



Can school conflict be considered violence? Factors that trigger school violence

¿Puede el conflicto escolar considerarse violencia? Factores que desencadenan la violencia escolar

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Abstract

This text offers a completely different vision on how necessary it is to recognize conflict and violence inside the school. Consequently, it is essential to elucidate that violence and school conflict are totally different. The study addressed the following research question: What differences exist between the concepts of conflict and violence, and how are the subjects involved in these situations understood within the school context? The base study for writing this article was supported by a qualitative paradigm with a hermeneutic approach and case study type of research, through collection techniques, such as focus groups, surveys and semi-structured interviews. Regarding the most representative findings, the lack of clarity perceived by the units of analysis towards what is understood as conflict and violence stands out; likewise, some confusions about the depth, configuration and essential features of the acts. Finally, as a conclusion it is established that there is a lack of connotation according to what the word 'violence'

semantically represents, describing this specific term in a basic or limited way as the most relevant for its situational use in immediate contexts.

Keywords: violence; aggressor; spectator; victim; school.

Resumen

Este texto ofrece una visión diferente sobre cuán necesario es reconocer el conflicto y la violencia en la escuela. Consecuentemente, es necesario dilucidar que las situaciones de violencia y conflicto escolar son distintas. El estudio respondió a la siguiente pregunta de investigación: ¿Qué diferencias existen entre los conceptos de conflicto y violencia y cómo se comprenden los sujetos que participan en estas situaciones dentro del contexto escolar? El estudio base para la escritura de este artículo se soportó en un paradigma cualitativo con enfoque hermenéutico y tipo de investigación estudio de caso, por medio de técnicas de recolección, tales como: grupos focales, encuestas y entrevistas semi-estructuradas. En cuanto

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a hallazgos más representativos, se destaca la falta de claridad percibida por las unidades de análisis hacia lo comprendido por conflicto y violencia; de igual modo, la confusión acerca de la profundidad, configuración y elementos constitutivos de los actos mencionados. Finalmente, como conclusión se establece

que existe una carencia sobre lo que semánticamente representa el vocablo 'violencia', describiendo dicho término de forma básica o acotada como el más relevante para su uso situacional en contextos inmediatos.

Palabras clave: violencia; agresor; espectador; víctima; escuela.

Introduction

Nowadays, violence is considered as something inherent to humans. Sometimes it has been related to age, gender and there are also those who think it has to do with humankind directly. Nevertheless, in this document there are specific reasons in terms of frequency and seriousness such as absence of commitment, this is the lack of someone who identifies himself as responsible for the act, lack of enquiry and critical questioning by some academics, incoherent discourses, among others. Current society has normalized violence, and it has not been perceived as such, due to its standardization of it as an everyday landscape. Therefore, when authors and their papers were reviewed, it was not surprising to realize they did not assign any importance to investigate about this phenomenon of violence and conflict. Accordingly, in most cases, their conclusions seemed to be confusing, inconsequential and inappropriate or they are not contributing at all to the solution of the phenomenon itself. Therefore, this text starts from differentiating *conflict* from *violent act*, its characteristics, its particularities, its subjects and its stages; but this does not mean denying the importance of the contribution made by Valencia and Sepúlveda (2022), because they highlighted one of its forms with an example. They meant violence as a negative act or action that is generated repeatedly against a pupil. They were clear in describing the behavior as something negative that is done to another subject and against his/her will.

Regarding to what was mentioned before, the observation of Valencia et al. (2022) has reflected a first conceptual definition, a simple analysis of context being enough to translate his exercise. Basically, there is violence that manifests itself with physical force and it is happening between schoolchildren. It occurs with a clear and worrying

intention that is to cause harm to the other; Similarly, it is this intentionality of causing harm to the other, which should attract the attention of academics to develop rigorous research of the phenomenon. This leads to the denial that the issue of school violence can no longer be exposed with trivial arguments, such as pretending to define violence as a connatural fact to man or as a necessary situation in community relations.

The perspective on which this text was constructed asserts that conflict and violence are not inherent to mankind. Actually, they are taken as decisions made by individuals, it is a choice one makes and it affects their individual and social development. Besides, such choices also affect surrounding contexts, like training centers, learning centers, schools and others.

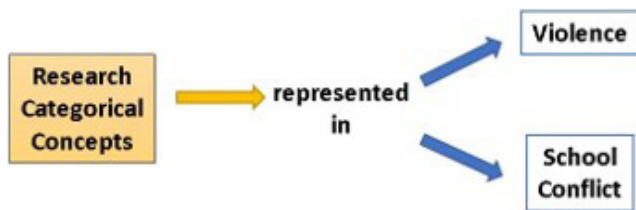
Based on the discussion presented above, it becomes evident that the conceptual distinction between school conflict and school violence continues to generate theoretical and practical challenges in educational contexts. This lack of conceptual clarity may affect how these situations are interpreted and addressed within schools (Gaviria et al., 2025). Consequently, this study was guided by the following research question: What differences exist between the concepts of conflict and violence, and how are the subjects involved in these situations understood within the school context? Accordingly, the objective of this research was to analyze the conceptual differences between conflict and violence, as well as the ways in which the participants in the school community understand the subjects involved in these phenomena.

Literature review

It is necessary to define the authors' epistemological stance to understand their worldview. Hence, some concepts will be explained in detail to make

them constitutively clear in this study. Moreover, those conceptions are exposed by establishing a relation among them. This exercise can be taken as a preparation for triangulation among theory, information collected, and authors' worldview. Additionally, it should be made clear that the words addressed here, as words with different content and characteristics, are related and complementary, and they have equally evolved and mutated over time.

Figure 1. *Conceptual categories that supported the study.*



Source: Own elaboration.

About violence and school violence

These two terms, which are sometimes used lightly as if they were synonyms, and that some authors even approach them without definition nor conceptual limits, placing them in an unclear and vague context, have been treated with apparent indifference (Astor et al., 2021). This leads to highlight that most research seems to begin by explaining the forms of the phenomenon rather than seeking a definition of the problem, then a study that is closer to the problem is necessary due to its great complexity, as Giacomozzi et al. (2020) point out when stating that: "school violence is a problem that involves a lot of bad consequences for the lives of students. So, preventing and researching about it is very important" (p. 179).

Society is equivalent to a living being, therefore, social institutions such as school, family and society have new components and dynamics. For instance, nowadays there are families composed of heterosexual and homosexual parents, with and without children; there are also divorced parents, married ones, single ones, in free unions, among others. There are virtual training schools and intramural schools, there are group training and individual (personalized) education, that is the individuals have had to change as their world has

evolved, and they have had to adapt to these new concepts and dynamics whether they understand them or not. That is the current reality, a multiplicity of individuals and particular behaviors (Vera et al., 2019). In this modern world, the concept of school continues existing, but now in a new modern reality where relationships continue being generated between subjects who, united by this context (the school), must coexist in the best possible harmony, which is not always experienced as expected, hence the necessity to understand when violence begins. Similarly, there are theories that affirm it, so school violence is rooted in the very existence of the school (Turanovic and Siennick, 2022). Thus, it is necessary to name them. However, after having a name, it is mandatory to assign a definition to it. A problem arises from this fact and it is that the term turns into a polysemous one. Therefore, it becomes more difficult to find a definition reached by unanimity (Gómez and Arias, 2023). Indeed, there is no conceptual agreement on the term. School violence is understood as a multiform and multidirectional problem, in which all those who are part of the educational community (like teachers, students, principals and parents) intervene (Valencia et al., 2021). In addition, another example is presented: "peer violence is a common form of interpersonal violence involving physical, verbal, or psychological abuse committed with the purpose of harming another person" (Dedios et al., 2023, p. 63).

The origins of this phenomenon go back, approximately thirty years, that is to the early eighties, when technological tools were just being developed and the concepts of family and school were somewhat conservative, as they were only conceived in terms of the family consisting of a man and a woman; and as for school, this was in some countries dictated only for boys; hence, if the perspective returns to Olweus, it can be remembered that his observations took place between 1980 and 1998. His observations are far removed from those another academic could make at the early 2000's or even today, due to all the political and cultural changes that have taken place in the history of humanity. For example, concepts and dynamics of family conformation, the concept of school

conformation, as was pointed out in previous paragraphs. Accordingly, some explanations seem to provide some clarity since they indicate that these authors have been handling different explanations of the problem, specifying two positions in particular: one which they called “Restricted” and another which they called “Broad”, as it can be noted in the next quote: “physical violence refers to intentionally using exercising physical aggression to cause physical harm or death. Physical violence includes beating, biting, kicking, slapping or strangling someone” (Bukuluki et al., 2021, p. 2).

However, if this conception is examined with the definitions, it is a broad viewpoint, which specifies that school violence has multiple reasons and causes. *Ergo*, violence as the object of study for this research is understood as a complex phenomenon with a background that has not been studied yet. This position matches with the proposal made by Giordani et al. (2022): “despite the relevance of studies on peer violence, school violence must not be analyzed as a kind of violence among young individuals, once this phenomenon reveals the intersection of several social factors - family, school, as well as individual characteristics” (p. 327). These authors are also based on the same broad definition of the phenomenon, while for other ones, the conceptual problem must be looked at in a more holistic manner (Dowdell et al., 2022). Up to this point, only the absence of unanimity among academics in defining the concept of violence has become evident; consequently, some of the views on the subject from the broad perspective stand out. But from the narrow view, definitions containing allusions to force or transgression, as has been asserted for more than a decade, come to be reduced to the requirement of a specific understanding (Mikolajczuk, 2020). However, it is not enough to define it from the force itself, inasmuch as other elements are required in order to make a definition in real context; thus, Negreiros and Couto (2021) indicate that school violence has its own characteristics and its own elements; components that begin with the description of force as a founding factor in the school violence explanation, supported by multiple arguments that range from non-acceptance of the school norm to personal

and gender differences. Moreover, it is imperative to clarify that it is being used *force* instead of *strength* due to the former one embraces violence while the latter one has to do with power and being able to do something.

Detaching conflict from violence

As indicated in previous paragraphs —and as it has been observed— the phenomenon of violence continues being referred without being defined. Nonetheless, there are authors who look for the origin of the problem, among them, Adamus (2020), indicates a difference between the two notions; it explains conflict as “a misinterpretation of something” and violence as “an act of force”. Therefore, conflict can happen without violence, but violence can start with a conflict (Parra et al., 2021). All this allows to comprehend that, while violence seems to have multiple approaches, conflict does have one slightly clearer; it is known as the difference or disagreement between several subjects in the same social context. In this regard, Walawalkar and Dhanu (2021) state that: “avoiding conflict is acceptable when the issue is trivial and you have more pressing issues to attend to” (p. 65).

Since the phenomenon involves those who will be the citizens that make up families, the basis of any state generates concern not only in schools but in the whole community, where strategies are born and aimed to resolve conflicts in order to prevent them from ending in violent acts, these schemes should be reflected at schools as common elements, but also in the society that surrounds the school; it should include institutionalism (Herrera et al., 2024). Therefore, in Colombia different alternative mechanisms have been created for conflict resolution, so that it is important to highlight Law 640 of 2001, an institution that aims to direct citizens to resolve their differences in an agreed manner before a third party, called a conciliator, who has the duty to listen to the parties and help them to resolve their differences without having to go before republic judges.

Having identified conflict and school violence as distinct phenomena, it is necessary to know among whom these behaviors take place and who the subjects that participate in acts are, being thus

evident that the subjects will be those who are in the school context, i.e., teachers, students, administrators, support groups such as parents' associations, psychologists, among others. As a result, it is not possible to think that the subjects in the school context are only teacher and student, or *vice versa*. The school is a nucleus where multiple subjects converge, ranging from the caretaker or the bus driver, to the lady who manages the school shop, but they are all a community of adults who are in front of subjects in training and who must follow the same goals according to the programs of each school unit, hence it is relevant to understand all the subjects that make up the school context.

This is why the general classification of subjects of violence into victims and aggressors can be accepted, according to which each position can be taken indistinctly by a peer, an administrator, a teacher, or a member of an auxiliary group; however, in recent years this classification has been evolving. Consequently, [Kaplan et al. \(2023\)](#) describe that now the subjects in the school context, facing conflicts or violent acts, went from being in two positions (victim - aggressor), to be in three of them (victim - aggressor - observer); relationships in which some are active, others passive, thus: aggressor (active) - victim (passive - observer "passive/active"). In other words, the aggressor will always be the active subject; the victim who endures will be passive and the observer can be active or passive, depending on whether he/she assumes a position of support for one of the subjects who participate in the act, as victim or aggressor, or whether he/she simply observes and is pleased, or not, with what happens there for whatever reason (identity with one of the parties or absolute indifference to the act).

Some authors sub-classify the subjects from their position; active or passive, warning that one can be a victim and aggressor at the same time and for any reason ([Pelaez, 2023](#)). To put in context, being an excellent student, having a different physical build, a different accent or a different creed. It is understood that the aggressor is the subject who abuses others and the victim is the one who endures the aggression; thus, some authors have defined the aggressor as a fearful subject who lacks many

things: affection, self-esteem, values, support from his parents and so on: "Sometimes aggressive adolescent behavior is associated with a conflictive parental relationship and inadequate parenting. Lack of family communication, absence of parental authority and low perception of parental support are associated with high levels of adolescent violence" ([Martos et al., 2021, p. 576](#)).

If this matter is carefully examined, it can be established that both aggressor and victim have elements in common, the most general seems to be the fear of rejection by the other participants in the school act, since one acts to be recognized (the aggressor), and the victim suffers aggression because he/she is not recognized and is afraid of facing others ([Cohen et al., 2021](#)). This makes it possible to assert that, in both cases, their aggressive or victim behavior will be reflected in their school results. Now, these are not only the subjects who participate in the violent act or in the conflict, there are also the third parties, the observers, the others, those who do nothing or those who are unwittingly taking sides, whether positively or negatively ([Learn, 2021](#)). In many cases, this third party is the most numerous subjects in the violent act or conflict, even surpassing the number of aggressors or victims; nevertheless, as the author explains in the previous quote, it will be the behavior of the third party the one that approves or disapproves the act, which can modify what happens there. Similarly, [Polishchuk \(2020\)](#) states that if the third observer is a human being, he or she will prefer what happens there, either for the subject or the situation according to his or her personal convictions. Consequently, if this third party participates in the violent act—and depending on his approval regarding one or the other side of the conflict—he/she has an active or passive interference in the situation.

Methodology

This methodological design was developed to answer the research question previously stated: What differences exist between the concepts of conflict and violence, and how are the subjects involved in these situations understood within the school context? Consequently, the study adopted a qualitative paradigm, since the purpose was to understand

participants' conceptions, meanings and perceptions regarding conflict, violence and the actors involved in these phenomena within their educational environment (Tungka, 2020). Likewise, it is also adopted a hermeneutic approach due to its interpretative characteristic, to acquire meaning from the research scenario: "A hermeneutical approach is important not only for the analysis of data, but also for building the evaluation design itself. In other words, it pulls everything together" (Kumar, 2022, p. 33). Finally, a qualitative case study was chosen because of its focus on particularities and situated realities under context, since the participants selected to perform this inquiry had direct and a truly lived experience with the phenomenon under study. They were "insiders" who could offer first-hand accounts, perspectives and emotional insights that external observers or secondary data could not provide. Moreover, these units of analysis represented a range of experiences related to the research scenario and could enrich the data itself. This allowed a more complete picture of how the research issue was perceived; therefore, all the arguments of this research study revolve around violence definition and subjects involved in these kinds of acts. Hence, Venturelli et al. (2023) establish that: "the use of the case study is adopted for the development of the research. Then, a case study is a proper approach for studies that aim to explore the "why" and "how" dimensions of phenomena" (p. 4). Likewise, the information collected is the product of some instruments that were applied, everything because of categorical matrices interpretation, based on the triangulation of data produced by these instruments: the survey, the semi-structured interview and the focus group. Unlike quantitative surveys, that rely on Likert scales or multiple-choice, this qualitative survey mainly used mixed closed and open-ended questions that invited detailed, descriptive and narrative responses from participants (Barreneche et al., 2025). This permitted the researchers to gather a wide array of personal experiences, opinions, perceptions and understandings related to complex social phenomenon. Additionally, although some descriptive frequencies are presented to illustrate recurrent tendencies among participants, these data were not intended for statistical inference. Instead, they served as complementary evidence

to support the qualitative interpretation derived from the interviews, focus group discussions and participants' narratives, which constituted the primary source of analysis.

The information obtained from the survey, the semi-structured interviews and the focus group was organized through categorical matrices to facilitate qualitative interpretation and data triangulation. The descriptive information obtained from the survey was used to identify recurrent patterns among participants, whereas the interviews and focus group provided the contextual and interpretative elements that supported the analysis and discussion of the findings.

The sample was taken in the municipality of Copacabana - Antioquia (Colombia), in *San José de los Hermanos Terciarios Capuchinos* School, an institution that works for people's rehabilitation who have suffered or generated violence to others. For the selection criteria (non-probabilistic), students with a level of education between the second and third year of high school were selected; additionally, teaching and administrative staff who were familiar with the institution emphasis.

Results

This section presents the findings derived from the qualitative analysis conducted through the semi-structured survey, interviews and focus group. Descriptive frequencies are included only to illustrate recurrent patterns identified among participants, while the interpretation is primarily based on the participants' narratives and perceptions collected throughout the research process (Murillo et al., 2024).

The following are some significant findings from the study: In response to the question *what is school violence?* All 25 responses gave a set of answers that have in common the restricted definition discussed in previous chapters, i.e., violence was not defined, but it was explained how it happens.

Based on the survey, 19% of participants identified it as the use of force; 33% as a form of power; and 48% as an unresolved conflict, reinforcing these perceptions, as was also noted by one of the units of analysis in the interviews: "violence is like going from conflict to act, like from

Table 1. Significant sample - categorical analysis matrix.

Research categories	Relevance in instrument 1. (relational data to category 1)	Relevance in instrument 2. (relational data to category 1)	Relevance in instrument 3. (relational data to category 1)	Textual references (previous research in relation to the category)	Critical vision of the researcher based on the results and analog inquiries
*Category #1 Conflict	//	//	//	//	//
*Category #2 Violence	//	//	//	//	//
*Category #3 Relationship between conflict and violence	//	//	//	//	//
*Category #4 Role of the manager in the face of conflict and violence	//	//	//	//	//
*Category #5 institutional participation in conflict resolution	//	//	//	//	//

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 2. Contextualization of the analysis units.

Educational institution	School grades	Section	Number of students		Number of teachers and administrators
<i>San José de los Hermanos Terciarios Capuchinos School</i>	Seventh and Eighth	"A"	Girls 10	Boys 10	5
Participants	25				

Source: Own elaboration.

a discussion to an argument, to insults or a lack of respect, leading to make the other person feel bad" (Student interviewed 3, personal communication, October 16th, 2021).

What these participants stated about violence was that they could barely define violence but they were able to identify it, recognize it and explain it from their own personal experiences, which have elements in common: "violence is aggression against a particular interest, a need, a condition, violence is transgressing the norm, imposing and generating pain. I think it occurs when there is a conflict that is presented badly, then violence occurs (Administrative interviewed 2, personal communication, October 16th, 2021). Below is the graph that describes the data presented on this result section, it reinforces the information that was presented through the units of analysis testimonies as well.

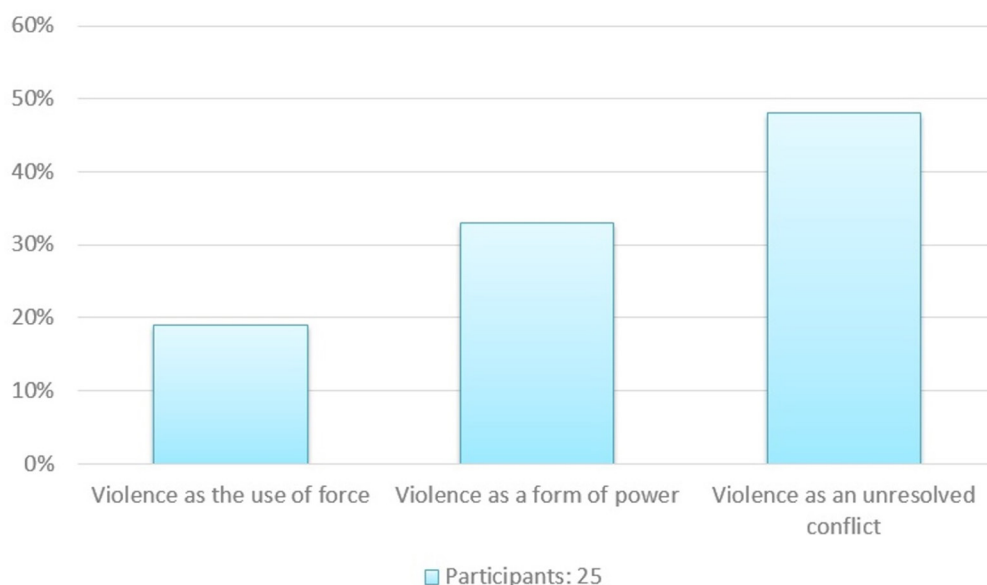
Additionally, these descriptive frequencies should be interpreted as complementary evidence of the participants' perceptions rather than as

statistical generalizations. Their purpose is to facilitate the identification of recurrent trends that were subsequently examined through the qualitative narratives obtained from the interviews and the focus group.

Beyond the descriptive distribution shown above, the participants' narratives revealed a more complex understanding of violence. Their testimonies showed that, although they experienced and recognized violent situations, they frequently explained the phenomenon through personal experiences rather than through explicit conceptual definitions.

Regarding this, a qualitative study performed by [Magrin and Oliveira \(2023\)](#)—which explored men's perceptions of violence against women in Brazil—found that participants, despite varying abilities to articulate a precise definition, consistently identified and described violent behaviors based on their observations and experiences. For instance, some of these people described violence as actions that cause suffering and harm, often

Figure 2. Definitions of violence: Survey applied to 25 participants (20 students and 5 administrative workers) from San José de los Hermanos Terciarios Capuchinos School, Medellín-Colombia, during October 2021.



Source: Own elaboration.

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rooted in power imbalances and leading to negative consequences for the victim.

On the other hand, in the focus group, students explained that these are some of the ways in which violence is evidenced; they pointed out that sometimes violent acts are used to gain power by showing who is the strongest or to seek recognition as the protagonist in that school context. They were clear in indicating, all 25 interviewees, that 10 had been victims and aggressors. Sometimes others abused them, and as a form of retaliation they abused others, but today they recognize that behavior is wrong and, simultaneously, they indicate that there is a difference or a disagreement (conflict) before getting to the violent act. Equally, they could intervene and mediate in the matter avoiding serious results. This was made clear by the following participant who explained:

In my experience, in my basic view of what has been presented, it is both, but mostly violence, but in order to get to violence you need to go through a conflict if you understand what I mean, both, violence has mainly happened to me. (Student interviewed 7, personal communication, October 16th, 2021)

They recognized that violence at school affects everything that happens around the educational process; and in spite of all this, as it was already mentioned, the subjects in the sample cannot define the word, but explain it through examples that have occurred in their own lives. In a recent research about students' experiences with conflict and aggression in high schools, some participants articulated complex understandings of violence beyond simple definitions (Kuzhiyengal and Kottian, 2023). They often described acts of violence as tools for asserting dominance or gaining notoriety. For example, one student, reflecting on common schoolyard dynamics, explained that sometimes it is about showing everyone who is "the real boss", or trying to be the "big shot".

If people who live the conflict, and violent acts generated by this one, have some constraints to define violence, it is not surprising that academics also suffer from this problem of definition and lack of stances. Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognize this gap in the theory to study how to fill it, that is the main reason for this inquiry. It is clear that in the field of social sciences, as far as this word is concerned, there are multiple contents found

in the literature; and as this term does not have its own definition, multiple axes of interpretation have been generated, one of the most current ones being that refers to a restricted or broad definition of the word violence, as mentioned by [Sims et al. \(2025\)](#); who explain about the broad and restricted interpretation of the phenomenon of school violence, as a consequence of the emptiness of the word and the absence of academic agreement on the concept content, which has meant that the word is not defined but rather exemplified as it was done by the participants of this research.

Today the subject of violence is characterized, and the material forms of violence are presented; at the same time, everyone assumes their own definition (restricted or broad). Correspondingly, no one is unaware that school violence, like any other violence, is the result of human behavior that will occur in relationships with others, and it will certainly have different degrees of difficulty, then there are not magic formulas to solve it. Nonetheless, it is imperative to start from the fact that schools are scenarios where multiple subjects converge and must find a means, a common way to understand each other and to be able to develop objectives, but all of them must coexist equally in that place. A comprehensive report on behavior in Scottish schools during 2023 acknowledged the multifaceted nature of violence, showing an increase in several kinds of disruptive behaviors and including physical aggression as well as verbal abuse ([Scottish Government, 2023](#)). While not explicitly providing a “magic formula”, the report’s qualitative sections implicitly reinforced the idea that individuals, students and staff alike, grappled with their own understanding of violence, often shaped by direct experience.

In turn, there are findings from other research that coincide with the one that serves as a reference for this article, such as the one developed by [Turner and Hodis \(2023\)](#), who in a case study, similar to this one, found that school violence was classified broadly into three groups: 1. Direct violence that can be recognized as physical, verbal, psychological, technological means or harassment expressions. 2. The structural violence that is conducted

by the institutionality against the student. 3. Cultural violence, represented in differences of religious, sexual or cultural concepts. Then, while verifying this theory, it can be noted that it coincides in its investigation with the results presented along the base study for this text, when they specify that one of the forms of school violence is verbal aggression, without it itself being the definition of violence, but a form of expression; as explained by one of the interviewees in the focus group:

Violence is already something harmful, because it affects not only physically but mentally. It can affect a person, because violence is also seen in discrimination, it is very physically and verbally presented. For instance, when a person says a nickname too or when somebody says things that the other doesn’t like; that is already like violence because it affects after all. (Administrative interviewed 5, personal communication, November 13th, 2021).

The participants in the sample are clear that school violence harms them, they know how it can affect others, but what they do not find is a way to remove the cycle of “not repeating it”, noting that violence has multiple causes and these multiple causes are in what “I do not understand”, “I do not share” or “I do not accept from the other”. A recent project explored students’ perceptions with violence in urban high schools and found that, while these teenagers were acutely aware of the detrimental effects of violence on themselves and their peers, they often felt trapped in a recurring cycle. They also described how underlying tensions, often stemming from “not understanding someone else’s background”, “not accepting different opinions”, or a fundamental “disagreement on how things should be done”, would escalate into conflict and eventually violence ([Stewart and Ezell, 2024](#)).

Moreover, there were very important contributions in this research and one of the participants explained in the focus group with great clarity that, despite everything, with these events nobody wins: “no one is going to win in the conflict, everyone is going to lose, their freedom or anything else” (Administrative interviewed 4, personal

communication, November 13th, 2021). There are always antecedents prior to the violent event itself, which in this exercise were found and classified as conflict.

Based on what was stated by the interviewees, the issue of conflict acquires greater relevance than violence itself, if it is understood that violence has a precedent in the conflict, so that it is necessary to understand what conflict is, considering that academics understand it as differences or disagreements. Besides, almost unanimously, 23 out of the 25 interviewees identify it in the same way: as a disagreement with another, as a misunderstanding with another, as a “non- communication” with another. A qualitative study that examined interpersonal disputes among adolescents found that participants frequently described the genesis of their conflicts not as an immediate violent act, but as a prior breakdown in understanding or communication. They explained that disagreements often stem from a lack of comprehension, misinterpretations of what others say or differing ideas on how to proceed, which can then escalate into more serious situations (Rodríguez and Chaux, 2022).

At this point in the research, it is possible to say that neither conflict nor violence occur in solitude, they always take place in relation with others or in front of others, due to circumstances with others. Accordingly, any difference occurs with another individual, as clearly expressed by one of the interviewees when stating that: “conflict is like a problem that one has with another person, something that makes one uncomfortable” (Student interviewed 5, personal communication, October 16th, 2021). Therefore, if it is resolved, the conflict disappears and there will not be violent act. This finding is linked to the position of Bickmore and Jaramillo (2022), who expresses that: “Conflict is everything that happens between two or more students in school..., that creates a bad environment. And it’s a teacher’s responsibility to resolve these situations” (p. 16).

The degrees of incompatibility are nothing more than the same differences or disagreements, inasmuch as they can arise due to multiple factors; thus, when applying the collection techniques, it was found that these differences can occur for

multiple reasons, ranging from sexuality, belonging to certain neighbourhoods (invisible borders), among others:

Well, more than anything, I have suffered because in my neighborhood you can see the invisible borders a lot and the dangerous people there wanted me to join them. The only alternative I had was to come here to Machado, because the truth is that I have never liked that, I have never been like that. (Student interviewed 10, personal communication, October 16th, 2021).

Surely, there will also be other types of violence, perhaps not so visible but which continue generating debate or disagreement at school, such as belonging or not to any creed or religion, differences in knowledge, etcetera. Those who know more or less than others tend to be segregated from the group, and there is not lack of futile discrimination based on race and skin color, extremely hidden but latent in contemporary times. For instance, an inquiry that explored experiences in a European high school found that while overt racism was officially condemned, “normative whiteness” often created an environment where black students felt marginalized, leading to their social exclusion despite an ostensible inclusive climate (Wiltgren, 2023).

On the other hand, many of those interviewed in this study stated that violence is one of the ways of demonstrating power in a specific environment. As a result, it is not often important to obtain recognition in the eyes of the social group where one belongs, including the school. For this reason, and in order to intervene in this situation, the contributions of Andrades (2020) are very important when explaining: “school coexistence is instead a variable associated with other factors, such as problems with learning outcomes, conflicts, bad teaching practices, inclusion, school violence, among others” (p. 1). Hence, current curricula must include practical and contextualized concepts that improve coexistence, and within which it would be necessary to return to concepts that vindicate values such as respect for differences. Therefore, the school must be seen in real contexts and the school community have to accept the existence of conflict

and include it in the development of its curricula as a form of violence prevention. Hence, one of the administrative staff points out: “we are responsible, the entire educational community must take a position of responsibility towards the mediation of situations and conflicts” (Administrative interviewed 1, personal communication, November 13th, 2021). Thus, one way to change school violence is to build curricula that include the reality of conflict as explained by [Zia-ur-Rehman \(2023\)](#): “At this point, family and society must be supportive and available to provide support and help that the individuals need” (p. 1079). Additionally, many schools are now implementing Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs that include explicit instruction in conflict resolution, emphasizing skills like active listening and empathy ([Pollack Peace-building Systems, 2025](#)). These programs often use real-life scenarios, like two students arguing over shared materials or a group project failing due to clashing personalities; as a consequence, they have the chance to know how to identify unmet needs or miscommunication and respond constructively.

Now, regarding the subjects’ classification, during the focus group session, the students were the ones who first identified that this categorization had mutated from a dual theory to a triad. This is a specific example of how they described it: “they would be victims and perpetrators, and the people who are outside observing, I would call them spectators, because they are part of the situation” (Interviewed student 3, personal communication, November 13th, 2021). Among all 25 participants interviewed, with slight differences, the majority affirmed that the subjects of the violent act are three, not two as previously thought. Throughout the focus group session, it was clearly explained that it is not only the victims and the aggressors who participate in the violent act; for them the largest number of subjects are the third parties, the observers, the apparently non-interveners in the violent act. On this situation, most of the participants explained that there are others, whom they called “observers” or “spectators”, and explained that the others always took sides in the violent act in favor of one or the other, both actively and

passively, but they were always there contributing to the act, that is why they are also part of the issue. For instance, recent research that examined video recordings of schoolyard conflicts found that bystanders were not neutral. They often cheered, laughed, recorded incidents or remained silent, which unintentionally empowered aggressors and discouraged victims from getting help. Participants confirmed that the observers’ presence and reactions heavily influenced the violence, noting that if onlookers were laughing, it would both intensify the victim’s distress and strengthen the aggressor’s confidence ([Chan et al., 2023](#)).

Throughout the research itself, the answers given by the interviewees show that today the number of participants in the violent act has changed, especially the evolution of the phenomenon has mutated from two parties to three subjects and therefore the relationship is not dual anymore, but it generated a triad of subjects where each of them has defined actions and behaviors, and where that third party may or may not be part of the school subjects. The third party can be representative in any of other social spheres; consequently, nowadays the intervention of this phenomenon requires the concurrence of all social actors. “Bystanders” are not merely passive observers; their actions, or inactions, can actively shape the progression of violent acts and their influence often extends beyond the immediate school setting to encompass broader social spheres. This understanding determines that phenomena like bullying are not isolated incidents but are embedded within, and influenced by family dynamics, peer group norms and societal values, reinforcing the notion that violence is a learned behavior ([Patel and Quan, 2024](#)).

None of this happens in isolation; thus, what occurs at school is linked to what happens in the family and in society. It cannot be presumed that an issue of such magnitude can be observed alternately, social contexts intervene at different stages of personal growth; therefore, the debate that “violence is learned” has not lost its validity yet, and a problem such as this cannot be intervened individually nor people must seek an answer in single and exclusive contexts in a similar sense, as

Warren (2021) claims: “teacher leadership starts in the classroom. Students’ success is not determined by the color of their skin or the income of their parents. Students’ success depends on the person standing in front of them in their classroom” (p. 8). To sum up, it is imperative to understand what violence and conflict are, as well as the subjects involved in these problematic situations, in order to make an accurate intervention when required.

Overall, the findings consistently reflected participants’ perceptions regarding the distinction between conflict and violence and the roles assumed by those involved in these situations. Rather than establishing statistical relationships, the analysis sought to interpret the meanings that members of the educational community attributed to these phenomena based on their lived experiences.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that, from the perspective of the participants and the literature analyzed, there is not any single or universally accepted definition of the concept of violence. Instead, different conceptual approaches coexist, among which the broad and the narrow perspectives were the most evident throughout this study.

Likewise, participants consistently described conflict as a disagreement or difference between individuals. Within the context of this case study, they frequently perceived conflict as preceding violent acts, although this relationship should continue to be explored in future studies conducted in different educational settings.

Regarding the actors involved in these situations, and as far as the subjects are concerned, it is not only possible to refer to victims and perpetrators anymore, but nowadays to victims, perpetrators and observers. This last figure is characterized by the number of subjects who act as spectators during acts of violence; similarly, the number of observers is almost always a plural-major subject.

Finally, this study suggests that understanding and addressing conflict at an early stage may contribute to preventing the escalation of situations into violent acts within the school context. Likewise, participants’ perceptions emphasized the relevance of involving the entire educational community,

particularly those who act as observers, in strategies aimed at strengthening school coexistence and preventing violence. These findings open new avenues for future research on the role of conflict mediation and bystander participation in educational environments.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

No artificial intelligence was used in this article.

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