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Study on homophobic bullying in Portugal using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA)

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Abstract   Educational institutions, as well as political, social and scientific discourses, have contributed towards discrimination and violence against people with non-normative sexual orientations. Acts of violence among peers (bullying) motivated by homophobia occur on a frequent basis in school contexts. This study aims to identify the patterns in which homophobic bullying (victim identified) takes place in Portuguese schools using Multiple Correspondence Analysis. This study involved the application of a questionnaire to people of both sexes before obtaining a total of 171 participants reporting themselves as victims of homophobic bullying in schools. Following the identification of eight indicators and the selection of two dimensions, while also structuring the axes in accordance with the representation space, four patterns of homophobic bullying could be identified: masculine violence, feminine violence, violence with less perceived impact, and violence with greater perceived impact. These different patterns have allowed us to learn about the different ways in which peer violence takes place in schools and its possible effects. Among the main study conclusions, it is highlighted how male participants were victims of violence at an earlier age than female participant victims. Another key finding is the complete lack of cases in which the aggressors were only female. Finally, a common conclusion to all participants, encapsulates how none of the victims reported the violence to their families for fear of losing family support by revealing a non-heterosexual orientation.

Estudio sobre *Bullying* Homofóbico en Portugal con recurso al Análisis de Correspondencias Múltiples (ACM)

Resumen   Las instituciones educativas, así como los discursos sociales, políticos y científicos, han contribuido a la discriminación y a la violencia contra las personas con

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orientaciones sexuales no normativas. Incluso en el contexto escolar suceden actos de violencia entre iguales (*bullying*) motivados por la homofobia. El estudio tiene como objetivo identificar los patrones en que ocurre el *bullying* homofóbico (identificado por las víctimas) en las escuelas portuguesas, recurriendo a un Análisis de Correspondencias Múltiples. Este estudio se basa en un cuestionario en línea realizado a personas de ambos sexos, hasta un total de 171 participantes que manifestaron haber sido víctimas de *bullying* homofóbico en las escuelas. Con la identificación de 8 indicadores y la selección de 2 dimensiones como ejes estructurales del espacio de las representaciones fue posible identificar 4 patrones del *bullying* homofóbico: la violencia en el masculino, la violencia en el femenino, la violencia con menor impacto percibido y la violencia con mayor impacto percibido. Estos patrones de diferentes características nos han permitido reconocer diferentes formas en que tiene lugar la violencia entre iguales en las escuelas y sus posibles efectos. Entre las principales conclusiones del estudio destaca el hecho de que los participantes de sexo masculino fueron víctimas de violencia en edades más tempranas, mientras que las participantes de sexo femenino fueron víctimas en edades más avanzadas. Otra conclusión principal devela que no existe ningún caso en el que los sujetos agresores fueran únicamente de sexo femenino. Una conclusión más, común a todos los patrones identificados, es que ninguna víctima contó la violencia sufrida a la familia, por temor a perder el apoyo familiar al revelar una orientación sexual no heterosexual.

The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1998) and the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (2003), establishes a solid legal basis for action against homophobia and other associated forms of discrimination (Warwick & Aggleton, 2014; Warwick, Chase, Aggleton, & Sanders, 2004).

In Portugal, some actions have been implemented at the legislative level in order to recognize new rights for people with non-normative sexual identities. In particularly, the inclusion of sexual orientation into the 13th Article of the Portuguese Republican Constitution – Principle of Equality (Canotilho & Moreira, 2008); the approval of the state law enacting civil marriage for same-sex couples, endorsed on May 31, 2010 (Law No. 9/2010, allows civil same-sex marriage) (Decreto-Lei, 2010) although the 3rd article of this law prohibits the adoption by same-sex couples, and hence resulting in new form of law based discrimination; alongside the passing of a gender identity law – Law No. 7/2011, March 15 – (Decreto-Lei, 2011) refers to sex change and first name change in the Civil Registry.

Despite the legal context prevailing for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people (LGBT), this group still faces prejudice and exclusion throughout their lives in different moments and in different contexts (Nogueira & Oliveira, 2010).

Furthermore, some research does indicate that the discourses and practices of heterosexist violence – whether at work, at school or in other social institutions – significantly correlate with the stress, depression and suicides of LGBT people (Oliveira, Pereira, Costa, & Nogueira, 2010; Smith & Ingram, 2004).

Even though there is recognition that LGBT people do still face discrimination in certain contexts – particularly at school – and the fact that an increasing concern over research on recognizing the sexual citizenship does subsist in Portugal and rendering LGBT issues visible (e.g., Costa & Davis, 2012; Costa, Nogueira, & López, 2009; Nogueira & Oliveira, 2010; Oliveira, 2010; Rodrigues, Oliveira, & Nogueira, 2010), peer violence against young LGBT people, or to those perceived as such, remains significantly silenced throughout the Portuguese school system. Is worth mentioning that homophobic bullying may also target individuals who have not yet identified with any sexual orientation, as well as those who identify themselves as heterosexual. The motivation for homophobic bullying derives from homophobia even when perpetrated against people who do not identify themselves as LGBT, but nevertheless get perceived as people contravening heteronormativity.

Despite the recognition that extends to how attitudes such as homophobia and transphobia encourage bullying (Clarke & Kiselica, 1997; Hong & Garbarino, 2012; Kosciw, Greytak, & Diaz, 2009), the vast majority of research on bullying fails to mention or approach either sexual orientation or gender identity standards as possible risk factors for occurrences of that violence (Poteat, DiGiovanni, & Scheer, 2013). However, different studies focused on the experiences of LGBT people present results that allow for the assumption of the existence of victimization within school contexts. Some studies carried out with LGBT youth reported that between 30% and 50% of participants have experienced some kind of homophobic violence within school settings (Ellis & High, 2004; Rivers & Duncan, 2002; Warwick et al., 2004). Such experiences include verbal and physical violence (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli, Pilkington, & Hershberger, 2002), sexual violence (Bochenek & Brown, 2001; Gruber & Fineran, 2007), social exclusion and isolation (Fineran, 2002; Rivers, 2001b; Rivers & D'Augelli, 2001)

and other interpersonal problems with peers (e.g., Pearson, Muller, & Wilkinson, 2007).

These results originate in school, from its very beginnings, have produced differences and dissimilarities that lead to segregation among people. Furthermore, even when access to education became a right for all, discourses developed in and about schooling that have frequently tried to organize the social structure so as to mute the diversity that coexists within them (Louro, 1997).

LGBT people represent part of this silenced diversity, arising from the need to standardize the school structure and merge the normative discourses on sexuality otherwise adopted by societies. One such normative discourse relates to heterosexism. Heterosexism is the belief about heterosexuality as the only possible orientation and correspondingly neglecting any other sexuality (Oliveira et al., 2010).

Sexism refers to another social lecture sustained by societies, which recognizes men and masculinity as the main approach to existence, relegating women to an inferior existence (Nogueira, 2001). Heterosexism and sexism are entrenched in the belief that some expressions of sexuality and gender are ''normal'' and acceptable while others prove ''deviant'' and reprehensible (Zavalkoff, 2002).

As Butler (1993) reveals, androcentrism and heterosexism form essential parts of the hegemonic heterosexuality (i.e. a regulatory system that affects not only behaviours but also the subject's own process of constitution).

Features of bullying (and features of homophobic bullying)

One of the main European laws on these issues determines an education based on the principles of citizenship and democracy, without any violence, for all children, adolescents and the youth. Nevertheless, preventing the conflict of interests, injustice or incompetence from concealing the social problems afflicting the youth has not proven possible. Bullying remains as one example of a hidden social problem (but certainly not the only one). This happens in all school organizations as well as in different institutions and, even though much has been done since its recognition as a real fact with evaluations made as regards its negative effects on students suffering such abuse, the problem has yet to be eradicated (Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2011; Defensor Del Pueblo, 2007; Ortega, Mora-Merchán, & Jäger, 2007).

Bullying does not represent a phenomenon exclusive to the Portuguese society. However, only recently did scientific outputs around this issue begin to increase and gain widespread dissemination in the media (Defensor Del Pueblo, 2006; Barrio, Martín, Almeida, & Barrios, 2003; Machado, 2011).

Olweus (1993, 1994) defines the term bullying as referring to a student who is intimidated and victimized through exposure to negative actions by one or more individuals, repeated over time. This negative action incorporates someone causing or attempting to cause intentional harm or distress to another person (Olweus, 1994). This repeated violence may be psychological, physical and/or sexual (Carvalhosa, Kima, & Matos, 2001; Defensor Del Pueblo, 2006).

The homophobic bullying concept has emerged from the need to identify motivations behind acts of violence among peers within school contexts and correspondingly perceived as specifically motivated by sexual orientation based upon sexual orientation related prejudice. Therefore, this may represent repeated violent behaviour performed by one or more students towards their peers, with the particularity that the students perpetrating such aggression appropriate homophobia, sexism and the values associated to heterosexism in order to exclude, isolate, insult and assault peers who break the normative patterns of gender identity and sexual orientation or, indeed, any other student who perceives or represents himself or herself as LGBT (Méndez, 2007).

Some studies indicate two similarities between general bullying[1] and homophobic bullying: both widely disseminated within the school context, and they are not often reported (Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2009). However, these authors also identify three items of homophobic bullying that appear unique. First, the fact that we live in a homophobic society and our culture not only legitimizes the practice of homophobia in school contexts, but also in the family, in religious institutions, in social policies, with state laws and in the media. Secondly, the paradox arising out of how revealing one's sexual orientation, potentially crucial to gaining social support, simultaneously represents a factor of risk as, for many young homophobic bullying victims, revealing their non-normative sexual orientation to their peers and to adults increases the risk of losing social support (Newman, 2002). Finally, despite the exponential scientific production about bullying in general and the consequential launching of public policy interventions designed to eradicate this kind of violence between equals, the motivations encouraging the bullying of LGBT people have been either denied or diluted – frequently by certain professionals and political organizations. This latter situation leads to a bias which hides other particular motivations in reducing all forms of violence in school contexts into a general bullying category (Greene, 2006) thereby camouflaging information vital to intervention and the prevention of homophobic bullying.

We would importantly stress that the bullying label may also ignore a series of actions, such as racist, xenophobic, ageist,[2] ableist,[3] homophobic, transphobic, ethnic and religious attacks. Thus, attention should be paid to the motivations driving these behaviours in order to successfully deal with bullying victims (Greene, 2006; Rigby, 2002). Therefore, providing visibility to research about homophobic bullying proves essential alongside understanding just which characteristics make victims vulnerable. Hence, this reflects the aims of this study: ascertaining the characteristics of homophobic bullying in Portuguese schools; particularly identifying the most associated features such as the age group with the greatest probability of violence, the victim's and aggressor's sex, the most common locations of such

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[1] General bullying stands for the practice of violence and/or abuse among peers in unequal power relationships but does not specifically refer to violence and/or abuse by peers against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people or against others perceived as such.

[2] Discrimination against people based on age.

[3] Discrimination against people with some kind of disability.

violence, the most frequent types of violence (e.g. psychological, physical and/or sexual violence), the victim's feelings; with whom the victims talked about violence and the reactions obtained. It is sought to identify the configurations of homophobic bullying and, consequently, promote action tools able to protect the most vulnerable students from peer violence in schools – specifically homophobic bullying.

Method

Participants

Three hundred and fifty-one Portuguese people attended this study – 152 (43.3%) men and 199 (56.7%) women. The average age of respondents was 24.9 years, with a standard deviation of 8.7.[4] Regarding the sexual orientation of the participants, 57 (16.2%) are heterosexual, 86 (24.5%) are bisexual and 199 (56.7%) are homosexual, with one person (0.3%) stating an inability to identify him/herself with any sexual orientation[5] and eight participants (2.3%) not answering this question. In terms of the total sample, 171 (48.7%) participants reported having been victims of homophobic bullying with 180 (51.3%) stating they have never experienced this kind of violence. Since the study purpose included the identification of patterns of homophobic bullying, only the data from participants who described their experience as homophobic bullying victims was subject to analysis, i.e. 171 (48.7%) of the initial sample. The average age of participants reporting homophobic bullying victimization was 23.7 years old (with a standard deviation of 7.7 years). Out of 171 participants, 104 (60.8%) are male and 67 (39.2%) are female. In terms of their sexual orientation, 121 (70.8%) identify themselves as homosexuals, 41 (24%) as bisexuals, five (2.9%) as heterosexual with one person (0.6%) stating an inability to identify him/herself with any sexual orientation, and three participants (1.8%) who did not reply to this question.

Instruments

The main study instrument was a questionnaire about homophobic bullying at Portuguese schools. This was distributed over the Internet[6] to people of both sexes who have attended Portuguese schools at different educational

levels.[7] The data collection process lasted approximately six months.

As the term bullying constitutes a concept that might not be perceivable to everyone, we placed a definition at the beginning of the questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises two main sections. The first sections spans general questions about any situation of violence. We also sought to lean the biographical characteristics of participants, specifically sex, sexual orientation, age, nationality, religion, political orientation, qualifications and area of residence. All the questions are closed in these sections (e.g., he/she is attracted to: same sex people, different sex people, people from both sexes, other[8]), except for the age question, which was left open.

The second section contains questions relating to the characteristics of the violence experienced. This section begins with a closed and dichotomic question (have you already experienced or are you currently suffering some form of intimidation, aggression or violence in schools related to your perceived or effective sexual orientation or gender identity? Yes or No). The same question lists examples of types of violence (specifically, offend, humiliate, discriminate, exclude, intimidate, harass, stalk, rob, beat, steal, break property, among others). Four closed questions then follow:

1. What kind of aggression, intimidation or violence have you suffered? Physical, Psychological, Sexual, Other.
2. At what age did it happen? Under five years of age; From five to 11; From 11 to 14; From 14 to 20; over 20 years of age; Other.
3. Where did it happen? On your way back home from school/college; During school breaks, In the classroom; In the canteen, Other.
4. How did you feel when it happened? It did not bother me; I felt scared; I got frightened; I felt bad; I did not want to go to school/college anymore; I gave up school/college; Other. The next question is closed and dichotomic (after the occurrence of violence, did you tell anyone about it?

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[4] This average refers to participant age at the time of responding to the questionnaire. This age range derives from applying the questionnaire to any person of Portuguese nationality who attended Portuguese schools across their different educational levels (kindergarten, primary school, secondary school, and higher education). Although the current age value proves highly variable, our interest does not focus on the age of people at the time of response and targets ascertaining their ages at the time of abuse. In some cases, this age was found to be the same.

[5] This person stated he/she does not identify him/herself with any sexual orientation (heterosexuality, homosexuality and bisexuality), and also said that he/she feels attracted neither to same sex people nor to different sex people.

[6] The Internet has become a major tool for disseminating information even if not accessible to the entire population, in particular to all those suffering and/or still suffering homophobic bullying,

specifically due to the difficulty in accessing victims from lesser developed and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

[7] We were not able to fully guarantee the reliability of all answers due to different participant memory processes. However, we did try to reduce such bias with closed questions. Likewise, the questionnaire included specific questions that allowed participants to provide the chronological context. We agree with Neisser (1982), who believes that autobiographical memories are not just reproductions of past experiences but reconstructions based on the person's understanding. Thus, from a research perspective, rather than remembering an episode or event just as it happened, participants may rebuild and even review their personal histories taking into account their current understanding of the phenomena under investigation. Such tests must also be recovered; nevertheless, this makes no reference to the context of application. Therefore, as stated by Rivers (2001a), retrospective studies play a role in applied research with memory stability constituting a useful indicator of reliability.

[8] This option is presented as an open question for an open answer. Where the options above do not apply to the participant, he or she may write out the best solution. This option was introduced to almost every closed answer.

Yes or No). Then, the questionnaire presented another series of closed questions:

5. When telling someone, who did you tell? Father; Mother; Teacher; Psychologist; Other.
6. Which reaction did this person you told have? Found out who was responsible for the violence; Did not do anything; Told my parents; Gave me support; Took me to some psychologist; Other. The next question is open (''When was the last time you experienced some form of intimidation, aggression or violence?''). And finally, there were two closed questions:
7. What is the sex of the person who assaulted you? Mostly girls; Mostly boys; Equally boys or girls; Boys only; Girls only.
8. In your opinion, who do you think suffers most from homophobic violence during the school year? Lesbians; Gays; Bisexuals; Other.

Procedure

In this study, we applied an Internet based questionnaire, a means of data collection instrument increasingly common in the social sciences and humanities. Increasing recourse to online questionnaires arises from the ease of answering as the Internet now proves the primary channel for expanding and collecting information, thus enabling the collection of more significant study samples. In addition, questionnaires via the Internet also boost the feasibility of studies, especially when research topics target areas depicted by major difficulties for participants, in particular victimology and/or LGBT studies.

We first distributed this questionnaire by email to some Portuguese LGBT associations/organizations, in particular, rede ex aequo, ILGA Portugal, Portugal Gay; Panteras Rosa, Não te prives, AMPLOS and to two victim support associations, Associação Portuguesa de Apoio à Vítima – APAV and the União de Mulheres Alternativa e Resposta – UMAR. Later, and since homophobic bullying does not only afflict LGBT people, the questionnaire was also disseminated from the project website to reach wider society and more people who might have been homophobic bullying victims.

Although the questionnaire was applied over the Internet, we made sure that the study was explained and that participant confidentiality was maintained. All the information related to the study objectives and procedures was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire. Furthermore, the responses were not mandatory in nature; this allowed the right for participants to not answer (anytime and with any question). The questionnaire also stated that all the data collected during the course of the study would remain completely confidential, with guaranteed anonymity and applied only for scientific research purposes in accordance with Portuguese Data Protection Laws (Law No. 67/98 October 26) (Decreto-Lei, 1998).

Data analysis

We applied Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) as a method ''particularly suitable for simultaneous multiple indicator approach and treatment of qualitative variables (expandable to quantitative variables, in a privileged

categorization)'' (Carvalho, 2008, p. 13, free translation), as is this case.

MCA provides for the description of a multidimensional space characterized by the interdependence of qualitative indicators, with the graphical representations herein constituting a fundamental support. Picturing the topological structure of this space enables the identification of associations established between the categories of the different analysis indicators, in order to evaluate the existence of subassemblies (tendentiously homogeneous groups) with specific patterns.

We undertook Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) with the goal of identifying patterns of homophobic bullying in Portugal. Consequently, we were able to identify eight indicators (how old the respondent was on becoming a victim; the context where violence happened; with whom he/she spoke about the violence; the reaction of the person whom the respondent told about the violence; the victim's feelings; the aggressor's sex; the victim's sex; the violence type), interrelated with the selection of two dimensions as spatial structural representative axes (dimension one: victim's characteristics, and dimension two: characteristics and impact of violence). Finally, this process results in a description of the multidimensional space of homophobic bullying,[9] presented through graphic representations, the usual procedure for setting out this type of results (Carvalho, 2008).

Results

While presenting the results, we also indicate the disposition of the eight indicators (the discrimination measures) and we further detail the two dimensions selected – dimension one: victim's characteristics and dimension two: the characteristics and impacts of violence (Fig. 1) – in conjunction with a table setting out the discrimination values and those variables contributing to the dimensions (Table 1). Finally, we put forward a description of the multidimensional space characterized by the interdependence of the qualitative indicators through the fundamental support of graphical representations (Fig. 2).

The first dimension chiefly includes the indicators relating to the victim's features (how old he/she was when becoming a victim and the victim's sex). In the second dimension we report indicators relating to the characteristics and impacts of violence (violence type, the context where violence happened and the victim's feelings).

Discrimination measures quantify the variance in each indicator. An indicator proves equally or more important to a

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[9] By identifying these patterns, we aim to render visible the specific set of homophobic bullying experiences of people who have attended or are attending Portuguese schools. However, these data focus only on the sample collected and we do not intend to generalize this to the Portuguese population as a whole. Identifying patterns enables the recognition of these situations as real and facilitates the development of interventions/campaigns countering this type of violence. Nevertheless, we do recognize the data collected from the experiences of each person as understood, may be particular and possibly unique phenomena, even while still bearing relevance in terms of scientific production (and intervention).
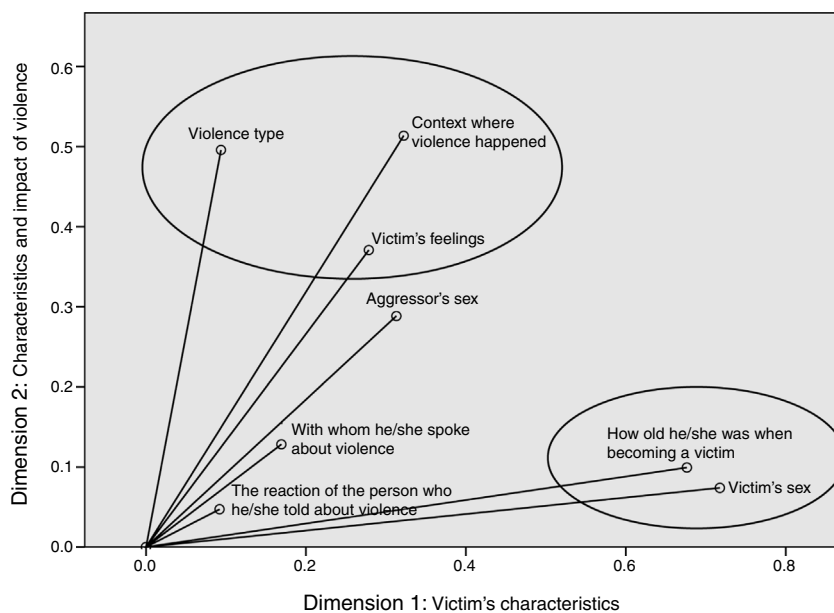
Figure 1   Indicators display (measures of discrimination).

dimension as its ability to discriminate between the objects under analysis is greater. In addition to the discrimination measures, another measure is often deemed relevant to portray the quality of indicators – their contribution towards explaining the variance in each dimension – through a comparison of the importance of these indicators within each dimension.

The victim's sex and how old he/she was when becoming a victim represent the indicators both most discriminating and making the largest contribution to dimension one.

The context where violence happened, the violence type and the victim's feelings constitute the strongest indicators of discrimination in dimension two. The context where violence happened stands out as the indicator that contributes the most to this dimension, followed by the violence type and, finally, the victim's feelings.

The aggressor's sex, with whom he/she spoke about violence, the reaction of the person who he/she told about the violence are the indicators that discriminate this dimension the most even if they only do so slightly.

MCA features four patterns of homophobic bullying for our sample with different features, described broadly as follows:

Pattern one – also stated as male violence –constituted of male victims (boys). They were victims, predominantly aged from five to 14 years old; the violence locations were mainly during breaks in school and in its vicinity. They suffered psychological violence, told teachers and friends, and experienced negative feelings, but there was no refusal to go to school. Boys perpetrated the attack.

Pattern two – also stated as female violence – features female victims (girls). These victims were assaulted at ages of older than 14 years old. The violence locations were not specific with the abuse occurring in different settings both in school and in the vicinity of school. They told friends and other people about the violence, some gave them support

Table 1   Discrimination and contributions of variables for the dimensions.

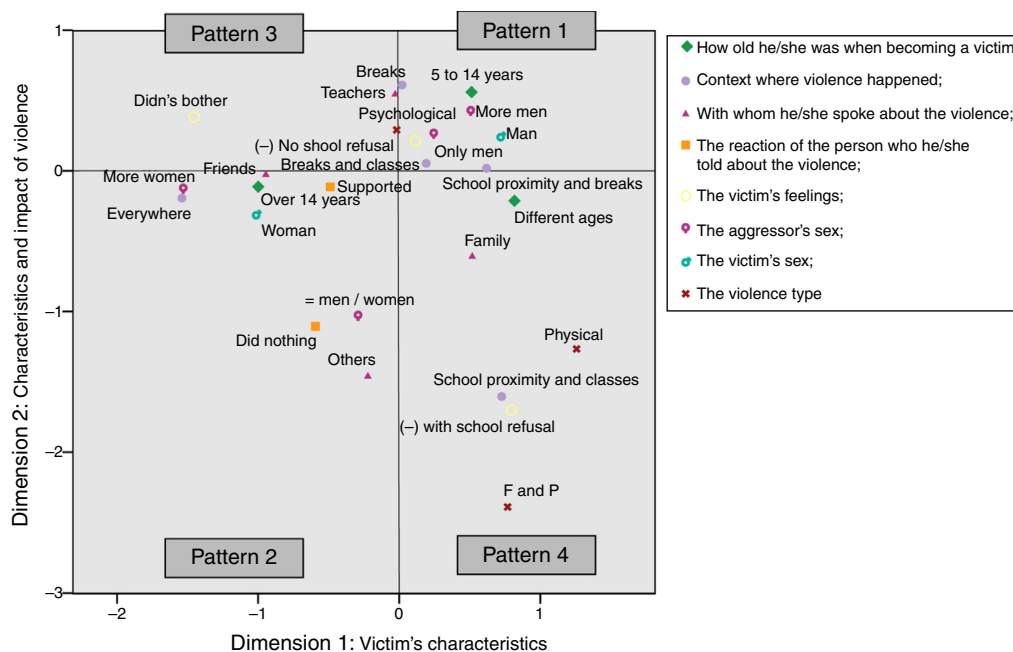|	Dimension 1		Dimension 2	
	Discrimination	Contribution	Discrimination	Contribution
Victim's sex	.718	26.97%	.074	3.67%
How old he/she was when becoming a victim	.676	25.38%	.099	4.91%
Aggressor's sex	.313	11.75%	.288	14.29%
With whom he/she spoke about violence	.169	6.35%	.128	6.35%
The reaction of the person who he/she told about violence	.092	3.45%	.047	2.33%
Context where violence happened	.322	12.09%	.513	25.45%
Violence type	.094	3.57%	.496	24.60%
Victim's feelings	.279	10.48%	.371	18.40%
Inertia	.333		.252	

Figure 2 Homophobic bullying patterns.

and some did nothing. Boys and girls perpetrated the aggression.

Pattern three – violence with slighter perceptions of the impact – does not differentiate between the victim's sex and includes both boys and girls. The violence occurs during school breaks with victims suffering psychological violence and telling teachers and friends. The victim's feeling in relation to the violence was neutral/did not bother them.

Pattern four – violence with greater perceptions of the impact – is composed of male and female victims. The violence occurred in class and in the vicinity of the school and happened across various age groups. They suffered physical and psychological violence with victims reporting negative feelings, including refusal to go to school. In some cases, the abuse even resulted in a change of school.

Discussion and conclusion

Using Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA), we identified eight core indicators related to homophobic bullying. We then selected two dimensions as spatial structural axes of violence representation (dimension one: victim's characteristics, and dimension two: characteristics and impacts of violence). These results corroborate previous studies on the fundamental characteristics involved in bullying situations, particularly the victim's characteristics and the characteristics of the violence. From these two dimensions and by evaluating these situations, victims would select coping strategies in order to deal with the violence experienced (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). Whenever recognizing external sources of support, these may serve as protective factors against the emergence of negative consequences for victims.

In addition, through Multiple Correspondence Analysis, we were able to identify four different patterns to peer violence in schools along with their respective possible effects. Analysis of these patterns results in the observation of the specific characteristics of each pattern, aspects that respectively served to name them: pattern one – male violence; pattern two – female violence; pattern three – violence with slighter perceptions of the impact; pattern four – violence with greater perceptions of the impact.

Boys turned out to be the youngest victims (aged from five to 14 years old). The victimization took place during school breaks, during classes and in the school neighbourhood.

Victims have told teachers and friends about the violence. Furthermore, the type of violence was psychological, and while it generated negative feelings it did not lead to refusals to attend school. Girls were older victims (aged over 14 years old) than boys, with violence occurring throughout the school environment. Girls informed friends about violence but did not report it to teachers (patterns one and two).

Some studies about bullying indicate that victimization takes place at an early age and that violence decreases with age (Matos & Carvalhosa, 2001; Olweus, 1994). In this regard, increasing age acts as a protective factor for these young people. We may explain these literature data by taking Pattern one into account, since victimization occurs to younger people in this pattern. Contrastingly, we may report that victimization occurred with older students in Pattern two. However, there is a fundamental difference in these two patterns regarding the sex of victims, i.e. victimization of boys occurred earlier than that of their female peers.

With regard to the context where homophobic bullying took place, these are specific in Pattern one whereas Pattern two encounters widespread locations of violence. One possible explanation for these results encapsulates the following: in Pattern one, the victim's evaluation of the occurrence of violence might lead him/her to adopt coping strategies whenever facing violent contexts and, consequently,

avoiding violence, in particular, telling teachers about violence or even purposefully socializing with other people identified as harmless and non-threatening. For girls, and as the locations of aggression remained not specific, possible violent situations might prove more difficult to predict and, therefore, they do not trust institutional support networks.

Some studies indicate that boys – more than girls – may simultaneously be the victims and also the perpetrators of bullying situations (Matos & Carvalhosa, 2001; Olweus, 1994). These findings are consistent with our research results; when identifying the aggressor's sex, boys were always present, even when the victims were female. We encountered no event in which the perpetrators were exclusively female.

Pattern three more closely relates to violence, with slighter perceptions of the resulting impacts (from the victim's perspective). In this pattern, we found both male and female victims. This group stated neutral feelings towards the situation of violence, and when telling friends and teachers about the violence, they spoke only about psychological violence, perhaps because the victim perceives this pattern as having lower levels of impact on him/herself. One possible hypothesis for these results may drive from the victim having chosen suitable coping strategies, particularly talking to teachers and friends about violence.

Both Pattern four and Pattern three include both male and female victims. In Pattern four violence took place nearby school and during classes, occurred across diverse age ranges with the violence both physical and psychological in nature. This is the only group that features physical violence and negative feelings, including the refusal to go to school. Victims perceived violence as having the largest impact on their lives, encouraging negative feelings and refusal to attend school. This result is strongly associated with the existence of two types of violence (psychological and physical) and its reiteration, increasing the severity of violence. Rivers (2004) denotes that these people may develop post-traumatic stress because they have experienced bullying in school, motivated by homophobia among their peers, for a long time.

A central feature – which is cross-cutting to all patterns, relates to the absence of sharing this information with the family. This result was also returned by previous studies on this subject (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002). One feasible explanation for the fact that victims did not talk with their families about the violence might interrelate with fears over losing family support as disclosure implies revealing a non-normative sexual orientation. This may represent the central motive to silencing violence.

Although we might have predicted that non-normative sexual orientation constitutes a risk variable for the occurrence of homophobic bullying, this was not confirmed. Violence was also perpetrated against people who identified themselves as heterosexual but probably due to the perception they were homosexual or bisexual. This perception may stem from stereotypes as regards the behaviours and attitudes of homosexual and bisexual people. However, some confusion about the meaning of gender identity and sexual orientation does seem to prevail. For instance, there are boys who perform more feminine behaviours and girls who perform more masculine behaviours. These behaviours are more commonly associated with a non-heterosexual orientation than with a non-normative gender identity.

For school communities to act preventively towards situations of homophobic bullying in schools, learning is required about who these victims actually are, as well as the settings which are most conducive to the occurrence of violence. This conveys our main goal in developing this study due to the need to identify the patterns whereby homophobic bullying occurs in Portuguese schools.

In understanding the four patterns of homophobic bullying, this study acts as a guide for the prevention of future violence situations, recognizing people, contexts, ages and characteristics that make one person vulnerable to such abuse.

Therefore, this study represents one contribution towards the development of tools of action able to strengthen sexual citizenship in young people attending Portuguese schools, and giving education professionals the guidelines to enable them to act differently with students. Thus, we need to encourage the development of studies rendering this type of violence visible, enabling evaluations and interventions to occur earlier and on a more specialized basis and, overall, contributing to the eradication of social exclusion and violence in school contexts.

Increasing awareness about homophobic bullying may also endorse an understanding of bullying in general and thus ensuring all boys and girls benefit and correspondingly providing a greater substance to multifaceted and multi-sectoral interventions (Mishna et al., 2009). As part of the educational community, society and families hold a clear responsibility for violence at school in general and for homophobic bullying in particular. Therefore, an integrated and entirely inclusive intervention is crucial (Méndez, 2007) to eradicate such violence and develop strategies to recognize, accept and integrate differences (González & López, 2009).

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