

## Diferencias por sexo y edad en actitudes hacia temas morales en estudiantes de educación secundaria.

*Gender and Age Differences in Attitudes Toward Moral Subjects in Secondary School Students*

**Francisco Manuel Morales Rodríguez**

Universidad de Málaga

[framorrod@uma.es](mailto:framorrod@uma.es)

### Resumen

La violencia escolar cotidiana en parejas adolescentes como reacciones agresivas proactivas y reactivas se producen con frecuencia en los centros escolares; existiendo cada vez mayor preocupación por los problemas de convivencia escolar, el deterioro de las relaciones interpersonales y la prevención de la violencia de género en los centros educativos de Educación Secundaria. Un elemento importante para evaluar en estas situaciones son las actitudes e intereses en temas morales y predisposición hacia la violencia en estudiantes de educación secundaria. Por ello, en el presente estudio descriptivo se presentan los resultados de un cuestionario sobre valores y actitudes en temas morales analizando diferencias en función del género y de la edad. Los participantes en esta investigación han sido 490 estudiantes de educación secundaria, con edades comprendidas entre los 11 y los 15 años, con una edad media de 13.21 años (DT=1.19). Los resultados demuestran diferencias estadísticamente significativas por género y edad, pudiéndose apreciar, en términos generales, una mayor tendencia a la despenalización de la violencia si es en defensa de lo propio y menor predisposición a la emisión de conductas prosociales tanto en los chicos en comparación con las chicas así como en el grupo de adolescentes de menor edad. Para concluir, se destaca la importancia de una detección y evaluación temprana de actitudes e intereses hacia estos temas morales con vistas a una educación integral dirigida a la mejora de la convivencia social y a la prevención de la violencia de género.

**Palabras clave:** Actitudes en temas morales, violencia, género, Educación Secundaria.

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### Abstract

School violence in teen dating everyday as proactive and reactive aggressive reactions occur frequently in schools, there is a growing concern for the problems of school life, deterioration of interpersonal relationships and the prevention of gender violence in the Secondary Education schools. An important element to evaluate in these situations are the attitudes and interest in moral issues and predisposition to violence in secondary education students. Therefore, in this descriptive study presents the results of a questionnaire on values and attitudes in analyzing moral issues in terms of gender differences and age. Participants in this research were 490 secondary school students, aged between 11 and 15 years, with a mean age of 13.21 years (SD = 1.19). The results show statistically significant differences by gender and age, being able to see, in general, a greater tendency to decriminalize violence if in defense of self and less willingness to issue both prosocial behavior in boys compared with and girls in the group of younger teens. To conclude, we highlight the importance of early detection and assessment of attitudes and interests towards these moral issues with a view to comprehensive education aimed at improving social coexistence and the prevention of gender violence.

**Key words:** Attitudes on moral issues, violence, gender, Secondary Education.

**Fecha recepción:** Octubre 2011

**Fecha aceptación:** Noviembre 2011

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## Introduction

School violence manifests itself every day in our educational centers with very negative consequences for students, teachers and our societies in general. Precisely this violence affects social and human coexistence that entails emphasizing ethical aspects that are often lacking, as well as the implementation of values such as solidarity, equity, freedom, equality, justice and peace. Schools constitute the optimal and dialogical space for the free construction of an open and plural society and of institutions that have among their basic or transversal competences that of training future socially responsible citizens. After the first decade of the 21st century, education in values such as solidarity and violence prevention is considered an increasingly essential factor in today's societies.

Education is not aseptic and the act of educating implicitly or explicitly contains values and hence the need to prioritize some over others. For González (2002), "education for coexistence... must develop the discourse of the so-called values for life and for coexistence (as a list of values derived from a minimum ethic), focusing on the great and basic values of equity education, freedom, solidarity, equality, justice and peace, as well as the recovery and defense of "small values" that run the risk of passing to a second order of importance. According to this author, these are values such as honesty, responsibility, effort, sacrifice, will, generosity, tenderness or hope; values that Peiró (2009) defines as properly human values that are the ones that can actually make possible the realization and experience of the supposed "great democratic values" that contribute to eradicate any form of violence, being one of the greatest scourges of our lives. societies the so-called gender violence.

It can be highlighted that education in values as solidarity and non-violence is affirmed in the need to become the guiding principle of all education, guiding the development of the curricula of the various educational levels in the search for an integral formation of the students, promoting attitudes and ethical values and showing, in programming and daily life, such conformity with ethical and socially desirable values (Trianes and Fernández, 2001).

Daily school violence in adolescent couples as proactive and reactive aggressive reactions occur frequently in schools; There is increasing concern about the problems of school coexistence, the deterioration of interpersonal relationships and the prevention of gender violence in Secondary Education educational centers. An important element to evaluate in these situations are the attitudes and interests in moral issues and predisposition towards violence in secondary school students. For this reason, the general objective of this study is to carry out an evaluation of attitudes and interests towards moral issues in a sample of adolescent secondary school students, analyzing differences based on gender and age.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

A total of 490 secondary school students, aged between 11 and 15 years, with an average age of 13.21 years ( $SD=1.19$ ), all belonging to public institutes in the province of Malaga, participated in this study. urban area, 243 girls and 207 boys. We have worked with a non-probabilistic incidental sample.

### *Instruments*

“Questionnaire on values attitudes in moral issues, VATM (Trianes, 2002)”: This questionnaire consists of a total of 13 items in which the subject is given a statement or a conflictive situation is presented so that they can choose between different alternatives. response (initial version more qualitative) in a Likert-type response format where students evaluate the degree of agreement with the questions raised on a scale of 1 to 4 (where 1 = Strongly disagree and 5 = Strongly agree). It presents adequate psychometric properties, being the internal consistency index for the total scale obtained by calculating the Alpha coefficient ( $\alpha$ )= .68. Evaluate some personal attitudinal issues such as theft, solidarity, cooperation, international aid, human rights, etc. It is an attitudinal-type questionnaire to investigate these issues of maximum frequency.

### *Process*

The data was collected by two counselors and a researcher from the UMA in the different Secondary Education centers participating in this study. The questionnaire was completed in the ordinary classes of the different study centers that have participated in this study after obtaining the corresponding authorizations, with a similar educational policy as far as the management of their study centers is concerned. In addition, the students were provided with the corresponding instructions for completing the questionnaire, also ensuring at all times the confidentiality of the data obtained in this study and explaining the subsequent use of the tests for research purposes.

The time allocated to the completion of the questionnaire by the students who were given the opportunity to respond to possible doubts and problems of understanding in this regard or how to fill out the proposed questionnaire was not limited either spatially or temporally.

### *Analysis of data*

For the statistical treatment of the data, the computerized statistical package SPSS 15.0 was used. Descriptive analyzes were performed reflecting percentages, means and standard deviations in addition to applying the Student's t-test for independent samples to see if there were statistically significant differences in the evaluation of attitudes and interests in moral issues based on gender and age.

### **Results**

Next, to determine if there are statistically significant differences in the variable attitudes and interests in moral issues according to gender and age, mean difference analyzes (Student's t) were performed. The methodology for the analysis of the differences according to sex and age is quantitative in nature, using the questionnaire in a four-point Likert-type response format (1= Strongly disagree and 4= Strongly agree). For this analysis of means, age has been categorized into two groups: >13 years and <13 years. The results obtained regarding the differences according to gender and age in attitudes and interests in moral issues are presented in tables 1 and 2, respectively.

The results show that there are statistically significant differences in attitudes and interests in moral issues according to gender and age.

Regarding the gender and age variables, in general terms, the results of the differences in means show in boys, compared to girls, as well as in the group of younger adolescents, a greater tendency to decriminalize crime. violence if it is in defense of one's own and less predisposition to the emission of prosocial behaviors.

Table 1. Difference in attitudes, values and interests in moral issues according to gender

	Gender	Media	Desviación típica	t
1. Si un adolescente entra en un centro comercial, cogen una cinta de vídeo, la esconde y se la lleva sin pagar. ¿Es eso robar?	Hombre	3.67	.75	-3.59*
	Mujer	3.87	.52	
2. Si un joven que está comprándose su casa trata de no pagar impuestos ocultando parte de sus ingresos. ¿Es eso robar?	Hombre	3.16	.86	-2.30**
	Mujer	3.33	.77	
3. Si una persona descubre a un asaltante que había entrado a su casa a robar y le pega un tiro. ¿Es una acción violenta?	Hombre	3.13	1.01	-2.83*
	Mujer	3.37	.86	
3.1. ¿Es justa dicha acción?	Hombre	2.29	.96	1.71
	Mujer	2.14	.97	

4. Si un estudiante al salir del instituto recibe una paliza por parte de un grupo y, en respuesta, saca una navaja con la que hiere a uno de ellos y lo mata.	Hombre	3.31	.94	-3.01*
	Mujer	3.55	.76	
¿Es una acción violenta?				
4.1. ¿Es justa dicha acción?	Hombre	2.24	.94	2.12**
	Mujer	2.07	.92	
5. Si una persona se acerca a ti pidiéndote dinero cuando vas de compras. ¿Sientes que debes dárselo?	Hombre	1.82	.92	-2.24**
	Mujer	2.00	.89	
6. Cuando ves la propaganda de las ONGs pidiendo ayuda o dinero para proyectos en colectivos desfavorecidos. ¿Sientes que debes ayudar?	Hombre	2.66	.82	-4.34*
	Mujer	2.99	.88	
7. Cuando ves que en tu entorno (familiar, de amigos, compañeros de clase, etc) se va a producir un conflicto. ¿Intentas evitarlo?	Hombre	3.42	.74	-1.35
	Mujer	3.52	.78	
8. ¿Es justa la pena de muerte?	Hombre	2.01	1.02	1.51
	Mujer	1.88	.98	
9. Cuando el ayuntamiento da viviendas gratuitas a personas que han sufrido una tragedia que les ha dejado sin hogar. ¿Estás de acuerdo con esa medida?	Hombre	3.44	.80	-3.00*
	Mujer	3.64	.72	
10. ¿Estás de acuerdo con que Europa cierre sus fronteras a los inmigrantes de países con menos recursos?	Hombre	2.22	.91	3.24*
	Mujer	1.95	.89	

11. ¿Estás dispuesto/a a intervenir si ves alguna acción injusta para alguien?	Hombre	3.15	.74	-2.07**
	Mujer	3.28	.78	

Table 2. Difference in attitudes, values and interests in moral issues according to age

	Edad	Media	Desviación típica	t
1. Si un adolescente entra en un centro comercial, cogen una cinta de vídeo, la esconde y se la lleva sin pagar. ¿Es eso robar?	>13	3.79	.66	-.39
	<=13	3.81	.52	
2. Si un joven que está comprándose su casa trata de no pagar impuestos ocultando parte de sus ingresos. ¿Es eso robar?	>13	3.26	.84	-.19
	<=13	3.27	.70	
3. Si una persona descubre a un asaltante que había entrado a su casa a robar y le pega un tiro. ¿Es una acción violenta?	>13	3.37	.89	3.98*
	<=13	3.02	.96	
3.1. ¿Es justa dicha acción?	>13	2.19	.97	-.89
	<=13	2.27	.98	
4. Si un estudiante al salir del instituto recibe una paliza por parte de un grupo y, en respuesta, saca una navaja con la que hiere a uno de ellos y lo mata.	>13	3.50	.81	2.18**
	<=13	3.33	.87	

¿Es una acción violenta?				
4.1. ¿Es justa dicha acción?	>13	2.08	.91	-2.34**
	<=13	2.29	.94	
5. Si una persona se acerca a ti pidiéndote dinero cuando vas de compras. ¿Sientes que debes dárselo?	>13	1.93	.92	-.09
	<=13	1.94	.84	
6. Cuando ves la propaganda de las ONGs pidiendo ayuda o dinero para proyectos en colectivos desfavorecidos. ¿Sientes que debes ayudar?	>13	2.83	.88	-1.28
	<=13	2.94	.86	
7. Cuando ves que en tu entorno (familiar, de amigos, compañeros de clase, etc.) se va a producir un conflicto. ¿Intentas evitarlo?	>13	3.46	.77	-1.25
	<=13	3.55	.71	
8. ¿Es justa la pena de muerte?	>13	1.85	.99	-1.56**
	<=13	2.10	1.01	
9. Cuando el ayuntamiento da viviendas gratuitas a personas que han sufrido una tragedia que les ha dejado sin hogar. ¿Estás de acuerdo con esa medida?	>13	3.59	.73	1.39
	<=13	3.49	.82	
10. ¿Estás de acuerdo con que Europa cierre sus fronteras a los inmigrantes de países con menos recursos?	>13	1.98	.88	-2.96*
	<=13	2.23	.92	
11. ¿Estás dispuesto/a a intervenir si ves alguna acción injusta para alguien?	>13	3.25	.72	1.02



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<=13	3.18	.69
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*Significación estadística. \*p < .01; \*\* p < .05*

## Conclusions

This paper provides the results of the Questionnaire on Values and Attitudes in Moral Issues, which are extremely useful with a view to education in values such as solidarity. The data provided by this study allow relevant conclusions to be drawn in the current context in which the number of attacks is increasing every day; There is increasing concern about the problems of social and school coexistence and the deterioration of interpersonal relationships in Secondary Education schools. An important element to evaluate in these situations are the attitudes and interests in moral issues and predisposition towards violence in secondary school students. Therefore, in this descriptive study, the results of a questionnaire on values and attitudes in moral issues are presented, analyzing differences based on sex and age; finding statistically significant differences by gender and age. Regarding gender, it can be seen, in general terms, a lower tendency in girls to decriminalize violence if it is in defense of their own (for example, in the item referring to if a person discovers an assailant who had entered to his house to rob and shoot him, the girls consider to a greater extent than the boys that it is a violent action even if it is in defense of their own; in item 4 referred to if a student when leaving the institute kills to another in response to a beating that girls have also conceptualized said action as violent to a greater extent than boys and value said response as a fair action to a lesser extent than boys). However, girls show a greater predisposition to emitting prosocial behaviors, they feel more need to participate and collaborate with NGOs (in fact, they participate more in NGOs and affirm that they carry out more solidarity activities compared to boys) and they are more willing to participate and collaborate with NGOs. intervene if they see any unfair action for someone. The girls also show less degree of agreement than the boys on the question raised about Europe closing its borders to immigrants from countries with fewer resources. These results are consistent with those obtained in other studies in which greater empathy, solidarity behaviors and moral reasoning are also found in girls (Carlo and Randall, 2002; Mestre, Samper and Frías, 2002; Ortiz,). Along these lines, other studies (Gilligan, 1985) also found in girls a higher degree of prosocial sensitivity on these issues, as well as a moral orientation more oriented towards the principles of care and concern for others. It can be thought that these results can be explained by the advance in the evolutionary development of girls compared to boys or following the

consolidated contributions of Turiel (1994) by the direct impact that social and cultural norms have on the moral beliefs that affect in behavior or considering the contributions of Hoffman (1987), a relevant element would be the influence of internal moral patterns promoted in boys and girls by their parents and that model the most acceptable moral practices according to gender. In this sense, the educational guidelines and guidance received by boys and girls is essential, in line with the approaches made by Zahn-Waxler, Cole and Barrett (1991) who point out that boys have been educated oriented towards less prosocial behaviors, for example, as a tool to earn a living in economically competitive environments. However, to end this section, it can be commented that there are contradictory results since while some authors point out that girls mature before boys, others find that differences do not always appear in favor of girls (Carlo, Roesch and Koller, 1999; Rest, 1979).

With regard to age, it can be noted that, as in the case of girls, the group of older adolescents conceptualizes certain actions as violent to a greater extent, such as those raised in items 3 and 4, even though they are actions in defense of one's own. However, whether due to a lesser effect of the social desirability factor or for another reason, it is the younger age group that considers certain actions to be fair, for example, they show a greater degree of agreement on the fact that the death penalty can come to be fair or about the fact that Europe closes its borders to immigrants from countries with fewer resources. As with girls, it is the older group that expresses collaborating more with NGOs or participating to a greater extent in acts of solidarity than the younger group. Other investigations (Whiting and Edwards, 1988) also find similar results, arguing that in adolescence, regardless of the image that may be socially held of this evolutionary period, primitive modes of prosocial reasoning, such as hedonistic reasoning, decrease; increasing prosocial behaviors both quantitatively and qualitatively. These last researchers find that during adolescence the capacities for empathy, moral judgment and cognitive skills increase, which have repercussions on prosocial behavior and on the recognition of the value of helping others, being, therefore, the ideal moment for psychoeducational intervention to improve coexistence in the stage of secondary education. These data are also consistent with the results found by other authors more recently (De la Caba and Etxeberría, 1999) who, delving into the consistency between cognition and moral action on the issue of solidarity in adolescents, find that moral behavior is not both subject to the height of moral judgment due to situational influences (group of friends, pressure from the teacher, etc.) but also due to the evolutionary reality of adolescents, marked by their formal cognitive capacity, their search for identity and the greater amplitude the older they are. the age of relationships and social roles performed. Along these lines, the contributions made by Aierbe, Cortés and Medrano (2001)

allow us to point out that it is logical that at 12 years of age the capacity for moral reasoning is in lower stages in terms of development compared to students of a higher age range.

With reference to moral issues, it is striking that there is a group of students who understand that a violent action can be fair, since both defending themselves from a robbery and receiving an attack among adolescents activate a response deeply rooted in our culture that decriminalizes violence if it is in defense of one's own. This would be a subject for debate, since there is no doubt that said decriminalization of violence in terms of self-defense belongs to the personal sphere of morality (Turiel, 1983), while the consideration of a violent action as intrinsically unfair belongs to the field of morality. universal moral whose main reference is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Schaffer, 2000). Both areas, also called micromorality and macromorality respectively (Rest, Narváez, Bebeau and Thoma 1999a, 1999b) can enter into contradiction, especially in young people who have not yet achieved a moral identity that characterizes adults with a cultural level (Blasi, 1993).

There is a relationship between morality and solidarity behavior as revealed by Gilligan (Gilligan and Wiggins, 1988) when elevating the interpersonal responsibilities characteristic of the female sex to a moral category. Rest, Narváez, Bebeau and Thoma (1999b) understand that the relationship is that while morality deals with macromorality, prosocial behavior belongs to micromorality.

This education in solidarity and for the prevention of violence is necessary in Secondary Education centers and in our universities since it allows progressively incorporating this value in secondary education centers, even being able to use ICT in this transmission and education of values (Morales, Infante and Galindo, 2003). A priority objective in matters of solidarity is to attack lack of solidarity from education, as an instrument of social transformation to avoid situations of social disadvantage of any kind (Council of Europe, 2000).

The absence of values in attitudes and moral issues is related to school violence in the form of aggression, which is a daily reality in secondary schools. In fact, numerous studies find that one of the main manifestations of this violence takes place among the adolescents themselves in these centers, who are the protagonists of most of the violent acts (Dodge, Coie, Pettit and Price, 1990; Ortega, 1995; Peiró, 2009; Prieto, 2005; Velásquez, 2005); hence the need for an education in values that contributes to the improvement of educational coexistence. It seems relevant to point out the importance of evaluating these attitudes and behaviors that can connect and be indicators of a way of projecting themselves in life on the part of these adolescents that should slide towards a merely individualistic mode where society is seen simply as a plural mosaic without links between its members beyond pure and simple competition where autonomy is confused with individuality.

From a structured society in which there are pluralistic projects and an autonomous way of projecting oneself in life, despite its complexity, a slide from tolerance to indifference occurs too easily, that is, the manifestation of a disregard of commitments and of the problems of the other, of not wanting to assume one's own responsibility on the condition of not being questioned or simply not being bothered in their daily work even when Aristotelian philosophy points out that we live in an interdependent society in which we can all need at one time or another. It is the risk of an alleged tolerance that does not know how to discern its limits, respect the ethical commitment and the demands of intolerance, slipping towards indifference curiously tinged with humanitarianism. Coexistence at school deteriorates, and with it the appropriate climate and the much-needed values involved in it. Different international organizations (UN, UNESCO, OECD, OAS) point out that education has to turn its gaze to the formation of attitudes and values in students. Some authors such as Ochoa, Peiró and Merma (2010) reflect that 16% of teachers have been spending most of their time "taking care of students" rather than teaching and that on many occasions they do not know how to deal with refusals. attitudes of civility that exist in their students and the conflicts that arise. In addition, on some occasions it seems that the important thing is that the students manifest certain behaviors even if they are not internalized or have previously delved into issues that entail the deployment of human values and values for coexistence, addressing issues such as diversity, equality, non-discrimination by gender, human rights and solidarity, etc.

Prosocial behavior is seen today as a dimension in which selfish behaviors are aligned at one extreme, while altruistic behaviors are at the other extreme (Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994). Since any altruistic act can bring some benefit to the person, one can think of proposing practices in secondary education that involve behavior in favor of others, even if they are useful for the students who carry it out.

To conclude, the importance of early detection and evaluation of attitudes and interests towards these moral issues is highlighted with a view to a comprehensive education aimed at improving social coexistence and preventing school violence.

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