advocate the inclusion of the entire educational community, including a clear positioning of teachers against violent attitudes in the classroom and the involvement of families in the transmission of non-aggressive messages and values to their children (Lester et al., 2017; Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). On the other hand, bystander intervention is an approach that, when adopted in educational contexts, successfully prevents bullying (Polanin et al., 2012) through the recognition of the fundamental role of the peer group as bystanders to violence, especially in mobilising resources to stop the abuse and defend the victims (Tsang et al., 2011). Concerning gender-based violence, both the effectiveness of involving the community in schools (Ruiz-Eugenio, Munte-Pascual et al., 2023) and the positive impact of developing programmes based on bystander intervention have been shown (Crooks et al., 2019). Bystander intervention with a community-based approach, involving the entire educational community (teachers, family, students, and other community members), promotes the acquisition of skills in all members to act safely and effectively in the face of a case of abuse or violence and has an important preventive potential (Storer et al., 2017).

Several international studies have provided evidence on the effectiveness of programmes designed to address gender-based violence in school settings through the incorporation of a community perspective, the bystander intervention approach, or a combination of both (Molina Roldán et al., 2025). Programmes such as DHERRA–Say No to VAW (Kumari et al., 2023) in India, IMPower and Your Moment of Truth in Nairobi (Baiocchi et al., 2017; Keller et al., 2015), and SKILLZ Street in South Africa (Merrill et al., 2018) are examples of school-based interventions to prevent gender-based violence that combine curricular content with community involvement and bystander training. These initiatives emphasise empowering students and mobilising local actors—teachers, families, community leaders—to guide youth in identifying and addressing violence. Common strategies include promoting active bystander roles and enhancing self-efficacy, especially among girls, who learn verbal, physical, and decision-making skills to prevent sexual aggression. Evaluations reported improved knowledge, confidence, and attitudes: girls displayed greater ability to avoid risky situations and challenge harmful norms, while boys showed stronger respect for consent and reductions in violent behaviours (Kågesten et al., 2021). In Western contexts, similar principles underpin bystander-focused programmes such as the Kentucky high school initiative (Coker et al., 2024), which trained student leaders using the "3D" model—direct, distract, delegate—yielding a modest decline in sexual violence perpetration.

Overall, the international literature indicates that educational programmes incorporating community participation and the bystander intervention approach yield positive outcomes in two key domains: the acquisition of knowledge and the modification of students' attitudes and behaviours. In Spain, scientific production on these types of programmes remains limited. Programmes such as GENER@T (Mateos et al., 2013; Mateos Inchaurrondo et al., 2020) revealed enhancements in the awareness of dating violence, particularly among adolescents exhibiting elevated social vulnerability and diminished academic performance. In a similar vein, the MEMO4LOVE project (Racionero-Plaza et al., 2020) increased critical awareness among students and helped them acquire tools to reject violent relationships. However, the role of bystander intervention and community participation remains underexplored in this context.

The Dialogic Model of Conflict Prevention and Resolution (DMPCR) is one of the few educational initiatives in Spain that has already been subject to scientific analysis and that integrates community participation and the bystander intervention approach. An examination of this programme, its main components and impacts is presented as follows.

The Dialogic Model of Prevention and Resolution of Conflict as a Strategy to Address Gender-Based Violence in the School Context

The DMPRC (García Yeste & García Carrión, 2022; Roca-Campos et al., 2021) is an educational action specifically aimed at improving the school climate and preventing and better managing conflicts, thereby tending towards school environments free of abuse and violence. Implementing DMPRC involves creating school rules agreed upon by the entire educational community, based on zero tolerance for any violent behaviour, to make schools safe spaces that support students' best academic and personal development.

Previous research on the DMPRC shows that two key elements in preventing school violence are also main features of the DMPRC: bystander intervention and family and community involvement. The bystander intervention approach within the DMPRC (Gómez et al., 2025; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019) is based on the idea that those who witness any form of violence can play a very significant role in preventing and reducing violence if they are trained to defend the victims, not to overlook these situations and to report them. In schools implementing the DMPRC, bystander intervention among peer groups is often promoted through the Zero Violence Brave Club (Duque et al., 2021; Melgar et al., 2025; Roca-Campos et al., 2021), which is used to teach students to be brave—that is, treat their peers well, defend victims of aggression, and reject violent behaviour—and not cowards—the perpetrators of these behaviours (García Yeste & García Carrión, 2022). Thus, the Zero Violence Brave Club results in a greater number of students who can break their silence when they witness any situation of violence (Roca-Campos et al., 2021).

Secondly, with the DMPRC, this active stance against violence is also transferred to all members of the educational community (Duque et al., 2021; Oliver et al., 2009; Padrós, 2014; Roca-Campos et al., 2021; Ruiz-Eugenio, Tellado et al., 2023; Serradell et al., 2020). There are two ways in which community participation can take place in schools implementing the DMPRC, through participation in decision-making—decisive participation—or through participation in learning activities—educative participation—; both forms of participation always pursue, among other educational objectives, the improvement of school coexistence (Garcia Yeste & García Carrión, 2022; Roca-Campos et al., 2021). The decisive participation is primarily materialised by creating a rule of coexistence, chosen and developed by consensus among all. One deliberative space usually applied for creating school rules is the coexistence committee, a mixed committee composed of different profiles such as students, teachers, families, and other community members such as volunteers (Padrós, 2014). The coexistence committee first gathers all the concerns and worries related to conflicts in the school from each sector of the community, and based on its analysis and structuring, the coexistence rules are drawn up (Burgués de Freitas et al., 2015; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019). On the other hand, the educative participation of the community involves families and volunteers in educational activities at the school. This approach helps reduce conflicts between peers, improves school performance, and enhances social cohesion, leading to a better climate within the school (Rodriguez-Oramas et al., 2022).

Previous research has already shown how the DMPRC contributes to the improvement of coexistence, the prevention of violence and the reduction of bullying (Duque et al., 2021; Roca-Campos et al., 2021; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019). As part of the DMPRC, the Zero Violence Brave Club has been shown to be an effective educational intervention in reducing and preventing school violence (Duque et al., 2021; Roca-Campos et al., 2021). Moreover, some of the evidence provided by previous research also suggests that the DMPRC can be an effective strategy to prevent, reduce and eliminate gender-based violence in the school context. In this sense, the Zero Violence Brave Club helps girls, in particular, feel less afraid of possible aggressions at school, as they know they will be defended and protected by their classmates. In this regard, the number of complaints increases because girls dare to expose that they have been assaulted, due to the increased climate of safety generated by the implementation of the DMPRC.

The inclusion of families in the creation of coexistence rules through mixed committees and in the educational activities of the school favours the consensus and transmission of common values against gender-based violence, while facilitating the whole community to become active spectators and advocates for the victims of violence in the school (Roca-Campos et al., 2021). Previous studies have shown how dialogue procedures established with the community based on egalitarian dialogue improve the identification of situations of gender-based violence, moving from interpreting certain behaviours as "nonsense" or child's play to a forceful rejection of these behaviours, promoting their visibility, reporting and the reduction of cases (Padrós, 2014).

Some studies have pointed more specifically to the integration of women in the community as a fundamental part of the effective prevention of gender-based violence in schools (Oliver et al., 2009; Ruiz-Eugenio, Munte-Pascual, et al., 2023). With the implementation of the DMPRC, diverse women can assume a decisive role in the prevention of gender-based violence in the school environment, through their participation in the design and application of actions to combat this type of violence, and by sharing experiences from different perspectives, the effectiveness of preventive measures is improved, and the identification of situations of gender-based violence is enhanced.

In summary, the review of existing literature to date on the impacts of the DMPRC on the prevention and reduction of

school violence points to similar impacts in terms of gender-based violence. However, there is as yet no research that focuses specifically on the analysis of the characteristics and impacts of the DMPRC on the prevention, reduction and elimination of gender-based violence. This study aims to build on existing knowledge to deepen our understanding of these characteristics and their impacts, thereby generating more scientific knowledge about the contribution of the DMPRC in addressing gender-based violence in the school context.

Methods

The main objective of this study is to analyse the DMPRC as a strategy to address gender-based violence in the school context. The research questions the study aims to address are:

1. Does the DMPRC contribute to the prevention, reduction, or overcoming of gender-based violence in schools? How are these effects manifested?
2. Which features and practices of the DMPRC support the prevention and response to gender-based violence in schools?

The study reported in this article is part of the research project "SAFE: Impact of the "Bystander intervention" for a school culture that overcomes gender-based violence," funded by the Spanish R&D&I Plan under the Subprogram for Knowledge Generation 2021. The main objective of the SAFE project was to analyse how the DMPRC is contributing to the prevention of gender-based violence in primary and secondary schools. The project was conducted over a period of 3 years, from September 2022 to August 2025.

Study Design and Conceptualisation

After conducting an exhaustive documentary analysis of previous studies on the DMPRC, fieldwork was carried out in four schools where the model is being implemented. All techniques employed in the fieldwork were qualitative, aiming to capture the subjective experiences of participants in depth. In line with the purpose of qualitative research (Creswell, 2008), this approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the DMPRC's functioning, the outcomes perceived by the educational community regarding gender violence, and how they interpret, from their experience, what helped achieve these outcomes.

The study also follows the case study methodology (Stake, 2008). More specifically, it is a collective or multiple case study, which encompasses different particular cases to understand the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, the research follows a communicative orientation (Gómez et al., 2019), which implies the full inclusion of the end-users' voices in the research process. This perspective assumes the capacity of the people targeted by the research as transformative agents of social reality and creates a context of egalitarian dialogue between researchers and participants in which they jointly interpret reality in an intersubjective dialogue; while the researchers contribute their accumulated academic knowledge on the topic, the end-users of research contribute their perspectives and interpretations from their experience (Gómez, 2023).

For the purposes of this research, "gender-based violence" is understood as "any type of harm that is perpetrated against a person or group of people because of their factual or perceived sex, gender, sexual orientation and/or gender identity" (Pandea et al., 2019, p. 18). "School-related gender-based violence" was understood as "acts or threats of sexual, physical or psychological violence occurring in and around schools, perpetrated as a result of gender norms and stereotypes, and enforced by unequal power dynamics" (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016, p. 20). Some of the indicators used to identify gender-based violence in school contexts were teasing or harassing girls based on their clothing, verbal insults, pressuring them to engage in romantic or sexual interactions, unwanted touching or attempts to view private body parts without consent, requesting intimate images, and distributing them without permission. The study also encompassed violence directed at students based on their sexual orientation (e.g., identifying as gay or lesbian) or gender identity (e.g., being transgender). These various forms of gender-based violence were presented explicitly as examples when questioning participants, in order to clarify and operationalise the concept within the context of the study.

Participants and Data Collection

A purposive sampling method was used to select the participating schools. Primary and secondary schools implementing the DMPRC were selected. Three main criteria were established to guide the selection of participating schools:

- Centres with at least 1 year of implementation of the DMPRC.
- Diversity in terms of cultural/ethnic background and socioeconomic status.
- Territorial balance between Spanish regions.

Finally, four schools participated in this study. Two schools provided primary education, one provided secondary education, and one provided both primary and secondary education. The school with the longest experience in implementing the DMPRC had been using the model for almost 10 years, and the school with the least experience had implemented it for 5 years. Furthermore, the participating schools demonstrated significant cultural and socioeconomic diversity, and the study successfully involved

Table 1. Summary of the Qualitative Techniques Applied During the First and Second Year of the Project in Four Centres.

Technique	School 1 (Primary)	School 1 (Secondary)	School 2 (Primary)	School 3 (Primary)	School 4 (Secondary)	Total
Communicative observations	6	6	6	6	5	29
Semi-structured interviews	6	6	6	6	7	31
Communicative daily life stories	0	0	0	1	1	2
Total	12	12	12	13	13	62

schools from three autonomous communities in Spain: Catalonia, the Valencian Community and the Region of Murcia. In terms of school size, two of the participating schools had fewer than 300 enrolled students, one had just over 400, and the largest was a secondary school with more than 1,500 students.

As part of each case study, three qualitative data collection techniques were applied: communicative observations, semi-structured interviews with communicative orientation and communicative life stories. The communicative observations took place in various school contexts, allowing the study of the DMPRC's operation regarding improving coexistence and preventing gender-based violence, such as in class sessions or meetings of the mixed committee on coexistence. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with students and teachers of the schools. The communicative life stories were conducted with various members of the schools' management teams who had been particularly involved in implementing the DMPRC and could offer a broad perspective on its implementation and impact on their school. The use of diverse qualitative techniques, along with the inclusion of diverse participants in this study, enabled data triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of the DMPRC and its effects in the participating schools, thereby strengthening the study's rigour and validity. Furthermore, the fieldwork and subsequent data analysis were conducted by different members of the research team, which helped to reduce potential biases and enhance the credibility of the findings.

Throughout the research project, four rounds of fieldwork were conducted: one in the first year, two in the second year —at the beginning and end of the school year—and a final round in the third year. As shown in Table 1, this article uses information collected in 62 qualitative techniques, carried out between the first year and the start of the second year of the SAFE project (2022–2023). For the communicative observations, a protocol for information collection was created and completed by the research staff during the observation. The interviews and life stories were audio-recorded and then fully transcribed verbatim to facilitate further analysis.

Table 2. Categories of Analysis of the Literature Review and Fieldwork.

Categories
1. Characteristics of the DMPRC that are relevant to addressing gender-based violence.
a. Bystander intervention
b. Community participation
2. Impacts of the DMPRC on preventing, reducing and/or overcoming gender-based violence.

Overall, the sample comprised 22 students, 10 teachers, and 5 members of the school's management teams, making a total of 37 participants ($n = 37$).

Data Analysis

For the data analysis, two main categories and two subcategories were created. These categories were established deductively, considering the previous literature review and simultaneously addressing the research questions (Table 2).

The process of analysing the data involved several members of the research team. Initially, one researcher developed a preliminary proposal for the analysis and categorisation of excerpts. Subsequently, the categories were distributed among groups of two to four team members, with each group examining in depth a set of excerpts related to the same theme. After incorporating the team's revisions and adjustments, the analysis of all the fieldwork data was finalised. This multi-layered review, together with the involvement of different researchers and the achievement of group consensus, helped ensure the validity of the findings.

The subcategories "bystander intervention" and "community involvement," key characteristics of the MDPRC, obtained a substantial number of references. A total of 389 excerpts were coded under "bystander intervention" and 103 under "community participation," 126 of which specifically reflected impacts related to the prevention, reduction and overcoming of gender-based violence.

Ethics

The entire process of data collection and analysis has adhered to ethical standards of human research, including anonymity and confidentiality. Specifically, it followed Article 8 of the "Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union" on the protection of personal data, the Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and the Council of April 27, 2016, on the protection of natural persons concerning the processing of personal data, and the Royal Decree-Law 5/2018, of July 27, on urgent measures for the adaptation of Spanish legislation to the EU regulations.

All participants participated in the study voluntarily and were informed about the research objectives and development, as well as about the use of their personal data and the impact expected from the results. For so doing, they or their parents/legal tutors signed an informed consent with information about the objectives of the research, the procedures adopted to guarantee the protection of data (use of pseudonyms, storage of data), use of the research results, and the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time. The SAFE project received approval from the URV's Ethics Committee for Research on People, Society and the Environment (CEIPSA) with code CEIPSA-2022-PR-0031.

Results

Following the set objectives, data collection and analysis have allowed us to deepen our understanding of the main characteristics of the DMPRC that favour creating school environments that prevent, reduce, and/or overcome gender-based violence in schools.

Characteristics of the Dialogic Model of Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts (DMPRC)

Bystander Intervention: Activating Students as Agents in the Face of Gender-Based Violence. Firstly, we find that the DMPRC promotes bystander intervention among students as a means of protection against gender-based violence. The schools that apply the DMPRC promote bystander intervention by implementing specific educational actions aimed at this objective. This would be the case of the Zero Violence Brave Club, a space intentionally created to discuss violence. The construction of this club in the classroom enables the handling of conflict or violence situations that may occur in schools, and it serves as a favourable place to raise awareness among students about rejecting violence. This is achieved by putting the spotlight on and giving value to people who do not use violence, are good companions and defend the victims, considering them brave people. The same approach is applied to gender-based violence. Teachers at both the primary and secondary levels have highlighted the usefulness of implementing the Zero Violence Brave Club to help students distinguish between violent and abusive behaviour and egalitarian and friendly behaviour. In this sense, the counsellor of a secondary school explained how the work of the Zero Violence Brave Club allows for creating spaces to discuss and raise awareness about violence in general and gender-based violence in particular. When it is possible to dialogue, think and clarify what constitutes gender-based violence, it makes it easier for students to take a stand when such a situation arises:

> Well, when I started with the Zero Violence Brave Club (…) we asked them [the students] what violence is, what they understood by violence, and then the children started… "is it only physical violence?" I said: "but violence is only physical? Let's see…." "No, teacher, the insults, the nicknames, if we play jokes…." And I saw him [a student] with his hand raised, (…) and he said: "well, for me, not respecting girls is a form of violence." (Secondary school teacher and counsellor, school 4)

This testimony illustrates how the Brave Club broadens students' understanding of violence by recognising that it can be symbolic and relational rather than just physical. It also highlights how some behaviours are especially directed at girls due to gender. Recognising the different types of violence is the first step in learning how to curb these behaviours.

More generally, the bystander intervention approach is present in the various actions and dialogic environments created in these primary and secondary schools, where it is possible to discuss and understand what it means to be an active spectator or upstander in conflict and violent situations. In this sense, orienting bystander intervention towards the prevention and reduction of gender-based violence requires teachers to direct student dialogue towards this topic at different moments of the school day, for example, when incidents of this type occur. In this sense, a primary school teacher (school 2) explained that the functioning of the DMPRC facilitates making the prevention of gender-based violence a regular topic of discussion, especially in classroom assemblies, where the delegated pupils bring up this issue, which is then transferred to other spaces such as the playground, the dining room, or the dialogic gatherings. Along the same lines, a primary school student from the same school explained that tutoring is a space in which the issue of gender violence is frequently addressed:

> There is a subject called tutoring, and sometimes, if something has happened in the playground or something, we talk about it (…), about gender-based violence or friendship or upstander and brave things. (Primary school student, school 2)

Thus, data suggest that the MDPRC incorporates the perspective of bystander intervention as a transversal theme throughout school life.

From the students' accounts, we can also see that this work of promoting bystander intervention involves the

explanation and use of some key concepts, such as "gender-based violence" or being "upstander" or "brave," which the pupils internalise, use and relate both to the need to take a stand against people who perpetrate gender-based violence when these situations arise and to obtaining an effective response:

> *And in this case, does being an upstander help to reduce gender-based violence?*
> Yes, it helps a lot, because the one who does the violence, when we become upstanders, will stop doing it because he knows that we don't laugh with him. (Secondary school student, school 1)

This quote suggests that students believe upstander behaviour has a deterrent effect, linking peer disapproval with a reduction in violent actions.

On the other hand, the daily and transversal work on the prevention of gender-based violence is intertwined with the work on curricular content, especially when the school implements actions based on learning through dialogue and joint reflection. This is the case of the dialogic literary gatherings, which, in addition to focusing on reading and literature, also serve as a space for preventing gender-based violence. By reading and debating works of classic universal literature, universal themes emerge in discussions that are important for the group and can connect with their realities. In an observation of a mixed committee on coexistence, one teacher explained how, during a dialogic literary gathering in which they were discussing a text where a boy kissed a girl without her consent, the students themselves reacted, identifying this act as gender-based violence and taking a stand against it:

> I remember when, during the Tom Sawyer literary gathering, the students rejected Tom's inappropriate, deceitful and non-consensual behaviour towards Becky when he kissed her. When gender-based violence arises, it is immediately identified, and both boys and girls take a clear stance. (Primary school teacher, school 2)

As we can see, dialogic gatherings function as an additional space in which students learn to position themselves as active bystanders against gender violence. This type of reflection is then easily transferred into day-to-day situations in the schools. Thus, in the framework of the DMPRC, dialogue, fed by previous dialogues in the context of the group, becomes a tool for managing events constituting gender-based violence, as can be seen in the case explained by a teacher:

> Look, just a fortnight ago, a boy in the group kissed a girl. And of course, the girl said "I don't want to," she did it right. (…) But sometimes these specific situations do happen. Well, it's about intervening with dialogue, that the victim speaks, that the group defends the victim and that the aggressor is the one who really feels bad. We can't say "nothing happens." (Primary school teacher, school 1)

Here, the dialogic approach validates the victim's voice and mobilises collective accountability, shifting the burden of shame from the victim to the perpetrator. We can also see how the students themselves, in a group interview, link the constant work they do on this topic in the dialogic literary gatherings with the fact of helping and intervening more in situations of gender-based violence and show how they understand these gatherings as a context where the DMPRC is put in practice:

> *And do you think that [gender-based violence] happens less because you work with the Dialogic Model [of Prevention and Resolution of Conflicts]?*
>
> **Student 2:** That's right, (…) I think that the dialogic literary gatherings and… do have an influence.
>
> *Do you think that, if you didn't, maybe you wouldn't think so much about helping your friends?*
>
> **Student 2:** Yes, we wouldn't do it so directly…
> **Student 1:** Maybe we think about it more and well, having participated in the gatherings and received talks, we already have it in our mind.
> **Student 2:** Of course, we already have it, it's like "Something is happening, I have to act." And as with the gatherings, we all talk, so we all know each other (Secondary school student, school 4).

As can be seen, the DMPRC incorporates the perspective of bystander intervention in a cross-cutting manner, at different times and in various situations of school life, seeking to encourage students to defend victims and take an active stance against gender-based violence when necessary.

Involving Families and the Community: A Community-Based Approach to Gender-Based Violence Prevention. The data collected has allowed us to investigate how family and community involvement is deployed in schools that implement the DMPRC to address gender-based violence. Community participation is achieved through the involvement of families and other community members in decision-making, as seen in the mixed committees on coexistence, or on educational activities in the classroom, such as interactive groups, dialogic literary gatherings, and family education. During the development of these actions, teachers can guide families and volunteers to address issues such as respectful treatment and attitudes toward gender violence, as well as the language

used in the classroom and the relationship with students. In this way, in addition to having more allies to prevent violence in the school context, they also help to transfer the work done with students in contexts outside the school. This was explained by a teacher, who is an equality coordinator at one school, during one of the observations made in mixed committees on coexistence:

> I see it as they have said, when they [relatives] come to [interactive] groups, to dialogic literary gatherings, and also in the space for dialogue that we have, where we read about the prevention of gender violence in minors and families become aware with us, we are creating that culture, of recognising and acting. Of talking to our children about this as well. (Primary school teacher, school 2)

Not only do teachers emphasise the importance of creating a shared "culture" of values between families and schools, but students also perceive this as essential. As one secondary school student articulated, it is imperative for the home environment to reinforce the principles against violence: "No matter how much you explain to me at school, if my parents then tell me 'If someone hits you, hit them back,' I'm going to do what they tell me at home." (Secondary school student, school 1).

Thus, structuring the participation of families and the community in school operations makes it easier for both families and the educational centre to work together in a coordinated manner towards preventing gender violence. Participants from the four centres have articulated an understanding that the dissemination of discordant messages between educational institutions and family units has the potential to compromise the school's prevention efforts; thus, the DMPRC's emphasis on community involvement may serve to address this potential gap by seeking to align values across all settings. In addition, we also find that in these schools, families and people from the community participate in specific training on the prevention of gender violence. These training sessions are not only aimed at teachers but are open to a broader audience to promote a community approach to gender violence. In this sense, the teaching staff stressed the importance of these spaces where they can raise awareness, dialogue and learn together with families and other people from the community to promote equal and non-violent relationships in a coordinated manner:

> In my opinion, this prevention is carried out indirectly, as families are educated through their participation in various successful activities conducted at the school, such as interactive groups and the coexistence committee. The tutor can initiate any related topic that leads to an exchange of opinions, and the activities proposed for the interactive groups can also address good treatment and the stance on this type of violence. (Primary school counsellor, school 2)

On this basis, families and other people in the community, including people who volunteer at the school, contribute to addressing gender violence by adopting the same position of rejection of these situations that the school maintains. Family and community participation in different activities and spaces at the school also helps teachers detect and stop violent acts, as observed by the students:

> *How do families or volunteers help to reduce gender violence?* Well, there are extracurricular activities, meetings where we also call families, and assemblies. All of this allows teachers to get to know parents better, talk to them, and get involved in the issue. Also, in the interactive groups, the parents come, and they can also see if there is a good or bad situation. Those who are not parents also come to help in interactive groups, and they can notice all those things and can help. (Secondary school student, school 1)

In this way, the involvement of families and the community becomes an everyday practice in the primary and secondary schools where the DMPRC is implemented, which facilitates close communication and the establishment of bonds of trust and collaboration between the teaching staff and families around a school project that seeks to overcome gender-based violence:

> Yes, I think that community participation is also key, (…). I think that the families are also educating themselves with us because they also have access to the information that their children are reading. For example, if I work on an article in class about friendship, it reaches them through a Telegram group, or in the group meetings that I do, the topic of violence is always present and we always touch on some point about what we are working on in the classroom and I take dialogues or conversations from the group and I also pass them on to the families, right? In other words, what topics we are dealing with, what we are working on, the families know about it, and they also have these dialogues, right? (Primary school teacher, school 2)

In short, the community perspective is integrated not only into specific actions but also as part of the life of the centres that implement the DMPRC.

Impacts on the Prevention of Gender-Based Violence in the School Context

Improving the Identification of Situations of Gender Violence. Firstly, the existence of a permanent dialogue on gender-based violence, whether in spaces where teachers encourage students to reflect on this issue, or as a way of dealing with conflicts when this type of situation arises, leads to greater identification and understanding of what constitutes gender-based violence among students, which is a

fundamental aspect to be able to react appropriately to this type of behaviour. In the schools participating in the study, teachers reported that students' ability to identify certain acts as gender-based violence, such as touching girls' bodies without their consent and humiliating them with insults and degrading comments, was improved. In the account of a primary school teacher, it was possible to see that a female student was able to recognise that she had been a victim of gender-based violence at her previous school, thanks to the classroom dialogues held on this subject:

> And a girl in class would raise her hand and say, "This is what was happening to me at my other school. Every time I talked to a friend I get along with, he would pressure me to say yes, to kiss him, to go out with him, to spend time together, to see what would happen between us," which was a constant harassment that she is able to recognise quickly when these topics are discussed in class. She can bring it up and comment on it, and yes, they do notice it. (Primary school teacher, school 2)

The impact on the identification of gender-based violence also extends to other moments and situations beyond the school context. During the interviews with students, when asked about issues related to gender-based violence, they were able to recognise and provide concrete examples of this phenomenon, as well as reject such behaviours. One female student illustrated this understanding by reflecting on toxic relationships:

> In a toxic relationship, well, it's like toxic friendships, but in a toxic relationship, I've seen that it goes too far, a lot. There are even news reports of men killing women (…). And when I'm an adult and of legal age, I will look for someone who treats me well, who makes me feel good, and if not, then goodbye. (…). And the most important thing in a relationship is respect and trust." (Primary school student, school 1)

Although we have not been able to collect long-term evidence, data suggests that the DMPRC provides them with tools to recognise and avoid violent behaviour in future relationships.

On the other hand, the involvement of families and the community in dialogue with students and teachers contributes both to recognising situations of gender-based violence as such and to the discovery of new cases. In this regard, a secondary school teacher recounted a case in which this dialogue, with the participation of a mother, helped to identify a situation as gender-based violence. The creation of this shared space for dialogue made it possible to give a voice to those classmates who did not support humiliating behaviour that was being normalised, generating a group position of rejection, and ultimately making the victim abandon the normalisation she had made of this situation and not consent to it:

> In the second [year], there was a problem that the pupils told me about. I wasn't the tutor, but it turned out that a girl was on the bus with a group of friends, and they were saying terrible things to her. They called her dirty words, "slut," "whore," "bitch." (…) The pupils told me about it, and then I decided to talk to them, but I contacted the mother. And the mother was very worried, (…) because her daughter said that they were friends of hers and that they said it as a joke. And the mother was very, very, very, very worried because her daughter was normalising that (…) I brought the mother to the class, and we talked to all the students in the assembly, (…). When the mother went in there, she was absolutely charming, the way she acted. (…) We were talking about it, and we said that the students should take a stand and, above all, that the female students should take a stand. And this girl's classmates took a stand, saying that obviously, being called a "slut," being called a "whore" is not a normal joke. This mother later called me and told me that her daughter had really understood and had changed when she heard her classmates. (Secondary school teacher, school 4)

Finally, the training and awareness-raising that families and the community receive as part of community participation in the school facilitates the identification and visibility of new cases of gender-based violence, leading to greater identification and reporting of cases, and revealing situations that may have gone unnoticed until then, as one teacher emphasises:

> The fact that they participate is important because, just like the students, I think they learn to take a stand against these behaviours, don't they? They are identifying what gender violence is, the community is also… I think it helps them to identify and to have a space to be able to denounce, right? (…) sometimes there have been cases where they haven't really known what to do or where to report it, and sometimes you have to find a place to do it, and that's important, isn't it? I mean, knowing that you have a place where this issue is talked about and worked on in depth and, let's say, taken seriously, I think that it is also an important part that is there and that the community, I think, that puts in value. (Primary school teacher, school 2)

Improved Action and a More Active Stance in Cases of Gender-Based Violence. The second impact we have identified is the progressive increase in the skills acquired by students to deal with gender-based violence, improving their performance as bystanders and taking an increasingly assertive stance. As a result of the work carried out from the bystander intervention approach, students learn to break their silence and become more confident in reporting these acts. In several cases, special emphasis is placed on the confidence the girls gain in not overlooking potentially harmful behaviour and in speaking out against these attitudes. We found testimonies in this sense from both primary and secondary education, as

well as from both pupils and teachers. This was expressed by a primary school student:

> I think it was in fourth or fifth grade once, but that was the only time it happened because it was carnival and we had to dress up, and some girls had put make-up on as part of their costume and some boys told them that they shouldn't wear make-up like that. And they [the boys] insulted them [the girls] every time they saw them, but they denounced them and that was the end of it, they didn't say it anymore. (Primary school student, school 3)

In the following quote, we see how a secondary school teacher insists on the same idea. Furthermore, he points out how having developed this ability to respond safely and assertively is especially important if we take into account that teachers are not always aware of the violent interactions that take place among students:

> The girls are now much more aware that they don't have to consent to certain comments that are made about them. And yes, I have noticed the change here, (…). The girls don't put up with these comments anymore. These are very common, it's true that we teachers don't know most of the things. But they indeed tell more. (…) Yes, I think so, I notice a difference. (Secondary school teacher, school 4)

In the quotes, it can also be observed that, although the teachers are not always present or aware of the violent situations that occur, they are an important source of support to denounce. The support they find among the adults at the school, with whom they have worked on their commitment to the centre's rules, reinforces the girls' behaviour of non-tolerance and reporting, as it provides them with a sense of security. In this sense, a primary school pupil clearly states that she would not give in to pressure from a boy who might insist that she send intimate photos of herself, and her first reaction would be to report him to adults in her environment:

> *Imagine you are asked for a photo. If a guy asks you to send him a picture without your shirt on, what would you do?*
> I wouldn't send it.
> *And if it's someone from school, what would you do?*
> I would tell my parents and my teacher so that they would know, in case it happens to another girl so that she knows that she doesn't have to send anything to that boy. (Primary school student, school 2)

On the other hand, the quote shows how the student's motivation is not only to help herself but also to prevent this from happening to other classmates, which shows an attitude of solidarity and unity in the face of violence. In the same vein, when another primary school student was asked if she would know how to act if she knew of a situation of violence against a girl, she clearly expressed the seriousness of these acts and how she would translate her stance against them into a denounce:

> Yes, because this is very serious, there have been many reports of women being harassed and even raped, and in this 21st century, I don't think there should be any more things like this. And the first thing I would do would be to tell an adult … (Primary school student, school 1)

Likewise, this positioning is not only perceived in the girls interviewed, but it is possible to see how it ends up being generalised to all the students, who, in addition to seeking help, apply other strategies to deal with situations of gender-based violence based on dialogue and argumentation, which is one key aspect of the DMPRC. In this regard, a secondary school boy explained that, if he witnesses such an incident, he first confronts the aggressor directly, trying to talk to him to stop him, and then informs a teacher:

> *When they explain to you the situations that you have told us about with girls and so on, what do you say to these guys?*
> That I don't think it's funny. Of course, those who do it haven't told me about it. Other people who have seen it at school have told me. I say it's not funny, I mean, a girl, respect her, right, she's a girl, I don't know, I just don't like it.
> *And what would you do if suddenly at school a boy is treating a girl badly? (...)*
> First of all, I would talk to the boy and say: "What did you do that for?" If he apologises to the girl and the girl says: "That's it, I forgive him" that's it. But if not, if the girl feels bad and is afraid to tell it, then I would tell the teacher that they are bothering a girl. (Secondary school student, school 1)

In the example of another primary school child, we also see how this recourse to dialogue and argumentation explicitly appeals to the school's coexistence rule, which is common in primary and secondary schools that implement the DMPRC. In this example, we see that the school rule becomes a tool to act in situations of violence, which gives security to the students because it is a rule shared by all:

> *For example, if you saw someone trying to force a kiss on a girl, what would you do?*
> Well, I would run and say "Stop, I like you to respect me, please stop." (Primary school student, school 3)

In addition to seeking external support or resorting to dialogue, another way in which students sometimes act when necessary is by physically intervening to stop a violent or abusive situation immediately. This is explained in a group

interview by several secondary school students, who say that another mechanism they use to stop these situations is to separate the people involved, for example, when a girl has been pressured to kiss her boyfriend in front of everyone in the playground:

> But maybe at recess… it hasn't happened to me, but some girls, for example, have boyfriends and then they say "kiss, kiss, kiss," and maybe they don't want to, but there's a big crowd of people there, and you feel terrible because you feel pressured and if you don't want to, you don't want to. (…) So, what you do is that, for example, the girl's group of friends take the girl somewhere else, so that she isn't bothered, and the boy's group of friends take the boy somewhere else so that he isn't bothered either…. (Secondary school student, school 4)

As can be seen, it is an action organised in groups of friends to protect and defend one of the girls, but boys also participate in these initiatives. This way of reacting shows that boys and girls have internalised the importance of intervening to defend those going through unwanted situations. As one student noted, the most effective strategy in his school to prevent such behaviours is "forming a shield" (Primary school student, school 3), which would be a way of explaining this type of protective action of friendship groups, that is, the group joins together to protect the victims.

Modifying and Curbing Gender-Based Violence-Related Behaviours Among Students. The third and final impact of the MDPRC is students' exhibition of more egalitarian and respectful behaviours. This transformation is evident in students' awareness of the importance of not tolerating gender-based violence, as well as in the cessation of violent and abusive behaviour by some students.

First of all, the active positioning of the peer group against gender-based violence, and in favour of the victims, manages to halt violent behaviours that may take place in classrooms or other spaces in schools. Some of the quotes collected in previous sections showed how better identification, greater action and a more active stance in situations of violence lead to ending specific situations of violence when students report them or intervene by appealing to dialogue around the rules of coexistence of the centre or more directly by separating the aggressor from the person being assaulted.

These acts of group positioning contribute to the students' decisive rejection of abuse, insult or assault towards a female peer. The group's disapproval of gender-based violence has a positive influence on the students who commit these acts, whether they are more or less aware of the negative consequences of these acts, and they end up putting an end to these attitudes, making these behaviours less and less likely to occur. The impact of group positioning in overcoming situations of gender-based violence can be seen, for example, in the case of a boy with a disability in a primary school who touched a girl without her consent and, after seeing the group's position rejecting this behaviour, was able to understand the negative meaning of his actions and stopped doing it:

> *Don't you see boys trying to take advantage of girls, talk to them badly or touch their body parts?*
> No, but in my class, a girl complained that a boy with a disability was touching her. But we think she did it unintentionally because he has a disability.
> *Did you tell him that it is wrong, and he doesn't do it anymore?*
> Yes, we used to tell him that it is wrong and now he doesn't do it anymore.
> *Even if the person thinks that it is not wrong, do you also tell him and have you stopped it?*
> Yes, we, whenever she said it, we always said it to him and every day he did it less and less, and now he doesn't do it anymore. (Primary school student, school 2)

Similarly, we found that group intervention effectively overcomes situations of violence in secondary education. In this sense, a secondary school pupil explained how the group's union to confront certain abuses a classmate was suffering at the hands of another boy effectively stopped the situation. This case illustrates how students explain to each other when this type of situation happens to them, especially among girls, and a collective mobilisation is created in support of the victim:

> (…) and the whole class went out, and the whole class knew about it, of course between friends, the rumour spread, and of course, everyone kept saying to the child, "Why are you doing this?" So, I think that helped the boy calm down a bit. (Secondary school student, school 4)

Thus, this active positioning of the group is effective not only in tackling situations of violence or harassment towards specific female students but also in changing the climate and treatment of girls in general. In one secondary school, it was common to use sexualised and offensive language towards girls. Following the implementation of the DMPRC, girls have started to say that they resent such comments, and their peers started to support them, which led to the elimination of such language, as one teacher reports:

> It has had consequences, that those sexist comments that used to be made, that were normalised, in a certain way, it was normal, I don't know, "hot chick," "what tits," that kind of things. Well, they don't do it any more, the girls already say that this kind of comment bothers them. Yes, yes, and their classmates say that

"it's true, I've heard them say it." They take a stand. (Secondary school teacher, school 4)

In summary, the promotion of students' awareness of gender-based violence, facilitated by the various dialogue spaces within the DMPRC, as well as training in bystander intervention, discourages students from engaging in abusive and violent behaviour and, in some cases, succeeds in modifying such behaviour.

Discussion

Previous research on the DMPRC has primarily examined its role in improving school coexistence and reducing peer violence (García Yeste & García Carrión, 2022; Roca-Campos et al., 2021). These studies have emphasised the promotion of bystander intervention and community participation as central mechanisms for fostering positive, respectful environments. However, few have addressed the model's potential to prevent gender-based violence specifically. Earlier evidence did point in this direction (Oliver et al., 2009; Padrós, 2014), suggesting that the DMPRC could also contribute to address school-based gender violence. he present study expands this line of research by analysing how these elements operate in addressing gender-based violence within schools, confirming their relevance and providing further insight into their concrete effects.

Our findings aligns with previous research on effective strategies for preventing and overcoming gender-based violence in schools, which identified the community perspective and the active intervention of the peer group as key elements (Crooks et al., 2019; Elboj-Saso et al., 2020; Racionero-Plaza et al., 2021; Ruiz-Eugenio, Munte-Pascual, et al., 2023; Storer et al., 2017).

The findings confirm that schools implementing the DMPRC recognise the central role of the peer group in preventing and reducing gender-based violence. In DMPRC schools, students are explicitly trained to identify, reject, and act upon situations of gender-based violence. This approach, comparable to other bystander-focused programmes such as those analysed by Williams and Neville (2017), Coker et al. (2024), and Kågesten et al. (2021), replaces passive or complicit behaviours with active rejection, thereby transforming school norms. As in other interventions that link bystander intervention to increased self-efficacy (Baiocchi et al., 2017; Kumari et al., 2023), students' awareness of what constitutes gender-based violence, combined with concrete strategies for safe action, enhances their confidence and collective capacity to respond to these situations.

At the same time, DMPRC's community dimension strengthens its impact, situating it alongside initiatives that involve parents, volunteers, or community leaders in violence prevention (Jewkes et al., 2019; Keller et al., 2015). In the schools studied, community participation extends beyond occasional collaboration to form a shared project among all educational agents. This collective commitment creates a climate of zero tolerance toward violence and enables the early detection of situations that might otherwise remain invisible to teachers, particularly those occurring outside school boundaries. The resulting bonds of trust and cooperation between families and school staff foster joint responsibility and sustained prevention efforts. This finding reinforces the importance of relational and community factors, often cited as critical in sustaining long-term cultural change in educational settings.

Other interventions that include bystander or community components are implemented through limited-duration curricula or specific training programmes (Merrill et al., 2018; Racionero-Plaza et al., 2020). In contrast, the DMPRC operates as a cross-cutting, permanent strategy integrated into the school's core project. This continuous and collective engagement is consistent with the principles of the whole-school approach, which has been shown to be effective in tackling gender-based violence in education (Keating & Baker, 2025; Nyoni et al., 2022; Olivia et al., 2024). By embedding the principles of dialogue and nonviolence across institutional structures, the DMPRC ensures that prevention does not depend on isolated actions but permeates everyday interactions and learning processes.

Two key aspects facilitate this comprehensive vision. First, the incorporation of DMPRC into the institutional framework ensures the entire community's commitment to nonviolence. Second, its dialogic nature materialises in diverse spaces for joint reflection and decision-making, such as class assemblies and mixed committees on coexistence, where students, families, and other community members discuss and address issues related to gender-based violence. Moreover, this dialogic dynamic extends to curricular learning activities, such as interactive groups or dialogic literary gatherings (Rodrigues de Mello et al., 2021), allowing the discussion of equality and nonviolence to permeate both formal and informal educational settings.

Finally, the study highlights that the prevention and reduction of gender-based violence through the DMPRC do not occur merely as a by-product of improving coexistence but as a result of explicitly addressing gender-based violence as a distinct issue. As other research has shown (Molina Roldán et al., 2025; Sundaram, 2016), effectiveness depends on naming and discussing this form of violence and on promoting shared understanding of key concepts such as bystander, upstander, or breaking the silence. In the DMPRC, this dialogic exploration of concepts enables the internalisation of new meanings that empower both students and adults to identify, reject, and act against gender-based violence.

Conclusions

Overall, the data analysed allow us to conclude that the DMPRC is a school-based intervention that helps prevent and overcome gender-based violence. The bystander intervention approach and community participation—core elements of the DMPRC—are two key features that contribute to this. The adoption of bystander intervention, together with community participation, helps create a school culture characterised by collaborative efforts among students, teachers, families, and other members of the community to identify, halt and prevent situations of gender-based violence. In this way, the community dimension of the DMPRC amplifies the impact of students' bystander intervention training. Their active stance against gender-based violence is transmitted to the wider community, though the peer group remains central to this process. The end result of implementing the DMPRC is the creation of school spaces that are increasingly free of gender-based violence.

As limitations of the study, we highlight that we have focused the research on only a few primary and secondary schools in the Spanish educational context. While this approach permitted a thorough examination of the implementation of the DMPRC in particular contexts, the limited number of cases constrained the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could explore the extent to which the conclusions obtained here can be replicated in other contexts or offer different nuances. Furthermore, as a qualitative study, we have focused on collecting the experiences of the educational communities from their accounts. While these narratives offer valuable insights into the lived experiences and perceptions of students and teachers, we have not taken into account here data on the number of incidents of gender-based violence, complaints or related disciplinary reports to quantitatively assess the evolution of gender-based violence in schools. Future analyses could provide this type of data to obtain a more complete understanding of the impact of the DMPRC on school-related gender-based violence. Additionally, a long-term longitudinal study of the examined schools would provide additional relevant information. While the data reveal encouraging impacts in terms of prevention and reduction of gender-based violence, it remains unclear whether these effects are sustained over time. In this regard, it would be highly relevant for future studies to examine the sustainability and transferability of the DMPRC. Such an approach would provide valuable insights into whether the impacts of the DMPRC can also contribute to the long-term prevention of gender-based violence.

Nevertheless, the conclusions obtained, consistent with previous studies, provide relevant information that can help schools generate safer contexts free of gender-based violence.

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Ethical Considerations

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Data Availability Statement

The datasets generated during and analysed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.*

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