

SOCIAL POSITIONING PATTERNS AND BULLYING PRACTICES: AN ANALYSIS WITH MALE ADOLESCENTS IN BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT

Bullying is widely recognized as a serious psychosocial issue that affects students' health and development. Two studies were conducted with the following objectives: 1) integrating available evidence in the literature on how sociometric status related to boys' perpetration of school bullying, and 2) identifying sociometric positions of a group of boys identified as aggressors in classrooms. The cross-sectional study involved 165 male adolescents aged 11 to

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19. Data was collected using the Sociometric Scale and analyzed descriptively and exploratively. The results revealed various factors influencing the relationship between sociometric status and bullying. Despite both aggressors and victims facing similar levels of rejection, perceptions varied, with victims seen as more vulnerable and aggressors as stronger. The complexity of popularity dynamics and associated contradictions highlighted the interconnectedness of sociometric status, rejection, and popularity in the context of bullying. The findings also suggested that aggressors were perceived as disruptive by peers, showing prevalence in behaviors associated with rejection and disorder. Both studies provided significant insights into bullying dynamics among boys, its link with sociometric status, and the complexities of social interactions in classrooms. The theoretical and practical implications are extensive. It highlighted the intricate nature of social interactions and sociometric status, emphasizing their influence on bullying dynamics. This underscores the need to further understand how rejection, popularity, and perceptions impact students' aggressive behaviors. Moreover, identifying aggressors as disruptive by peers indicates the importance of intervention strategies focusing on this behavior.

Keywords: School Violence, Sociometric Status, Social Psychology.

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RESUMO

O *bullying* é uma questão psicossocial grave que afeta a saúde e o desenvolvimento dos estudantes. Dois estudos foram conduzidos com os seguintes objetivos: 1) integrar as evidências disponíveis sobre a relação entre o *status* sociométrico e a prática do *bullying* entre meninos; 2) identificar as posições sociométricas de um grupo de meninos classificados como agressores em sala de aula. O estudo transversal envolveu 165 adolescentes do sexo masculino, com idades entre 11 e 19 anos. Os dados foram coletados por meio da Escala Sociométrica e analisados de forma descritiva e exploratória. Os resultados revelaram diversos fatores que influenciam a relação entre *status* sociométrico e *bullying*. Embora tanto agressores quanto vítimas enfrentassem níveis semelhantes de rejeição, as percepções diferiam: as vítimas eram vistas como mais vulneráveis e os agressores como mais fortes. A complexidade das dinâmicas de

popularidade destacou a interconexão entre *status* sociométrico, rejeição e popularidade no *bullying*. Além disso, os agressores foram percebidos pelos colegas como disruptivos, demonstrando comportamentos associados à rejeição e à desordem. Os estudos forneceram *insights* relevantes sobre as dinâmicas do *bullying* entre meninos e sua relação com o *status* sociométrico. As implicações teóricas e práticas são amplas, ressaltando a necessidade de compreender como rejeição, popularidade e percepções impactam os comportamentos agressivos. A identificação dos agressores como disruptivos pelos pares reforça a importância de estratégias de intervenção voltadas para esse comportamento.

Palavras-chave: Violência escolar, *Status* Sociométrico, Psicologia Social.

INTRODUCTION

School bullying is a phenomenon characterized by a real or perceived power imbalance among peers, where systematic and intentional aggressive behaviors are directed either directly or indirectly towards victims (Oliveira *et al.*, 2016). Regarding prevalence, occurrence rates vary between 2% and 32% worldwide. In Brazil, the 2019 National School Health Survey (PeNSE) indicated that 23% of students declared themselves victims, and 12% declared themselves aggressors, with this behavior reported by 14.6% of boys compared to 9.5% among girls (Malta *et al.*, 2022). Specialized scientific literature on this type of violence indicates that boys, in various sociocultural contexts, are more prone to perpetrate it (Garcés-Pretzel *et al.*, 2020; Reisen *et al.*, 2019). A recent study revealed significant predictors for bullying: being male; studying in public schools; having atypical emotions or poor relationships with peers (Rana *et al.*, 2020). Besides prevalence, it is also documented that there are gender differences in how aggressions manifest. In this sense, boys tend to engage more in direct bullying (such as kicks, punches, insults, etc.), while girls tend to engage more in indirect bullying (social exclusion, spreading rumors, etc.) (Bosa *et al.*, 2018).

The phenomenon began to be investigated by the scientific community in the late 1960s and, currently, due to its high prevalence rates and consequences, it is considered a public health problem (Hultin *et al.*, 2021). Beyond the impact on the daily lives of students exposed to bullying, a relevant association with various mental health problems has been described. Involvement in bullying situations, whether as a victim, perpetrator, or victim-perpetrator, has been associated with anxiety, depression, psychosocial difficulties, and self-harming behavior, for example (Eyuboglu *et al.*, 2021). Prospective analyses indicated that an adolescent who is consistently involved in aggressive behaviors is 1.71 times more likely to develop symptoms

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of anxiety or depression over time compared to adolescents who do not engage in bullying (Silva *et al.*, 2020).

Another important point to consider regarding this phenomenon is sociometric status, which refers to the distribution of symbolic power among students and the definition of positions among peers (Maia *et al.*, 2020). Since bullying is a problem that emerges from social relationships, the literature highlights the importance of popularity and social position (including attention, power elements, and status) among peers, as well as feelings of fear of becoming a victim, insecurities, and the pursuit of emotional rewards through aggressions (Thornberg, 2011). Moreover, during adolescence, profound changes in an individual's psychological functioning occur, which are meaningful, interpreted, and constructed within a cultural and historical context (Souza; Silva, 2019). In this context, obtaining and maintaining a good social position and being accepted by peers are highly valued by adolescents, which, for some groups, means exhibiting aggressive behaviors in the classroom (Estévez *et al.*, 2012).

Scientific studies using sociometry, i.e., instruments involving peer nominations, have identified several profiles in relation to scores obtained in social status, namely: (I) popular, reflecting the degree to which the teenager is perceived by peers as popular; (II) preferred, the profile of the individual remembered for being liked and accepted by peers; (III) rejected, describing the teenager whom most classmates do not like; (IV) controversial, the profile of a teenager who receives high acceptance scores from some peers but is also rejected by others; (V) ignored, a teenager who is not remembered as accepted or rejected by peers; and (VI) median, the individual who does not receive high rates of acceptance or rejection from peers (Cañas *et al.*, 2022; Farmer *et al.*, 2011; Stotsky; Bowker, 2018).

Although there is an extensive literature on the relationship between bullying and psychosocial issues, gaps remain regarding sociometric issues related to bullying in schools in Portuguese-speaking countries. Investigations that focus on specific groups, such as only boys or girls, are also lacking. Studies, in general, concentrate on prevalence diagnoses, investigating associations with mental health problems, or academic performance.

From the presented scenario, two studies were proposed. The first study, a literature review, aimed to integrate evidence on how sociometric status related to the practice/perpetration of school bullying by boys. The second study aimed to complement, empirically, some findings from the first and identify the sociometric positions of a group of

boys identified as aggressors in classrooms. The investigative assumptions were: 1) aggressors may occupy specific positions within classroom social dynamics, and these positions can be identified and characterized; 2) understanding bullying behavior among boys is important to identify and address the specific challenges faced by this group; 3) theoretical and practical implications could be highlighted based on the results obtained.

METHODS

Study 1

Study type: an integrative literature review was conducted. This type of review provides a comprehensive view of a topic, and its process is structured in seven steps: 1) selecting a concept/theme of interest; 2) determining objectives and guiding questions; 3) conducting searches; 4) organizing and evaluating data; 5) analyzing and synthesizing results; 6) summarizing, integrating, and formulating conclusions about the results; and 7) disseminating the review (Kutcher; Lebaron, 2022).

Search strategy and guiding question: Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, and SciELO databases were consulted. The PVO strategy (participants, variables, and outcomes) was applied in formulating the study's guiding question (How is sociometric status related to the practice of bullying among male students?), as well as in defining the terms used in searches: peer status, sociometric, bullying.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: quantitative and qualitative studies published in Portuguese, English, or Spanish were considered eligible. No temporal restriction was applied, and only scientific articles published in journals were considered. Review and theoretical studies were excluded, as well as studies involving adults or bullying in other contexts. Other types of materials were not considered (editorials, comments, letters to the editor, etc.).

Study selection and data extraction: after searching the databases, the results were exported to the Rayyan platform (Ouzanni *et al.*, 2016) for duplicate removal and analysis of titles and abstracts. A total of 181 articles were identified, with 69 duplicates excluded. From the analysis of titles and abstracts, 96 articles were excluded, and 16 were selected for full analysis. In the end, eight studies composed the review corpus, and the others were excluded due to a lack of relevant evidence.

Data analysis: strategies were used to establish themes and patterns, group and make descriptive contrasts/comparisons.

Study 2

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Design and setting: a cross-sectional study was conducted to obtain self-reported data on bullying and sociometric positions. The study took place in a public school in the interior of São Paulo state, Brazil.

Participants: 165 male students aged 11 to 19 (mean age 14.79 years; SD = 1.93) participated, enrolled from the 6th grade of Elementary School to the 3rd year of High School. Data collected with girls in each classroom were also used for peer nomination.

Instrument: data were collected through self-application of the Sociometric Scale (Levandoski, 2009). The instrument consists of 12 peer-nomination questions to identify bullying aggressors and victims and social position in peer relationships. A header was included in the scale to collect participant characterization data.

Procedures: the study's objectives and operational dynamics were presented to the students. Consent and assent forms were signed. The sociometric scale was applied collectively in classrooms, with each participant receiving a printed sheet for completion. Assistance was provided to students who needed it during scale completion.

Data analysis: The interpretation of the self- and peer-nomination instrument initially involved the tabulation of responses to identify frequencies across items, as recommended in sociometric research (Levandoski, 2009). Within each classroom, students were classified as aggressors when they received a total of ten or more nominations across the items “peers who bothered the most with jokes” and/or “peers who provoked or threatened the most.” Subsequently, for each sociometric category (acceptance, attraction, speaks less, makes less trouble, rejection, less attraction, speaks more, and makes more trouble), the three most frequently nominated students were identified. In order to enhance analytical clarity and ensure participant confidentiality, the data were then reorganized into aggregated analytical categories. This procedure involved grouping participants according to (a) frequency of nominations and (b) sociometric positioning across evaluative dimensions (positive and negative). Additionally, participants were classified based on their level of sociometric insertion (number of categories in which they were nominated) and the predominance of positive or negative nominations. This categorization strategy follows principles of qualitative content organization and data reduction (Bardin, 2011), allowing the identification of patterns and profiles within the dataset while avoiding individual-level exposure. Such an approach is consistent with recommendations for

transforming raw frequency data into analytically meaningful categories in mixed sociometric analyses (Creswell & Creswell 2018).

Ethical aspects: This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of [Institution HIDDEN], under protocol number [HIDDEN] and approval opinion [HIDDEN]. In order to ensure participant confidentiality and minimize the risk of indirect identification, individual-level data were not reported. Instead, all results were presented in aggregated form, preventing the identification of specific participants while preserving the analytical integrity of the findings.

RESULTS

Study 1

Eight articles were included to constitute the review corpus (Acquah *et al.*, 2014; Bruyn *et al.*, 2009; Cerezo; Ato, 2010; Greco, 2019; Lee, 2009; Molina *et al.*, 2011; Veenstra *et al.*, 2010; Zequinão *et al.*, 2020). Among the eight included articles, Spain and the Netherlands were the countries where most of the research was conducted, with two publications each, followed by Brazil, Argentina, Finland, and South Korea, each with one study. Concerning the publication year, 2010 and 2009 were the most frequent, in this sample, with two publications each year. Overall, the articles defined bullying based on the power imbalance among peers, in which intentional and continuous aggressions occur, directed directly or indirectly at the victims. It was noted that, in general, researchers show interest in understanding bullying and the associated psychosocial factors.

The main results related to the integrative review objective were systematized into seven general themes presented in Table 1.

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Table 1. Interpretative synthesis of the reviewed results.

Theme	Interpretative Synthesis
Sociometric status	Perpetration of bullying was more prominent in boys than in girls; boys are more remembered both positively and negatively by peers; peers liked aggressive boys less than aggressive girls.
Boys identified as aggressors	They perform better in sociometric status compared to students not involved in bullying situations or victims; they are the first to be chosen in physical education activities but the last in classroom activities.
Rejection	Rejected students were predominantly boys and aggressors; rejection occurs among aggressors, victims, and students with a profile of social withdrawal, although there are groups of popular aggressors; approximately 3 out of every 4 boys make up the group of popular aggressors; the most rejected students in the classroom were aggressors or victims; aggressors were rejected by peers of the same gender as the victim; rejection prompted the choice of victims who, to some extent, sustained the affection of the peer group; aggressive behaviors were more associated with rejection in boys than in girls.
Rejected aggressors and victims	Aggressors and victims were both considered rejected compared to other students, but victims were seen as cowards, while aggressors were perceived as physically strong.
Changes with age	Aggressors and victims were equally considered rejected compared to other students, but victims were seen as cowardly and aggressors as physically strong.
Popularity and contradictions	The most popular students scored lower on "victimization" and higher when adopting victim-defending behaviors; that is, students had a controversial assessment because in the role of aggressor, they were rejected, but in the role of defender, they were considered popular; popular and peer-rejected adolescents engaged in more bullying than those who were popular and accepted; the association between bullying perpetration and popularity was significant.
Acceptance	In general, boys and girls considered "accepted" by peers were not named as victims or aggressors.

It was observed the plurality of variables that encompass the relationship between sociometric status and bullying, highlighting the complexity of social interactions and how gender factors play a significant role in the phenomenon. Regarding rejection, it is interesting to note that both aggressors and victims faced similar levels of rejection compared to other peers. However, perceptions about them varied. Victims were often seen as more vulnerable, while aggressors were perceived as stronger or more powerful. The popularity and associated contradictions are also an important point to be highlighted in the review of studies. Sociometric status, rejection, and popularity were complex aspects evidenced in the dynamics of bullying in different studies.

Study 2

The sample of this study consisted of 165 male students, aged 11 to 19, with a mean age of 14.79 years (SD = 1.93). Most were enrolled in the 8th grade of Elementary School (18.79%) and self-declared as having a brown skin color (47.27%). Table 2 presents the frequencies of

peer nominations used to identify 39 aggressors in the study. A cutoff score of 10 or higher was established as the criterion for classification, such that students were considered aggressors when the sum of nominations across both items reached or exceeded this threshold. Total scores ranged from 10 to 30 ($M = 16.10$), indicating variability in the degree of peer-recognized involvement in bullying behaviors. In order to preserve participant confidentiality and enhance the analytical robustness of the findings, subsequent analyses were conducted using aggregated categories rather than individual-level profiles. Specifically, participants were grouped according to levels of nomination frequency (low, moderate, high) and the relative predominance of mild versus severe behaviors.

Table 2. Distribution of participants according to frequency of nomination and intensity of bullying behaviorso.

Frequency category	Predominantly mild behaviors	Balanced	Predominantly severe behaviors	Total
Low (1-10 points)	n = 4	n = 1	n = 1	n = 6
Moderate (11-20 points)	n = 15	n = 0	n = 7	n = 22
High (≥ 21 points)	n = 7	n = 1	n = 3	n = 11
Total	n = 26	n = 2	n = 11	N = 39

Note: N/n = refers to the number of participants within each category.

As observed in Table 2, the distribution of participants reflects a heterogeneous pattern of peer nominations, with a concentration in the moderate range and a meaningful proportion of high-frequency cases. This configuration suggests that involvement in bullying is not evenly distributed, but rather organized around differing levels of centrality within the group. In addition, while milder forms of behavior predominate overall, the presence of participants associated with more severe practices indicates variability in the intensity of aggressive interactions. Taken together, these patterns point to a structured and differentiated social dynamic. From a sociometric perspective, the findings support the identification of three behavioral profiles within the sample: occasional aggressors, whose involvement is episodic and predominantly associated with mild behaviors; situational aggressors, who display moderate frequency and variability in intensity depending on relational contexts; and recurrent aggressors, characterized by high frequency and the presence of more severe behaviors, suggesting a more central and potentially structuring role in bullying dynamics.

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After identifying the aggressors, a sociometric analysis was conducted within each class to examine their positioning across peer nomination patterns. Specifically, the analysis assessed whether these students appeared among the three most frequently nominated peers in each of eight sociometric categories, organized into two dimensions: positive (acceptance, attraction, speaks less, and makes less fuss) and negative (rejection, low attraction, speaks more, and makes more fuss). To enhance the analytical clarity of the results, the data were subsequently aggregated according to two criteria: (a) the level of sociometric insertion, defined by the number of categories in which each participant appeared (low: 0–2; moderate: 3–4; high: ≥ 5), and (b) the evaluative dimension of nominations, based on the relative predominance of positive or negative categories. Participants were thus classified as predominantly positive, predominantly negative, or mixed, depending on their distribution across these dimensions. The results of this aggregated analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of aggressors according to sociometric insertion and evaluative dimension.

Sociometric insertion level	Predominantly positive	Mixed (positive + negative)	Predominantly negative	Total
Low (0–2 categories)	n = 1	n = 1	n = 3	n = 5
Moderate (3–4 categories)	n = 1	n = 1	n = 23	n = 25
High (≥ 5 categories)	n = 0	n = 1	n = 8	n = 9
Total	n = 2	n = 3	n = 34	N = 39

refers to the number of participants in each category. Sociometric insertion levels are based on the number of categories in which participants were among the top three nominated peers, and evaluative classification reflects the predominance of positive (1–4) or negative (5–8) nominations.

As observed, aggressors exhibited markedly asymmetric patterns of sociometric positioning across evaluative dimensions. Overall, the distribution was strongly skewed toward the negative dimension, with the vast majority of participants classified as predominantly negative. In contrast, only a small number of participants were classified as predominantly positive, while a limited subset displayed mixed sociometric profiles, appearing across both positive and negative categories. Complementary analyses based on the total number of nominations across the eight sociometric categories further indicated that aggressors were

primarily associated with negative peer evaluations. Most notably, they were more frequently nominated in the category “makes more fuss” ($n = 33$), suggesting that they are widely perceived as disruptive within the peer group. Conversely, they were rarely nominated in the categories “speaks less” ($n = 1$) and “makes less fuss” ($n = 1$), reinforcing the predominance of active and visible forms of disruptive behavior. The positive nominations appear to coexist with, but not outweigh, negative evaluations. This pattern indicates that, while some aggressors may receive elements of acceptance or attraction, such perceptions do not define their overall sociometric profile.

When considering levels of sociometric insertion, distinct patterns emerged. Even among participants with higher insertion (≥ 5 categories; $n = 9$), increased visibility was not associated with positive social valuation. On the contrary, nearly all highly inserted participants ($n = 8$) were classified as predominantly negative, indicating that greater sociometric prominence corresponds to heightened recognition within negative evaluative contexts rather than increased acceptance. Taken together, these findings suggest that aggressors in this sample are primarily characterized by negative sociometric status, regardless of their level of visibility within the group. The limited presence of mixed profiles indicates that ambivalent positioning exists but is not predominant. From a sociometric perspective, this configuration reinforces the distinction between visibility and social valuation, showing that high levels of peer recognition may coexist with negative status rather than social acceptance.

DISCUSSION

In the two reported studies, crucial aspects related to bullying and its complexities within student social interactions were investigated. The plurality of variables influencing the relationship between sociometric status and bullying practice was revealed, emphasizing the significant influence of gender. Furthermore, the results highlighted that despite both aggressors and victims facing similar levels of rejection, perceptions varied, with victims being often seen as more vulnerable and aggressors as stronger. The complexity of popularity dynamics and associated contradictions were also emphasized, demonstrating the interconnection between sociometric status, rejection, and popularity in the context of bullying. The findings suggest that aggressors were perceived as disruptors by peers, with a prevalence of behaviors associated with rejection and disorder.

Boys tend to engage in bullying about twice as much as girls (Akanni *et al.*, 2020), and the way they do so differs. They tend to be more direct, using physical or verbal aggression,

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while girls prefer indirect or relational methods (Oliveira *et al.*, 2016; Silva-Rocha *et al.*, 2019). A study by Ramírez (2008) demonstrated that these differences in the manifestations of aggression can be attributed to sociocultural patterns that establish expectations about the social roles of men and women. In this sense, the presented data indicate a strong influence of masculinity on bullying dynamics and peer social interactions in school. The higher prevalence of boys as bullying aggressors suggests that social norms associated with masculinity, which may valorize aggressive behaviors among boys, can play a significant role (Ingram *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the fact that aggressors often have a higher sociometric status in sports activities, where masculinity is often emphasized, and lower popularity in academic environments suggests that behavior expectations for boys vary across contexts.

Regarding sociometric status categories, in line with literature on the subject, aggressors were categorized as: controversial, preferred, rejected, or median (Engels *et al.*, 2017). Controversial aggressors ($n = 15$) were those named in both positive and negative categories simultaneously; preferred ones ($n = 5$) obtained high scores in positive categories; on the other hand, rejected ones ($n = 18$) had higher scores in negative categories; finally, only 1 aggressor was classified as median, meaning they obtained low scores in all categories. It was confirmed that peers often reject aggressors in bullying dynamics (Prinstein; Cillessen, 2003).

Studies on the topic suggest that peers have no affection for those involved in school bullying dynamics, especially in the case of aggressors (Veenstra *et al.*, 2005). In this sense, it was observed that male aggressors tend to be more rejected by their classmates compared to females. It is also assumed that the higher levels of rejection reported regarding male aggressors may be related to gender differences in the manifestation of aggression and/or to the sociocultural patterns mentioned earlier, as suggested by the study of Cillessen and Mayeux (2004). However, despite the high prevalence of reported rejection, it is important to highlight that aggressors classified as controversial or preferred also received scores in positive categories. In this sense, an investigation conducted by Goossens *et al.* (2006) also found aggressors considered controversial. From this, it is postulated that they are rejected by their victims but accepted or admired by peers who are not targets of their aggressive behaviors, leading to the hypothesis that they seek approval from their reference groups.

A key finding of the present study is that aggressors are not predominantly characterized by positive sociometric status, despite sometimes occupying visible positions within the peer

network. Although a proportion of nominations fell within positive categories, these were not sufficient to define their overall sociometric profile. Instead, aggressors were consistently associated with negative evaluations, particularly in categories related to disruptive behavior. Importantly, higher levels of sociometric insertion did not correspond to greater acceptance, but rather to increased visibility within negative evaluative contexts. This distinction highlights that social prominence among aggressors should not be interpreted as popularity in the traditional sense, but rather as a form of negative centrality within the group. While previous studies have suggested that some aggressors may achieve socially influential or even popular positions (Malamut *et al.*, 2020; Cañas *et al.*, 2022), the present findings align more closely with research indicating that aggressors are frequently rejected or negatively evaluated by peers (Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003; Veenstra *et al.*, 2005). Although a small number of participants displayed mixed or controversial profiles, consistent with prior findings (Goossens *et al.*, 2006), these cases were limited and did not alter the overall pattern of predominantly unfavorable sociometric status.

The findings of the present study have important implications for the school context, particularly regarding peer relationships, learning processes, and intra-school dynamics. The predominance of negative sociometric status among aggressors, combined with their frequent visibility within peer networks, suggests that disruptive behaviors may be socially salient even when not positively valued. This configuration can contribute to the normalization of negative interactions in classroom environments, potentially affecting both the quality of peer relationships and students' engagement in learning activities. Research has shown that bullying dynamics are closely linked to classroom climate and can interfere with academic functioning, emotional well-being, and school adjustment (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Moreover, the coexistence of visibility and negative evaluation observed in this study reinforces the importance of distinguishing between social prominence and acceptance, as students who occupy central but negatively perceived positions may still influence group norms and interaction patterns (Salmivalli, 2010). From an educational perspective, these findings highlight the need for interventions that not only target individual behaviors but also address peer group structures and classroom social dynamics, promoting more inclusive and supportive interaction patterns that are conducive to both social development and learning.

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CONCLUSIONS

This article reported on two studies that aimed to: 1) integrate evidence on how sociometric status related to the practice/perpetration of school bullying by boys; 2) identify the sociometric positions of a group of boys identified as aggressors in classrooms. Both studies provided important insights into bullying dynamics among boys, their relationship with sociometric status, and the complex social interactions occurring among students. The findings underscore the need for multidimensional approaches to understand the phenomenon and promote more inclusive and secure school environments. Traditional conceptions of masculinity may be linked to bullying behavior and social dynamics in schools, an aspect to be considered as an influential factor in addressing the issue. Among the study's strengths is the data collection with a diverse sample, an in-depth analysis of the complex relationships between factors, and the individualization of boys' experiences.

It is worth noting that involvement in bullying has been consistently associated with mental health problems in adolescents from different countries. The current study highlights the importance of understanding the complexity of the relationships between sociometric status and bullying to propose more effective interventions. The main intention of this approach is precisely the recognition of the impact of a broad range of determinants contributing to the well-being and quality of life of students. Professionals from different fields can develop approaches to reduce aggressive behaviors and promote a climate of greater belonging, considering gender influences, the complexity of social dynamics, and the need for personalized and holistic strategies, aiming to create healthier and safer school environments.

However, the findings revealed should be interpreted considering some limitations. Firstly, the generalization of results is limited to the studied group or even to the texts that composed the literature review. In the second study, the identification of aggressors based on a cutoff score established from peer nominations may have limitations, as peers' perceptions can vary and may not accurately reflect students' behavior—although recognized by the literature as the best methodological strategy to assess bullying behaviors. Thus, there is a recognized need for additional research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex social interactions related to bullying and the role of sociometric status among peers.

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