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Multidimensionality of Social Competence: Measurement of the Construct and its Relationship With Bullying Roles

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

The aims of this paper were two-fold: to validate the AMSC-Q (Adolescent Multidimensional Social Competence Questionnaire) and to examine the social competence of those involved in bullying. The representative sample was composed of 4047 Andalusian secondary school students (48.2% girls). Two measures were used: the AMSC-Q and the EBIPQ (European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire). The AMSC-Q measure yielding a 5-factor structure (prosocial behaviour, social adjustment, normative adjustment, cognitive reappraisal and social efficacy) and revealed adequate reliability and validity. Victims presented greater prosocial behaviour and normative adjustment but low social adjustment and social efficacy. Bullies and bully victims demonstrated worse normative adjustment and less developed cognitive reappraisal but similar social adjustment and social efficacy. The social competence characteristics of those involved and non-involved in bullying are discussed.

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Multidimensionalidad de la competencia social: medición del constructo y su relación con los roles del *bullying*

R E S U M E N

Los objetivos de este trabajo fueron dos: validar el AMSC-Q (Cuestionario Multidimensional de Competencia Social para Adolescentes) y examinar la competencia social de los distintos implicados en acoso escolar. La muestra representativa estuvo compuesta por 4047 escolares andaluces de educación secundaria (48.2% niñas). Se utilizaron dos instrumentos: el AMSC-Q y el EBIPQ (European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire). El AMSC-Q reflejó una estructura de 5 factores (conducta prosocial, ajuste social, ajuste normativo, revaluación cognitiva y eficacia social) y mostró una adecuada fiabilidad y validez. Las víctimas presentaron una mayor conducta prosocial y ajuste normativo, aunque un ajuste social y eficacia social baja. Los agresores y agresores victimizados mostraron un peor ajuste normativo y una revaluación cognitiva menos desarrollada, aunque similar ajuste social y percepción de eficacia social. Se discuten las características en términos de competencia social de los implicados o no en este fenómeno violento.

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Introduction

The study of social competence, defined as the effectiveness in social interaction, has evolved considerably in the last decades, moving towards more inclusive theoretical models that embrace developmental processes and which look beyond traditional social skills (Rose-Krasnor, 1997). It has been recognized that social competence is a multidimensional concept which includes different dimensions: social and emotional skills, mainly prosocial behaviour and ability of emotion regulation; the skill to adapt to the rules and conventions of the immediate social environment; perceived acceptance by others or social adjustment; and the perceived efficacy in social interactions (Dirks, Treat, & Weersing, 2007; Santos, Pecegui-na, Daniel, Shin, & Vaughn, 2013). The study of these dimensions show that prosocial behaviour is a social skill recognized as a primary component of social competence and is key to promoting positive social interaction (Padilla-Walker, Fraser, Black, & Bean, 2015). Among emotional skills, the emotion regulation has been identified as a necessary element to ensure positive social development. Spe-

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cifically, the cognitive reappraisal strategy has shown to be one of the most effective and positive approaches, because it allows one to anticipate the emotional consequences of a given situation, thus maximizing personal gains and interests (Gómez-Ortiz, Romera, Ortega-Ruiz, Cabello, & Fernández-Berrocal, 2016). To be and feel accepted by peers is also a very important indicator of satisfactory interpersonal relationships (Zhang et al., 2014). Moreover, the presence of behaviours adapted to the basic rules to get a harmonious school climate and cohabitation is a relevant aspect in social competence (Junttila, Voeten, Kaukiainen, & Vauras, 2006). Finally, it is necessary to consider the assessment of one's sense of efficacy in social interaction as an indicator of social competence (Connolly, 1989; Dirks et al., 2007; Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

The procedures and questionnaires currently available to assess adolescent social competence use self-report items to evaluate components belonging to this complex construct, focusing on personal skills of a social nature. It is the case of the scale devised by Harter (2012), which assesses the ability to be accepted by peers and the Perceived Social Competence Scale (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2014), which takes into account prosocial behaviours mainly. The Adolescent Social Self-Efficacy Scale (Connolly, 1989) measures social self-efficacy, defined as self-expectations of one's ability to perform specific behaviours underlying interpersonal relationships. The AECS (Actitudes y Estrategias Cognitivas Sociales) scale (Moraleda, González, & García-Gallo, 1998) also measures positive social behaviours related to social conformity, help and collaboration, confidence in one's own possibilities and prosocial leadership. The Social-Emotional Learning Scale (Coryn, Spybrook, Evergreen, & Blinkiewicz, 2009) includes three aspects of social-emotional learning: task articulation, peer relationships and self-regulation. However, none of the aforementioned instruments consider the assessment of these skills, good social results, self-efficacy in social situations and normative adjustment, together in the same measure. These dimensions are deemed essential from different perspectives of social competence analysis, especially from the educational point of view (Dirks et al., 2007; Rose-Krasnor, 1997).

In educational context, it has been recognized the importance of social competence to favour the social development of teenagers. Its promotion is included in many intervention programs whose aim is to improve interpersonal relationships in school and prevent problems, such as bullying. In this line, some studies have recognized different social characteristics depending on the assumed role in this violent phenomenon (Cerezo, Sánchez, Ruiz, & Arense, 2015; Romera, Cano, García-Fernández, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2016). However, these investigations have taken into account only some of the social competence dimensions. Regarding the role of victim, current studies reveal similar trends relative to the lack of peer social acceptance and social skills, mainly assertiveness (Fox & Boulton, 2005; Sentse, Kretschmer, & Salmivalli, 2015). The social profile of bullies, however, is not so clear; whereas some studies identify them as rejected students who have adjustment problems, others have shown them to experience a fair amount of social acceptance or sociometric status (MacEvoy & Leff, 2012; Reijntjes et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2012). From this perspective, it has been reported that dominant behaviours lead to benefits, namely social popularity; this in turn motivates bullies to keep up this arrogant behaviour, which has little relation to social skills deficits (Berger & Caravita, 2016; Olthof, Goossens, Vermande, Aleva, & Van der Meulen, 2011). On an emotional level, victims are described as having difficulties with emotional acknowledgment, expression and understanding, whereas bullies seem to experience problems linked to emotional regulation (Elipe, Ortega, Hunter, & Del Rey, 2012). In bully-victims are recognized the lowest levels of social acceptance and socio-emotional skills (Cerezo et al., 2015).

Understanding the relationship between bullying and social competence requires instruments that assess social competence in ado-

lescence, briefly and concisely, including all the components present in its operational definition. The first aim of this study has been to create a valid and reliable measure of perceived social competence for adolescents. The second aim was to analyze the social competence differences among the different roles directly and indirectly involved in bullying situations (bully, bully-victim, victim and uninvolved students). Our hypotheses were:

1. The designed measure will yield acceptable psychometric properties with the 5 theoretical dimensions identified.
2. There will be differences between the varying social competence dimensions belonging to each of the roles.

Method

Participants

The reference population used to conduct this study comprised male and female students in ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) from the Andalusian region (southern Spain). A random, stratified, cluster-based, probabilistic, monoetapic sampling with proportional allocation was performed (Cea D'Ancona, 2004). The strata were identified as geographical area (western or eastern Andalusia), type of centre (public or private), and municipal population (less than 10.000 inhabitants, between 10.001 and 100.000 inhabitants and more than 100.000 inhabitants, corresponding to small, medium and big populations, respectively). All of the categories of the strata are relevant indexes in Spain.

The final sample was made up of 4047 students (48.2% girls) who belong to 39 different high schools. The students were aged between 12 and 19 years ($M = 14.58$; $SD = 1.45$). There was a 35.6% who studied in high school located in small villages, 32.8% in a town with medium populations and 31.6% in big cities. 64.1% of teenagers studied in a public centre and 35.9% in a private high school.

Measures

Adolescent Multidimensional Social Competence Questionnaire

The AMSC-Q (Adolescent Multidimensional Social Competence Questionnaire) contains 26 items scored on a 1-7 Likert scale (1 = completely false; 7 = completely true). These items measure five key domains of social competence: prosocial behaviour, emotional self-regulation, social efficacy, social adjustment among peers and normative adjustment. When devising this instrument, items and scales were taken from different questionnaires: Adolescent Social Self-Efficacy Scale (Connolly, 1989); Cuestionario de Convivencia Escolar (Ortega, Del Rey, & Sánchez, 2011) and Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (Gómez-Ortiz et al., 2016).

European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire

The EBIPQ (European Bullying Intervention Project Questionnaire) self-report (Ortega-Ruiz, Del Rey, & Casas, 2016) is a self-report that comprises 14 Likert-type items, each with 5 possible responses (0 = no; 1 = yes, once or twice; 2 = yes, once or twice a month; 3 = yes, about once a week; and 4 = yes, more than once a week). It has 2 dimensions: *victimization*, composed of 7 items (e.g., "Someone has hit, kicked, or pushed me") and *aggression*, also composed by 7 items (e.g., "I threatened someone"). Assessed with McDonald´s Omega, the internal consistency of each dimension (aggression, $\Omega = .86$; victimization, $\Omega = .86$; total, $\Omega = .89$) was adequate in our sample.

Procedure

Prior to the data collection, informed consent was obtained from students' families. Students were informed of the anonymous, confi-