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# Prevalence of violence among students in public schools in Piauí, Brazil

# Prevalência de violência entre alunos nas escolas públicas do Piauí, Brasil

# Prevalencia de violencia entre estudiantes de escuelas públicas en Piauí, Brasil

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***Abstract***: The present work aims to identify the prevalence of violence from the student's perspective; gather evidence of factorial validity and precision of the violence questionnaire in public schools in Piauí, in Brazil; and compare the scores according to the participants' sex. This is a documentary type study, with a quantitative approach. The registration documents of the 21 GREs totaled 57.906. After the collection, it was possible to analyze the factorial structure of the items referring to the violence questionnaire, through a frequency analysis, followed by an exploratory factor analysis, a parallel analysis and reliability and t test for comparison in relation to sex. The results suggest an internal structure of the unifactorial questionnaire, with satisfactory psychometric indices, in addition to indicating that among the most frequent types of violence were verbal violence, followed by moral violence, material violence and social violence. As for the participants, males had the highest score in expressions of violence at school.

***Keywords***: school violence; public schools; factor analysis; Piauí.

***Resumo***: O presente trabalho tem como objetivos identificar a prevalência de violência na perspectiva do aluno, reunindo evidências de validade fatorial e precisão do questionário de violência nas escolas públicas no Piauí, no Brasil; compara, também, as pontuações quanto ao sexo dos participantes. Trata-se de um estudo do tipo documental, de abordagem quantitativa. Os documentos de registros das 21 GRE somaram 57.906. Após a coleta, foi possível analisar a estrutura fatorial das perguntas referentes ao questionário de violência por meio de uma análise de frequência, seguida de uma análise fatorial exploratória, de uma análise paralela de confiabilidade e teste *t* para comparação em relação ao sexo. Os resultados sugerem uma estrutura interna do questionário unifatorial, com índices psicométricos satisfatórios, além de indicarem que dentre as violências mais frequentes estavam a violência verbal, seguidas da violência moral, violência material e violência social. Quanto aos participantes, o sexo masculino obteve a maior pontuação em expressões de violência na escola.

***Palavras-chave***: violência escolar; escolas públicas; análise fatorial; Piauí.

**Resumen:** El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo identificar la prevalencia de la violencia desde la perspectiva del estudiante; reunir evidencias de validez factorial y precisión del cuestionario de violencia en escuelas públicas en Piauí, Brasil; y comparar los puntajes para el sexo de los participantes. Este es un estudio de tipo documental, con un enfoque cuantitativo. Los documentos de registro de las 21 GRE sumaron 57.906. Después de la recolección, fue posible analizar la estructura factorial de las preguntas referidas al cuestionario de violencia, a través de un análisis de frecuencia, seguido de un análisis factorial exploratorio, un análisis paralelo y una prueba de confiabilidad y *t* para comparar en relación al sexo. Los resultados sugieren una estructura interna del cuestionario unifactorial, con índices psicométricos satisfactorios, además de indicar que entre los tipos de violencia más frecuentes se encuentran la violencia verbal, seguida de la violencia moral, la violencia material y la violencia social. En cuanto a los participantes, los varones obtuvieron la puntuación más alta en expresiones de violencia en la escuela.

*Palabras clave:* violencia escolar; escuelas públicas; análisis factorial; Piauí.

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Violence is a social problem that emerges through the varied relationships established in society. In ancient times, the practices of violence used to have characteristics linked to the way of life of individuals and the relationships established with their social environment. Factors such as culture, politics, religion and economy became the main triggers for the production and reproduction of violence in all social spaces (Magalhães & Santos, 2016; Souza, 2019).

In international literature, violence is understood as a multifaceted phenomenon that is classified based on the actions carried out by individuals, groups, cultures, nations and ethnicities, and which transforms into physical, emotional and symbolic violence - individually or collectively (Conselho Federal de Psicologia, 2018).

Many studies define that violence cannot be understood only as a synonym for aggressiveness, as it can manifest itself through veiled, prejudiced, racist acts, that is, in a multicausal way, among the various possible forms of violence (Abramovay, 2005; Conselho Federal de Psicologia, 2018; Salles & Silva, 2008). Thus, violence as a global phenomenon manifests itself in the most varied social environments and has been consolidated in the

school environment, a safe place for learning, interpersonal relationships and social transformation (Botler, 2020).

School violence is understood as a phenomenon that spreads through various actions that may come from teachers, students, students, employees or from a community or group in which individuals participate. Discussions, fights, bad jokes, incivilities, destruction of public property and conflicts are the triggers for acts of violence (Moral Zafra, 2020; Morrone, 2016).

Violence for the World Health Organization is a public health situation, the responsibility of a state that should be concerned with providing security, individual and collective care for the entire society. For this agency, specialized in health, defining such a phenomenon becomes comprehensive, because when analyzing the high rates of violence throughout the world, it is clear that this is a social problem. According to statistics, around 1.6 million people die each year as a result of violence (Krug, Dahllerg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002).

The social changes existing around the schools also imply the expansion of violence, directly related to the increase in crime, especially in more peripheral neighborhoods with high levels of poverty and social vulnerability; places where the presence of firearms, conflicts between gangs, drug trafficking, among other characteristics, reinforces this trend. Such situations have directly and indirectly changed the scenario of social violence present in the school, modifying the relationships between teachers, students, management and the community (Njaine & Minayo, 2003; Silva & Coutinho, 2020; Teixeira & Kassouf, 2015).

Studies reveal that school violence has changed the professional life of teachers, students and everyone who lives directly and indirectly within the school space (Abramovay, 2005; Charlot, 2005). Among the main forms of manifestation of school violence are violence at school (it occurs inside or outside school walls), violence against school (physical, verbal, sexual, psychological aggression, among others) and school violence (the school performs acts of discrimination, prejudice, labeling and symbolism) (Silva & Assis, 2018).

Violence in different social and individual contexts makes people more vulnerable and susceptible to suffering and victimization. Data investigated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OCDE), in the year 2019, show that Brazil leads the ranking of violence against teachers in schools. The state of São Paulo occupies the first position, with a teacher suffering violence in the classroom every two days (Martins, 2019; Winston, 2019). Circumstances may indicate that by not presenting a solution to reduce incivility acts, the State, by using repression, encourages the intimidated student to use rebellion as a response to a given situation.

In the state of Piauí, data provided by the Independent Company of School Policing (CIPE), report that 203 cases of violence were registered in the capital alone. Among so many acts that took place in a systematic way, there were threats and fights involving students and teachers, the use of narcotics and the possession of firearms and bladed weapons. To the detriment of such occurrences, the Public Ministry implemented the *Queremos Paz* project (project literally translated as "We want peace"), which aimed to foster a culture of peace through dialogue and respect through differences (Brito, 2020).

School violence as a multifaceted concept has been occupying a prominent place in social media, and it is evident that it affects a high number of people in the world regardless of social group (men, women, indigenous, black, LGBTQIA+ etc.) or economic class.

However, it is noteworthy that research finds that male students are more susceptible to being aggressors and victims than female students (Sousa & Stelko-Pereira, 2016; Vasconcelos, Holanda & Albuquerque, 2016). Thus, it is important to point out that both sexes practice violence and that regardless of the way each one performs such an act, they develop relationships of power and domination over the other.

Works found in the literature show that school violence has grown in parallel with a low performance of the actors involved in the process (victims, aggressors and witnesses) (Botler, 2020; Charlot, 2005). Thus, school violence is a multi-causal phenomenon that permeates all social spheres. It is necessary to know what the conceptions are, the ideas that those involved (students and teachers) have so that actions to face such incivility are promoted in the school institution and its reproduction in other social spaces (Conselho Federal de Psicologia, 2018).

Given this discussion, the study aims to identify the prevalence of violence from the student's perspective, and gather evidence of factor validity and accuracy of the questionnaire on violence in public schools in Piauí, in Brazil; in addition to comparing the scores regarding the gender of the participants.

## Method

### *Nature of Research*
This is a documental study with a quantitative approach.

### *Documents/ Search Scenario*
The documents analyzed from the database of the School Management and Inspection Unit/UGIE of the State Department of Education/SEDUC totaled 57,906. The average age of the participants is 15, being (53.5 %) female and (46.5 %) male. The collection was carried out during 2018 and this cut represents (20 %), considering the inclusion criterion to be students enrolled in basic education (elementary school final years and high school) and professional technician of the state public education system in Piauí, in Brazil, in that year.

The research scenario was the schools that make up the Regional Managements of Education/GRE in the state of Piauí, in Brazil. The state is one of 27 Brazilian federative units and is limited to the northwest of the Northeast Region. As a result, the Piauí education in Brazil, according to data obtained through the State Department of Education (SEDUC) in 2018, has more than 340,000 students enrolled in 659 schools. It is, therefore, one of the Brazilian states that has the highest levels of social inequality; therefore, it is urgent to approach the state, as well as education through the large regional education centers to obtain an overview of how these managements are articulated regarding the survey of school violence.

### *Instruments*
Participants received a questionnaire prepared by the Piauí State Department of Education (SEDUC), in Brazil, designed to map violence in state public schools. The questionnaires were printed and destined to each of the GREs in the state and these were responsible for applying and collecting the records acquired in the UGIE/SEDUC database. The questionnaire consisted of 7 (seven) questions, totaling 32 (thirty-two) items. The first

was based on finding how many and which situations of violence occurred over the past few weeks (for example, someone pushed, hit, kicked or knocked you down; someone threatened, blackmailed or intimidated you; someone cursed, yelled or offended you). The items were answered, and there were some of the following possibilities: 1x, 2x4, 5x8 or none.

### *Procedures of Data Collection*

To carry out this study, contact was initially made with UGIE/SEDUC, by means of a letter of Institutional Authorization, to request authorization to access the database of questionnaires prepared and applied by SEDUC. Then, the research was submitted to the Ethics and Research Committee (CEP) of the Federal University of Piauí, in Brazil, and approved according to the opinion number: 3,502,770, in compliance with Resolutions No. 466/2012 and No. 510 /2016 of the National Health Council/Ministry of Health and with Resolution 010/2012 of the Federal Council of Psychology, which deal with the ethical and legal aspects of research involving human beings.

After the authorization to carry out the research, access to the database was collected after approval by the committee and its removal from the School Management and Inspection Unit/UGIE of the State Department of Education/SEDUC occurred through collection for a mobile device (pen drive), which in turn was used on a single computer for the purpose of conducting this research.

### *Data analysis*

Data analysis was performed using the SPSS statistical program, version 21. The choice for this program is due to its analytical analysis of more complex and broader data. At first, with descriptive analysis, to characterize the sample and frequency with the prevalence of violence behaviors; next, a factor analysis was performed, using the main axis factorization method, with oblique rotation (Promax), with the items intended to measure violence in order to reduce dimensions; later, gender scores were compared with a t-test, and finally, the accuracy of item responses was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha index.

## Results

Taking into account the objectives of this study, we tried to organize the results in order to make them clearly and logically understandable by readers. In this sense, descriptive analyzes are first presented (table 1) and psychometric evidence about the instrument of violence in public schools in Piauí; and, later, the factor analysis of the violence items.

Table 1.
*Sample and frequency of prevalence of violence behaviors*

|  | 1x | 2x4 | 5x8 | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Pushing, assaulting, kicking or knocking down | 46968 (81.1%) | 5351 (9.2%) | 3935 (6.8%) | 1652 (2.9%) |
| 2. Humiliating, defaming or nicknaming | 37025 (63.9%) | 9151 (15.8%) | 7086 (12.2%) | 4644 (8%) |
| 3. Threatening, blackmailing and intimidating | 48375 (83.5%) | 5111 (8.8%) | 3111 (5.4%) | 1309 (2.3%) |
| 4. Excluding or staying out of a group | 41947 (72.4%) | 8577 (14.8%) | 4919 (8.5%) | 2463 (4.3%) |
| 5. Destroying or misplacing any object | 39534 (68.3%) | 8776 (15.2%) | 5842 (10.1%) | 3754 (6.5%) |
| 6. Social networks / apps for offending | 52709 (91%) | 3094 (5.3%) | 1436 (2.5%) | 667 (1.2%) |
| 7. Harassment or obscene gestures | 45664 (78.9%) | 5406 (9.3%) | 4302 (7.4%) | 2534 (4.4%) |
| 8. Cursing, yelling or offending | 33521 (57.9%) | 9996 (17.3%) | 8918 (15.4%) | 5471 (9.4%) |

Given the frequency of violence in the 8 (eight) items of the individual violence questionnaire, the possibility of reducing them to dimensions/factors emerged. Therefore, it was necessary to perform an exploratory factor analysis (AFE) and precision analysis, with results presented below.

In order to verify the factorial structure, an EFA was performed. To assess whether the data matrix could be factored, we tried to prove the KMO index and Bartlett's Sphericity Test. The indicators obtained for the adequacy of the sample were: KMO = 0.86; Bartlett = 83726.698; $p < 0.01$, showing the significance of the correlations in the data matrix. The main axis factorization method was used, with oblique rotation (Promax), obtaining a factorial structure with two factors, with eigenvalues above 1.0 – the 50.01 % of the data variance was clarified. The graphical representation of eigenvalues (Cattell's Criterion) showed the existence of a single factor.
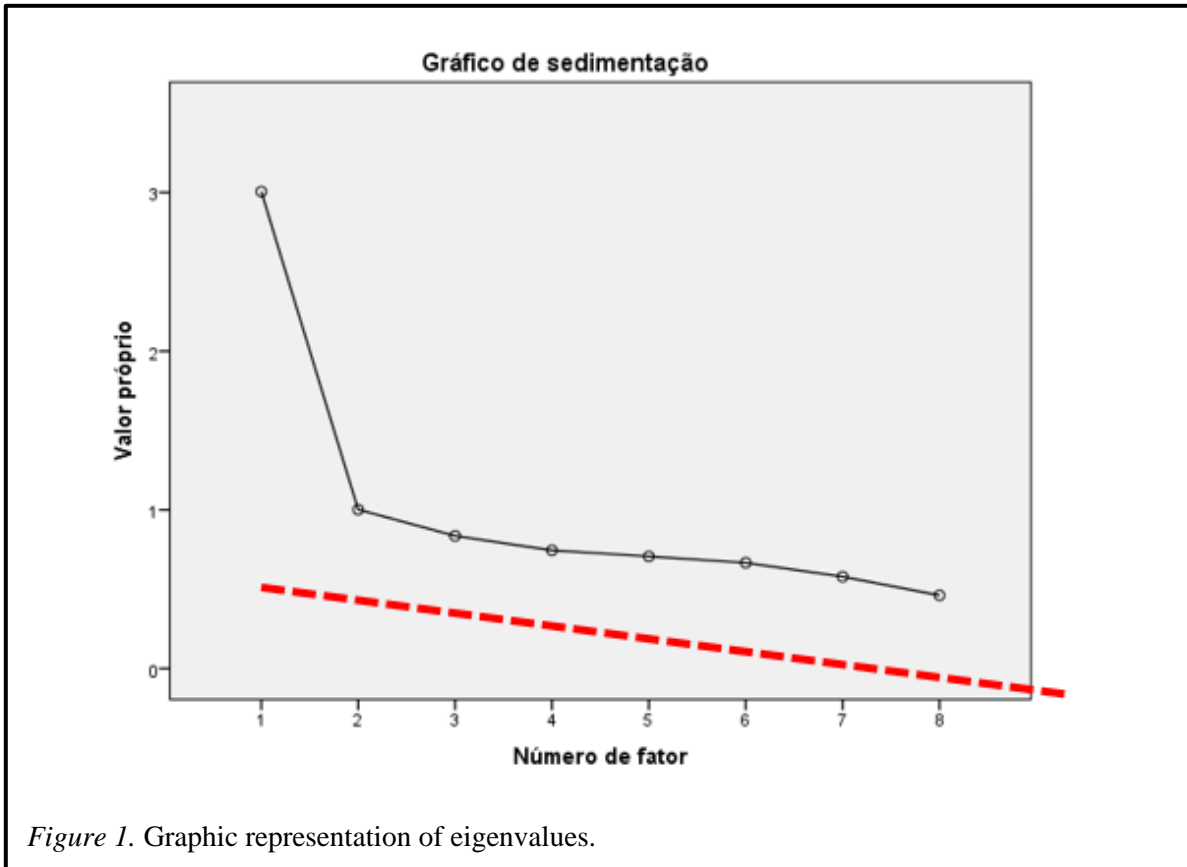
*Figure 1.* Graphic representation of eigenvalues.

Kaiser's Criterion presented two factors, and Cattell's (figure 1) showed an adequacy with a single dimension. In order to obtain greater clarity regarding the dimensionality of the items, it was decided to carry out a parallel analysis, which allowed the comparison of real data values with those of random data, thus removing only one factor in which the eigenvalue of the real data was greater than random data (table 2).

Table 2.
*Result of Parallel Analysis*

| Number of factors | Real eigenvalue | Random eigenvalue |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | 3.01 | 1.02 |
| 2 | 1.01 | 1.02* |
| 3 | 0.84 | 1.00* |
| 4 | 0.74 | 1.003* |
| 5 | 0.71 | 1.01* |
| 6 | 0.67 | 0.99* |
| 7 | 0.58 | 0.99* |
| 8 | 0.46 | 0.98* |

Subsequently, a second exploratory factor analysis was performed, restricting the extraction to one factor, considering as a minimum factor loading |0.40| so that the item was retained in the factor. Table 3 details the data on the factor structure of the Violence Questionnaire, showing the number of items and factor loadings.

Table 3.
*Factor structure of the Violence Questionnaire*

| Items | Factor loading |
| --- | --- |
| 8- Someone cursed, yelled or offended you | .72* |
| 2- Someone humiliated, defamed or nicknamed you | .68* |
| 5- Someone has destroyed / lost or stolen some of your objects | .63* |
| 4-You have been excluded / left out of a group | .56* |
| 3- Someone threatened, blackmailed or intimidated you | .55* |
| 7- Someone harassed or said something obscene to you | .53* |
| 6- Someone used social media or apps to spread offensive things about you | .42* |
| 1- Someone pushed, hit, kicked or knocked you down | .02 |
| Number of items | 8 |
| Own values | 4 |
| Variance explained | 50.01 % |
| Cronbach's Alpha | .79 |

As observed in table 3, all items had factor loadings above the recommended, with the exception of the item "Someone pushed, hit, kicked or knocked you down", which had a factor loading below .35, which is why it was excluded. Therefore, the questionnaire consisted of only 7 items. The items had factor loadings that ranged from .418 "Someone used social networks or apps to spread offensive things about you" to .722 "Someone cursed, yelled or offended you". In respect to internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha was taken into account, which proved to be meritorious ($\alpha$ = .79). In short, with item 8 eliminated, the instrument was composed of a factor with 7 items.

Using the general factor, from the sum of all items, it was possible to compare the sex scores with a t-test. Proceeding in this way, it was found that there are statistically significant differences ($p < .05$) regarding the scores of boys and girls, suggesting that boys have greater expressions of violence at school.

## Discussion

The present study sought to identify the prevalence of violence from the student's perspective and gather evidence of factor validity and accuracy of the questionnaire on violence in public schools in Piauí, Brazil. Thus, according to the results obtained, among the types of violence at school, the ones that were most frequent, when considering the

answers 5 to 8 times a week, followed by 2 to 4 times a week, were verbal violence (cursing, yelling or offending) and morals (humiliating, defaming or nicknaming). Thus, the increase in violence has been growing in recent years in today's society, and its incidence has had negative repercussions in the school environment.

At first, in order to gather psychometric evidence of the questionnaire, internal validity was observed, with all factor loadings going above the cutoff point recommended in the literature (|0.30|, Pasquali, 2010), except for item 1 that specifies physical violence and it was statistically excluded. As Pasquali (2010) points out, in addition to the numerical indicators, there is a theory behind the instrument, as it is also possible that the sampling and cultural variability has somehow interfered in this process. It is noteworthy that indirect forms (e.g., verbal and relational) become the most used, as behaviors such as hitting, pushing, are not seen as socially desirable (Berger, 2007; Rolim, 2008).

In general, violent behavior in its different forms is still present in everyday school life, those involved may or may not value such behavior, consider themselves popular, strong, and feel good attacking (Vasconcelos, Santana, Borges, Couto & Fonsêca, 2017). The study confirmed the results of other studies that indicated verbal violence between students and teachers as the most prevalent in the school environment. The presence of verbal and moral violent behavior, through insults and offenses, end up unbalancing the environment and harming teaching, learning and relationships (Martins 2019; Mischel & Kitsantas, 2020; Pinto, Bezerra & Morais, 2017).

Moral or symbolic violence, the second most prevalent among the students of the study, is associated with psychological issues suffered by the actors. In this type of violence, it makes explicit the abusive power relations, impositions among teachers, students and other school professionals (Bourdieu, 1982; Silva & Negreiros, 2019). Therefore, cursing, harassment and threats are representations of this violence. It is necessary to emphasize that, many times, in this type of violence, the student and the teacher may not even know that they are being targeted by this violence (Pupo, 2007; Teng, Bear, Yang, Nie & Guo, 2020).

Another relevant finding in the results was the frequency of material violence (destroying or misplacing an object), the third one more prevalent and social (excluding or staying out of a group), the fourth more prevalent one, and which corroborates the ideas of previous studies (Mello & Campos, 2018; Souza Batista & Calheiros, 2020) that point towards the lack of dialogue, communication and authoritarian imposition through oppressive and that allowed the emergence of behaviors that raised obstacles in learning and difficulties in interpersonal relationships.

In this sense, violence can have different manifestations, forms of production and reproduction. Studies show that material violence is associated with precarious conditions and low infrastructure; the destruction of public property, graffiti and theft all contribute to violence in schools. By the way, it is clear that school violence causes different forms of representations and that the tendency to reproduce comes from internal and external factors of the most varied social environments, such as the family, the church, politics, the community around the school, among others (Pinto et al., 2017).

The incidence of violence in all social spaces, especially in schools, is more visible on a daily basis. Therefore, acts of exclusion, abandonment, isolation are characterized as social violence, the fourth most frequent according to the results of the study. Current research on school violence reveals that social relationships that are poorly established at

school between students, teachers, employees and the community influence the manifestation of this violence, bringing insecurity, low development and behavioral changes (Oliveira & Senra, 2020; Villela, 2016).

The way how society organizes itself intensifies the increase in existing inequalities in all social sectors. Scholars from different areas in countries around the world indicate that violence resides inside and outside school walls, and factors such as the lack of dialogue, religious differences, political ideas and social class divisions (capital and bourgeoisie) become elements that trigger exclusion and increase in social violence within this space of interaction and socialization (Charlot, 2005; Debarbieux, 1996; Prudente, 2017).

With regard to the four least frequent, the fifth with the lowest prevalence is psychological violence (threatening, blackmailing and intimidating), followed by sexual violence (harassment or obscene gestures) the sixth least frequently; the seventh, the one with the lowest frequency, according to the survey, is virtual violence (social networks/applications used for offenses) and the eighth with the lowest prevalence is physical violence (pushing, assaulting, kicking or knocking down).

Violence is known as one of the most worrying problems in contemporary society, however the various forms of expression of violence vary according to the historical-cultural context of each school reality.

However, it is important to highlight that the literature has pointed out that the use of Information and Communication Technologies (TIC) are being used as forms of production of violence, through the virtual environment, overcoming the limits of school walls. A survey developed by the Brazilian Internet Steering Committee (CGI.br) in 2018 in partnership with the Regional Center for Studies for the Development of the Information Society (Cetic.br), with children and adolescents from 9 to 17 years old, presents cyberbullying as one of the most present problems in the lives of young people (Coelho, 2018; Schreiber & Antunes, 2015; Wendt & Lisboa, 2013). Therefore, the results found that virtual violence, which should be the most frequent, became the one with the lowest prevalence among the eight types of violence at school.

Exclusion practices and the expansion of inequalities in all social spaces have caused violence, especially at school. Furthermore, school violence is also related to sex. Throughout history, men have exerted their strength and domination against each other, and for cultural reasons, due to patriarchal remnants, this posture is still commonly transmitted to other generations in society (Giordani, Seffner & Dell'Aglio, 2017; Silva, Moraes & Rocha, 2017). In a study carried out in 2018 with adolescents enrolled from the 6th to the 9th year of school - a public similar to the present research -, it also demonstrated the highest prevalence of violence (in all types) in male students (33.8 %), which evidences the results obtained from this research in which boys have greater expressions of violence at school (Marcolino, Calvacanti, Padilha, Miranda & Clementino, 2018).

The study results demonstrated that the factor loadings of items in the overall school violence factor were above |0.40|, which has been commonly required (Clark & Watson, 1995; Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 2006), and Cronbach's alpha surpassed the most demanding cutoff point |0.70| (Lance, Butts & Michels, 2006). Therefore, researchers interested in this theme have a psychometrically adequate measure, which has the advantage of having few items.

## Final considerations

This study aimed to identify the prevalence of violence from the student's perspective, comparing it to the gender of the participants, as well as gathering evidence of factor validity and accuracy of the questionnaire on violence in public schools in Piauí, Brazil. The results show that among the most frequent types of violence are verbal violence (swearing, yelling or offending), followed by moral violence (humiliating, defaming or nicknaming), material violence (destroying or misplacing an object) and social violence (excluding or staying out of a group). Less frequent ones are psychological violence (threatening, blackmailing and intimidating), followed by sexual violence (harassment or obscene gestures), virtual violence (social networks/applications used for offenses) and physical violence (pushing, assaulting, kicking or knocking down). As for the gender of the participants in such acts, it was clear that male students are the most likely to be aggressors and victims of violence at school when compared to the numbers of female students.

Thus, the results of this study can contribute to the construction of educational public policies aimed at teacher training, in order to strengthen their educational practice in the face of mediation of conflicts and violence at school; it can also contribute to the foster of educational programs aimed at students, taking into account the ways of expression of emotions, empathetic behavior and coping with multiple prevalent types of violence (verbal, moral, material and social) in everyday school life; the subsidy of practices co-built with the intersectorial network of school communities (CRAS, CREA, Tutelary Council, Universities, arts and recreation centers, etc.) of training the school community (all school employees, without restrictions) and the surrounding community; and, also, contribute to the development of continuing education programs with school managers, encompassing the culture of peace and the list of institutional potentialities to deal with the prevalence of specific violence in each school unit.

Although this study provides general evidence about violence in public schools in Piauí, in Brazil, it is relevant to consider some limitations. A limitation that arises is the cutoff, as it referred to a documental data of registration referring to the year 2018, from only 1 state and in 1 specific historical-cultural context. Thus, new studies should be carried out and that they may be of a longitudinal nature, in other states, other Brazilian regions, as well as in other Latin American countries, for example, comparing sociodemographic variables, sex, race, ethnicity, as well as students from the private sector.

Through this study, it is expected that it can contribute in a formative way to education professionals and members of civil society concerned with education. In this way, actions to raise awareness about this theme, programs and educational assistance policies involving different social actors in the school community and its surroundings, should be considered. In view of this, the benefits of preventing violence at school is a problem for all, since the school as an environment of social transformation governs the principles of humanization and knowledge.

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