

# Aggression and violence in adolescents in the iberoamerican context, a systematic review

## Agresión y violencia en adolescentes en el contexto iberoamericano, una revisión sistemática

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### SUMMARY

*This research is a systematic review that uses the Prism method, searching different databases to systematically analyze studies related to aggression and violence in adolescents in Iberoamerica.*

**Objective:** *The present study aims to systematically analyze studies related to aggression and violence in adolescents in Iberoamerica.*

**Method:** *Research works were collected from a total of 5 databases. For the selection of the articles, keywords or search terms were entered, and inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied. After the complete reading, a total of 47 research studies were selected.*

**Results:** *The country retrieved with the largest number of articles was Brazil with a total of 11 documents, followed by Spain with ten, and the United States with a total of eight documents. It was also found that the*

*database with the largest number of articles retrieved was Scopus, with 21 papers equivalent to 44.7 % of the total documents retrieved, followed by Science Direct and SciELO, each with a percentage of 19.1 %, equivalent to 9 documents.*

**Keywords:** *Aggression, violence, adolescents, Iberoamerica.*

### RESUMEN

*Esta investigación es una revisión sistemática que utiliza el método Prism, buscando en diferentes bases de datos para analizar sistemáticamente los estudios relacionados con la agresión y la violencia en adolescentes en Iberoamérica.*

**Objetivo:** *El presente estudio tiene como objetivo analizar sistemáticamente los estudios relacionados con la agresión y la violencia en adolescentes en Iberoamérica.*

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**Método:** *Se recopilaron trabajos de investigación de un total de 5 bases de datos. Para la selección de los artículos se introdujeron palabras clave o términos de búsqueda y se aplicaron criterios de inclusión y exclusión. Tras la lectura completa, se seleccionaron un total de 47 investigaciones.*

**Resultados:** *El país recuperado con mayor número de artículos fue Brasil con un total de 11 documentos, seguido de España con diez y Estados Unidos con un total de ocho documentos. También se encontró que la base de datos con mayor número de artículos recuperados fue Scopus, con 21 trabajos equivalentes al 44,7% del total de documentos recuperados, seguida de Science Direct y SciELO, cada una con un porcentaje del 19,1 %, equivalente a 9 documentos.*

**Palabras clave:** *Agresión, violencia, adolescents, Iberoamérica.*

## INTRODUCTION

Ibero-America is a region with ample cultural, political, social, and economic variety. Among the countries it encompasses are Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Spain, and Portugal. Each of these countries has its own historical identity, different languages, behaviors, and development contexts. However, they share a context permeated by aggression and violence that has been framing their socio-political situation in recent years. This context is more evident in regions with middle and low income (1). In this sense, it would be appropriate to make a brief differentiation between what is aggression and violence. Aggression is related to the survival of the individual and the species, while violence refers to a form of aggression in which the adaptive value has been lost, and the objective is extreme harm (2,3). Thus, violence is influenced by socio-cultural factors (4,5) while aggression by biological ones.

Violence is then defined as those acts that involve the exercise of verbal or physical force on another person, resulting in harm to the victim voluntarily (6). The context highly influences its content, and in fact, it is considered that it can be influenced by the culture or society in which an individual is, thus generating an intentional and harmful behavior by the downstream factors from their context and setting (7).

Aggression is considered a multifactorial and multi-determined phenomenon, present in different social, work, and family contexts (8). Likewise, it has been defined as an attack or violent act that is intended to cause harm (9), which is manifested since childhood and often decreases with age (10). It has been associated with an innate behavior that responds to different biological stimuli of the person depending on the situation in which they find themselves (7).

According to some authors, there are different types of aggression which are classified into proactive, reactive, and mixed. Proactive aggression is understood as a purpose that is held in the mind that goes beyond hurting the victim and tends to be seen as a goal-led behavior as in the case of robbing someone (11). On the other hand, reactive aggression aims to cause harm directly to the other person, which is impulsive and generated by emotional aspects such as fear or anger (12). Finally, in mixed aggression, a subject is perceived as having both proactive and reactive aggression (11).

Aggression has been considered a severe problem for the subject due to its consequences, which have a negative impact on a social and personal level due to possible physical injuries (12,13). Based on the above, it is necessary to consider that one of the stages of life with the highest propensity to aggression is adolescence. It is regarded as a formative period in the individual's life, including children and adolescents between 10 and 18 years of age, in which determinant biopsychosocial changes are generated (14). At this stage, emotional exacerbation and the difficulty or scarcity of psychological resources to manage their emotions make young people prone to aggressive behavior, a critical negative factor in developing their emotional competencies (15).

During adolescence, young people are exposed to multiple scenarios of violence and aggression (16,17), an issue evinced in several studies that have analyzed the conditions of this age group in relation to other variables: use and abuse of psychoactive substances and generation of violence (18-20); violent video games (21), bullying (22); child maltreatment and psychopathy (23-25), violence control, parenting

states and pedagogy in violence (26,27) and dating characterized by aggressive behaviors (28-30) with findings that demonstrate the bidirectionality of the aggression (31).

Another line of research has focused on adolescents with specific conditions exposed to violence concerning aggression and sensory processing in autism spectrum disorder (32) (psychiatric patients with psychotic disorders (33), and genetic polymorphisms in the corticotropin-releasing hormone (34) among others.

In light of the foregoing, the present research conducted a systematic review of aggression and violence in adolescents in Latin American countries.

## METHOD

A review of the studies of aggression and violence in adolescents carried out in Latin America in recent years was conducted using the PRISMA methodology, which is used to analyze this study. The methodology incorporates 27 items defined by its evaluation focusing on the quality and content of the research question, the quality of the data, the extraction process, and the reduction of bias (35,36).

### Collecting information in databases

The following databases were used to obtain the information based on the quality of the documents for analysis: *ScienceDirect*, *Scielo*, *Scopus*, *Sage Journals*, and *Web of Science*. Searches were carried out with the following descriptors or keywords: Adolescent OR Teenager AND aggression and violence in English and Spanish. The search time interval was five years (5) from 2016 to 2021.

### Inclusion and exclusion criteria

As inclusion criteria, the present study determined: original articles in English, Spanish or Portuguese, studies in humans, and published in the established time range. Articles that were

outside the proposed dates, studies that were not in humans, and that were not related to the terms proposed for the present study were not taken into account.

### Procedure

After the selection by keywords in the databases, two experts in the field proceeded to make the election by reading the title and abstract. Some works were eliminated by duplicates in Mendeley through BibTex format. After this procedure, the complete reading was carried out, and the information was entered into the matrix for analysis, which was based on the criteria of the Prisma method (Figure 1).

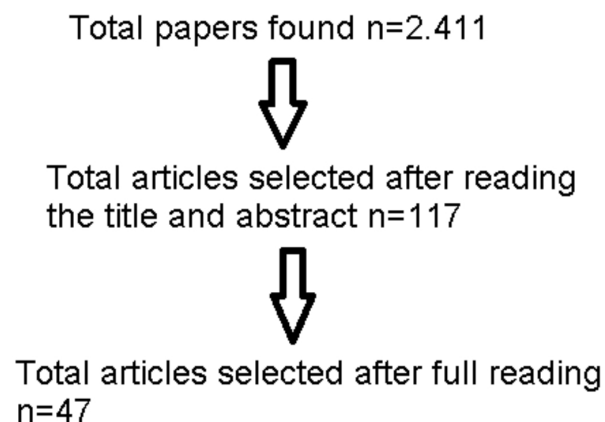


Figure 1. Document selection process. Source: own elaboration.

## RESULTS

### Unit of analysis

Starting from the search criteria established by the keywords, a total of 2 411 articles were initially found, which respectively belonged to *Science Direct* (294), *SciElo* (5), *Scopus* (155), *SAGE Journals* (492), *Web of Science* (1,465); Then the Mendeley platform was used to make the analysis of duplicate documents and exclude those documents not corresponding to what

was needed. Consequently, after conducting the reading by title and abstract, 117 papers were obtained. Later on, 70 articles whose

subject matter was not related to the research were excluded, thus bringing a final total of 47 articles (Figure 2).

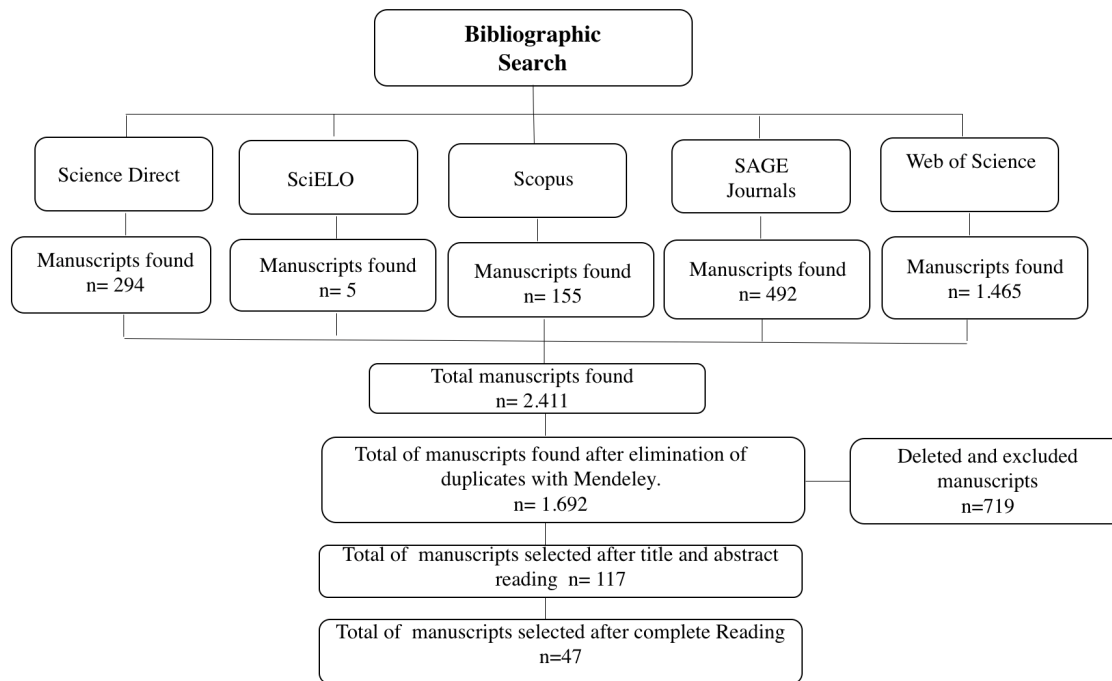


Figure 2. Bibliographic search and selection of articles in the databases. Source: own elaboration.

**Results by country**

Within the 47 documents reviewed, it was identified that the country with the largest number of results obtained was Brazil with a total of 11 documents (23.4 %), followed by Spain with 10 (21.3 %) and the United States with a total of 8 documents (17.0 %) recovered. Subsequently, an equal number of documents were retrieved from countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Peru, and Portugal, 2 for each one which is equivalent to 4.3 %. Likewise, it is worth mentioning the total retrieved from Mexico, as 4 results were obtained (8.5 %) and 2 more participations with countries such as Guatemala and Spain. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the document by (37) since Spain occupied a substantial percentage of the population sample (Figure 3-A).

**Results by database**

Now then, it was also decided to identify the total results obtained in each database. *Scopus* was found to be the database from which the largest number of references was retrieved, with 21 documents equivalent to 44.7 % of the total number of documents retrieved, followed by *Science Direct* and *SciELO*, each with a percentage of 19.1 % equivalent to 9 documents. It is worth mentioning that out of the total number of references retrieved (47), no paper was identified from the *Web of Science* database (Figure 3-B).

**Results of aggression and violence in the Ibero-American Context**

Considering the search results in the present review, studies have been found from cyber

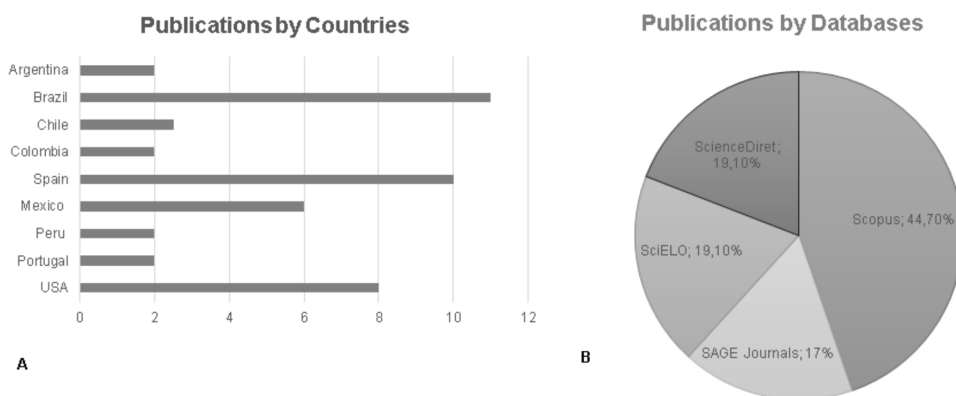


Figure 3. A-Publications by country. B- Publications by database. Source: own elaboration.

victimization and cyber aggression (38,39) aggression, family and adolescents (40,41) there are no studies that quantify this co-occurrence among adolescent victims of family violence. Our objective was, therefore, to investigate the co-occurrence of health risk behaviors in these adolescent victims. Data from the National School Health Survey, collected in 2015, were used. Co-occurrence of risk behaviors— involvement in fights, substance use (alcohol, drugs, and tobacco); types of aggression towards adolescents: cyber abuse and aggression in dating (42,43) civil conflict and domestic violence (44,45) exposure to violence and violence profiles (8,46) as well as to analyze the extent to which such adolescents show impulsivity traits. The participants were selected by cluster random sampling. There were a total of 822 high school students in the sample, aged 13 to 18 years with a mean age of 14.84 (SD = 0.87; dating and partner (47,48) extant self-report measurement tools of DV do not adequately consider age-, generation-, and culture-specific issues, which are essential for its accurate conceptualization. To address these gaps, we developed the Violence in Adolescents' Dating Relationships Inventory (VADRI) and violence prevention and reduction studies (49) among others.

Due to this, a series of typologies were developed in the present work. In the first one, relational categories, the majority of the articles retrieved are included (20), belonging to 46 % of the total articles, in which topics such as Dating, Family, and schooling relationship of

partners are grouped. In the second typology, Personal categories (12), with a percentage of 25 % topics such as behavior and the use of substances by adolescents. Thirdly, in the Psychosocial categories (15), with a percentage of 29 %, articles are grouped related to Legal framework, bullying, and socio-economic and social issues (Figure 4-A).

In this sense, it was also possible to identify that 12.8 % belong to qualitative articles and the remaining 87.2 % to quantitative articles (Figure 4-B), 72.3 % of the total articles recovered have an experimental design, 6.4 % have a longitudinal design, 12.8 % are quasi-experimental, 4.3 % are non-experimental correlational-cross-sectional, and the remaining 4.3 % have a cross-sectional design (Figure 4-C).

Regarding the instruments used by the articles recovered, 83.0 % (39 articles) used tests, questionnaires, and/or scales for the collection of information. In total, 57 instruments applied were identified in which the Aggression Questionnaire (50) was found, which was also used twice. In the Cyberbullying Questionnaire (51); 2.1 % (1) used a self-developed telephone survey, 4.3 % (2) used interviews, and 10.6 % (5) did not specify the instrument used.

48.9 % (23 documents) use a population sample that falls within the age range for the inclusion criteria within the review (between 10 and 18 years of age). Still, it is worth mentioning that not all of the population sample is specifically

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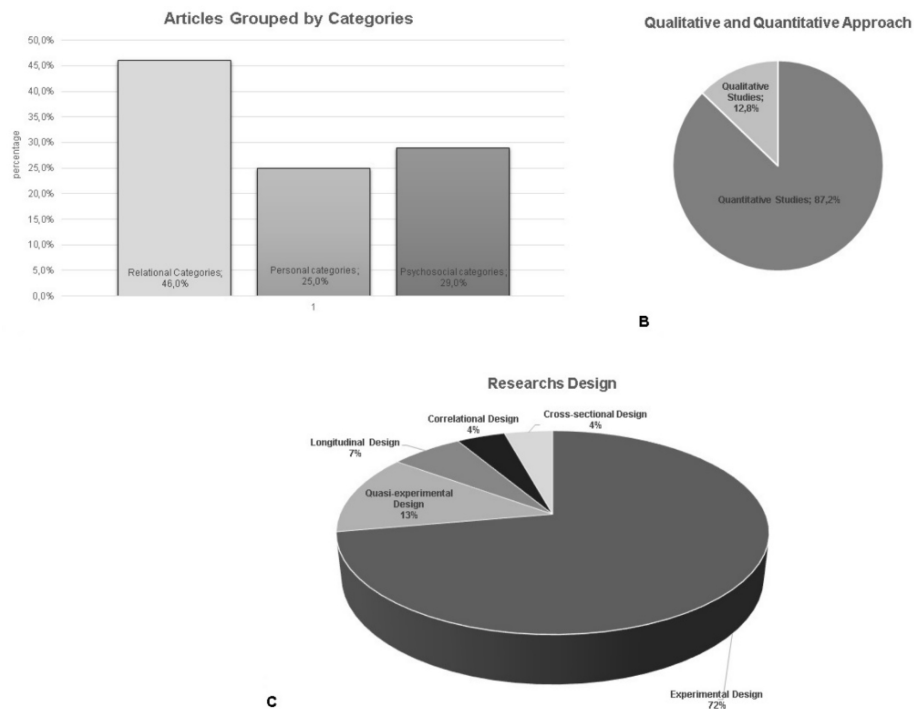


Figure 4. A. Articles Grouped by categories. B. Qualitative and Quantitative Approach. C. Research Design. Source: own elaboration.

in the requested age range, given that many papers took into account the guardians and/or parents of the adolescents. The remaining 51.1 % do not specifically indicate the age range but make it clear that the participants were adolescents.

### DISCUSSION

Violence and aggression in Ibero-American adolescents have been a topic of interest over the years (11). This is an issue reflected in the variety of studies found in the literature review on the different factors relating adolescents to the issue of violence and aggression. As the systematic review was developed, three main categories were found accounting for the different circumstances in which violence and aggression can be perceived in the adolescent population.

Firstly, there is the relational category, which refers to the couple's relationship, whereas affective relationships include any abuse, whether

physical, emotional, or sexual, that may affect the life of the victim and is produced by their emotional partner (52). Family relationships are affected by the physical punishment of parents to adolescents, including blows, and emotional irritation, among other conditions affecting the life of the adolescent by the abuse of authority at home (53). Schooling relationship, where the issue of aggression and violence is taken into account between the partners and considers the promotion and prevention of any negative effect on the life of the child and adolescent who may suffer from this problem (26).

Secondly, the personal category encompasses the behavior of adolescents in the face of violence and aggression, which arise due to different social, emotional, family, and other contexts. These conditions can develop patterns of defiant behavior toward others (54), and there is the consumption of substances that generates erratic behaviors, mood change, and loss of interest, among other variables that strengthen criminal, aggressive, and violent behaviors (46).

Finally, the psychosocial category involves bullying of children and adolescents in their school by their peers, either by jokes, or physical aggression, affecting academic performance, social life, and interest in school activities (55). Socio-economic problems have an essential point which is the stratum in which an adolescent grows. Criminal, violent, and aggressive behaviors in the vulnerable population are usually of more significant impact given the low economic stratum in which they live (44).

The results obtained in the present study confirm these data. Most research on violence and aggression was recovered from Brazil due to the tremendous impact it has in different urban areas because of the differences at the economic level. This violence experienced over the years resulted from political upheavals and overpopulation with low resources leading to intense instability in Brazil for the scant provision of services to vulnerable populations affected mainly by aggression and family, social, and economic violence (56).

In the systematic review, it could be observed that the different studies emphasized: dating relationships with a general objective of the realization of tests for the study of violent relationships in adolescents in different cultural contexts (47); in behavioral research, the objective was to study the variables leading a young person to act violently and aggressively through instruments in the different environments in which they interacted (57); in family relationships, the purpose was to evaluate domestic relationships and how these affect the adolescent's life (20); in legal aspects, although there was very little research retrieved, this consisted of examining mental health in adolescents who were going through detention for some legal conflict (58); in peer schooling relationship, the primary emphasis was to detect school violence involving the parents in preventing further violent abuse (59).

Regarding school bullying, the purpose was to conduct a study on the different forms of school aggression among students, such as bullying and school victimization for the prevention of bullying (55). It was also found that articles related to socio-economic aspects were aimed at determining whether income inequality was associated with victimization (9). In social relations, the goal was to analyze social

support in terms of different social and cultural issues (60). In gender vulnerability, gender violence is analyzed in terms of how it affects women's lives (61). Finally, the substance use category aimed to study and identify the profiles and relationships between violence and the consumption of alcohol and substances (19).

In the detailed review of the subject of violence and aggression in Latin American adolescents, a deficiency in the Colombian population can be seen. There is little research related to the country and its population, which makes it distant from the problems that have been experienced over the years with issues such as massacres, violence against adolescents, and the low resources the Colombian population has to make a living with (62). Cultural diversity has a significant impact on research on aggression and violence since it is a topic taken from countries with more socio-economic implications. In the Hispanic population, this issue, as is the case of Colombia, has not taken into account the other cultures or Latin American countries (63).

Now, multiculturalism is understood as "recognizing the coexistence of different cultural groups within the same national state" (62). However, this type of research generates a limitation regarding the development of aggression and violence in the Colombian population. There are simply insufficient theoretical bases that can affect the population due to the discrimination held in different countries that have left aside the research and importance of other countries to understand the culture (64,65). It is essential to note that it is evident in the Ibero-American context the need for studies with qualitative methodologies and research to design which prevention programs and interventions of aggressive behavior are developed would be trem, build and validate instruments of aggression since the existing ones are primarily self-reports. Finally, research is endously beneficial.

### **Conflict of interest**

The present investigation was financed by the Católica de Pereira University through an internal call, with internal code CI-020-01 respectively. Likewise, the authors of this article indicate

that they do not present any type of conflict of interest that would prevent the publication of this research article.

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