

Forgiveness in the context of bullying and cyberbullying at school

Why is it so important to train it in
adolescence?

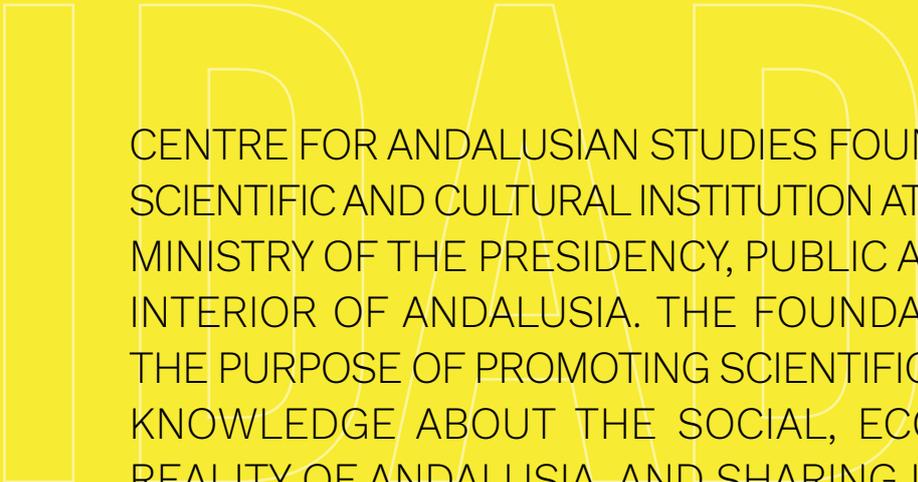


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Forgiveness in the context of bullying and cyberbullying at school

Why is it so important to train it in adolescence?

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1. Introduction

1.1. Bullying and cyberbullying

The first studies emerged on peer violence in schools in the late 1970s. Since then, the interest in and scientific knowledge of violent behaviour has increased, with research being conducted into the modalities, consequences and ways to prevent this type of behaviour, and to intervene when they arise. Under the umbrella term of violent behaviour, school bullying (also known as traditional bullying and face-to-face bullying) refers to the persistent abuse of power exercised by a person or group of people over a prolonged period, with the aim of harming the other person who is helpless or at a disadvantage (Romera *et al.*, 2017). Violent conduct that may be involved in bullying can be physical (hitting or the theft of items), verbal (teasing, insults or threats), psychological (belittling or humiliating) and social (exclusion from the group).

Currently, such violent behaviour has spread through cyberspace through the use of social networks and new technologies, giving rise to the phenomenon known as cyberbullying (also known as online bullying). Cyberbullying, considered a form of school bullying, preserves the characteristics of traditional school bullying (repetitiveness, intentionality, etc.), but, in turn, has specific features such as the anonymity of the aggressor, instant dissemination of the content, and the inability to disconnect from the virtual environment (Kowalski, Limber and McCord, 2019).

Prevalence studies show that bullying and cyberbullying at school pose a major problem worldwide. Generally speaking, in the case of traditional bullying, rates of prevalence have been found at between 8.6% and 45.2% among boys, and between 4.8% and 35.8% among girls, although the phenomenon decreases with age in most countries. With regard to cyberbullying, in a review of 159 studies, rates of prevalence of between 1% and 61.1% were found, with a tendency for such conduct to decrease in pre-adolescence and increase at the age

of 14-15 years (Brochado, Soares and Fraga, 2016; Garaigordobil, 2018).

In Spain, the prevalence of school bullying stands at around 3% and 30% (Garaigordobil, 2011). In reports by *Save the Children* (Calmaestra *et al.*, 2016) and *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* (Inchley *et al.*, 2020), rates of prevalence of cyberbullying in Spain are reported at around 3% and 9.5%. In addition, according to the *Save the Children* report, at national and regional level focusing on adolescents aged between 12 and 16 years, Andalusia would be the second autonomous region with the highest percentage of victims of traditional bullying and would come first in Spain for the indices of victims of cyberbullying.

School bullying and cyberbullying have very harmful short- and long-term consequences on the health and emotional well-being of all involved. Involvement in this kind of phenomenon has been linked to greater deterioration of physical and mental health that can last into adulthood, especially among its victims (Zych, Ortega-Ruiz and Del Rey, 2015). The psychological consequences that may be suffered include increased indicators of depression, anxiety, loneliness, suicidal behaviour and ideation, as well as an increase in aggressive and hostile reactions (Quintana-Orts, Rey and Neto, 2020; Sigurdson, Undheim, Wallander, Lydersen and Sund, 2015).

1.2. What is the definition of “forgiveness”?

Despite significant breakthroughs in the field of prevention of aggression and victimisation arising from bullying and cyberbullying at school, today, there are numerous challenges and inconsistencies in the understanding and identification of the factors influencing the prevention and development of effective programmes (Zych, Farrington and Ttofi, 2019).

Traditionally, approaches to peer violence have considered “pathogenic” visions focusing on reducing risk factors and improving the shortcomings of the most helpless and vulnerable. This approach, focusing on the

identification and mitigation of risk factors and vulnerability, has proved highly useful for the prevention of the two phenomena. However, new approaches and research underscore the need to identify factors that the teenagers themselves present and can develop to cope with stressful situations (Hinduja and Patchin, 2017).

Although there is no single, specific profile of adolescents involved in bullying, the learning of or training in certain personal resources are identified as being particularly important to protect adolescent students from becoming bullies or victims and the consequences entailed. One of the schools of thought within psychology which focuses on analysing individual factors that might be important protectors against unpleasant and stressful life experiences is known as Positive Psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). From this paradigm, a growing number of international empirical and theoretical studies point to forgiveness as one of the important resources against bullying and cyberbullying in adolescence.

Forgiveness is a complex construct involving many aspects (i.e. cognitive, emotional, behavioural, motivational, decisional and interpersonal) whose effects are related to various factors, including the characteristics of harm (the type of wrongdoing or aggression, or the perception of the severity of the harm), the type of relationship between aggressor and victim (acquaintances, relatives...), or the responses of the aggressor (apologies) (Toussaint, Worthington, and Williams, 2015). Because of the complexity of forgiveness, a variety of theoretical models and instruments have been developed in an attempt to

From Positive Psychology, a growing number of international empirical and theoretical studies point to forgiveness as one of the important resources against bullying and cyberbullying in adolescence

conceptualise and evaluate it (Fernández-Capo *et al.*, 2017). Although there is a lack of unanimity regarding its conceptualisation, there are a number of elements where most definitions coincide. We can say, therefore, that forgiveness:

- includes decreased negative emotions, behaviours, thoughts, and motivations (hate, anger, guilt, hostility, aggression, revenge, rumination, etc.);
- involves an increase in more neutral or positive behaviours, thoughts, emotions and motivations (compassion, empathy, etc.) against the aggression, the aggressor, or oneself;
- does not necessarily imply reconciliation, punishment or the wait for compensation by the aggressor;
- does not mean consenting to, forgetting or excusing the harm done.

1.3. The protective role of forgiveness

Forgiveness has been extensively studied in view of various violent events, conflicts and wrongdoings (conflict in romantic relationships, traumas of childhood abuse, wars, infidelity, etc.). Among the positive effects for well-being that have been found, improved physical and mental health (less rumination, stress or depression, and higher levels of life satisfaction and optimism) are noteworthy (Prieto-Ursúa, 2017; Wade, Hoyt, Kidwell, and Worthington, 2014). At the social level, forgiveness has been associated with the development of more adaptive skills and strategies that relate to higher levels of social support, satisfaction and stability in social relationships; as well as greater inhibition of aggression, a reduction in negative reactions in the face of harm (lower levels of vengeance and unpleasant emotions like anger), and a lower likelihood of future transgressions (van der Wal, Karremans and Cillessen, 2017; Webb, Hirsch, Visser and Brewer, 2013). Although these investigations have provided evidence of the role played by forgiveness before interpersonal transgressions in adult populations, few studies have explored the

influence of this factor in specific contexts with adolescents.

The field of bullying and cyberbullying at school is one of the contexts in adolescence in which a growing number of studies are being conducted on the benefits of forgiveness. Forgiveness has been suggested to act as a positive resource that can be learned and allows adolescent girls and boys to identify and understand the impact of the harm done, as well as overcome the resulting emotional consequences (Egan and Todorov, 2009). However, as mentioned above, the study of the benefits of forgiveness with samples of adolescents in contexts of bullying, continues to be an under-explored area, even more so in Spain.

For all of the above, this research focuses on examining the influence of forgiveness on the mental health and well-being of samples of Spanish adolescents. Prior research on the role of forgiveness in interpersonal harm leads us to the hypothesis that sufficient capacity to forgive is related to improved mental health and well-being, as well as the prevention of violent reactions such as revenge or aggressive behaviour towards peers. Taking into account the fact that bullying is a worldwide social public health problem, common at schools across the globe, identifying and comprehending forgiveness as one of the protective factors becomes necessary in order to prevent and intervene more efficiently in cases of bullying and cyberbullying.

2. Research goals

Based on a review of the scientific literature, this research was carried out with the aim of finding out the influence of forgiveness in contexts of bullying and cyberbullying at school among Spanish adolescent populations. The specific goals of this research are:

- **Objective 1:** To ascertain the current state of the knowledge of forgiveness in settings of traditional bullying and cyberbullying among adolescents and to contribute a degree of systematisation to the studies that comprise the current literature on an international level.
- **Objective 2:** To explore the relationship between forgiveness and mental health (symptoms of depression and suicidal thoughts and behaviours), and whether the effect is similar between samples of girls and boys.
- **Objective 3:** To examine the association between forgiveness and the two kinds of bullying (traditional and cyberbullying) and mental health (life satisfaction and suicidal thoughts and behaviours).
- **Objective 4:** To analyse the role of forgiveness in the face of cyberbullying in adolescents who have previously suffered cybervictimisation.

Table 1. Summary of the methodology used in each study

Articles included	Goals	Participants	Variables studied	Procedure
1. The relationship between forgiveness, bullying and cyberbullying in adolescence: A systematic review ¹	Objective 1	18 studies that included adolescents on an international scale	Forgiveness School bullying Cyberbullying	Review of the existing international literature
2. Forgiveness, depression, and suicidal behavior in adolescents: Gender differences in this relationship ²	Objective 2	572 adolescents (49.1% girls) Age range: 13-17	Forgiveness Depression Suicide Personality	Questionnaire administered at 3 secondary schools*
3. Traditional bullying, cyberbullying and mental health in early adolescents: Forgiveness as a protective factor of peer victimisation ³	Objective 3	1,044 adolescents (50.5% girls) Age range: 12-14	Forgiveness Cyberbullying School bullying Suicide Life satisfaction	Questionnaire administered at 6 secondary schools*
4. Forgiveness and cyberbullying in adolescence: Does willingness to forgive help minimise the risk of becoming a cyberbully? ⁴	Objective 4	1,650 students (50.5% girls) Age range: 11-20	Forgiveness Cyberbullying	Questionnaire administered at 6 secondary schools*

Source: adapted from Quintana-Orts (2019).

Note: *Conditions: Voluntary and anonymous participation; certificate of authorisation issued by the University of Málaga Ethics Committee.

Nota 1: QUINTANA-ORTS, C.; REY, L. and WORTHINGTON Jr, E. L. (2019): "The relationship between forgiveness, bullying, and cyberbullying in adolescence: a systematic review", in *Trauma, Violence, and Abuse*, 1524838019869098.

Nota 2: QUINTANA-ORTS, C. and REY, L. (2018): "Forgiveness, depression, and suicidal behavior in adolescents: Gender differences in this relationship", *The Journal of genetic psychology*, 179 (2), pp. 85-89.

Nota 3: QUINTANA-ORTS, C. and REY, L. (2018): "Traditional bullying, cyberbullying and mental health in early adolescents: Forgiveness as a protective factor of peer victimisation", *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 15 (11), p. 2389.

Nota 4: QUINTANA-ORTS, C. and REY, L. (2018): "Forgiveness and cyberbullying in adolescence: Does willingness to forgive help minimise the risk of becoming a cyberbully?", *Computers in Human Behavior*, 81, pp. 209-214.

3. Methodology

This research is founded on four studies that focus on an adolescent population, in line with the four proposed goals. Among these studies, a systematic review was carried out of research analysing the relationships between forgiveness and bullying at school in the adolescent population internationally. This review includes different theoretical approaches and measures of forgiveness as well as different types of bullying, mainly classified as traditional bullying and cyberbullying, in order to find out in greater depth the role of forgiveness among the adolescent population. Then, based on this first study, three empirical studies will be conducted on three samples of Spanish adolescents doing their compulsory secondary education (ESO) and high school (baccalaureate) studies.

Below is a summary of the most relevant data of the methodology used in the studies (Table 1).

Table 2. VIA-Y instrument: forgiveness sub-scale

I can remain friends with people who were cruel to me, if they apologise
Even if someone hurts me, I forgive them if they apologise
I'm quick to forgive people
When people apologise to me, I give them a second chance
Even if someone apologises, I'm still upset with them
Even if someone hurts me, I don't wish to see them suffer
When someone does something wrong to me, I try to take revenge

Source: back translation by Giménez (2010). The original English version of VIA-Y is available in <https://www.authentic happiness.sas.upenn.edu/testcenter>

The instrument used to evaluate forgiveness in studies 2, 3 and 4 was the VIA-Y sub-scale of forgiveness (Peterson and Seligman, 2004; Spanish validation by Gimenez, 2010) composed of seven items that continuously refer to the ability to forgive (Table 2). It includes the concept of benevolence: ("When people ask me for forgiveness, I give them a second chance") and of opposite behaviour to forgiveness (revenge): "When somebody does something to me, I seek revenge".

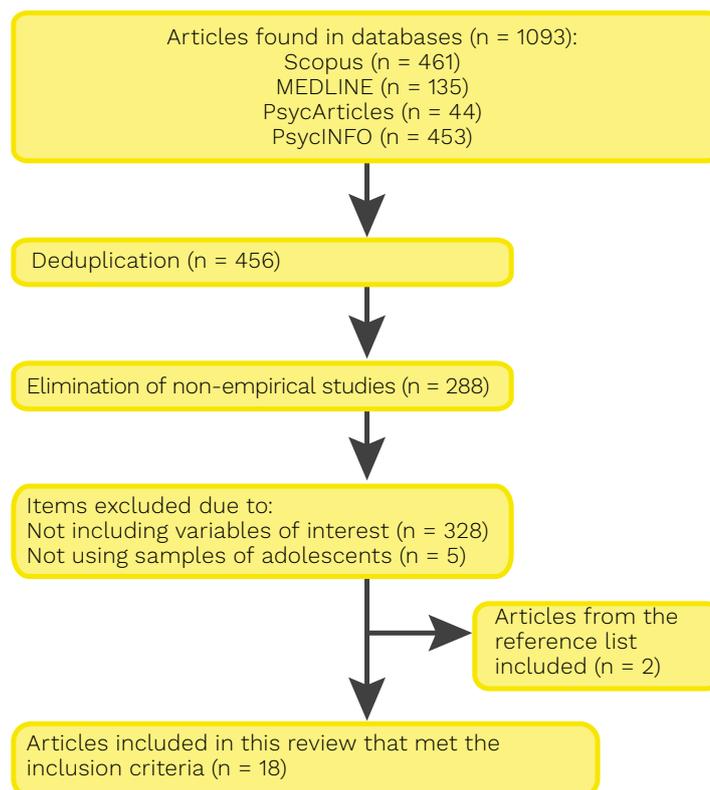
4. Overall results: What effect does forgiveness have on aggressive behaviour and mental health in the adolescent population?

To our knowledge, the four studies offer the first results relating forgiveness, mental health and (cyber)bullying in the Spanish adolescent population (Table 3). The most relevant results obtained from each of the studies are briefly described below:

Study 1. To date, this is the first systematic review that, in a structured manner, collects current empirical evidence on the role of forgiveness in relation to impact on psychological adjustment and the reduction of aggression in situations of bullying and cyberbullying. The results highlighted how research on forgiveness has progressed in recent years and underscores the need to work hard in carrying out basic and applied studies to reduce the problem of bullying and cyberbullying. The findings showed that when victims forgive, they tend to undergo better psychological adjustment and engage in fewer episodes of violent behaviour. Conversely, when victims of bullying react through revenge or avoidance, their psychological adjustment tends to be worse and they have a greater likelihood of getting involved in situations of bullying towards their peers. These results were similar in different cultural contexts, regardless of the methodology used to evaluate forgiveness, and measure traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

Study 2. This study aimed to expand the knowledge of forgiveness and mental health in adolescence, assessing gender differences. In the literature and in line with studies conducted among adults, it was found that girls tend to forgive more and boys tend

Figure 1. Article selection process



Source: prepared by the authors on the basis of data from Quintana-Orts et al. (2019).

to seek revenge. However, this issue is still little studied in the adolescent population. In our study, girls were found to score higher levels of forgiveness compared to boys, but only among boys with high depressive symptomatology did forgiveness seem to reduce the risk of suicide. In line with other studies, these gender differences in forgiveness levels may be due to numerous factors such as gender socialisation or gender-specific coping strategies (Miller et al., 2008; Rey and Extremera, 2016). These results suggest that for boys, forgiveness would help reduce the negative feelings related to the risk of suicide, while it may increase more positive or neutral emotions, thoughts, and behaviours; while for girls there would be other factors rather related to suicide, such as rumination or neuroticism. Together, the data seem to suggest that among boys with high levels of depressive symptomatology, forgiveness interventions could prove highly useful to reduce suicide risk.

Study 3. Some authors consider traditional bullying and cyberbullying as being violent phenomena that share more similar

characteristics than differences and therefore similar intervention programmes can be applied to the two phenomena. However, with regard to forgiveness, analysis had not been conducted in both types of violence in the same investigation and with the same sample. This study covers this limitation as it examines the role of forgiveness between the two forms of bullying and their consequences on mental health. The results confirmed previous research on the protective role of forgiveness in the health of adolescents to reduce the emotional stress and impact of bullying and cyberbullying (Skaar, Freedman, Carlon and Watson, 2016; van Rensburg and Raubenheimer, 2015). The data showed that adolescent victims of traditional bullying and cyberbullying with high levels of forgiveness tend to report higher levels of life satisfaction compared to those with low levels of forgiveness. In turn, students who have suffered traditional bullying but have high levels of forgiveness will display lower levels of suicidal behaviours and thoughts compared to those with low forgiveness levels. However, this buffering role of forgiveness on suicide risk is not found among adolescents suffering cyberbullying.

These differences in suicide risk may be due to the type of severity of the wrongdoing. In direct forms of bullying (i.e. traditional bullying), higher negative emotionality scores are frequently found in comparison with cyberbullying (Gerlsma and Lugtmeyer, 2018). Therefore, traditional bullying and its consequences may be perceived as a more severe wrongdoing and, in this case,

high levels of forgiveness may be more effective in buffering suicide risk levels, while cyberbullying may be considered less severe and other factors may explain its influence on suicide risk.

Study 4. Since cyberbullying is a more recent phenomenon in the scientific literature, studies analysing protective factors that may decrease or prevent such behaviours are still scarce. In addition, the relationship between victimisation and aggression in the field of cyberbullying remains under-explored, although some authors are beginning to point out the importance of emotional coping following this kind of wrongdoing that may be more likely to lead to aggressive reactions and responses. Therefore, the aim of this study was to assess the relationship between forgiveness and cyberbullying in greater depth. The results showed that adolescents who had frequently suffered cyberbullying reflected fewer cyberbullying behaviours when displaying high levels of forgiveness. This would indicate that forgiveness would allow regulating these negative emotional states, avoiding vengeful behaviour and searching for more effective solutions to conflicts, such as seeking help, especially for frequently cybervictimised adolescents.

Table 3. Summary of the results of the studies

Articles included	Results
1. The relationship between forgiveness, bullying and cyberbullying in adolescence: A systematic review	Data from 18 publications point to forgiveness as an important resource for addressing bullying experiences, with benefits for mental health and reduced negative emotions, motivations and behaviours
2. Forgiveness, depression, and suicidal behavior in adolescents: Gender differences in this relationship	Forgiveness affects boys and girls differently: with high levels of depressive symptomatology, boys with higher levels of forgiveness report fewer suicidal behaviours and thoughts
3. Traditional bullying, cyberbullying and mental health in early adolescents: Forgiveness as a protective factor of peer victimisation	Adolescents with higher levels of forgiveness are less susceptible to developing psychological problems after experiencing bullying and cyberbullying at school
4. Forgiveness and cyberbullying in adolescence: Does willingness to forgive help minimise the risk of becoming a cyberbully?	Adolescents who often suffer cyberbullying but are more willing to forgive have a lower tendency towards cyberbullying behaviours

Source: adapted from Quintana-Orts (2019).

5. Discussion and conclusions

Bullying and cyberbullying can be stressful experiences that are difficult to control. In light of their many serious short- and long-term consequences, there is a clear need to focus efforts on identifying and understanding the protective factors that may help adolescents more efficiently to prevent and address cases of bullying and cyberbullying. In particular, knowledge of possible protection factors, which the adolescents themselves can learn and develop to resolve conflicts and wrongdoings with their peers, has become one of the main research goals in various scientific fields. Some of the social and scientific interest in identifying and understanding protective resources has drawn attention to the role of forgiveness in the face of situations of bullying and cyberbullying in adolescence.

5.1. Why is it so important to train forgiveness in adolescence?

Due to the promising findings among adult populations in the international literature on the study of forgiveness, the purpose of this work was to examine and expand on the literature review of adolescent samples. The results obtained from the four studies have helped advance in the conceptualisation and understanding of forgiveness as a protective personal resource in adolescence.

From an exploratory perspective, the studies support the results of research that have linked forgiveness to increased mental health and overall well-being, thus contributing to better psychological adjustment. In general terms, the review carried out in the first study indicates that adolescent samples with higher levels of forgiveness report lower levels of hostility, revenge, and avoidance. This results in a lower desire to harm the aggressor back or to take out their aggression on others, for example, bullying others in response to being a victim of bullying (García-

Vázquez, Valdés-Cuervo and Parra-Pérez, 2020; Park *et al.*, 2013). In turn, this ability to forgive seems to reduce psychological and psychophysiological problems from being bullied or being a bully, and increases adolescents' mental health and well-being (increased self-esteem and life satisfaction; and lower levels of anxiety, depression, risk of suicidal behaviours and ideation, etc.) (Flanagan *et al.*, 2012; León-Moreno, Martínez-Ferrer, Moreno-Ruiz and Musitu-Ferrer, 2019; Quintana *et al.*, 2019).

However, differences have been found depending on gender and the type of harm. In line with studies that find differences between the forgiveness scores of men and women, the second study shows that although girls have higher levels of forgiveness, it is boys who report benefits when depressive symptomatology and suicide risk are taken into account. On the other hand, according to the results of the third study, forgiveness may present differences in the protective role of mental health depending on whether the person has suffered cyberbullying or traditional bullying.

If we pause to analyse the role of forgiveness in the different roles involved in bullying and cyberbullying at school, this work suggests important effects. In the case of the victims, developing forgiveness entails a reduction in the risk of becoming bullies after experiencing cyberbullying. Specifically, training and improving the capacity to forgive could involve a significant reduction in the likelihood of becoming bully-victims (a role which presents the characteristics of victims and bullies together) and the mental health problems that this entails. Since forgiveness does not necessarily imply forgetting, tolerating or justifying, nor a reconciliation, training focusing on the knowledge and understanding of forgiveness will allow better development of this resource that ensures evaluating the change in the regulation of the various psychological processes (i.e. emotions, thoughts, motivations and behaviours) that are being initiated and the associated consequences. In this respect, understanding the difference regarding what forgiveness does and does not involve could serve to protect victims of unhealthy relationships or abuse, helping them discover

the limits in cases of interpersonal harm to them and facilitating more suitable strategies that help them to enforce those limits (for example, informing of and reporting bullying or seeking help).

According to the studies conducted and the existing literature, forgiveness not only has positive effects on victims but can also be beneficial for adolescents playing other roles in bullying and cyberbullying at school. The case of aggressive profiles (i.e., bullies or bully-victims), adolescents may have more difficulty in managing their negative thoughts, emotions and behaviours and use revenge as a regulatory strategy in the face of stressful or unpleasant happenings. Therefore, there is a need to work with this group so that they can receive training that can help them to identify, understand and regulate these motivations of revenge and develop their capacity to forgive. Training in forgiveness, which includes recognising the point of view of the person harmed and empathy, would allow adolescent students to examine and understand possible motivations behind their aggressive behaviours. Likewise, by developing forgiveness, they would benefit from identifying and acknowledging the harm done, realising the negative effect it has caused and their accountability for the negative consequences.

Understanding the difference regarding what forgiveness does and does not involve could serve to protect victims of unhealthy relationships or abuse, helping them discover the limits in cases of interpersonal harm to them and facilitating more suitable strategies that help them to enforce those limits

5.2. Limitations and future lines of research

Despite the importance and novelty of the results obtained, the sample of articles presented displays a number of limitations that should be examined in greater depth as future lines of research.

First, as occurs in the international setting, the results of this work are cross-cutting. This hinders establishing relationships which imply causality between the analysed variables. Thus, the results of this research should be considered with caution; the results require corroboration by means of longitudinal and experimental designs in order to generalise the data. For example, it would be interesting to carry out studies to measure relationships over time within the same group of participants.

Secondly, the different study variables were evaluated using self-report tests which involve certain biases, such as social desirability. In this sense, the estimation of variables of interest may be inaccurate as they consider the adolescent's subjective assessment as the sole measurement. This limitation is also repeated in the international studies. Therefore, it would be advisable for future research to consider including other measurements, such as hetero-reported instruments (by family and/or friends), measurements of skill (i.e. objective assessment of the ability to forgive), or interviews.

Thirdly, the samples used for the studies mainly involved the general population of Andalusia (especially from the province of Málaga). Although the samples used are relatively large and homogeneous insofar as their sociodemographic characteristics, due to geographical restrictions, these samples are not sufficient or representative of the Spanish adolescent population. On this basis, future research should take populations of different autonomous regions and provinces into account, even comparing the results at national level. In addition, it would be advisable, for example, to analyse the different roles involved in bullying (victims, bullies, victim-bullies, bystanders, etc.), and even examine samples

of adolescents with clinical diagnoses resulting from previous situations of bullying and cyberbullying at school (depression, anxiety or suicide risk).

5.3. Practical implications of the results

Despite the limitations that emphasise the need to perform further research in this field, the four studies conducted with large samples of Spanish adolescents provide results that point towards important practical implications.

5.3.1. Educational practice

In general terms, forgiveness has been identified as an essential personal resource for learning how to successfully cope with disappointments, wrongdoings and interpersonal conflicts that arise during everyday social interactions. The development of forgiveness implies coping better with negative emotional states that would lead to a reduction in maladaptive strategies and aggressive behaviour. This, in turn, would reduce negative health consequences. Furthermore, developing forgiveness among adolescents seems to have positive effects in other areas of life (social, ethical, emotional and behavioural) and would foster a more positive climate at school (Hui Tsang and Law, 2011; Skaar *et al.*, 2016).

In educational practice, the results of the studies presented and of previous research are an important basis for implementing intervention programmes based on forgiveness at different Andalusian schools as a tool for consideration within the Spanish Ministry of Education's *Formación para la Paz y la Convivencia*, a training programme to foster peace and coexistence. Also, a forgiveness programme in schools can help foster students' moral development and, therefore, is of high social and educational value for the entire student body, whether or not they have been involved in a school bullying situation.

5.3.2. Clinical practice

In clinical practice, the ability for victimised adolescents to forgive wrongdoings seems to help reduce their levels of anger and revenge and, therefore, psychological problems related to or arising from them (rumination, depression, suicide risk, etc.). Thus, the development of forgiveness becomes a key tool for therapists working with this body, whose goal is to improve psychological well-being in the wake of stressful or traumatic experiences, such as bullying or cyberbullying at school. It should be pointed out that in the adult population, the development of forgiveness has been shown to be even more effective than other traditional treatments to address interpersonal transgressions (Wade *et al.*, 2014).

5.3.3. Implications from adult models

Adult models, such as the family and the educational community, are an important basis for children and adolescents to learn to forgive and apologise (Serrano, Prieto-Ursúa and López, 2018). Interventions could benefit from the involvement and training of families and teachers in promoting forgiveness from a young age. Sometimes, some of the recommendations made by adults are "if they hit you, you hit them back harder" (i.e. revenge) or "if they insult you again, ignore them and you'll see how they tire" (i.e. avoidance). These suggestions can lead to learning little adaptive or unhealthy strategies and may spread to other areas and problems of the adolescent's life. As set out in various studies (Ahmed and Braithwaite, 2006; Watson, Rapee and Todorov, 2017), recommendations concerning forgiveness and advice to forgive following harm not only provide benefits for the victims, but also benefit the rest of students as they would prevent vicious cycles of violence and revenge in the classroom.

6. Key aspects for the training of forgiveness

Due to its recent addition as a study area in adolescence, interventions carried out regarding forgiveness are still scarce. For adults, strongly science-based programmes exist to work on forgiveness. The two most commonly used programmes enjoying the greatest support are the REACH programme, developed by Everett L. Worthington, Jr.; and the programme by Robert Enright and Richard Fitzgibbons, which focuses on the clinical field and consists of four phases.

For the adolescent population, programmes have been designed based on the principles and steps developed by the aforementioned authors. Freedman (2018), through 31 forgiveness sessions held with American adolescents aged 15 to 19 years, finds higher levels of knowledge of forgiveness and hope in the intervention group as well as lower levels of depression and anxiety. With Greek pre-adolescents, Vassilopoulos, Koutsoura, Brouzos and Tamami (2018) found that, after training in forgiveness, adolescents displayed

lower levels of depression and anger, greater life satisfaction, a better understanding of forgiveness and a more positive attitude towards people who assaulted. Through the Hero programme (Mesurado, Distefano, Robiolo and Richaud, 2019) carried out with Argentine adolescents online, participants trained in forgiveness together with other socio-emotional resources such as gratitude and empathy. Upon completing the programme, the adolescents showed higher pro-social behaviour, primarily with relatives and strangers.

In the area of sexual or physical abuse, Rahman, Iftikhar, Kim and Enright (2018) reported that, after one year of intervention, programme participants showed higher levels of forgiveness and hope, and lower levels of anger. In the context of peer violence, Park *et al.* (2013) developed a forgiveness programme with victimised girls who displayed aggressive reactions and found that training in forgiveness led to an improvement in levels of empathy as well as reductions in levels of anger, hostility and aggressive behaviour.

On the basis of the above-mentioned interventions and the proposals developed with adults and adolescents, there are

Table 4. Key aspects in the training of forgiveness

General aspects	Specific aspects
Acknowledgement and analysis of the wrongdoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge that harm has been done. • Acknowledge the significance of the harm done. • Analyse negative emotions (anger denial, repression of anger, situation avoidance) • Evaluate levels of emotional pain: consider the range of emotions when recalling the wrongdoing
Facilitation of empathy with the perpetrator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the perpetrator as a human being • Understand the perpetrator's vulnerabilities • Work using the memories of previous experiences when we were forgiven
Facilitation of empathy with the victim	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and recognise the harm done and the negative impact of the consequences • Acknowledge responsibility for one's own actions and their consequences for others
Understand personal and unilateral benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand what it is to forgive and what forgiveness does not imply to foster healthy relationships • Know that an apology helps, but is not required for forgiveness • Know that reconciliation is not strictly necessary
Educational community and families as models of forgiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From a young age, adult models have a powerful effect on children to learn to apologise and foster forgiveness
Duration of the intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although programmes involving few sessions have certain effects, programmes lasting 12 weeks or more have tended to reap greater benefits

Source: adapted from Quintana-Orts and Rey (2019).

a number of key issues that should be considered for training and developing forgiveness. Based on previous work (Quintana-Orts and Rey, 2019), Table 4 below summarises some key aspects:

Considering the scientific evidence to date, fostering forgiveness may prove a useful and even complementary component in intervention programmes against bullying and cyberbullying, which should be included in educational and clinical practices working

with adolescents. In addition, increasing forgiveness would favour a more positive atmosphere in the classroom, healthier coexistence with peers and improved psychological well-being. Ultimately, more positive development of the human being. However, there are few interventions with scientific evidence and even fewer proposals focusing on the adolescent population. This opens a novel field of research in contexts of bullying and cyberbullying at school that requires further exploring.

7. Recommended reading and websites

Books

ENRIGHT, R. (2017): *Las 8 claves del perdón*. Barcelona: Elefthería.

PRIETO-URSÚA, M. (2017): *Perdón y Salud: Introducción a la psicología del perdón*. Madrid: Universidad Pontificia Comillas.

Notable articles

DÍAZ-FIGUEROA, P. AND PRIETO URSÚA, M. (2020): «El desarrollo del perdón en niños», *Revista Clínica Contemporánea*, 11, pp. 1-15 <<https://repositorio.comillas.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/11531/45583/El%20desarrollo%20del%20perd%C3%B3n%20en%20ni%C3%B1os.pdf?sequence=-1&isAllowed=y>>.

QUINTANA-ORTS, C. AND REY, L. (2019): «El perdón en el contexto educativo: recomendaciones prácticas para su desarrollo en las escuelas», *Voces de la Educación*, pp. 129-143 <<https://www.revista.vocesdelaeducacion.com.mx/index.php/voces/article/view/216>>.

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Websites, blogs and others

Webpage of the expert Everett L., Worthington, Jr. and his psychoeducational programme called REACH: <http://www.evworthington-forgiveness.com/reach-forgiveness>

Forgiveness phases and training materials from the Enright model: <https://internationalforgiveness.com/>

Podcast “Perdono, Pero No Olvido” del European Institute of Positive Psychology (EIPP): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2JGmKuEtWQc&ab_channel=InstitutoEuropeodePsicolog%C3%ADaPositiva

Website of the European Institute of Positive Psychology for courses, questionnaires and news: <https://www.authenticchappiness.sas.upenn.edu/es>

Resources and activities of the project Emotional Education provided by the CEIP Carmen Hernández Guarch (Madrid) <http://blogcolegiochg.blogspot.com/2018/03/marzo-y-abril-trabajamos-el-perdon.html>

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