Psychology, Society & Education (2022) 14(3), 38-47

Psychology, Society & Education

www.uco.es/ucopress/ojs/index.php/psye

A comparative study of youth victimization during COVID-19 lockdowns in Mexico and Russia

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Keywords

COVID-19
Bullying
Victimization
Mexico
Russia
Lockdown
Cross-cultural
Online-victimization
Perpetrator

Abstract

This study investigated the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic school closures on peer victimization in Mexico and Russia. In addition to effects on academic performance and attendance, the lockdowns interfered with usual peer socialization experiences and interactions. We examined the effects on the problem of bullying victimization. Since all measures were originally in English, factorial invariance was established at the outset. Comparisons by country for frequency of victimization, type of victimization, harmfulness of the victimization experiences, location of the victimization, and relationships to the perpetrator, were calculated. Although the countries were similar in many ways, significant differences were detected on several items; one notable difference was the relationship to the perpetrator. In Mexico, the most common bully was siblings, while in Russia, the highest rank was for parents. Significant differences reflected the cultural contexts of each country; these cultural influences are discussed.

Un estudio comparativo de la victimización en jóvenes durante el confinamiento por COVID-19 en México y Rusia

Palabras clave

COVID-19
Acoso
Victimización
México
Rusia
Confinamiento
Transcultural
Victimización en línea
Perpetrador

Resumen

Este estudio investigó cómo el cierre de escuelas por la pandemia de COVID-19 impactó en la victimización entre pares en México y Rusia. Además de los efectos en el rendimiento académico y la asistencia, la cuarentena interfirió con las interacciones comunes de socialización entre pares. Se examinaron los efectos en la victimización por acoso escolar. Debido a que todas las medidas estaban originalmente en inglés, se estableció la invariancia factorial de las medidas. Se calcularon comparaciones por país para la frecuencia de la victimización, el tipo de victimización, lo dañino de las experiencias de victimización, el lugar de la victimización y la relación con el perpetrador. Aunque los países eran similares en muchos aspectos, se detectaron diferencias significativas en varios elementos; una diferencia notable fue la relación con el perpetrador. En México, los acosadores más comunes fueron los hermanos y hermanas, mientras que en Rusia fueron los progenitores. Las diferencias significativas reflejaron los contextos culturales de cada país; estas influencias culturales son discutidas.

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Cite this article as: Bochaver, A. A., Navarro-Rodríguez, C. D., Korneev, A., Lagarda, Á., Khlomov, K. D., Vera, Á., & Bauman, S. (2022). A comparative study of youth victimization during COVID-19 lockdowns in Mexico and Russia. *Psychology, Society & Education, 14*(3), 38-47. https://doi.org/10.21071/psye.v14i3.15047
Received: 23 June 2022. *First review*: 23 October 2022. *Accepted:* 1 November 2022.
ISSN 1989-709X

Impact of the pandemic on schools

The rapid spread of COVID-19 around the world in 2020 affected all aspects of everyday life. Education was suddenly disrupted: in-person classes in schools for more than 1.57 billion students from 190 countries were canceled (Giannini et al., 2020). In the past, there have been school closures due to localized disasters (Marcotte & Hemelt, 2008; Thamtanajit, 2020), but the transition to distance learning in 2020 was unmatched in scale. Although the intent was to continue education while in-person classes could not be held, the impact of the shift was uneven, due to inequities in access to digital devices and to the internet, and the unavailability of adequate study spaces at home (Dietz & Mateos, 2020).

In spring 2020, the authors of this paper provided online access to student questionnaires, investigating the impact of the pandemic lockdowns on peer aggression and psychosocial functioning. For this study, two countries were selected: Mexico and Russia. They are on opposite sides of the globe, speak different languages, have different cultures, governmental structures, and educational systems. Both countries had large samples and the researchers had established professional relationships. By examining two such diverse cultures, we sought to identify commonalities and differences in children's victimization during lockdowns. Health officials expect that this pandemic will not be the last (Plump, 2021; Smitham & Glassman, 2021), so knowledge gained from studying the COVID-19 pandemic may be useful in the future.

The abrupt transition to online education did not allow sufficient time to prepare schools and students. This change affected students in many ways; academic engagement and performance declined (e.g., Zierer, 2021), as did attendance (Dorn et al., 2021). Children and adolescents spent more time at home when many usual activities that provided enjoyment and socialization were not available. The current study examined the prevalence and dynamics of victimization during lockdowns in Mexico and Russia.

There is consensus among researchers that being involved in bullying puts youth at elevated risk for negative outcomes, including symptoms of mental health disorders (Arseneault et al., 2010; Copeland et al., 2013). Although bullying has been studied world-wide, the focus has largely been on bullying in school. Most bullying occurs in school because of the continuous contact with peer groups (e.g., Costa et al., 2015). What is less often investigated is bullying within the family. The standard definition of bullying applies repeated deliberate harmful acts toward an individual with less power. We hypothesized that bullying within the family would be prevalent during the pandemic because youth were isolated from peer groups and had increased contact with family.

Pre COVID-19, data from the 2018 PISA database found that self-reports of frequent victimization were 22.9% for Mexico and 36.2% for Russia (Hosozawa et al., 2021). Other studies (e.g., Smith et al., 2019), using HBSC 2013-2014 and EUKO data, listed Russia among the countries with highest rates of bullying. During COVID-19 Vaillancourt et al. (2021) reported that in a sample of Canadian students in grades 5 - 12, rates of student-reported victimization were significantly higher prior to the lockdowns, although the decline was not as great for cyberbullying as for other forms.

Impact of the pandemic on families with children

The pandemic presented many families with novel challenges. The economic and social changes increased risks of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and other mental health problems (Baird et al., 2020; Tamarit et al., 2020). Increased financial stress, disrupted routines, lack of control, ongoing frustrations, social distancing rules, substance misuse, and lack of access to community supports contributed to an increasing level of interpersonal aggression and child maltreatment (Griffith, 2020). The data from different countries show an increase in demand for domestic violence services during the pandemic (Poate, 2020), as well as an increase in domestic abuse callouts (Cappa & Jijon, 2021; Usher et al., 2020).

Parental stress, high anxiety, and depressive symptoms are associated with higher risk of child abuse by parents (Brown et al., 2020). For children from vulnerable or hostile family environments, not attending school is a risk factor for violence from family members (Bradbury-Jones & Isham, 2020; Usher et al., 2020). The lockdown restricted contact between children and protective adults, such as teachers and school counselors, who most commonly report cases of suspected child maltreatment (Kang & Jain, 2020).

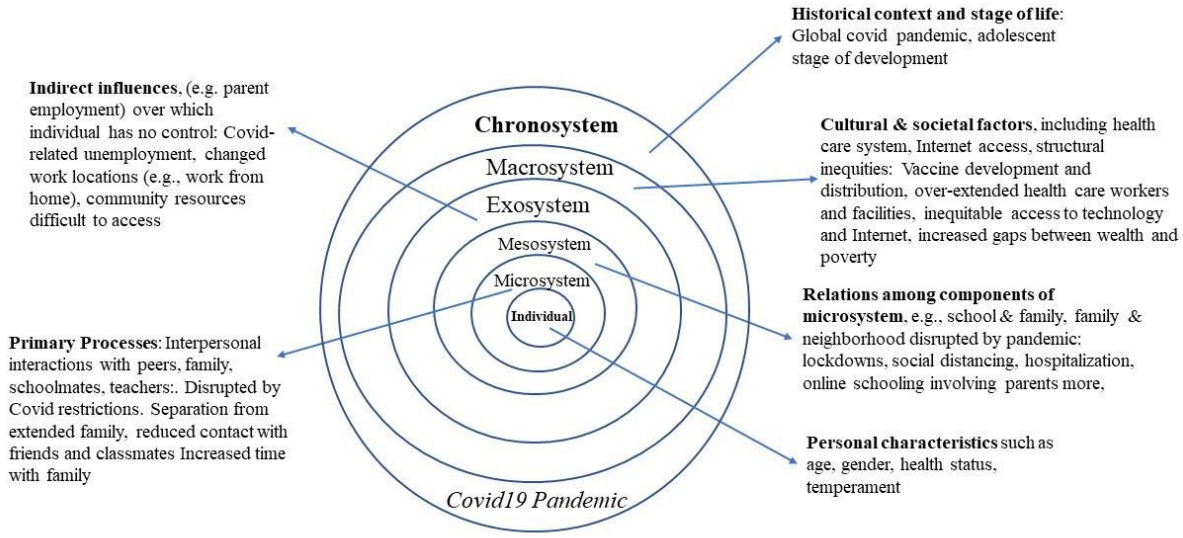
Although schools may be the locus of bullying for some youth, others may find schools to be safe havens (Haleemunnissa et al., 2021). Wolke and Skew (2012) found that nearly 50% of their participants reported that a sibling had bullied them or had both bullied and been bullied by a sibling each month. Furthermore, whereas peer victimization declines over adolescence, sibling bullying stabilizes between age 10 and 15. Children who are bullied at home and at school have significantly higher prevalence of emotional and behavioral problems than those who are victimized in either context (Sisler & Ittel, 2015). When members of a family share a living space, the increased contact makes it difficult for the victim to avoid or evade the perpetrator (Berry & Adams, 2016).

Cultural contexts

In March 2020, classes in Russian schools were switched to distance formats using several online platforms, or by providing paper-and-pencil assignments at the beginning of the week and collecting them at the end of the week (Ozornina et al., 2022). Similarly, in Mexico, all schools were closed in mid-March 2020 and changed to a distance learning program called *Aprende en Casa* (Learn at Home), delivered via television (Dietz & Mateos, 2020), and supported on some digital platforms. Note that in 2018, prior to the pandemic, about 10% of school students in Russia and 25% in Mexico reported that they did not have access to a quiet place to study (OECD, 2020).

Figure 1

Applying the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) to the pandemic



Theoretical framework

To compare these countries, we consider Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) to be the most relevant. We conceptualize youth adjustment and well-being in the context of the significant changes associated with the pandemic in all systems. Figure 1 describes the overlapping systems that affect individual functioning and identifies some ways in which that system was impacted by the pandemic.

As seen in Figure 1, the macrosystem is the layer that contains cultural values and practices that exert an indirect influence on individuals through their effect on the broader social system. We examine a global event (chronosystem) as it was experienced in two different cultural contexts (macrosystem). The components of the macrosystem set the stage for how the pandemic affected each country.

Although the Hofstede & Bond (1984) model of cultural dimensions is frequently cited in cross-cultural studies, we found the Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (Haerpfer et al., 2022) to be more relevant. The model conceptualizes cultures along two dimensions: Traditional vs. Secular Values and Survival vs. Self-Expression values. Russia is higher on secular values, whereas Mexico is closer to the traditional pole, but on survival vs. self-expression, Mexico is in the mid-range of countries on self-expression while Russia is closer to the survival pole (Haerpfer et al., 2022).

Research questions

From these theoretical perspectives, we investigated the following research questions, with each analysis including comparisons by country. First, what is the prevalence of various forms of violence against children during the period of lockdown? Second, how does the subjective experience of harm from the bullying experience differ by country? Third, which relationships to the perpetrator are most frequently reported? Fourth, how prominent was online victimization compared to victimization in other locations? Lastly, how do the cultural differences contribute to our understanding of the findings?

Methodology

Participants

The participants from Mexico, primarily from state of Sonora (n = 657) were 307 females (46.7%), 206 males (31.4%), one non-binary (0.2%), two unspecified (0.3%) and 141 missing (21.5%). The Russian sample, from several areas (Krasnoyarsk and Voronezh), as well as Moscow (n = 427), comprised 190 females (44.5%), 126 males (29.5%), 15 non-binary (3.5%), three unspecified (0.3%), and 93 were missing (21.8%). The age of participants from Mexico ranged from 12 to 17 years (M = 14.8 years, SD = 1.9). Russian respondents' ages ranged from 10 to 18 years (M = 15.4 years, SD = 1.92).

Measures

All measures were originally in English. They were translated into Spanish or Russian using standard practice for translation: the English version was translated into the new language by a bilingual translator, and back-translated by another bilingual translator who did not view the original English version. The original version and the back-translations were compared, and any differences were resolved via discussion among the translators (Geisinger, 1994; Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2004). In all cases, modifications to the surveys were made as needed to conform to the local language conventions and the cultural context.

We used the eight-item victimization scale from the *Student Aggression and Victimisation Questionnaire* (SAVQ) (Skrzypiec, 2015) When a participant answered a question *While*

in lockdown, I was… [type of victimization] with *yes*, they were asked follow-up questions to assess frequency, level of harm, persons involved, and location of the experience. Response options for the frequency items were on a 7-point scale from 0 (*never*) to 7 (*more than three times a week*). The harmfulness item had response options from (1) *not harmful at all* to (5) *extremely harmful*. Reliability coefficients for these scales were acceptable in the development sample (Menin et al., 2021); for the current sample, $a = .7$ for the frequency scale, and $a = .77$, for the harmfulness scale. For the item inquiring about the respondent's relationship to the victim, eight dichotomous options were provided (*best friends*, *classmate / peer*, *parent(s)*, *friends*, *brother(s) / sister(s)*, *teacher*, *no relationship*, and *other*).

Because our data were from two countries, it was necessary to test for factorial invariance to ensure the same construct was being measured across countries (e.g., Samara et al., 2019). For the main scale, we considered the questions *While in lockdown, I was… [type of victimization]* to comprise a general scale of victimization and tested a unifactorial model. A multi-group confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using the Lavaan package (version 0.6-10 in R version. 4.1.1) (Rosseel, 2012). We used the weighted least squares means, and variance adjusted (WLSMV) estimator for modeling categorical or binary data. We tested for configural, metric, and scalar invariance and obtained good fit indices for all models (see Table 1). These results demonstrated partial invariance of the scale across Russian and Mexican participants.

Procedures

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from appropriate entities in both countries; parental consent was obtained, and youth assent was required. Using non-probabilistic snowball sampling through the networks of the research groups, an online questionnaire was distributed in Mexico and Russia during June and July 2020. An invitation to participate was sent through social networks to researchers of education, authorities of schools, teachers, directors, and parents of students aged 12 to 18. This invitation provided information about the aim of the study, privacy and data protection, a contact to resolve concerns, clarification of parental consent, a link to the online parent consent form, and another link to access the questionnaire for the student once parental consent had been obtained.

Data analysis

The statistical analyses were conducted in R v. 4.1.1. (R Core Team, 2020). Chi-squared analysis was used to compare categorical data and the Mann-Whitney test was used to compare the ordinal data. A *t*-test was used to compare prevalence rates for victimization. Preliminary analyses revealed that gender differences were significant on only one item: spreading rumors, with females having higher numbers in both countries. Gender by country interactions were not significant. Therefore, we did not include gender in subsequent analyses.

Results

First, we determined the prevalence of victimization experienced by participants during lockdown conditions 73% (95% *CI* [69.61; 76.39]) of Mexican and 47% (95% *CI* [42.27; 51.73]) of Russian participants indicated they had not experienced any of the eight types of bullying during the lockdown; an additional 12.5% (95% *CI* [9.97; 15.03]) and 21.1%, (95% *CI* [17.23; 24.79]) respectively reported experiencing only one type. Thus, overall prevalence was marginally less than that found in the PISA 2018 data (OECD, 2019). The total prevalence was calculated by summing responses (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes* to descriptions of eight types of bullying and responding to the question. To compare the prevalence the total rates by country, a *t*-test for independent samples was conducted (equal variances not assumed): $t\,(753.71) = 7.018$, $p > .001$, $d = .46$. The mean of the total rate for Mexican participants was 0.56 and for Russia, 1.16.

To determine how the types of bullying vary between the two countries, χ^2 values were calculated using the mean scores for each item on the questionnaire. Adolescents from Russia reported significantly higher values on the three items shown in bold in Table 2.

The frequency of being bullied showed significant differences by country on three items, *How often were you teased or laughed at?* ($\chi^2 = 22.278$, $p = .002$), *How often were you hit, kicked, or pushed around?*

The differences between the frequencies of the different types of bullying were tested using the Mann-Whitney *U* Test. The greatest difference was on the item, *How often were you left out by another person?* ($U = 1906.5$, $p = .004$). For all items, the frequencies were higher in Russia (see Table 3 for details).

Table 1

Fit indices and factor loadings for victimization scale

Models	χ^2	*CFI*	*TLI*	*RMSEA*	*SRMR*
General model	106.08, *df* = 20*	.95	.93	.06 [.05, .08]	.09
Configural	61.92, *df* = 40	.99	.98	.03 [.01, .05]	.07
Metric	63.23, *df* = 48	.99	.99	.02 [0, 0.4]	.09
Scalar	146.84, *df* = 47*	.94	.93	.06 [.05, .07]	.09

Note. χ^2 = chi-square test; *df* = degree freedom; *CFI* = Comparative Fit Index; *TLI* = Tucker–Lewis Index; *RMSEA* = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; *SRMR* = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.
* $p < .001$.

Table 2

Types of bullying experienced

When I was in lockdown…	Response	Mexico (%)	Russia (%)	χ^2
I was teased or laughed at	Yes	61 (9.28)	35 (8.2)	0.379
	No	596 (90.72)	392 (91.8)	
I was picked-on	Yes	45 (6.85)	27 (6.32)	0.116
	No	612 (93.15)	400 (93.68)	
I was called names.	Yes	58 (8.83)	64 (14.99)	9.833*
	No	599 (91.17)	363 (85.01)	
I was left out by another person(s)	Yes	45 (6.85)	117 (27.4)	85.99**
	No	612 (93.15)	310 (72.6)	
Another person(s) spread rumors (lies) about me	Yes	73 (11.11)	35 (8.2)	2.45
	No	584 (88.89)	392 (91.8)	
I was threatened	Yes	14 (2.13)	28 (6.56)	13.615**
	No	643 (97.87)	399 (93.44)	
I got hit, kicked, or pushed around	Yes	27 (4.11)	17 (3.98)	0.011
	No	630 (95.89)	410 (96.02)	
Someone was mean to me	Yes	42 (6.39)	171 (40.05)	185.65**
	No	615 (93.6)	256 (59.95)	

Note. χ^2 = chi-square test.
* $p < .01$. * $p < .001$.

Table 3

Bullying Frequency

When I was in lockdown…	Response	Mexico (%)	Russia (%)	χ^2
I was teased or laughed at	Yes	61 (9.28)	35 (8.2)	0.379
	No	596 (90.72)	392 (91.8)	
I was picked-on	Yes	45 (6.85)	27 (6.32)	0.116
	No	612 (93.15)	400 (93.68)	
I was called names.	Yes	58 (8.83)	64 (14.99)	9.833*
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Note. χ^2 = chi-square test.
* $p < .01$. * $p < .001$.

The same test was used to compare scores of perceived harmfulness and detected significant differences for three types of victimization as shown in Table 4. Russian participants had higher scores on being physically bullied while the Mexican students reported that being threatened was most harmful.

Because many experts predicted an increase in cyberbullying when face-to-face contact was curtailed due to lockdowns (e.g., Almeida et al., 2022), we considered the location of the victimization. In both countries, *home* was the most common location, as expected (see Table 5 for details). Results regarding victims' relationship to the perpetrators of violence showed that Russian adolescents named parents as the main aggressors most often, while Mexican participants most often chose their siblings (Table 6).

Discussion

Violence against children is a public health problem, and bullying is one form of violence. OECD determined rates of exposure to bullying in school in 2015 for countries around the world. The percentage of students reporting any kind of bullying act at least a few times per month was 20.2% in Mexico and 27.5% in Russia. The average rate in OECD countries was 18.7% (OECD, 2017). Since peer interactions at school were curtailed during the pandemic, it is reasonable to expect that bullying would be reduced or modified due to restricted access to schoolmates. However, many experts expressed concern that cyberbullying would increase when in-person opportunities for bullying decreased. We found that the location of bullying shifted from school, which decreased significantly from 2019-2021 (Martinez & Temkin, 2021) to home, and the main perpetrators were the closest people to the children –their parents and siblings.

This study examined bullying during the COVID-19 lockdowns. Because bullying is considered to be a universal problem, we were interested in comparing findings from two different cultural contexts: Mexico and Russia. We anticipated that although the pandemic and the shift to online education occurred in both countries, the cultural contexts would affect

Table 4

Relative harmfulness of victimization

	Mexico			Russia			
Item During the lock-down, how harmful was it to you…	*n*	*Mdn*	*M (SD)*	*n*	*Mdn*	*M (SD)*	Mann-Whitney
To be teased or laughed at?	61	1	0.77 (0.72)	35	1	1.11 (0.99)	882
Picked on?	42	1	0.9 (0.8)	27	1	1.37 (0.69)	368.5*
To be called names?	58	1	1.12 (1.04)	64	1	0.95 (0.93)	2013
Being left out?	44	1	1.18 (1.04)	117	1	0.97 (1.02)	2918.5
To have rumours (lies) spread about you?	72	1	1.15 (0.94)	35	1	1.31 (1.1)	1183
To be threatened?	14	2	1.86 (0.77)	28	1	0.96 (1.04)	294.5*
To be hit, kicked, or pushed around?	24	1	0.96 (0.96)	17	1	1.41 (1.28)	164.5
To be treated meanly?	42	1	1.5 (1.11)	171	1	0.8 (0.9)	4896**

Note. n = number of participants who responded to each item; M = median; SD = standard deviation.
* $p < .01$. ** $p < .001$.

Table 5

Locations of victimization experience by country

During the lockdown, where were you…	Mexico (%)	Russia (%)
At home		
Teased or laughed at?	55.7	65.7
Picked on	62.2	63
Called names	65.5	73.4
Threatened	42.9	46.4
Hit, kicked, or pushed around	74.1	76.5
Treated meanly	64.3	67.3
Online		
Having rumors or lies spread	42.5	40
Left out	31.1	67.5

Note. Other locations (at school, to / from school, elsewhere) had low rates and are not included in this table.

Table 6

Percentages of relationship of perpetrator to victim

Item	Being teased or laughed at		Being picked on		Being called names		Being left out		Having rumours (lies) spread		Being threatened		Being hit, kicked or pushed around		Being treated meanly		Total	
	MX *n* = 61	RU *n* = 35	MX *n* = 45	RU *n* = 27	MX *n* = 58	RU *n* = 64	MX *n* = 45	RU *n* = 117	MX *n* = 73	RU *n* = 35	MX *n* = 14	RU *n* = 28	MX *n* = 27	RU *n* = 17	MX *n* = 42	RU *n* = 171	MX *n* = 177	RU *n* = 226
best friend(s)	8.2	14.3	2.2	7.4	**1.7**	**14.1**	**13.3**	**28.2**	6.8	11.4	0	3.6	0	5.9	7.1	11.1	**10.2**	**22.1**
classmate/peer	6.6	14.3	6.7	14.8	6.9	20.3	20	31.6	15.1	20	0	17.9	0	11.8	4.8	12.9	**14.1**	**27.4**
parent(s)	**23**	**54.3**	**24.4**	**66.7**	32.8	46.9	17.8	23.9	5.5	8.6	**7.1**	**39.3**	**11.1**	**41.2**	31	45.6	**23.7**	**46.0**
Friend(s)	16.4	20	6.7	14.8	24.1	14.1	22.2	34.2	12.3	14.3	0	7.1	11.1	23.5	16.7	12.9	22.0	27.0
brother(s)/sister(s)	44.3	37.1	**46.7**	**22.2**	41.4	35.9	17.8	13.7	4.1	2.9	**28.6**	**0**	59.3	29.4	35.7	28.1	35.6	27.9
Teacher(s)	1.6	2.9	0	7.4	1.7	1.6	**0**	**10.3**	**0**	**5.7**	0	3.6	0	5.9	0	3.5	**0.6**	**8.8**
no relationship	13.1	22.9	15.6	11.1	19	9.4	11.1	9.4	45.2	25.7	28.6	25	3.7	5.9	11.9	12.9	**31.6**	**21.7**
other	16.4	11.4	11.1	7.4	13.8	10.9	**33.3**	**8.5**	28.8	22.9	**35.7**	**7.1**	18.5	0	50	11.1	**34.5**	**16.8**

Note. MX = Mexican students; *RU* = Russian students; *n* = number of participants who responded to that item.
Since a respondent could select several persons, the sum may be greater than 100.
Significant differences (at the level $p < .05$ according to Chi-square test) are in bold font.

the dynamics of the victimization. The bioecological theory aptly conceptualized these influences as overlapping layers of influence, all of which were features encompassed within the chronosystem. See Figure 1 for examples.

Our findings revealed that there were significant differences on many of the variables (types and frequency of victimization, perceived harmfulness of the victimization) in our analyses, with almost all showing higher rates in Russia than Mexico, which is consistent with pre-pandemic research. In both countries, the location of bullying was primarily at home, which was expected. A notable and unexpected finding was that Russian participants more often identified their parents as perpetrators, while the Mexican sample selected siblings.

Theoretical explanations

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map (Haerpfer et al., 2022) described above shows Russia is higher on secular values whereas Mexico is closer to the traditional pole; Mexico is in the mid-range of countries whereas Russia is closer to the survival pole. The greater focus on survival needs in Russia implies competition for scarce resources. Those with more power and higher social status (or those seeking those) may find that bullying others is a survival mechanism, providing more access to necessities. These explanations are of course speculation, and future research is needed to test these hypotheses.

Our finding that Russian adolescents in this study were victimized more by parents, whereas Mexican participants identified siblings as the most common perpetrators might be explained by the different traditions in two countries. Russian families are more hierarchical and authoritarian, and rely on harsher disciplinary measures (Lyubchenko et al., 2012) while Mexican parents are more lenient and expressive.

A qualitative study of Russian immigrants to Mexico related their perceptions of differences between the two countries (Lyubchenko et al., 2012). The participants agreed that both cultures place a high value on families. The Russian subjects considered Russian teachers and parents to be stricter and more demanding, while from their perspective, Mexican teachers and parents are more lenient. The participants noted that strict discipline for misbehavior at home might include spanking, which they see as sometimes necessary to impart the importance of respect and teach the children the difference between good and bad. We speculate that this more authoritarian approach to child-rearing may account for our finding that Russian participants identified parents significantly more often than their Mexican counterparts for being teased or laughed at, being picked on, being threatened, and being hit, kicked, or pushed around. Furthermore, the authoritarian and punitive style of parental discipline has been associated with bullying behavior in children and adolescents (Dickson et al., 2019).

In Mexican families, with more children per family (PRB, 2022; Nation Master, n.d.) and perhaps a more lenient parenting style, siblings may develop a hierarchical system, often with older siblings having more power than younger ones. Older siblings are sometimes parentified, and expected to discipline younger children, which increases their power differential (Cicirelli, 1994). Skinner and Kowalski (2013) noted that sibling bullying is very common and normative; 58% of their participants reported that bullying by siblings is acceptable and 85% believed it is expected. They observed that bullying by siblings has been associated with internalizing, externalizing, and behavioral problems. Importantly, a large proportion of their participants reported that parents were present when the bullying occurred. Note that children often replicate their roles with siblings in their interactions with peers. Furthermore, engaging in sibling bullying increases the likelihood of involvement in school bullying, often as bully / victims.

Our finding that parents and siblings are part of the bullying dynamic in Russia and Mexico during the lockdowns does not mean that such interactions do not occur when school is in-person. Within-family bullying influences peer bullying and victimization (Wolke & Skew, 2012). This suggests that school personnel should consider family factors when attempting to reduce bullying in schools.

Our results correspond with the pre-COVID-19 data, according to which the level of bullying victimization in Mexico was much lower than in Russia (OECD, 2019). We suggest that the characteristics of the proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) occurring in (Wolke & Skew, 2012) microsystems of both countries are affected by cultural differences, but the specific processes have yet to be identified.

Limitations

Although the sample sizes were adequate for most analyses, they were convenience samples that may not be representative of the populations. It is impossible to determine what proportion of invitees chose to participate; there may be systematic differences between those who accepted and declined participation. Furthermore, although the overall sample sizes were adequate, when examining variables related to victims, the sample size is reduced, and some cell sizes are quite small, making it difficult to detect significant differences.

Conclusions

In addition to the academic function of schools, they provide opportunities and experiences to interact with peers, develop friendships, practice teamwork, receive support from non-familial adults, and hopefully experience a sense of belonging. The lockdowns interfered with these activities, and it is important to understand how the restrictions impact youth around the world. One phenomenon that is a source of concern is victimization. Our study examined aspects of victimization in two diverse cultures; although some participants in both countries experienced victimization, the cultural context played a role in the dynamics of those events. This knowledge might assist educators in addressing the needs of students during lockdowns. It will be useful for future research to examine the psychological resources –sources of strength, emotional support, resilience, which were protective to children during the lockdown.

Our finding that bullying occurs within families suggests that when children are involved in school bullying, the family situation should be considered when designing interventions. Other agencies serving families should also be mindful that bullying and violence at home places children at greater risk for engaging in bullying at school, and every effort should be made to provide families with information and strategies for curtailing violence and bullying at home.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to acknowledge the leadership and efforts of Dr. Grace Skrzypiec from Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia who designed the questionnaire and organized international researchers.

Conflict of interest, statements and declarations

All research was approved by the Ethical Standards entity at their respective institutions. Parental consent was obtained for all minor participants; student assent was also obtained. The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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