



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Adolescent Violence in High School Students in Juarez City, Mexico. Scale Development, Measurement and Validation

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ARTICLE INFO

Received: Jan 7, 2025

Accepted: Feb 24, 2025

Keywords

Adolescent violence
Gender violence
Structural violence
Systemic violence
Design and adaptation of
Items

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ABSTRACT

The 2030 agenda seeks to reduce violence against children and adolescents; therefore, it is a priority to identify, analyze, and adequately measure the violence they suffer. This research aims to design and validate a scale to measure violence in adolescence. Based on a literature review, the dimensions of the construct were identified. The study is quantitative with a non-experimental, empirical, cross-sectional, and explanatory design. The instrument was applied to 123 adolescents from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. The content validity of experts, exploratory factor analysis, and confirmatory factor analysis identified the factor structure of the adolescent violence construct, which consists of three dimensions and 13 items. The scale was tested with partial least squares structural equations to demonstrate the accuracy of the construct, which confirmed its reliability and validity. The key finding of the study is that adolescent violence is a second-order construct whose scale is made up of reflective items comprising the dimensions: gender violence, structural violence and systemic violence. The results confirm a positive and significant relationship between the relationships of the dimensions and their construct, as well as between the dimensions among themselves. It is concluded that the scale developed satisfies the criteria required of a reflective measurement model and that adolescent violence in high school students in Ciudad Juárez includes and is related to gender, structural, and systemic violence.

INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a crucial stage in human development marked by profound physical, emotional, and social changes, as well as a period of vulnerability to various forms of violence, such as bullying, dating violence, and the dynamics of inequality in the family and community environment. Violence against children and adolescents (VAC) as defined by General Comment 13 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), includes “physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse...” It also contains harmful practices, gender-based violence, exploitation, abuse, and other forms of violence (United Nations, 2011).

The levels of violence against children are more accentuated in some parts of the world. According to UNICEF (2022), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is currently considered the most violent region in the world, attributing its high rates to its dominant patriarchal culture, authoritarian social norms, low awareness of non-violent disciplinary methods, weak governance systems, organized crime, corruption, urban marginalization, among others.

All these types of violence that adolescents may suffer often go unnoticed, yet they are an extremely vulnerable population. For example, the World Health Organization (2024) reports that 1 out of every 6 adolescents who have been in a relationship has suffered physical and/or sexual violence by their partner. Two out of every three children between 1 and 14 years of age experience violent discipline in the home and the adolescent homicide rate is four times higher than the world average (UNICEF, 2022).

Research Significance

The 2030 agenda seeks to reduce violence against children and adolescents and to achieve this, it is important to identify the violence they suffer. However, given the normalization of different types of violence, adolescents have difficulty recognizing abusive behaviors that represent violence (Borges *et al.*, 2020). Hence the importance of their identification and measurement.

Meinck *et al.* (2023) conducted a systematic review of self-administered instruments of violence in children and adolescents, identifying 52 with at least one psychometric property, and most of them elaborated in high-income countries; based on their good psychometric properties, he recommends six of them for use in research and Elklit *et al.* (2024), analyzes the overlap of items and specification of the dimensions of exposure. These six instruments recommended for measuring violence against children focus on victimization, abuse, trauma, and adverse experiences from a physical, psychological, emotional, economic, health, social, and cultural approach.

However, these approaches often omit an articulated analysis of how violence at this stage of life is intertwined with broader dimensions, such as gender-based violence, systemic violence, and structural violence. Recognizing these connections is fundamental to understanding the difficulty of the phenomenon and designing effective intervention and prevention strategies. In this sense, this paper aims to explore and evidence this intrinsic relationship, delving into the meaning and implications of each of these dimensions.

Research Gap and Objectives

In the Latin American and Caribbean region, Mexico is the second most dangerous country according to the 2024 conflict index (De Paris and Murillo, 2024) with more than a decade immersed in a deep crisis of violence. In recent years, different instruments have been adapted and created to measure violence among Mexican adolescents, to identify, measure, understand, and be able to effectively deal with the problem. However, none of them intertwines the violence of adolescence by measuring gender-based violence, systemic violence, and structural violence in a single instrument. For example, instruments in Mexican adolescents, Galán-Jiménez (2018) the questionnaire on direct and indirect exposure to violence, Arellanez-Hernández & Velasquez-Lancheros (2023) questionnaire on exposure to violence, Ronzón-Tirado *et al.* (2019) adaptation of the scale of conflict tactics that measures dating violence, among others. Therefore, the objective of this study is to design and validate a scale to measure adolescent violence in high school students in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender-based violence

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, approved by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1993, defines in its first article that gender-based violence or "violence against women is any act of violence based on belonging to the female sex that has or may result in physical harm or suffering, sexual or psychological violence against women, as well as threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether they occur in public or private life".

Exposure to gender-based violence produces harmful consequences for both children and their mothers, which is why it is relevant to understand the phenomenon (Porter & López-Angulo, 2022), children and adolescents often show post-traumatic and emotional disorders, experience low self-esteem, suffer from depression and anxiety, and frequently use alcohol or drugs to mitigate their psychological stress (Águila *et al.*, 2016). Gender-based violence is a social problem, it constitutes a model of learning about violent behaviors within the home (Ordoñez & González, 2012).

Gender-based violence is usually identified as a problem for adult women. According to Vidal *et al.* (2024), it is also suffered by girls and adolescents, mainly in adolescent couples, producing serious individual and social consequences from childhood. In this subgroup, gender-based violence can reach dimensions such as trafficking, infanticide, child prostitution, and others (Hernández, 2017). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1. Gender-based violence has a positive effect on adolescent violence

Structural violence

Corruption and drug trafficking are associated with high levels of violence throughout Mexico. Exposure to structural violence can have a severe impact on an individual, especially when it begins in childhood or adolescence (Nijdam-Jones et al., 2023). "Structural violence presupposes an unfair distribution of goods, where some people have everything in excess and others lack even a vital minimum" (Castro & Orozco, 2022, p. 170).

Structural violence against children and adolescents is caused by machismo, discrimination, normalization, and the indolence of the State, among other factors, and negatively affects the satisfaction of their basic needs, perpetuating gender-based violence (Castro & Orozco, 2022). Schools are a scenario that favors the spread of structural violence, particularly in historically marginalized groups, where their voices, faces, and perspectives are not privileged in educational settings (Sánchez et al., 2024).

Structural violence brings together messages and voices that were concretized in laws and government operations (Payán & Flores, 2022), it has several facets, one of them is politics, which is characterized by adolescent pregnancy, a problem of governments that must be addressed through institutions (Wallis, Cadena & Krumeich, 2024). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2. Structural violence has a positive effect on gender-based violence

H3. Structural violence has a positive effect on adolescent violence

Systemic violence

The type of violence that cannot be attributed to a specific person, but whose roots are found in the sociocultural system is known as systemic violence, it is exercised through practices or discourses to harm subordinate groups (Pérez & Fernández, 2022; Prieto-Ríos, 2018). This violence is the consequence of the functioning of the political and economic systems, which normalizes the aggressive behaviors of the rich and powerful (Armenta, 2021).

Systemic violence is based on gender inequality, on the imposition of patriarchy as the dominant social model, whose silent victims are women, children, and adolescents (Martínez, 2008). In addition, systemic violence reinforces gender stereotypes, extending to all aspects of children's lives, limiting their interests, activities, and affective relationships (Laguarda et al., 2023). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. Systemic violence has a positive effect on gender-based violence

H5. Systemic violence has a positive effect on adolescent violence

METHODOLOGY

The research is quantitative with a non-experimental design, empirical, and explanatory in primary data. The study population includes adolescents living in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. Cross-sectional data were collected through an on-site survey in secondary schools. The data collection was carried out in October 2024, and a sample of 123 valid surveys was collected.

Of the 123 participants, 48% were male, 38% female, 10% non-binary, and 4% preferred not to say so. 46% in the first year of secondary school, 28% in the second year, and 26% in the third year of secondary school. 81% reported not having psychological support 53% from two-parent families (mother, father, and children), and the remaining percentage in extended, single-parent, reconstructed, and homoparental families.

The procedure for the design, measurement, and validation of a new questionnaire began with the consultation and analysis of available academic literature to identify the antecedents of violence affecting adolescents. Scales, instruments, and questionnaires were searched, identifying some on gender violence and structural violence, but not aimed at adolescents, so it was necessary to select, adapt, and create items. Violence in adolescence is a second-order variable composed of the dimensions of gender violence, structural violence, and systemic violence. The gender-based violence items were designed based on the work of López-Garrido & Sánchez-Santamaría (2024), López et al. (2023) and Ascensio (2022). The items on structural violence were designed based on the work of Gómez et al. (2023), Galán et al. (2022) and Pecho y Tejada (2020). For systemic violence, the items

were designed based on the studies of De Filippis (2024), Contardo *et al.* (2023), Pérez and Fernández (2022), Prieto-Ríos (2018) and Martínez (2008). The answers with a five-point Likert rating where 5 is totally in agreement and 1 is totally in disagreement.

The sample size of 123 is considered sufficient for analysis, since having three dimensions would take 103 observations to reach a statistical power of 80% to detect R² values of at least 0.10 with a 5% probability of error (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Data analysis, SPSS was used for exploratory factor analysis and partial least squares structural equations (PLS-SEM) were used for confirmatory factor analysis using SmartPLS software.

RESULTS

Content validity

In the validity of content, each of the items was assessed through the dimensions of clarity, coherence, and relevance by six expert judges, who were contacted by email. Relevance refers to the degree to which the item is essential or important and therefore should be included to assess the construct; coherence is the degree to which the item is related to the construct that measures it; clarity is the degree to which the item is understandable, clear, and comprehensible (Caycho *et al.*, 2019). Each criterion is assigned a score ranging from 1 (not at all relevant/consistent/clear) to 4 (totally relevant/consistent/clear).

The degree of clarity, coherence, and relevance of the items was quantified using Aiken's V coefficient and its 95% confidence intervals (95% CI) based on what was proposed by Penfield and Giacobbi (2004). All items received favorable ratings for their clarity ($V \geq 0.70$), coherence ($V \geq 0.70$), and relevance ($V \geq 0.70$). Values of $V \geq .70$ express a positive assessment of the item at the sample level. All items received 95% CI lower limit (Li) values greater than .59 (from 0.61 – 1) that are appropriate for the population level.

Exploratory factor analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was performed following the steps described by López-Aguado & Gutiérrez-Provecho (2019). The preliminary analyses to check the adequacy of the sample (data) through the Bartlett sphericity test have a significance of 0.000 and the KMO value is 0.845; both data confirm that the variables are related to each other, the KMO indicates a relevant sample size and the Bartlett sphericity test shows the validity of the instrument. The results show that the data sample is appropriate for performing the EFA since the correlation matrix yielded a determinant of value 2.331E-8, very close to zero, showing that the variables have a high degree of intercorrelation. The results in Table 1 show the extraction of factors performed using the maximum likelihood method and the self-value criterion > 1 .

Table 1. Total variance explained

Factor	Initial eigenvalues			Load Extraction Sums Squared		
	Total	% of variance	% accumulated	Total	% of variance	% accumulated
1	10.483	31.766	31.766	10.004	30.316	30.316
2	2.597	7.870	39.636	2.074	6.284	36.600
3	1.950	5.908	45.544	1.475	4.469	41.069
...						
33	.119	.360	100.000			

Note: SPSS Output Results

The total variance explained (Table 1) shows three factors detected, which correspond to the dimensions of gender violence, structural violence, and systemic violence that make up the variable adolescent violence. Factors explain 45.54% of the variance. The results of goodness and fit of the factor structure (three factors) from the chi-square test (X^2) of 347.825 and 292 degrees of freedom, with significance with a value close to zero (0.014) allow validating the fit of the data to the model. In general, exploratory factor analysis shows positive correlations between the items of each

construct, indicating their reflective nature and that internal consistency is within the limit (Cabral & Dhar, 2019).

Confirmatory factor analysis (Measurement model)

To obtain the factor loadings of the items, the calculations were performed using the Smart PLS 3 software due to its usefulness for the construction of theories due to its high statistical power (Hair et al., 2019). Table 2 shows the reliability values and construct validity, discriminant validity according to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, and the cross-loading criterion.

Table 2. Construct reliability, convergent validity, cross loads, Fornell-Larcker / HTMT

item	Load	Alpha a	CR	AVE	rho_A	cross loads			Fornell-Larcker / HTMT		
						VG	VE	VS	VG	VE	VS
VG5	0.725	0.847	0.891	0.621	0.856	0.840			0.788		
VG6	0.772					0.802					
VG9	0.796					0.725					
VG10	0.840					0.772					
VG12	0.802					0.796					
VE1	0.785	0.828	0.879	0.593	0.830		0.785		0.776	0.780	
VE2	0.738					0.738					
VE4	0.771					0.771					
VE5	0.764					0.764					
VE6	0.792					0.792					
VS2	0.713	0.606	0.792	0.559	0.609			0.713	0.616	0.645	0.748
VS5	0.773							0.773			
VS9	0.756							0.713			

VG = gender-based violence; VE = structural violence; VS = systemic violence.

The adolescent violence scale is made up of 13 items, all of which exceed the factor load criterion. It is observed that the loads range between 0.713 and 0.840, therefore, they meet the condition. Cronbach's alpha values for gender-based violence and structural violence exceed the general rule of 0.70 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988), for systemic violence, it is 0.606 below, but given that this is an exploratory study and that the composite reliability result is 0.792 - meeting its criteria - considered a measure superior to Cronbach's alpha because using the item loadings in the causal model is considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2018).

The composite reliability of all constructs is greater than 0.70, the values range between 0.792 and 0.891, which indicates the existence of internal consistency and reliability between the constructs (Table 2). The Dijkstra-Henseler value (rho_A) shows that the reliability of the constructs of gender violence and structural violence is adequate since they have values between 0.7 and 0.95 (Hair et al., 2019). This is not the case for systemic violence whose value is 0.609, but being close to the acceptance value and having an acceptable composite reliability is considered adequate (Hair et al., 2019).

The discriminant validity of the model, the Fornell-Larcker criterion, allows us to observe that the model is adequate since the AVE of each latent variable is greater than all the correlations squared of this variable with the others. The cross-loads corroborate the adequacy of the model since the load of each indicator is greater than all its cross-loads (Hair et al., 2018). The results support that the measurement model has discriminant validity.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equations (PLS-SEM)

To evaluate the structural model, the steps proposed by Hair et al. (2016) were adopted, as a first step the path coefficients between the constructs were assessed (see Table 3). All hypotheses were found to have significant positive effects and in all cases the t-statistic values exceeded 1.96 at the 5% significance level, therefore indicating acceptance of the hypotheses.

Table 3. Testing Hypotheses and Results of the Structural Model

Hypothesis Testing						Results of the structural model			
H	Relations	Path coefficient	Valor t	Valor p	Result	Construct	R ²	f ²	Q ²
H1	VG -> VA	0.461	17.984	0	Supported				
H2	VE -> VG	0.648	7.682	0	Supported	VG	0.624		0.367
H3	VE -> VA	0.44	18.434	0	Supported	VE		0.653	
H4	VS -> VG	0.197	2.011	0.044	Supported	VS		0.060	
H5	VS -> VA	0.208	8.924	0	Supported	VA	1.000		0.466

As a second step, the variance of the constructs was measured using the coefficient of determination (R²), and the results (table 2) show a moderate relationship for gender-based violence (0.624) (Hair *et al.*, 2019). As a third step, the effect size (f²) was examined to understand the variance of the independent variable over the dependent variable. They have a large effect on structural violence-gender violence (0.653) and a small effect on systemic violence and gender violence (0.060) (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

Finally, the existence of predictive relevance between the independent and dependent variables was measured through Stone-Geisser Q². The results indicate that Q² is > 0 for all cases, and there is high predictive accuracy for VG and VA.

DISCUSSION

To identify, know, and analyze violence in adolescence, it is important to have reliable and valid measures that allow for accurate evaluations that lead to the formulation of studies, proposals, and programs for preventive intervention or reduction of violence. The systematic review by Meinck *et al.* (2023) analyzed 52 instruments that measure violence against children and adolescents, finding that only 5 of them reported content validity, which, compared to this research, reports the degree of clarity, coherence, and relevance of the items using Aiken's V coefficient with favorable values.

Of the 52 instruments analyzed by Meinck *et al.* (2023) found that only 26 were structurally validated using principal component analysis or exploratory factor analysis, however, they only found 9 instruments with indices or values considered "sufficient". Compared to this research, it is reported that the three factors identified coincide with the dimensions of gender violence, structural violence, and systemic violence, and their EFA values are sufficient.

Meinck *et al.* (2023) found that 49 of the instruments analyzed used hypothesis tests for construct validity, however, they do not mention what type of statistical tests they used. In the case of this research, the common practice of evidence of the validity of theoretical models based on results of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis (Pérez-Gil *et al.*, 2000) and structural partial least squares equations (PLS-SEM) was used to test the hypotheses raised.

The construct of violence in adolescence is proposal by the authors as a second-order construct with three first-order factors: gender violence, structural violence, and systemic violence. In this sense, the results allow evidence for the case of the sample of high school students from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, that the violence in adolescence to which they are subjected, is composed and related to the three determined factors.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND LIMITATIONS

The 2030 agenda seeks to reduce violence against children and adolescents, highlighting target 16.2 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that look to end mistreatment, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence and torture against children (United Nations, n.d.), for which it is a priority to identify the violence they suffer. In this sense, as mentioned, this work aims to design and validate a scale that allows measuring adolescent violence from the perception of adolescents, it is innovative

since, according to the review carried out, there is no scale limited to this territory and its particularities.

The results obtained from the exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses reveal that adolescent violence is assessed through 13 items distributed in three dimensions of a reflexive nature. Therefore, it is concluded that the measurement instrument has a high level of reliability and validity, which can be used to measure adolescent violence in an urban destination.

Among the limitations of the study is the use of cross-sectional data to determine the causal relationship, future studies could employ longitudinal data to understand the effect of the constructs at multiple time points. The design of the Adolescent Violence Scale was carried out based on the Mexican experience, which implies national cultural biases. Replication of this scale in other national contexts would help to understand its widespread use. It is important in the future to be able to realize the nomological validity of the scale.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

All authors contributed to the literature review writing, review-editing, and the conduct and conceptualization of the research. CPJ-T and VGL-T contributed to data collection, acquisition, and analysis. All authors have read and approved the final and publishable version of this article.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors are thankful to the management and teaching staff of the secondary schools where the data was collected and to the students who participated in the study.

Funding

This study is funded by the National Council of Humanities, Sciences, and Technologies (CONAHCYT) of Mexico, project "Learning and normalization of gender violence in the context of structural and systemic violence. Analysis and design of cognitive teaching tools to unlearn" key CF-2023-G-323.

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