

Teenagers use violence to boost their social standing

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Teenagers use violence to boost their social standing. Credit: Kamyar Adl

A new study looks in depth at the social relationships between male and female teenagers, relational violence, and psycho-social adjustment factors such as loneliness, self-esteem and satisfaction with life. The results show that young people who want to be better appreciated and respected within their group are the most likely to be violent.

"There is a growing interest in studying the [violent behaviour](#) of teenagers in school, which can have serious consequences for the psychological and emotional adjustment of the people involved and hinders the dynamics of a school", David Moreno Ruiz, lead author of the study and a researcher at the Pablo de Olavide University (UPO) in Seville, tells SINC.

This study, published recently in the Spanish journal *Psicothema*, focuses on the relationship between relational violence between teenagers, their social adjustment and their reputation, in order to show how young people who long for high "reputation status", in other words a social identity that will enable them to become part of a group and be respected, are more likely to use relational violence as a tool for achieving this objective.

Previous studies have already shown that some teenagers who are popular among their peers use relational violence in order to maintain and improve their reputation in their peer group. "Having high self-esteem is a key aspect, because this is important in inhibiting teenagers from indulging in behaviour that involves relational violence between peers at school", explains Moreno.

The new study was carried out on 1,319 teenagers at seven schools in Valencia, and shows that teenagers whose social status is questioned by their peers and are socially rejected by their [classmates](#), or who do not have intimate friendships, suffer from greater feelings of [loneliness](#), low self-esteem and low levels of satisfaction with their lives.

"We must prevent the development of teenage social identities that are based on harming others, using unjustifiable tactics that are damaging to others, as is the case with relational violence. We need to draw up appropriate psycho-educational programmes to prevent, diagnose and intervene in cases of such violence, in order to improve coexistence in schools", point out the researchers.

Relational violence is a girl thing too

Although the results of studies into this type of violence and its links to gender have been contradictory, the conclusions of this research show that boys use relational violence much more, except when the violent

behaviour is used as a defensive response to provocation, when there is no difference between boys and girls.

However, contrary to popular belief, it is probable that girls make greater use of violence as a strategy for achieving or maintaining improved social identity within their peer group.

Relational violence is any kind of behaviour designed to provoke harm within another person's circle of friends, or to damage their perception of belonging to a group. The experts say this causes psychological damage, as it marginalises and isolates the victim, causing suffering that may sometimes be hard to recover from.

More information: David Moreno Ruiz, Estefanía Estévez López, Sergio Murgui Pérez y Gonzalo Musitu Ochoa. "Reputación social y violencia relacional en adolescentes: el rol de la soledad, la autoestima y la satisfacción vital". *Psicothema*, vol. 21, nº 4, pp. 537-542, Nov 2009.

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