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Emotional intelligence and profiles of participation in bullying: A systematic review

The role of emotional intelligence and participation profiles in bullying: A systematic review

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SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Emotional Intelligence and Profiles of Participation in Bullying: A Systematic Review

Abstract

Bullying has generated a social alarm in recent years. For this reason, the present systematic review has as its main objective to carry out an analysis of updated information that allows describing those areas belonging to emotional intelligence that are less developed in the profile of the aggressor and in that of the victim, and that have a negative effect on the person and is the cause of bullying. The search was conducted in the ERIC, Psycodoc, PsycINFO, and Scopus databases, finally obtaining a total of 17 quantitative investigations. The results show that a good development of emotional intelligence provides students with a series of tools in terms of conflict resolution, emotional regulation and social skills, which reduces the possibility of being a victim or aggressor of bullying.

Keywords: adolescence; bullying; emotional development, violence.

Inteligencia emocional y perfiles de participación en acoso escolar: Una revisión sistemática

Resumen

El acoso escolar ha generado una alarma social en los últimos años. Por ello, la presente revisión sistemática tiene como objetivo principal realizar un análisis de información actualizada que permita describir aquellos ámbitos pertenecientes a la inteligencia emocional que están menos desarrollados en el perfil del agresor y en el de la víctima, y que tienen un efecto negativo en la persona y sea causante del acoso escolar. La búsqueda se llevó a cabo en las bases de datos de ERIC, Psycodoc, PsycINFO y Scopus, obteniendo finalmente un total de 17 investigaciones de carácter cuantitativo. Los resultados muestran que un buen desarrollo de la inteligencia emocional dota a los estudiantes de una serie de herramientas en cuanto a la resolución de conflictos, regulación emocional y habilidades sociales, lo cual reduce la posibilidad de ser víctima o agresor de acoso escolar.

Palabras clave: acoso escolar, adolescencia, desarrollo afectivo, violencia.

Introduction

Bullying is a relatively recent term, as defined by Ruiz Utrilla et al. (2018), it refers to the actions carried out by one or more students that discriminate, intimidate, or systematically mistreat another student. The term “bullying” is commonly known as such when it occurs face-to-face. However, if student harassment takes place through information and communication technologies, it is referred to as “cyberbullying” (Gómez Tagle López, 2016). Some studies provide an annex about this terminology, as the one by González & Molero (2022), as they analyze the impact of the term “bullying” within certain social networks, where cyberbullying often occurs. This is one of the social problems that is of most concern in different educational spaces, especially in adolescents, where cyberbullying experiences have been associated with episodes of anxiety and depression (Molero et al., 2022; Molero et al., 2023).

This student harassment takes place during school hours and typically occurs in areas like the playground or restrooms, where teachers are less present, as opposed to the 20% that occurs within classrooms. The most common types of aggression are verbal, physical, and social (Arciniega-Carrión & Veja-Ojeda, 2019).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021), among the various factors affecting the mental health of adolescents, school bullying plays a significant role. It leads to emotional management problems, resulting in anxiety, depression, social anxiety, loneliness, and, in some cases, suicidal behavior. School bullying is one of the most common peer relational problems experienced by children and adolescents worldwide (Inmuta et al., 2022). Therefore, as seen in the study by González-Moreno & Molero-Jurado (2023), it is crucial to prioritize the personal well-being of minors, especially during adolescence.

There is growing societal concern over cases of school bullying and the consequences these actions have on minors (Dragone, et al., 2022; Pérez-Virtus & Larrondo-Ureta, 2018). To prevent

bullying in adolescents, early detection of aggressive behaviors is crucial (Varela Torres et al., 2023). The study conducted by Calmaestra (2016) found that over 9% of students had experienced bullying, and nearly 7% had been victims of cyberbullying. Another study by Attawell (2021) asserts that more than a third of the sample studied had experienced school bullying, with 10% facing cyberbullying and 32.4% participating in peer fights.

The results of these studies show that a significant portion of adolescents are involved in school bullying situations, either as victims or aggressors. Furthermore, many students engage in fights among peers at specific moments, indicating that minors lack conflict resolution skills, leading to different forms of aggression. Studies like the one by Martín Rodríguez & Luján Henriquez (2021) directly relate the lack of conflict resolution skills to emotional intelligence, through emotional understanding and regulation (Chaux et al., 2012). Studies as that of Fernández-Alfaraz et al. (2023) state that the origin of peer bullying may be in the use of digital technologies or due to the social and family environment. Adolescence is a period of change in which relationships between peers are very important, and stressors of anxiety and depression can lead to dropping out of school (La Greca & Burdette, 2022).

Emotional intelligence (EI) is a concept that has evolved over time, with some authors directly linking it to social intelligence, as Salovey & Mayer (1990), who define EI as the ability to identify one's own and others' feelings, understand these emotions, and know how to manage them. Educating minors to develop their EI from an early age is crucial (Fernández-Martínez & Montero-García, 2016).

Students with low EI display fewer social behaviors, more negative behaviors, and are more associated with cases of school bullying. Studies like Sporzon & López López (2021) link EI development to prosocial behaviors among students. An increasing number of studies delve into the involvement of EI in bullying profiles, whether as

aggressors or victims, demonstrating that both profiles exhibit low EI (Masabanda Pazmiño & Gaibor Gonzalez, 2022).

In general, the profile of the aggressor seeks to establish leadership among peer groups, displaying intimidating behavior (Arciniega-Carrión & Veja-Ojeda, 2019; Clareth et al., 2015), aggressiveness, impulsivity (Peña et al., 2013), low perception of others' emotions (Polo et al., 2015), low self-esteem, low empathy (Martínez-Sitjes et al., 2023), and a high level of frustration.

The victim experiences fear due to the recurrent aggressions (León-Moreno et al., 2019), low emotional clarity, poor social adaptation (Ortega Ruiz et al., 2012), resulting in feelings of loneliness and social isolation (Polo del Río et al., 2015), low self-esteem, and increased frustration.

This literature review aims to identify current research on the role of emotional intelligence and describe the profiles of both aggressors and victims of bullying. The main objective of this study is to conduct an analysis of updated information that identifies areas of emotional intelligence that are

less developed in both aggressor and victim profiles and have a negative impact on individuals, leading to school bullying. This, in turn, will serve as a basis for prevention and intervention projects aimed at nurturing emotional education in students (Bisquerra-Alzina, 2006), with the ultimate goal of reducing or eliminating the prevalence of school bullying.

Methodology

Search Process

The search was conducted in the ERIC, Psycodoc, PsycINFO, and Scopus databases, and to ensure scientific rigor, it was based on the 'PRYSMA' method (Page et al., 2021). This search was conducted in both Spanish and English during the month of February 2023, using Boolean operators that referred to emotional intelligence, bullying, and cyberbullying. The initial results were filtered by peer-reviewed journal articles and publication dates, spanning from 2018 to 2023, encompassing the most recent complete five-year period and the month of February 2023 (Table 1).

Table 1
Search results in the different databases and the filters used

Base of data	Search language	First result	Article Scientific	Date (2018/ 2023)
ERIC	spanish	0	0	0
ERIC	english	37	28	11
Psycodoc	spanish	9	7	4
Psycodoc	english	22	22	15
PsycINFO	spanish	8	8	6
PsycINFO	english	173	103	47
Scopus	spanish	4	3	2
Scopus	english	184	138	87

Search results in the different databases: 172

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The results underwent manual filtering based on a set of inclusion and exclusion criteria after reviewing the title and abstract. Notable inclusion criteria were as follows: a) the sample age range should be between 11 and 18 years, b) the study

must describe the role of emotional intelligence in bullying, cyberbullying, or both, as well as the description of the aggressors, victims, or both profiles, and c) the sample should be enrolled in an educational institution.

The established exclusion criteria were: a) articles that analyze violence outside the school environment without reference to bullying or cyberbullying, b) studies that do not describe the role of emotional intelligence in school bullying, c) articles that do not provide a description of the different roles involved in school bullying, as the aggressor and the victim, d) documents where the selected sample falls below eleven years of age or

exceeds eighteen years, and e) articles where the sample is not enrolled in an institutional educational center at any educational stage.

Information Analysis Procedure

Following the search process in the mentioned databases and the implementation of inclusion and exclusion criteria, a total of 17 selected documents were obtained

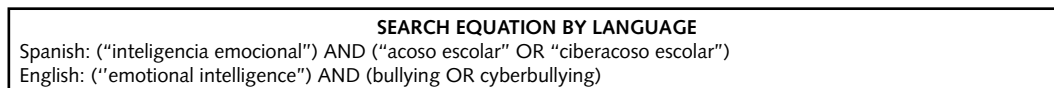
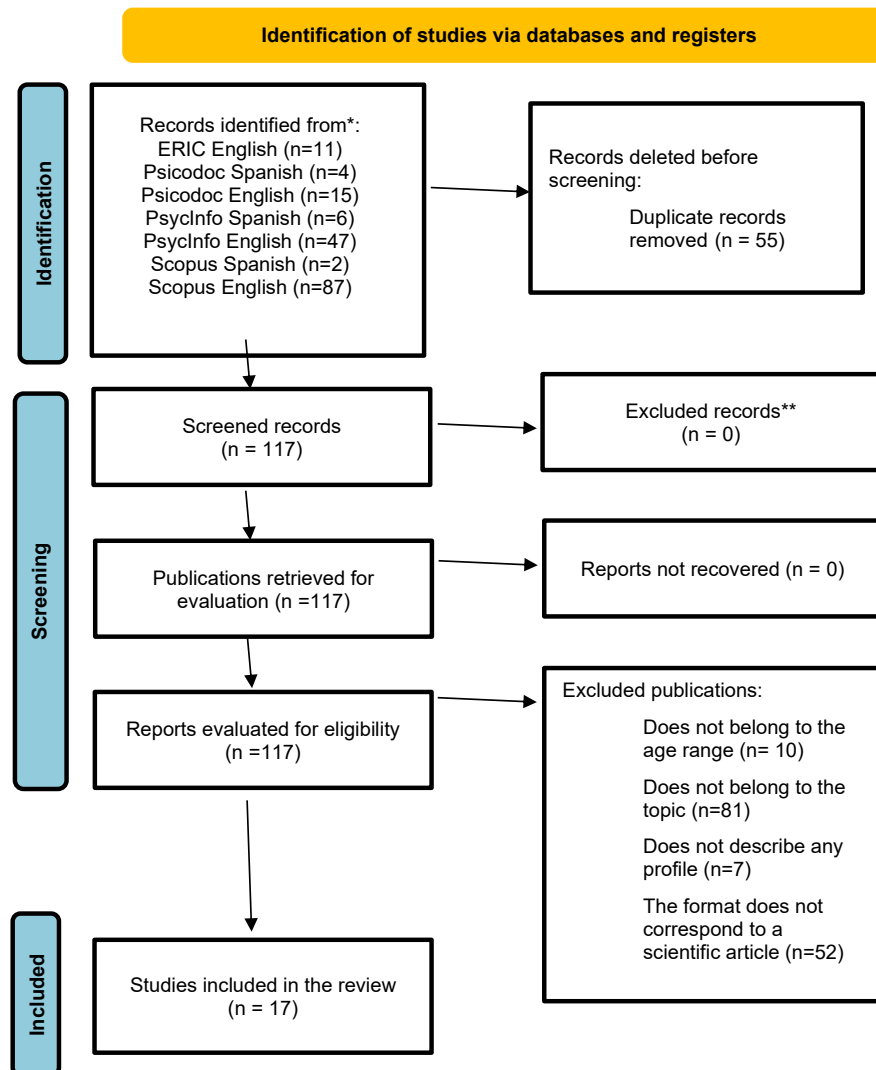


Figure 1. Search Equation and Flowchart of the Document Selection Process.



Coding Data

We obtained 172 documents, originated from the following sources: ERIC with a Spanish search (0), ERIC with an English search (11), Psycodoc with a Spanish search (4), Psycodoc with an English search (15), PsycInfo with a Spanish search (6), PsycInfo with an English search (47), Scopus with a Spanish search (2), and Scopus with an English search (87).

Duplicate articles were subtracted, amounting to a total of 55, which were distributed as follows: Psycodoc with an English search (6), PsycInfo with a Spanish search (5), PsycInfo with an English search (12), and Scopus with an English search (32).

After eliminating duplicate articles, a total of 117 documents were obtained. Following the review of titles and abstracts, exclusion criteria was applied, and articles were removed if they met the following conditions: a) the age was outside the specified range for the systematic review, b) the subject matter did not correspond to the research topic, c) it did not describe the victim's or aggressor's profile. This led to the removal of the following articles: ERIC with an English search (a=1 and b=5), Psycodoc with a Spanish search (a=1 and b=1), Psycodoc with an English search (a=2 and b=4), PsycInfo with an English search (a=1 and b=31), Scopus with a Spanish search (a=1 and b=0), and Scopus with an English search

(a=4 and b=40). Two articles were also removed as they did not conform to the scientific format, one from Psycodoc with a Spanish search and one from PsycInfo with an English search.

As a result, a total of 24 documents were obtained, that underwent manual filtering to eliminate those that did not describe the victim's or aggressor's profile or both. This led to the removal of the following articles: ERIC with an English search (3), PsycInfo with a Spanish search (1), PsycInfo with an English search (1), and Scopus with an English search (2).

This process resulted in a total of 17 documents from the following databases: ERIC with an English search (2), Psycodoc with a Spanish search (1), Psycodoc with an English search (3), PsycInfo with an English search (1), Scopus with a Spanish search (1), and Scopus with an English search (9). Among these 17 documents, 5 describe the aggressor's profile, 3 describe the victim's profile, and 9 describe both profiles.

Results

After the systematic and manual document selection process, a total of 17 quantitative research studies were obtained. These studies describe the role of emotional intelligence in bullying or cyberbullying, as well as the profiles of victims or aggressors (Table 2).

Table 2

Scientific articles on the role of emotional intelligence, and the profiles of the aggressor and victim

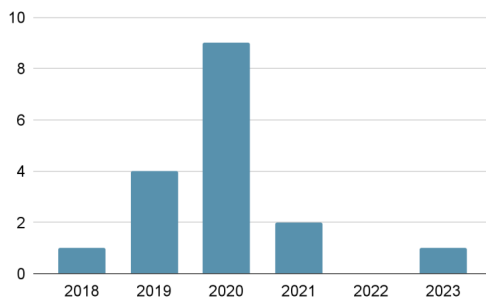
Nº	Year	Author/s	Country	Size of the sample and age	Profile that describes
1	2018	Razjouyan K. et al.	Iran	N=360 16–18 years	Aggressor and Victim.
2	2019	Quintana-Orts C. et al.	Spain	N=456 12–18 years	Victim.
3	2019	Méndez, I. et al.	Spain	N=309 12–18 years	Aggressor.
4	2019	Estévez, E. et al.	Spain	N=1.318 11–18 years	Aggressor and Victim.
5	2019	Cañas, E. et al.	Spain	N=1.318 11–18 years	Aggressor and Victim.
6	2020	Romano, I. et al.	Canada	N=6585 14–18 years	Aggressor and Victim.

7	2020	Méndez, I. et al.	Spain	N=810 12–16 years	Aggressor.
8	2020	García, L. et al.	Spain	N=731 14,76 years	Victim.
9	2020	Segura, L. et al.	Spain	N=1.318 11–17 years	Aggressor and Victim.
10	2020	Chamizo-Nieto et al.	Spain	N=1.157 12–18 years	Aggressor.
11	2020	Garaigordobil	Spain	N=2.283 12–17 years	Aggressor.
12	2020	Yudes et al.	Spain	N=2.039 12–18 years	Aggressor.
13	2020	Cañas et al.	Spain	N=1.318 11–17 years	Aggressor and Victim.
14	2020	Estévez et al.	Spain	N=1.318 11–18 years	Victim.
15	2021	Agus et al.	Italy	N=650 12–16 years	Aggressor and Victim.
16	2021	Quintana-Orts et al.	Spain	N=3.520 12–18 years	Aggressor and Victim.
17	2023	Valenzuela-Aparicio et al.	Colombia	N=141 12–18 years	Aggressor and Victim.

Year of Publication

The systematic review filtered its results annually, from 2018 to February 2023, thus conducting an up-to-date search based on the last 5 years and two months. The year with the highest number of publications was 2020, accounting for nearly 53% of the total publications. In contrast, no publications were obtained for 2022 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Selected publications, according to year of publication.

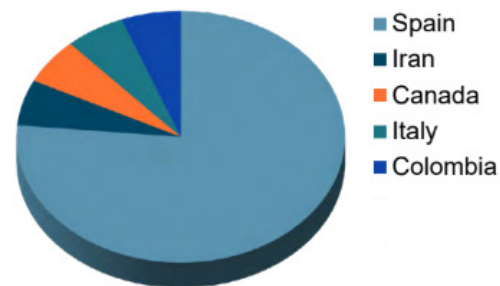


Country of Publication

Among the selected research for this systematic review, it's worth noting the countries of origin. The vast majority of the research is conducted in

Spain, with the remaining studies coming from Iran, Canada, Italy, and Colombia (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Selected articles, according to country of publication.

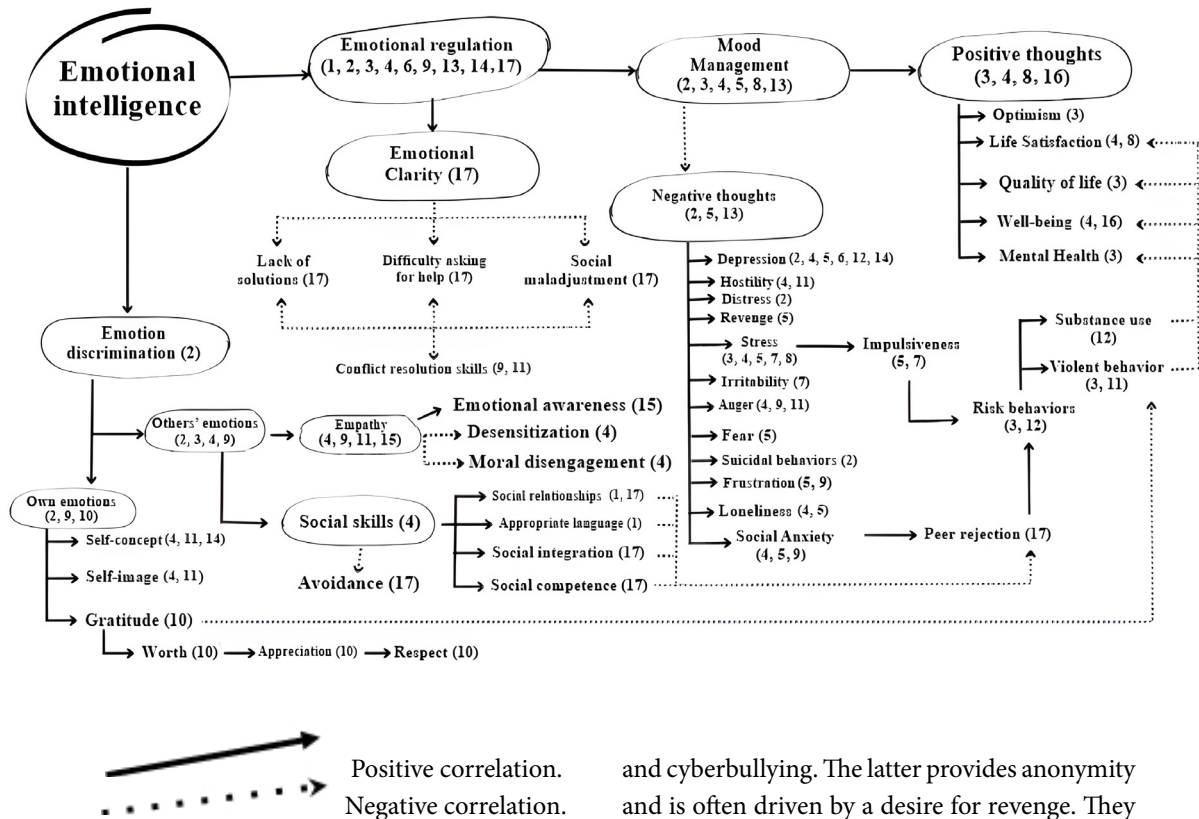


The Role of Emotional Intelligence in School Bullying: Relationship with Other Implicated Variables and Participation Profiles

Emotional intelligence is a resource that everyone possesses, but not everyone develops it effectively and in all its aspects. As shown in Figure 2, emotional intelligence directly influences the assessment of one's own and others' emotions, emotional regulation, emotional clarity, mood management, as well as our thoughts and feelings. This influence has an indirect impact on the quality of life, well-being, mental health, life

satisfaction, and various risk behaviors. Therefore, intelligence can lead to adopting a role or profile in school bullying, whether as a bully or a victim.

Figure 4. The Role of Emotional Intelligence in School Bullying



(X) = Document number from the first column of Table 2.

Individuals with higher emotional intelligence have more resources for conflict resolution, social relationships, and experience fewer psychological consequences when facing a bullying situation. Those who take on a role in school bullying have low emotional intelligence, and depending on the qualities they have more or less developed, they adopt the profile of a victim or aggressor.

Aggressor: They exhibited poor emotional regulation, leading to a series of negative thoughts and feelings, stress, impulsivity, engagement in risky behaviors, and involvement in both face-to-face

and cyberbullying. The latter provides anonymity and is often driven by a desire for revenge. They also had difficulty assessing others' feelings and low empathy, hindering their understanding of others and developing moral disengagement. Lack of social skills and social anxiety led to peer rejection, which, in turn, led to bullying. Emotional confusion eventually led to social maladjustment and fewer conflict resolution skills.

Victim: This profile, experiencing different bullying situations and having low emotional intelligence, had a negative impact on the assessment of their emotions, diminishing their self-concept and self-image. They felt emotional confusion, a sense of guilt, believing that they deserved what they were going through, lacked resources to seek help, and find solutions. Their social skills were affected, avoiding social interaction, which resulted in

poor emotional regulation and a series of negative thoughts, including stress, loneliness, depression, and suicidal behaviors, negatively affecting their mental health, life satisfaction, and quality of life.

Discussion

The results of the current systematic review establish that, although there is research addressing emotional intelligence and describing both profiles, these studies are scarce in both the number of investigations and the number of authors, making it challenging to formulate a comprehensive paradigm of the reality that students face. Among the selected documents, it is worth noting that 76.5% are from Spain, with the remainder originating from Iran, Canada, Italy, and Colombia, providing a broader cultural perspective.

Bullying affects a large number of students (Attawell, 2021; Calmaestra, 2016), which is directly related to the scarcity of social and emotional skills and conflict resolution abilities (Martín Rodríguez & Luján Henríquez, 2021). This demonstrates a low EI on the part of the students, leading to a higher likelihood of perpetrating or experiencing bullying.

Emotional intelligence aids in the capacity to identify one's own and others' feelings, comprehend these emotions, and manage them (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). This affects emotional regulation (Estévez et al., 2020; Razjouyan K. et al., 2018; Valenzuela-Aparicio et al., 2023), mood management (Cañas et al., 2019; Cañas et al., 2020; Estévez et al., 2019; García et al., 2020; Méndez et al., 2019; Quintana-Orts et al., 2019), as well as the generation of positive or negative thoughts and emotional clarity (Martín Rodríguez & Luján Henríquez, 2021; Valenzuela-Aparicio et al., 2023). Although both profiles exhibit low development in all these mentioned EI qualities, they do not share the same profile as they develop different behaviors, skills, and thoughts.

The aggressor's profile is characterized by poor emotional regulation (Cañas et al., 2019; Cañas et al., 2020; Segura et al., 2020; Yudes et al., 2020), leading to both a lack of mental clarity, resulting

in a deficiency in conflict resolution skills, and negative thoughts as hostility, anger (Segura et al., 2020), a sense of revenge (Cañas et al., 2020; Razjouyan et al., 2018; Yudes et al., 2020), intimidating behaviors (Arciniega-Carrión & Veja-Ojeda, 2019), frustration (Cañas et al., 2019), loneliness (Cañas et al., 2019; Cañas et al., 2020; Estévez et al., 2019), social anxiety (Cañas et al., 2020; Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2020), and stress (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2020; Estévez et al., 2019; Méndez et al., 2020). Poor management leads to impulsivity and engaging in risky behaviors, both aggressive and substance use (Peña et al., 2013). Additionally, they have difficulty in assessing others' emotions (Méndez et al., 2020), resulting in a lack of social skills and peer rejection (Arciniega-Carrión & Veja-Ojeda, 2019; Masabanda Pazmiño and Gaibor Gonzalez, 2022; Valenzuela-Aparicio et al., 2023), as well as low empathy (Martínez-Sitjes et al., 2023; Segura et al., 2020; Yudes et al., 2020), ultimately leading to emotional unawareness (Méndez et al., 2019) and desensitization (Segura et al., 2020; Yudes et al., 2020), rejecting peer groups and engaging in violent behaviors (Cañas et al., 2019). Furthermore, self-evaluation of feelings is negatively impacted, affecting gratitude, devaluing the world, appreciating things less, and losing respect (Chamizo-Nieto et al., 2020). Lastly, this profile seeks leadership through bullying (Arciniega-Carrión & Veja-Ojeda, 2019), as they experience loneliness and depression (Estévez et al., 2019).

The victim's profile is also characterized by poor emotional regulation and low self-esteem, leading to a lack of positive thoughts such as optimism, life satisfaction, a sense of diminished quality of life, or even negative effects on mental health (García et al., 2020; Quintana-Orts et al., 2021). Low self-esteem results in negative thoughts like depression, anxiety, fear, frustration, loneliness, social anxiety, and stress (Cañas et al., 2019; Cañas et al., 2020; García et al., 2020; Razjouyan et al., 2018; Romano et al., 2020), and in some cases, even suicidal behaviors (Quintana-Orts et al., 2019). This situation leads to emotional

confusion (Estévez et al., 2019), where the victim cannot seek help, lacks solutions, and ends up in a state of social maladjustment (Estévez et al., 2019), resulting in a deficiency in conflict resolution skills to escape this situation. Lastly, they cannot assess their own feelings, affecting their self-image and self-concept (Cañas et al., 2019; Estévez et al., 2019). This leads the victim to feel rejected by their peer group (Estévez et al., 2019).

Conclusions

In this systematic review, research has been found that addresses school violence, both face-to-face and cyberbullying. The level of emotional intelligence development of the participating profiles, aggressors and victims, has been analyzed, highlighting the deficiencies in emotional intelligence in each profile, as well as their positive and negative correlations. This has allowed us to achieve the main objective of this review: to analyze up-to-date information that describes the emotional intelligence aspects that are less developed in the aggressor's and victim's profiles, which have a negative effect on individuals and lead to school bullying. This analysis can serve as a precursor to prevention and intervention projects that aim to provide students with emotional education to reduce or eliminate the prevalence of school bullying.

This study has presented certain limitations, as the number of documents found was not extensive, and the number of authors analyzing similar studies was limited. Additionally, most studies were conducted in Spain, with some from Iran, Canada, Italy, and Colombia. The methodology of the research was qualitative, which limits a more descriptive approach to addressing individual cases but has allowed representation of the results from a larger sample of students.

Despite these limitations, the main objective of this systematic review has been achieved. The review aimed to analyze up-to-date information that describes the emotional intelligence aspects that are less developed in the aggressor's and victim's

profiles, which have a negative effect on individuals and lead to school bullying. This information can help develop various educational projects, both preventive and intervention-based, to provide students with greater emotional intelligence. This not only helps reduce the number of students who experience or engage in school bullying but also equips them with lifelong social, emotional, and conflict resolution tools to reduce or eliminate potential future issues, as partner violence or workplace bullying.

This is why psychoeducational involvement is crucial to address the problem of bullying and emotional intelligence. It is essential to promote a healthy, safe and enriching school environment, where all students have the opportunity to achieve effective personal and academic development.

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