

Bullying assessment tools in prevention and intervention programs in Latin America

Instrumentos de evaluación del acoso escolar en programas de prevención e intervención en Latinoamérica

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Summary

Bullying and cyberbullying are challenging situations for health systems worldwide; assessment is a necessary mechanism for establishing diagnoses and guiding interventions. The objective of this study was to identify the assessment tools used in bullying and cyberbullying prevention or intervention programs implemented in Latin America with primary and secondary school students. A search was conducted for articles (Spanish and English) published in the last 20 years (2004–2024) in the databases PubMed, Web of Science, Scielo, and Scopus. Twelve articles were included, indicating that the instruments used assess dimensions such as victimization, perpetration, justification of bullying, and prosocial behavior, as well as the roles in which students are immersed. The reliability and validity of the instruments are discussed, and the development and validation of robust and culturally sensitive tools is suggested.

Keywords: Bullying; assessment; childhood; adolescence.

Resumen

El bullying y ciberbullying son situaciones desafiantes para los sistemas de salud a nivel mundial; la evaluación se constituye en un mecanismo necesario para establecer diagnósticos y orientar las intervenciones. El objetivo de este trabajo fue identificar las herramientas de evaluación utilizadas en programas de prevención o intervención frente al acoso escolar y ciberacoso que se implementaron en Latinoamérica con estudiantes de primaria y secundaria. Se desarrolló una búsqueda de artículos (español e inglés) publicados en los últimos 20 años (2004-2024) en las bases de datos PubMed, Web of Science, Scielo y Scopus. Se incluyeron 12 artículos, que permiten señalar que los instrumentos aplicados evalúan dimensiones como victimización, perpetración, justificación del acoso escolar y comportamiento prosocial, así como los roles en los que están inmersos los estudiantes. Se discute sobre la confiabilidad y validez de los instrumentos, y se sugiere el desarrollo y validación de herramientas robustas y culturalmente sensibles.

Palabras clave: Acoso; evaluación; infancia; adolescencia.

1. Introduction

Bullying and cyberbullying are phenomena that, due to their proliferation, are positioned as challenging situations for health systems worldwide (Páez et al., 2020; Gómez Tabares and Correa Duque, 2022). In fact, in Latin America, according to Herrera-López et al. (2018), the prevalence of bullying is approximately 29% and that of cyberbullying would fluctuate between 2% and 42%. In Cuenca, Ecuador, it was found that 28.3% of students were victims of bullying, of which 20.7% were victims of bullying, 4.3% were cybervictims, and 3.4% were victims of both bullying and cyberbullying (Ordóñez-Ordóñez and Prado, 2019). In this situation, Avilés-Martínez (2013) refers to the importance of evaluation as a mechanism to establish diagnoses in terms of quality and quantity of bullying and cyberbullying, but also as a method to design effective and efficient interventions for these problems.

Bullying is conceptualized as a set of aggressive behaviors, carried out intentionally and repeatedly, based on an imbalance of power (real or perceived) between the victim and the perpetrator (Olweus, 1998, 2007). This problem also represents a breach of ethics, as it involves breaking established social norms (Ortega, 2020). Cyberbullying is an indirect variant of bullying (Smith et al., 2008) that develops through the repeated and premeditated transmission of hostile messages through digital tools (Dennehy et al., 2020; Tokunaga, 2010). Among the most common forms of cyberbullying are messages, calls and emails, as well as offensive posts on digital social platforms, which are intended to intimidate and humiliate the victim, who usually shares the same school environment with the bully (Cedillo-Ramírez, 2020).

Given this situation, different assessment methods have been developed to determine the frequency, duration, and intensity of this type of violence (Lucas-Molina et al., 2016), as well as to identify the characteristics of the students involved, the context in which it occurs,

and the psychological consequences of in-person or virtual bullying (Avilés-Martínez, 2013). Among other tools, interviews, questionnaires, checklists, focus groups, and individual or collective scales have been identified (Vera-Giraldo et al., 2017). However, the most commonly used instruments are self-report inventories, psychometric instruments, and behavioral observation (Gutiérrez-Ángel, 2019).

According to Pereira-Gallindo (2014), the diversity of available tools can generate anxiety in professionals responsible for assessing bullying, whether in person or online, when selecting the most appropriate method. In this sense, the objective of this work was to identify the assessment tools used in bullying and cyberbullying prevention or intervention programs implemented in Latin America with primary and secondary school students. This document may be relevant for teachers, psychologists, researchers, and governmental and non-governmental organizations involved in educational issues, as well as in promoting healthy school coexistence and positive relationships between children and adolescents.

2. Methodology

This manuscript is based on a systematic review of prevention and intervention programs for online and in-person bullying. A search was conducted for articles (Spanish and English) published in the last 20 years (2004–2024) in the databases PubMed, Web of Science, Scielo, and Scopus. The terms *bullying*, *cyberbullying*, *virtual bullying*, *intervention*, *program*, *prevention*, and their English translations were used for this search, applying the Boolean operators OR and AND in the search protocol.

In this context, articles were selected that included interventions or programs targeting bullying in primary and secondary school students, ranging in age from 5 to 19 years, and that evaluated their effectiveness through group comparisons (experimental and control) or pre- and post-test analysis. Studies conducted outside of Latin America were discarded.

In total, 396 articles were identified; after eliminating 43 duplicates and reviewing titles and abstracts, an additional 315 studies were excluded. Finally, 38 full articles were analyzed, of which 26 were discarded, leaving 12 for the final review (see Figure 1).

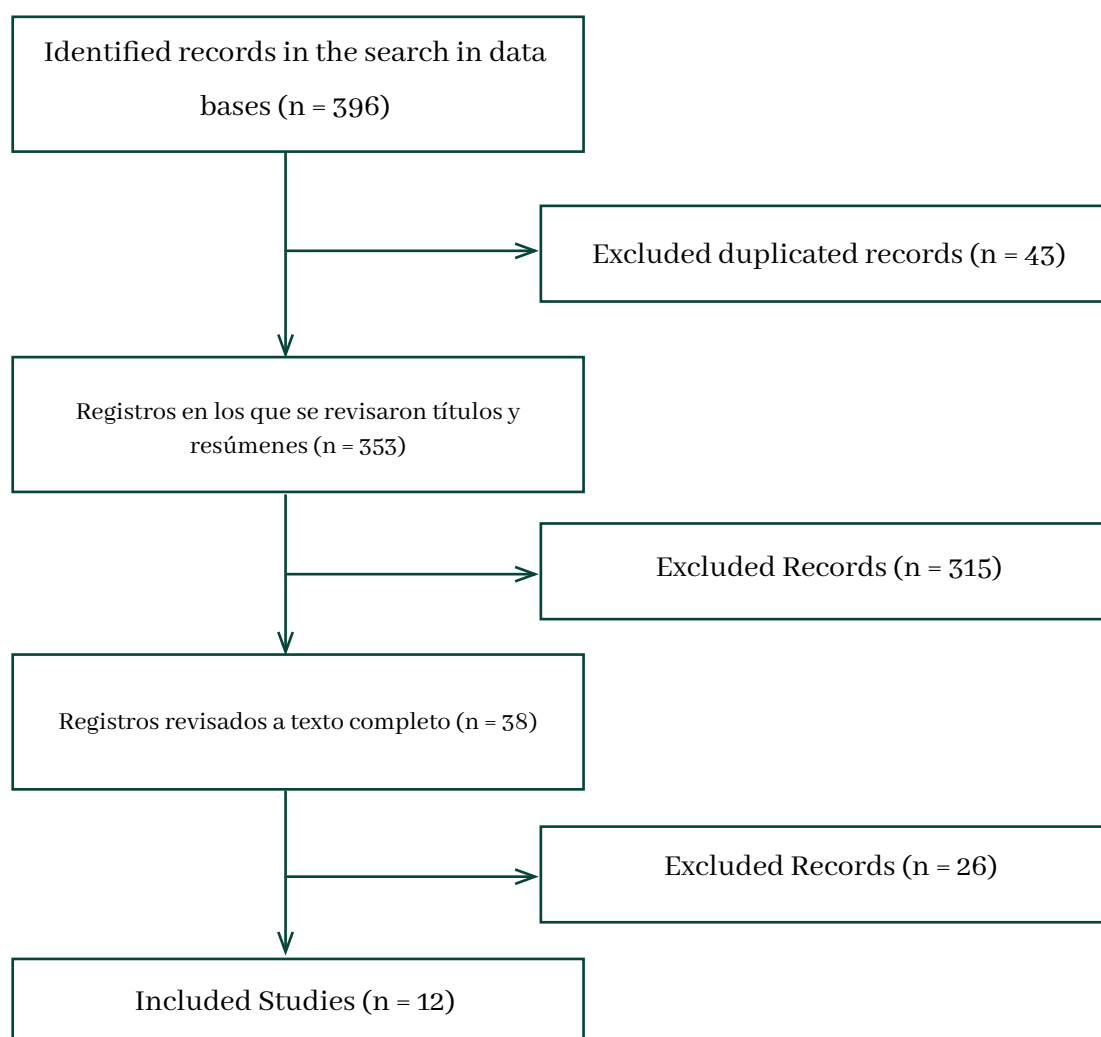


Figure 1: Flowchart of the search and selection process.

Source: Own elaboration, 2024

3. Development

Before presenting the results, it is important to note that five of the included studies were conducted in Brazil, three in Mexico, three in Chile, and one in Peru. A brief description of the instruments used to assess bullying in the included prevention or intervention programs follows (Table 1).

3.1. Links program

Pérez et al. (2013) used the *Secondary School Questionnaire on Peer Abuse due to Abuse of Power*, which evaluates four dimensions, namely: Witness of Bullying, consisting of 18 questions with a range of results ranging from 18 to 72 points, reporting a Cronbach's alpha of 0.80; Victim of Bullying, consisting of 12 questions, with a range of results from 12 to 49 points and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.72; Aggressor-Victim of Bullying, consisting of 10 questions, with a range of results ranging from 13 to 52 points and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.22; and, Bullying Aggressor, consisting of 9 questions with results ranging from 9 to 36 points and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.46; the authors indicate that there is a positive correlation between the score and the presence of bullying.

They also applied the *Internet Experiences Questionnaire* adapted to the Chilean context by Lecannelier et al. (2011). The instrument consists of 28 questions and assesses the presence of in-person or virtual bullying. For the research, they used nine questions to identify students who were victims of cyberbullying; they did not report the Cronbach's alpha for the instrument. Furthermore, they implemented the intervention program with a population of students ranging in age from 9 to 18 years (Pérez et al., 2013).

3.2. Violence Zero Note

In this research, they used the revised version for teachers of *The School Violence Scale* developed by Stelko-Pereira and Williams (2013). The instrument is composed of the following subscales: frequency of victimization used by students, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85; severity of victimization used by students, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.78; knowledge of student victimization by other students, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90; and, risk behaviors by students, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 (Stelko-Pereira and de Albuquerque, 2016).

They also administered the revised student version of the *School Violence Scale* (Stelko-Pereira, Williams, & Freitas, 2010). The instrument consists of 5-point Likert-type questions and four subscales. The first assesses student victimization by other students and is composed of two factors: 1) the frequency of physical (two items, $\alpha = 0.64$), psychological (two items, $\alpha = 0.63$), and property (two items, $\alpha = 0.64$) violence; and 2) the severity of the physical (three items, $\alpha = 0.80$) and psychological (four items, $\alpha = 0.70$) violence episodes. The second assesses student victimization by school employees and presents two factors: 1) interpersonal victimization (four items, $\alpha = 0.72$) and 2) property damage (two items, $\alpha = 0.71$) (Stelko-Pereira and de Albuquerque, 2016).

The third scale focuses on violence perpetrated by another student and is composed of three factors: 1) perpetration of physical violence (six items, $\alpha = 0.83$), non-physical violence (five items, $\alpha = 0.71$), and virtual violence (two items, $\alpha = 0.5$). The last scale investigates students' risk behaviors (five items, $\alpha = 0.81$). The study was conducted with students and teachers from sixth to ninth grade (Stelko-Pereira and de Albuquerque, 2016).

3.3. Emotional competencies program

Martínez-Vilchis et al. (2018) applied an adapted version of the *Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ) to the Mexican population*. This question consists of 33 questions answered on a Likert-type scale and allows for the evaluation of three dimensions: victimization with 14 items ($\alpha = 0.93$), perpetration with 14 items ($\alpha = 0.80$), and justification with 5 items ($\alpha = 0.89$). The victimization and perpetration dimensions assess the frequency with which cyberbullying situations were experienced or carried out. The population with which they implemented the program consisted of students aged 15 to 17 (Martínez-Vilchis et al., 2018).

3.4. Cyber coexistence program (Pozas et al., 2018)

Pozas et al. (2018) conducted their research with students aged 15 to 18, to whom they applied an adapted version of the *Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ)* (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2014). The version they applied consisted of 33 questions with answers on a Likert-type scale and allowed them to evaluate three dimensions, which are: victimization with 14 items ($\alpha = 0.939$), perpetration with 14 items ($\alpha = 0.801$), and justification with 5 items ($\alpha = 0.895$) (Pozas et al., 2018).

3.5. #Tamojunto

Gusmões et al. (2018) developed a scale for their research based on three other questionnaires (*European Union Drug Abuse Prevention Questionnaire*, *World Health Organization for Drug Use Questionnaire*, and *Pesquisa Nacional de Saúde do Escolar Questionnaire*), whose questions were answered in a binary way (yes or no); to evaluate bullying (received or executed) they used two questions, which were: In the last 30 days, how often did your classmates bother you or bully you? and In the last 30 days, have you scolded, mocked, manipulated, intimidated, or bothered any of your classmates?

To assess physical violence (whether experienced or committed), they used two questions: In the last 30 days, have you been physically attacked at school? and In the last 30 days, have you physically attacked someone at your school? They also worked with a population of students between the ages of 11 and 15 (Gusmões et al., 2018). No results were found regarding the reliability or validity of the instrument used.

3.6. Intervention in bullying, anger and depression

In this research, they used the *Peer Violence Scale* (Cajigas et al., 2006). The instrument is composed of 43 items grouped into five dimensions: the first, *External Influences*, which consists of two subdimensions (transgressive behavior and adult behavior regarding bullying) and focuses on the influence of student and adult behavior on aggressive behavior; *Attitude Toward Violence*, which is composed of two subdimensions (facilitating behavior and lack of control attitude) and assesses aggressive behavior, physical violence, and problem-solving strategies (Vanega-Romero et al., 2018).

The third dimension is *Prosocial Behaviors*, which assesses supportive behavior among peers; the fourth is *Aggressive Behaviors*, which consists of three subdimensions (argument, threat, and teasing) and evaluates the frequency with which students engage in aggressive behavior among peers; and the fifth is *Victimization*, which focuses on identifying the number of students who are bullied; they report a Cronbach's alpha for the scale of 0.96; they also intervened with students between the ages of 12 and 16 (Vanega-Romero et al., 2018).

3.7. Active-Start Intervention

Hormazábal-Aguayo et al. (2019) used an extract from the *Single Questionnaire on School Well-being (CUBE)* (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2013). The extract applied omitted questions related to virtual bullying and was composed of 10 questions with 4-point Likert-type responses.

These questions asked about the frequency with which students were exposed to bullying situations (physical, verbal, and social exclusion) in the last seven days. A Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 is reported for the scale. They also intervened with students aged 8 to 10 years old (Hormazábal-Aguayo et al., 2019).

3.8. ProCiviCo

Palacios et al. (2019) assessed aggression, victimization, friendships, and antipathy in seventh-grade students ($M=12.32$) through peer nomination activities. For aggression, they asked students to identify peers who best fit the description of behaving aggressively or teasing others; for victimization, they asked about students who best fit the description of being the victim or being teased; for friendship, they asked about peers with whom they shared recess; and for antipathy, they asked about students with whom they preferred not to share recess. No validity or reliability data were found.

3.9. Brief anti-bullying intervention

In this research, they administered the self-report *Bullying Questionnaire* to students aged 10 to 17. The questionnaire consists of 23 questions on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 3 about bullying, and 23 questions about victimization in the past 30 days. It also allows for the identification of forms of bullying (physical, verbal, and indirect bullying), with higher scores indicating greater prevalence of bullying (Bottan et al., 2019). No results were found regarding the reliability or validity of the instrument used.

3.10. CONVIVE Program

In this research, they used the CUVE ³ -ESO School Violence Questionnaire (Álvarez-García et al., 2013). The instrument, which was applied to students aged 12 to 15, allows the evaluation of different

dimensions of bullying (interpersonal isolation, verbal aggression between student and teacher, verbal aggression between peers, disruptive behavior in classes, physical aggression and threats, aggression through digital media, indirect physical aggression, and aggression from teachers towards students). It is composed of questions with answers on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 5 points and has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.94 (Santa-Cruz and Ríos, 2022).

3.11. #NoBullying Intervention

In this study, they applied the *Cartoon Test* (Smith et al., 2018). This instrument, used to assess students' perceptions of bullying, is composed of eight dimensions and was validated in eight countries, including Brazil. The research population consisted of adolescents aged 12 to 17 (Fernandes and Dell'Aglío, 2023). No results were found regarding the reliability or validity of the instrument used.

3.12. #Tamojunto 2.0

The instruments used to assess bullying in this research were the same as those used in #Tamojunto (Valente et al., 2023) and the Brazilian version of the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Ferreira-Junior et al., 2022). The latter questionnaire asks students about their experiences with bullying in the past 30 days. It contains seven dichotomous (yes or no) questions about victimization and eight about bullying perpetration. Higher scores indicate greater prevalence of perpetration or victimization (Valente et al., 2023). No validity or reliability statistics were found.

3.13 Discussion

Having briefly described the instruments used to assess bullying in prevention and intervention programs developed in Latin America, it is possible to present some ideas for discussion. Similar to what was indicated by Avilés-Martínez (2013), in the present review two types of evaluation instruments were identified, which are: self-report instruments applied directly to the participating students (Pérez et al., 2013; Stelko-Pereira and de Albuquerque, 2016; Martínez-Vilchis et al., 2018; Pozas et al., 2018; Gusmões et al., 2018; Vanega-Romero et al., 2018; Hormazábal-Aguayo et al., 2019; Palacios et al., 2019; Bottan et al., 2019; Fernandes and Dell'Aglio, 2023; and Valente et al., 2023), and hetero-report instruments that are applied to external observers, for example teachers (Stelko-Pereira and de Albuquerque, 2016).

Likewise, Avilés-Martínez (2013) points out the importance of self-report techniques, since by taking into account the point of view of each participant, the diagnosis and decision-making regarding the intervention are facilitated. These techniques include peer nomination exercises, an evaluative activity that was implemented by Palacios et al. (2019) in their research to identify the presence of aggression, victimization, friendships, and antipathy.

In this context, Vera-Giraldo et al. (2017) indicate that the techniques to assess bullying include dimensions such as: aggressive behavior, intimidation and identification of the role that students occupy in the different types of violence. However, regarding the behaviors, the instruments included in this review are not limited to the dimensions indicated by these authors, since they include victimization, perpetration, justification (Martínez-Vilchis et al., 2018; and Pozas et al., 2018; Bottan et al., 2019), bullying, physical violence (Gusmões et al., 2018), prosocial behaviors (Vanega-Romero et al., 2018), friendships and antipathy (Palacios et al., 2019).

Regarding the role of students, it was found that some scales allow differentiation between witness, victim, aggressor-victim and aggressor (Pérez et al., 2013), but other tools focus exclusively on the victim role, as is the case of the *School Violence Scale* (Stelko-Pereira and de Albuquerque, 2016). Likewise, unlike what was reported by Vera-Giraldo et al. (2017), none of the instruments included for the evaluation of bullying addresses dimensions of anxiety or stress symptoms.

On the other hand, it is necessary to agree with what Avilés-Martínez (2013) pointed out, when they mention that the diversity of instruments generates difficulties in comparing the prevalence and, in this case, the effectiveness of the programs included, since unlike the research carried out by Martínez-Vilchis et al. (2018) and Pozas et al. (2018) in which they use the *Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ)*, as well as those of Gusmões et al. (2018) and Valente et al. (2023), in which they generated an evaluation instrument for the *#Tamojunto programs*, the remaining seven investigations used different evaluation tools.

This difficulty is exacerbated by the fact that, similar to what Vera-Giraldo et al. (2017) found, not all studies report data on the validity and reliability of the instruments used. In the case of this review, seven of the included articles reported data on Cronbach's alpha, while the remaining five studies did not mention any of these statistics (Gusmões et al., 2018; Palacios et al., 2019; Bottan et al., 2019; Fernandes and Dell'Aglio, 2023; and Valente et al., 2023).

Table 1
Summary of feature research and evaluation tools

Program	First author	Year	City / Country	Ages / courses	Assessment instruments	Dimensions or description	Cronbach's alpha	
Links Program	Perez	2013	Santiago de Chile / Chile	9 to 18 years old	Secondary school questionnaire on peer abuse due to abuse of power	Witness to bullying	0.80	
						Victim of bullying	0.72	
					Internet Experiences Questionnaire	Aggressor-victim	0.22	
						Bullying aggressor	0.46	
Violence Note Zero	Stelko	2016	São Paulo / Brazil	Sixth to ninth grade	The School Violence Scale revised version for teachers	Evaluate the presence of in-person or virtual bullying	NR	
						School Violence Scale revised version for students	Frequency of victimization	0.85
							Severity of victimization	0.78
							Knowledge of victimization	0.90
					Risk behaviors		0.89	
					Victimization of students by other students			
					Frequency of physical violence.		0.64	
					Frequency of psychological violence.		0.63	
					Frequency of property violence.		0.64	
					Severity of physical violence.		0.80	
					Severity of psychological violence.		0.70	
					Victimization of students by employees			
					Interpersonal victimization.		0.72	
					Damage to property.		0.71	
					Violence perpetrated by another student		0.83	
					Perpetration of physical violence.	0.71		
					Perpetration of non-physical violence.	0.5		
					Perpetration of virtual violence.	0.81		
Student risk behaviors								
Emotional Competencies Program	Martinez	2018	Toluca / Mexico	15 to 17 years old.	Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ).	Victimization.	0.93	
						Perpetration.	0.80	
						Justification.	0.89	
Cyber coexistence program	Pools	2018	Mexico City / Mexico	15 to 18 years old	Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ).	Victimization.	0.939	
						Perpetration.	0.801	
						Justification.	0.895	
#Tamojunto	Gusmões	2018	São Paulo, Federal District, São Bernardo do Campo, Florianópolis, Tubarão and Fortaleza / Brazil	11 to 15 years old	Self-made questionnaire.	Bullying.	NR	
						Physical violence	NR	
Intervention in bullying, anger and depression	Vanega-Romero	2018	Yucatan / Mexico	12 to 16 years old	Peer Violence Scale	External influences	0.96 (Overall scale)	
						Transgressive behavior.		
						Adult behavior regarding bullying.		
						Attitude towards violence		
						Facilitation behavior.		
						Attitude of lack of control.		
						Prosocial behaviors		
						Aggressive behaviors		
						Quarrel.		
						Threat.		
						Joke		
						Victimization		

Active.Start Intervention	Hormazábal-Aguayo	2019	Santiago de Chile / Chile	8 to 10 years	Single Questionnaire on School Well-being.	Evaluates the frequency with which students were exposed to physical and psychological bullying and social exclusion.	0.81
ProCiviCo	Palaces	2019	Santiago de Chile / Chile	Seventh grade students with an average age of 12.32 years.	Nomination by students	Students were asked to identify peers who best fit the descriptions of aggression, victimization, friendships, and dislike.	NM
Brief anti-bullying intervention	Bottan	2019	Porto Alegre / Brazil	10 to 17 years old	Bullying Questionnaire	Bullying. Victimization	NM
CONVIVE Program	Santa Cruz	2022	Trujillo / Peru	12 to 15 years old.	CUVE3-ESO School Violence Questionnaire	Interpersonal isolation. Verbal aggression between student and teacher. Verbal aggression between classmates. Disruptive behavior in classes. Physical aggression and threats. Aggression through digital media. Indirect physical aggression. Aggression of teachers towards students	0.94 (Overall scale)
#NoBullying Intervention	Fernandes	2023	Porto Alegre / Brazil	12 to 17 years old.	Cartoon Test	It is composed of eight dimensions and allows us to understand students' perceptions of the presence of bullying.	NM
#Tamojunto 2.0	Valente	2023	São Paulo, Fortaleza and Eusébio / Brazil	11 to 15 years old.	Questionnaire developed by Gusmões et al. (2018)		NM
					Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire	Victimization Perpetration	NM NM

Note: NM = Not mentioned. Prepared by the authors, 2024.

4. Conclusions

After presenting the results and discussing the findings, it is concluded that bullying and cyberbullying prevention and intervention programs developed in Latin America between 2004 and 2024 used a variety of tools, but limitations related to their validity and reliability were found. Although Brazil, Mexico, and Chile are leaders in the management, development, and implementation of these programs, challenges persist related to the standardization and adaptation of the tools to the social and cultural context of the region.

The information reported in the included articles shows that the assessment instruments used include dimensions such as victimization, perpetration, justification of bullying, and prosocial behavior, and that they focus on determining the roles students play (observer, victim, bully-victim, and bully). Furthermore, their application shows promising results. However, in some cases, the reliability reported is insufficient, while in others, it is not declared.

In this regard, emphasis is placed on conducting appropriate assessments as a foundation for the design and implementation of effective programs that promote harmonious school coexistence and positive interpersonal relationships among students in the region. Furthermore, it is suggested that the development and validation of robust and culturally sensitive assessment tools be continued, as well as those that allow for better identification of the dynamics of bullying, both in person and online, and of the roles played by each member of the school community. Likewise, the development of scales that involve different sources of information (students, teachers, and parents) should be considered.

5. Contribution of the authors

DRF: conceptualization, methodology, research, writing of the original draft, initial review and editing.

WOO: final review of the article and editing.

MGC: research, writing of the original draft and editing.

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