Moral Development in Adolescents as a Key Indicator for the Prevention of Violent Behavior in Their Couples' Relationships

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Abstract

Dating violence is a multidimensional and cross-cultural problem that in the last decade has extended worryingly to teenage age. The consequences are so serious and lasting over time that they cause serious psychological, educational, family and social implications. Knowledge of predictive indicators and the consequences that these aggression and victimization processes cause, can offer an important guide for the design of prevention and intervention protocols that contribute to decrease the prevalence of cases, to facilitate their identification, to give an answer faster and more efficient. This study emphasizes the moral development of adolescents as a key indicator and, specifically, in the level of moral disengagement they present. The aims are: a) Analyze the level of moral disengagement of adolescents, as well as the mechanisms they use to accept and normalize violent behaviors; b) Know what mechanisms of moral disengagement predict certain forms of aggression in dating relationships. The sample consists of 2029 adolescents (55.4% girls) with ages between 14 and 18 years (M = 16.2; SD = 1.2). The results indicate that adolescents have a moderate level of moral disengagement (M = 2,562; SD = 0.4362) and the most commonly used disengagement mechanisms coincide with the diffusion and displacement of responsibility for the damage caused. As the level of disengagement increases, the mechanisms that adolescents use to validate and approve aggressive behaviors committed and suffered are diversified. Finally, it is found that the use of mechanisms such as dehumanization and euphemistic language are strong predictors of certain forms of victimization.

Keywords: dating violence, moral disengagement, diffusion of responsability, predictive factors, secondary education