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Effects of an integrative school-based intervention on child protection against violence: A quasi-experimental study

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ABSTRACT

Considering that one in two children is estimated to have experienced violence in the last year according to the World Health Organization, the school has an undeniable and unique protective and preventive role. #EscuelaSinViolencias is the first programme to comprehensively target violence against children in the context of primary school in Spain through the solid theoretical approach of Developmental Victimology. The objective of this study was to assess its impact on the children's psychological, family and school well-being and their knowledge of Children's Rights and violence in 971 girls and boys from third to sixth grade. It also tests school staff's knowledge, preparedness to detect and respond to possible cases of violence and perception of the family and school environment as protective in 110 participants. A pre-post design with a control group was used. Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) and generalized linear mixed models (GLMM) were conducted. A significant increase in school well-being among students in experimental schools compared to control schools was found, as well as increased knowledge of Children's Rights and access to report. School staff from experimental schools reported significant increases in knowledge of violence against children and in preparedness to deal with potential cases. At the same time, their perception of the family and school environments as protective decreased slightly but significantly. This programme is the first to address violence in a comprehensive manner with an empirical study that validates its positive impact for the integral protection of children.

Efectos de una intervención integral en escuelas de primaria para proteger a la infancia frente a la violencia: Un estudio cuasi-experimental

Palabras clave:
Niños/as
Violencia
Victimología del Desarrollo
Intervención escolar
Evaluación de impacto
Bienestar

RESUMEN

Considerando que se estima que uno de cada dos niños y niñas y ha experimentado violencia en el último año según la Organización Mundial de la Salud, la escuela tiene un innegable y único papel protector y preventivo. #EscuelaSinViolencias es el primer programa que aborda de manera comprensiva la violencia contra la infancia en el contexto de la Educación Primaria en España, con un sólido enfoque teórico, la Victimología del Desarrollo. El objetivo de este estudio ha sido analizar su impacto sobre el bienestar psicológico, familiar y escolar y los conocimientos sobre derechos de la infancia y violencia de 971 estudiantes de 3º a 6º curso de primaria. También se ha testeado el efecto en los conocimientos, preparación para detectar y responder ante posibles casos de violencia, y la percepción de los contextos familiar y escolar como protectores en 110 trabajadores escolares. Se ha utilizado un diseño pre-post con grupo control y se han realizado análisis de varianza de medidas repetidas (ANOVA) y modelos lineales generalizados mixtos (GLMM). Se ha encontrado un aumento significativo del bienestar escolar de los estudiantes de centros experimentales en comparación con los centros control, así como un aumento en conocimientos sobre derechos de la infancia y vías de notificación. El personal escolar de los centros experimentales ha reportado un aumento significativo de conocimientos sobre violencia contra la infancia y en la preparación

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para gestionar posibles casos. Al mismo tiempo, su percepción de los entornos familiar y escolar como protectores ha disminuido ligera y significativamente. Este programa es el primero en abordar la violencia de manera integradora con un estudio empírico que valida su impacto positivo para la protección integral de la infancia.

Introduction

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in two children has experienced physical, sexual or psychological violence in the last year (WHO, 2022), enduring its impacts throughout their lives (Hillis et al., 2017). Schools provide a crucial environment to shield children from any form of violence, not only by preventing it, but also by detecting potential cases and acting on them as soon as possible. In fact, several studies indicate that many indicators of victimization experiences often manifest in the school context, such as a sudden decline in performance, isolation from peers or involvement in incidents of physical aggression within the school (Fry et al., 2018; Gardella et al., 2016). This is not only because the majority of children spend approximately 25 hours a week in school, but also because their cognitive and emotional development, the interaction between peers and adults, and the bond that school staff can establish with students and their families allow for the observation of indicators suggesting experiences of violence (Fry et al., 2018) and the promotion of the ideal protective environment for children to disclose such situations.

Children present difficulties to speaking up in general, partially due to the manipulation or coercion that can be exercised by those who perpetrate violence to maintain secrecy in specific types of victimization (that is the case for example, in sexual abuse see the review by Zubieta-Mendez & Montiel, 2016). The low rate of disclosure could also be attributed to the fear of receiving negative reactions from others (Ullman, 2002), because they have previously experienced them, or they have witnessed them towards others (Landberg et al., 2022). This seems to modulate victims' perceptions and feelings (Pereda & Sicilia, 2017; Ullman, 2002). Consisting findings regarding disclosures are reported in studies including victims of different types of violence, such as physical or sexual abuse (Augusti & Myhre, 2024), any type of maltreatment (Lev-Wiesel et al., 2019), bullying (Estévez-García et al., 2023; Van Der Ploeg et al., 2022; Wójcik & Rzeńca, 2021) or studies performed with violence survivors in general (Pereira et al., 2020). Most of them conclude that the perception of available support in the family (Estévez-García et al., 2023; Pereira et al., 2020) or in school (Lev-Wiesel et al., 2019; Wójcik & Rzeńca, 2021) seems key in determining the decision to ask for help.

School as a context to tackle violence

In Spain, the Organic Law on the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents against Violence (known as LOPIVI 8/2021) emphasizes the protective role that schools must play. Additionally, there is a duty for all citizens to report any suspicion or certainty of violence against a minor, especially those entrusted with the assistance, care, teaching or protection of children or adolescents due to their position, profession, trade or activity. To address this complex challenge, various prevention programmes have been developed for implementation within the educational context. According to the WHO database (WHO, 2022), nowadays are 202 studies on violence prevention programmes, of which only eight include initiatives implemented and evaluated in Spain. Two interventions are focused on dating violence (Fernández-González et al., 2020; Muñoz-Fernández et al., 2019), and six address bullying (Castillo et al., 2013; Franco et al., 2016; Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2016; Ortega et al., 2004; Ortega-Ruiz et al., 2012; Schoeps et al., 2018). Only one programme (Schoeps et al., 2018) includes an evaluation of subjective well-being, assessed as life satisfaction, reporting a significant, albeit small, effect ($d = 0.18 - 0.25$). All mentioned programmes target children over the age of 10 years.

Although this database does not include every existing violence prevention programme it can be considered an updated, comprehensive and reliable global source. However, there are numerous impact studies of national programmes published in languages other than English and/or not featured in international journals. Most of these studies report a significant increase in teachers' knowledge about child sexual abuse (Prous-Trigo et al., 2021, which lacks a pre-post design) and in the strategies available to children for self-protection (Del Campo & López, 2006; Pérez Daza et al., 2023, which lack a control group). Nevertheless, few studies examine the impact on other important aspects of their development, such as well-being (e.g., Menéndez Santurio et al., 2021, which reports an increase in life satisfaction but lacks a control group), with only one focusing on Primary Education (Del Campo & López, 2006). The only study we were able to find framed in elementary school in our context with a pre-post design and a control group aiming to improve school climate, tackles exclusively violence among peers or within the school context (González Bellido, 2021). Available reviews also tend to focus solely on programmes tackling violence that occurs within the school context or among students (Mena et al., 2021).

On the other hand, it seems that including adults among the targeted audience of these programmes and as participants of these studies is key, as they play a crucial role in ensuring children's well-being (Greco et al., 2022). Internationally, educators participating in violence prevention training often significantly increase their knowledge, with a large effect size (e.g., $d = 0.95$, Mathews et al., 2017) or in more than 40% of participants (Gün et al., 2022).

Recent reviews highlight the scarcity of studies with a comprehensive approach and considering the impact on overall development beyond reducing aggression (Del Campo & Fávero, 2020). There is a notable shortage of studies in Spain on the impact of school-based programmes, particularly highlighted by the absence of programmes targeting children under the age of 10 and addressing various types of violence (WHO, 2022). Furthermore, studies often present significant design limitations, such as the absence of control groups and at least two measurements over time (Fondren et al., 2020). In general, the reported effect sizes are relatively low among students (Schoeps et al., 2018) and large among adults (Mathews et al., 2017), but do not usually include both populations simultaneously. It is therefore necessary to develop and evaluate the impact of programmes that address different types of violence from a strong theoretical approach at the primary school stage to maximize their preventive capacity, with a commitment to promote a culture of comprehensive protection in schools that has a positive and proven impact on the welfare of children.

The present study

This study covers the design and implementation of a comprehensive programme aimed at addressing all forms of violence within the context of school, known as #EscolaSenseViolencies. As such, the programme tackles violence form the Developmental Victimology perspective including online violence (i.e., cyberbullying, online peer sexual harassment and online grooming), sexual victimization (i.e., by a grown-up or a peer), caregiver violence (i.e., physical maltreatment, emotional maltreatment and neglect), peer violence (i.e., physical or emotional bullying) and indirect violence (i.e., exposure to violence between caregivers, peers or in the larger community). According to its original author, violence is conceived as the harm produced by human behaviour violating social norms (Finkelhor, 2007). Within this framework, the programme also intends to influence another key construct related with children's health and development, which is their psychological and environmental well-being. In this sense, children's psychological well-being (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010) is conceived as their adjustment or functioning, considering the frequency of positive states (e.g., how much they are able to enjoy and participate in their regular activities) and negative states (e.g., how sad they feel). Family and school well-being is defined by the quality of the relationship in each context, including how valued and protected by people surrounding them children feel (Rees et al., 2020). Well-being has been reported to be related with children's health and development (Aymerich et al., 2004), and it is also affected by violent experiences (Schoeps et al., 2018). Family and school are also assessed as protective environments through school staff's perception, asking them how safe and protected they believe children under their care are in school and at home.

The programme's primary objective is to create an environment of comprehensive protection against violence for students and to foster positive treatment by strengthening the knowledge, detection, and management skills of the school staff. Additionally, it aims to improve the knowledge and well-being of children. The programme provides online training for all school staff in contact with children, including teaching units for students aged 8 and above. Developed by a research group of university professors specializing in victimology and education, the programme aligns with the current legal framework and is financially supported by a private entity. For a detailed overview of the contents, please refer to Chart 1. The content composing the initial school staff through six modules in an online campus, including conceptualization of violence, risk and protective factors and indicators, how to handle disclosures, what the legal framework states, how and to whom report a potential case and how to keep on giving support to victims and their families in the everyday school life. The programme also includes activities for children since third grade (when they are around 8 years old) until sixth grade (when they are around 12 years old). They are designed in a spiral curriculum, from most simple to more complex addressing children's rights, the responsibility for child's well-being, identifying risky or potentially violent situations and strategies to protect themselves, like asking for help to grown-ups (further details of the content can be provided by contacting the corresponding author).

Distinguishing from previous initiatives, this programme does not concentrate solely on one type of violence (e.g., child sexual abuse) or on a specific context or perpetrators (e.g., violence among minors or only online). Instead, it encompasses all types of violence, grounded in the robust theoretical and empirical foundation of Developmental Victimology (Finkelhor, 2007) and using its taxonomy (i.e., victimization by caregivers, sexual victimization, peer-violence, violence exposure and online victimization). It also draws on previous guides developed for various application contexts (e.g., THRIVES by Hillis et al., 2016) and school programmes covering all types of violence conducted in North America (e.g., HEARTS, Dorado et al., 2016).

The primary objective of this study is to assess the impact of the *#EscolaSenseViolencies* programme on two groups within the school community, aiming to provide empirical evidence of its effectiveness. The following working hypotheses are proposed:

1) School staff in the experimental centres will likely report a greater increase in knowledge of violence against children, self-efficacy and preparedness to handle potential cases of violence compared to control centres. Furthermore, there is an expectation of an increased perception of the school and family environment as a safe space.
2) Acknowledging that the well-being of children tends to decline with age (Helliwell et al., 2024; Marquez et al., 2024; Rees et al., 2020), it is hypothesized that students in the experimental centres will report a smaller decrease in these variables (i.e., psychological, family and school well-being) compared to the control group. However, in the most recent reports it is claimed that data from children below 10 years old is still needed (Helliwell et al., 2024; Marquez et al., 2024). In our country, studies including children of different ages report lower scores of psychological well-being and parental relationship among adolescents between 12 and 18 years old, when compared to children between 8 and 11 years old (Aymerich et al., 2004). Additionally, children from experimental schools are expected to demonstrate a higher level of knowledge of children's rights.

Chart 1
Content of the programme #EscolaSenseViolencies

Target	Structure	Themes	Format
School staff	Six online training modules	1 Definition and prevalence 2 Detection 3 Disclosures 4 Legal framework 5 Communication to external agencies 6 Support	Each module includes a video summarizing the main concepts, the full content developed in the online campus and an activity.
Children	Five teaching units to apply in grade 3 and 4, when students are 8-9 years old. Three of them are conceived for the classroom and two for Physical Education course. Two in teaching units to apply in grades 5 and 6, when students are 10-11 years old. One is designed for the classroom and another one for Physical Education course.	1 Children's Rights and legal framework 2 Child welfare as a social responsibility 3 Potentially violent situations 4 Self-protection strategies 5 Summary	Introductory material to the topic to be worked on (e.g., story, song, video, etc.) A teamwork proposal Joint reflection Summary of what has been learnt.

Note. For a more detailed description of the content please contact the corresponding author.

Table 1
Sample characteristics

	Experimental	Control	Total
School staff	76(79.09)	34(30.90)	110(100)
Gender - n(%)			
Female	67(88.16)	29(85.29)	96(87.27)
Male	9(11.84)	5(14.71)	14(12.73)
Non-binary	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Age - *M* (DT)	41.7(9.38)	41.5(7.30)	41.64(8.75)
Role - n (%)			
Teacher	35(46.05)	14(47.06)	49(44.55)
Management position	6(7.89)	7(20.59)	13(11.81)
Professor[a]	16(21.05)	11(32.35)	27(24.55)
Guardian	14(18.42)	0(0)	14(12.83)
Others	5(6.58)	2(5.89)	7(6.36)
Years of experience - *M* (DT)	14.4(8.22)	16.9(8.26)	15.18(8.27)
Have been Trained on violence - *n(%)*	33(43.42)	16(21.05)	49(44.55)
Students	629(64.78)	342(35.22)	971(100)
Gender - n(%)			
Female	293(46.58)	162(47.37)	455(46.86)
Male	332(52.78)	179(52.34)	511(52.63)
I don't know or I don't want to answer	4(0.64)	1(0.29)	5(0.51)
Age - M (DT)	9.76(1.18)	9.64(1.13)	9.72(1.16)
Course - n(%)			
Grade 3	142(22.58)	78(22.71)	220(22.66)
Grade 4	133(21.14)	90(26.32)	223(22.97)
Grade 5	183(29.09)	102(29.82)	285(29.35)
Grade 6	171(27.19)	72(21.05)	243(25.03)
Maximum educational level of the main caregivers[*] *- n(%)*			
No studies			
Primary education	7(1.11)	1(0.29)	8(0.82)
Secondary Education	64(10.17)	13(3.80)	77(7.93)
Bachelor, FPGM or FPGS[b]	95(15.10)	30(8.77)	125(12.87)
University	154(24.48)	73(21.35)	227(23.38)
Post-university	109(17.33)	99(28.95)	208(21.42)
Lost or unanswered	41(6.52)	37(10.82)	78(8.03)
Gross monthly family income[*]*- n(%)*	159(25.28)	89(26.02)	248(25.44)
Less than €1,000			
Between €1,000 and €2,500	30(4.77)	7(2.05)	37(3.81)
Between €2,501 and €4,000	181(28.78)	61(17.84)	242(24.92)
Between €4,001 and €5,500	105(16.69)	81(23.68)	186(19.16)
More than €5,500	19(3.02)	20(5.85)	39(4.02)
Prefer not to answer	10(1.59)	18(5.26)	28(2.88)
Lost	126(03.20)	66(19.30)	192(19.77)
	158(25.12)	89(26.02)	247(25.44)

Note. M (SD) = Mean(Standard Deviation); *n* (%) = frequency (percentage).
[*] Significant differences between groups according to the Chi square test (p <.001).
[a] Music, English, religion and physical education teachers were included in this category.
[b] FPGM = Intermediate Vocational Training, FPGS = Higher Vocational Training.

In sum, the current study is unique in both the programme it assess (because it targets children below 10 years old and it is framed in a comprehensive and integrative conceptualization of violence including experiences beyond the school context) and the design used (a longitudinal design with two time measurements and control group, evaluating the impact in variables related to the management of potential cases of violence, psychological, family and school well-being and with both adults and children participants).

Method

Participants

The sample of students was composed of 971 Spanish children (52.34% boys, 47.37% girls and 0.29% who did not want to report their gender or did not know), from third to sixth grade (n_{exp} = 629, $M[SD]_{exp}$ = 9.76[1.18]; n_{ctr} = 342, $M[SD]_{ctr}$ = 9.64[1.13]), and the sample of school staff was composed of 110 workers (n_{exp} = 76, $M[SD]_{exp}$ = 41.7[9.38]; n_{ctr} = 34, $M[SD]_{ctr}$ = 41.50[7.30]), all of them from the northeast of Spain.

Baseline (pre-test) equivalence on sociodemographic characteristics was tested across intervention conditions. Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of the samples for each group and in total, indicating whether the differences between the groups were statistically significant.

Instruments

Family and school well-being. Drawing from the international survey on child well-being (*ISCWeb*, Rees et al., 2020) in its Spanish and Catalan version (Casas et al., 2015), five items were adapted to assess *family well-being* (e.g., "In my family, we all have a good time together"), and five for *school well-being* (e.g., "I feel safe at school"), on a five-point Likert scale (from "Never" to "Always"). A total score was obtained for each sub-scale (i.e., family well-being and school well-being), where a higher score indicates greater well-being. Internal consistency indicators for the *school well-being* sub-scale in this sample were α = .77, $\alpha_{ordinal}$ = .83, Ω = .78 in the first measure; α = .77, $\alpha_{ordinal}$ = .83, Ω = .78 in the second measure. For the *family well-being* sub-scale, the coefficients obtained were α = .77, $\alpha_{ordinal}$ = .86, Ω = .79 in the first measure; α = .79, $\alpha_{ordinal}$ = .90, Ω = .82 in the second measure.

Psychological well-being. The homonymous subscale of the *Kidscreen-27* (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2010), in its Spanish and Catalan version (Aymerich et al., 2004), was utilized to evaluate *psychological well-being* of students with seven items (e.g., "In the last week, have you had fun?"). Total scores were transformed to generate scores with a mean of 50 (*SD* = 10), where higher scores indicate better psychological well-being. The internal consistency indicators obtained were $\alpha = .79$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .85$, $\Omega = .80$ in the first measure; $\alpha = .80$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .86$, $\Omega = .81$ in the second measure.

Children's rights knowledge. Three direct questions were utilized, two with four-point response options ranging from "not at all" to "a lot" (e.g., "How much do you know about children's rights?"; "Do you think that adults must listen and protect children?" and "If you feel you are in danger, does the law allow you to go to the police on your own, without an adult accompanying you?" (with response options "yes," "no" or "I don't know").

Perception of the family and school environment as a protective, safe space. The items of the sub-scales applied to measure children's *family* and *school well-being* were adapted to school staff. Five items in each sub-scale were used to gather school staff's perception on how protective children's home and school environment were (e.g., "My students are safe at home with their families"; "If a child has a problem, other children at school help him/her"). Internal consistency indicators for the *family environment* scale were $\alpha = .84$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .91$, $\Omega = .84$ in the first measure; $\alpha = .87$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .93$, $\Omega = .87$ in the second measure. For the *school environment* scale, the coefficients obtained were $\alpha = .78$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .89$, $\Omega = .79$ in the first measure; $\alpha = .78$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .88$, $\Omega = .81$ in the second measure.

Violence against children knowledge. Based on a previously employed instrument (Greco et al., 2017, 2020), 10 phrases were included (e.g., "The most frequent type of childhood violence is physical abuse") that had to be rated as "True," "False," or "I don't know." A total score was derived from the sum of correct answers (range 0-10).

Preparedness. School staff were requested to rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, how prepared they felt to detect possible cases of child victimization, manage disclosures and communicate potential cases to external agencies (3 items). The internal consistency indicators obtained were $\alpha = .88$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .90$, $\Omega = .88$ in the first measure; $\alpha = .89$, $\alpha_{ordinal} = .89$, $\Omega = .87$ in the second measure.

Procedure

The procedure for data collection was approved by the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya's Ethics Committee CE22-RC03). A team hired by the entity financing the project was responsible for recruiting schools, contacting them through e-mail at their publicly available address obtained from the Directory of educational centres in [region]. Out of the 2,355 schools enlisted, 48 requested further information, and, in the end, nine public schools signed up to participate. Five schools were assigned to the experimental group and the other four were assigned to the control group. Schools would discuss their willingness to participate as a control or experimental in accordance with the recruitment team, considering their availability and trying to balance schools by size and territory. Following the initial evaluation, the experimental centres had four months to implement the programme. The control centres will implement the programme in the 2024-2025 academic year, once full evaluation of the programme's impact is complete.

All students in the targeted courses of engaged schools were invited to participate. The legal guardians of the students were provided with an informed consent document. School staff received guidelines and synchronous online training including appropriate reactions to a disclosure of a possible experience of violence were explicitly outlined, as well as reactions to avoid (e.g., not questioning or attempting to assess the truthfulness of what was being told). Additionally, the steps to follow for reporting any risk situation were reminded, and personalized counselling was provided when necessary.

The survey and data collection platform were provided by a specialized external company. They were previously presented with information about the study and were explicitly asked if they understood and were willing to participate. Children filled the surveys during school hours, and they received individual headphones, to listen to the questions if they needed it.

School staff received a link to complete their survey online. The first page explained the objectives of the study and the conditions of participation, as well as data management, allowing each person to decide if they wanted to participate voluntarily. The battery of instruments was administered online at two time points: before the intervention at the beginning of the academic course (between September 2022 and January 2023) and towards the end (during the months of May and June 2023).

The total number of students enrolled in participating schools was 1,271. Out of them, 1,214 (95.52%) were authorized by their legal guardians to participate, 1,062 (87.48% of those authorized to participate) filled the questionnaires during wave 1 and 971 completed the survey at both waves of data collection (79.98% of those authorized to participate; 91.43% of those completing the survey in the first wave).

Data analysis

To assess the effects of the programme, a quasi-experimental pre-post design with a control group was employed. Analysis of variance for repeated measures (ANOVA) was conducted to compare the means of the control and experimental groups in various quantitative variables before and after applying the programme. Gender and age were included as covariates but finding no significant effect of this variables we prioritized the most parsimonious model. In instances where extreme outliers were identified that could impact the results, analyses were performed both with and without the subjects displaying outliers to assess the model's sensitivity. Following the ANOVA results, points with significant effects were compared using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995), which minimizes the risk of false positives due to the multiplicity of tests. Effect sizes were also computed using partial eta squared (η_p^2), with small effects starting at 0.01, medium effects at 0.06, and large effects at 0.14 (Cohen, 1969). For pairwise comparisons, Cohen's *d* was calculated and interpreted according to the recommendations of Funder and Ozer (2019). To compare frequencies and proportions, the guidelines of Bates et al. (2015) were followed, opting for a generalized linear mixed-effects model (GLMM). Odd Ratios (OR) with their corresponding confidence intervals were computed for ease of interpretation. All analyses were conducted using the R Studio programme (R Core Team, 2023).

Results

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for each quantitative variable analysed by group and time point, along with the results of the ANOVA. Among the school staff in the experimental group, *knowledge* increased (+1.12), as well as *feeling prepared* (+2.50), while in the control schools, they decreased (-0.2 and -0.7 respectively). Regarding the perception of the protective environment, the experimental schools show a reduction in both the *family environment* (-0.07) and the *school environment* (-0.01), whereas in the control schools, an increase in the perception is observed in the *school environment* as protective (+0.07) and

Table 2
Descriptive statistics and ANOVA for quantitative variables

	n	Group	Wave	Mean(SD)	Range	ANOVA
School staff						
Protective family environment	34	Control	Pre	4.01(0.49)	3-5	Group: $F(1,94) = .003$, $\eta^2 < .001$
			post	3.94(0.47)	3-5	Wave: $F(1,94) = .56$, $\eta^2 < .001$
	76	Experimental	Pre	3.98(0.44)	2.8-5	Group*Wave: $F(1,94) = .56$, $\eta^2 < .001$
			post	3.91(0.43)	3-5	
Protective school environment	34	Control	Pre	4.41(0.44)	3.2-5	Group: $F(1,108) = .33$, $\eta^2 = .002$
			post	4.46(0.41)	3.4-5	Wave: $F(1,108) = .19$, $\eta^2 < .001$
	76	Experimental	Pre	4.48(0.37)	3.4-5	Group * Wave: $F(1,108) = .43$, $\eta^2 = .001$
			post	4.47(0.42)	3.2-5	
Knowledge about violence	34	Control	Pre	4.21(1.67)	1-8	Group: $F(1,108) = 2.31$, $\eta^2 = .02$
			post	4.06(1.87)	0-8	Time: $F(1,108) = 8.93$, $\eta^2 = .02$##
	76	Experimental	Pre	4.01(1.62)	1-8	Group * Wave: $F(1,108) = 15.15$, $\eta^2 = .03$###
Feeling prepared to manage potential violence cases			post	5.13(1.44)	2-8	
	34	Control	Pre	19.7(4.75)	3-27	Group: $F(1,108) = .17$, $\eta^2 = .002$
			post	19.0(4.64)	7-27	Wave: $F(1,108) = 3.51$, $\eta^2 < .001$
	76	Experimental	Pre	18.5(5.34)	3-30	Group * Wave: $F(1,108) = 11.72$, $\eta^2 = .03$###
			post	21.0(5.34)	8-30	
Students						
Psychological well-being	288	Control	Pre	50.5(8.85)	16.8-70.1	Group: $F(1,846) = .05$, $\eta^2 < .001$
			post	50.4(9.81)	27.8-67.4	Wave: $F(1,846) = .02$, $\eta^2 < .001$
	560	Experimental	Pre	50.3(9.93)	16.8-70.1	Group * Wave: $F(1,846) = .04$, $\eta^2 < .001$
			post	50.3(10.2)	5.48-67.4	
School well-being	318	Control	Pre	4.26(0.72)	1-5	Group: $F(1,911) = 3.94$, $\eta^2 = .003$#
			post	4.24(0.77)	1.4-5	Wave: $F(1, 911) = .48$, $\eta^2 < .001$
	597	Experimental	Pre	4.31(0.69)	1.4-5	Group * Wave: $F(1, 911) = .15$, $\eta^2 < .001$
			post	4.36(0.68)	1.4-5	
Family well-being	289	Control	Pre	4.68(0.40)	1.8-5	Group: $F(1, 846) = 2.05$, $\eta^2 < .001$
			post	4.77(0.35)	2-5	Wave: $F(1, 846) = .48$, $\eta^2 = .009$#
	559	Experimental	Pre	4.65(0.46)	1-5	Group * Wave: $F(1, 846) = .02$, $\eta^2 < .001$
			post	4.73(0.40)	1.8-5	

Note. Statistical significance is expressed by multiple asterisks # $p < .05$. ## $p < .01$. ### $p < .001$.

we found a smaller reduction than in the experimental schools concerning the *family environment* (-0.05). Likewise, the *psychological well-being* of the students is maintained in the experimental schools, and it is slightly reduced in the control schools (-0.01). *School well-being* shows a greater increase among the experimental schools (+0.05) compared to the control schools (+0.02). On the other hand, *family well-being* perceived by students increases 0.01 more in control schools (+0.09) than in experimental schools (+0.08).

Figure 1 summarizes the results of the significant effects found using box plots. For school staff, no significant effects were found between groups or over time in the perception of the *family environment* as protective $F(1, 94) = 0.456$, $p = .46$, $n = 96$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$, not even keeping the 14 cases with extreme outliers $F(1, 108) = 0.00003$, $p = .99$, $n = 110$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. No significant effects were found for the perception of the *school environment* as protective, which did not present any extreme outliers $F(1, 108) = 0.62$, $p = .43$, $n = 110$, $\eta_p^2 < .001$. In the case of *knowledge*, a significant effect was found for the interaction between time and group with a small effect $F(1, 108) = 15.15$, $p < .001$, $n = 110$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, without extreme outliers detected. When comparing between pairs, significant differences were found between the experimental and control groups for the post-intervention scores, of size $d = 0.67$. For the school staff preparedness, a small albeit significant effect of the interaction between time and group was also found $F(1, 108) = 11.72$, $p < .001$, $n = 110$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$, and no extreme outliers. Through pairwise comparisons, a significant difference was found between the experimental and control groups in the post scores ($d = 0.46$).

For the *psychological well-being* of students, no significant effect of time or group was found, and there were no extreme outliers $F(1, 846) = 0.03$, $p = .85$, $n = 848$. For *school well-being*, a significant main effect was found for group $F(1, 911) = 3.94$, $p < .05$, $n = 913$, with a minimal effect size ($\eta_p 2 = .003$), but when including two extreme outliers the effect was no longer significant $F(1, 913) = 3.11$, $p = .07$, $n = 915$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.003$. When performing the pairwise comparisons, a significant difference of size $d = 0.16$ (eliminating the outliers) and $d = 0.15$ (in the complete sample) was found between the groups for the scores of the post-intervention measure ($p < .05$). For *family well-being*, a significant effect was found for time removing extreme outliers $F(1, 846) = 36.75$, $p < .001$, $n = 883$. When cases with extreme outliers were incorporated, this effect was maintained $F(1, 881) = 24.17$, $p < .001$, $n = 883$, and a significant effect of group was also found $F(1, 881) = 5.01$, $p < .01$, $n = 883$. However, for all cases, the effect sizes were insignificant ($\eta_p^2 < .001$). When making pairwise comparisons, none of the differences between the experimental and control groups were significant, but significant differences were found in both groups over time, with effect sizes of $d = 0.19$ for the experimental group and $d = .23$ for the control group, which were reduced to $d = 0.12$ and $d = 0.18$ respectively when including extreme outliers.

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the qualitative variables by group and point in time and summarises the results of the MGLM. The students in the control schools increase their *knowledge of children's rights* by approximately 9%, while the experimental schools increase it by 21%. According to the MGLM results, this effect is significant, suggesting the programme's activities tended to increase children's *knowledge about their rights* significantly when compared to the tendency shown in control schools. The item "If you feel in danger, does the law allows you to go to the police on your own, without an adult accompanying you?" presents an increase of 7% for the experimental schools, while the correct answers for the control schools are reduced by 0.6% between the first and the second wave. The difference in the trends in this case suggest that schools following a regular programme do not directly include content about the specifics ways in which children can ask for help when they feel they are at risk. In the same table, it can be seen for the first and third knowledge items a significant effect of the interaction between time and group, but the second item (i.e., "Do you think that children have the right for adults to listen to you

and protect you?") did not report a significant effect. In fact, almost all students (over 90% at all waves and school type) thought that adults shall listen and protect them. According to the calculated OR, a child from schools applying the programme is more than twice as likely as students from control schools to answer, "Quite a bit or a lot" to the item "Do you know the children's rights?" with each new measurement. Children enrolled in experimental schools are also more than 1.5 times more likely to answer correctly to the item "If you feel in danger, does the law say that you can go to the police alone, without any adult accompanying you?" compared to students from control schools.

Discussion

To the best of our knowledge and understanding, this is the first study in the context of Spain that evaluates the impact of a comprehensive child protection programme from the school context on a sample of children and a sample of school staff with a pre-post design and a control group (Fondren et al., 2020), finding promising results. Previous studies either includes only a control-experimental group comparison (e.g., Prous-Trigo et al., 2021), a pre-post measurement of the experimental group (e.g., Pérez Daza et al., 2023) or focus on only one type of violence, mainly within

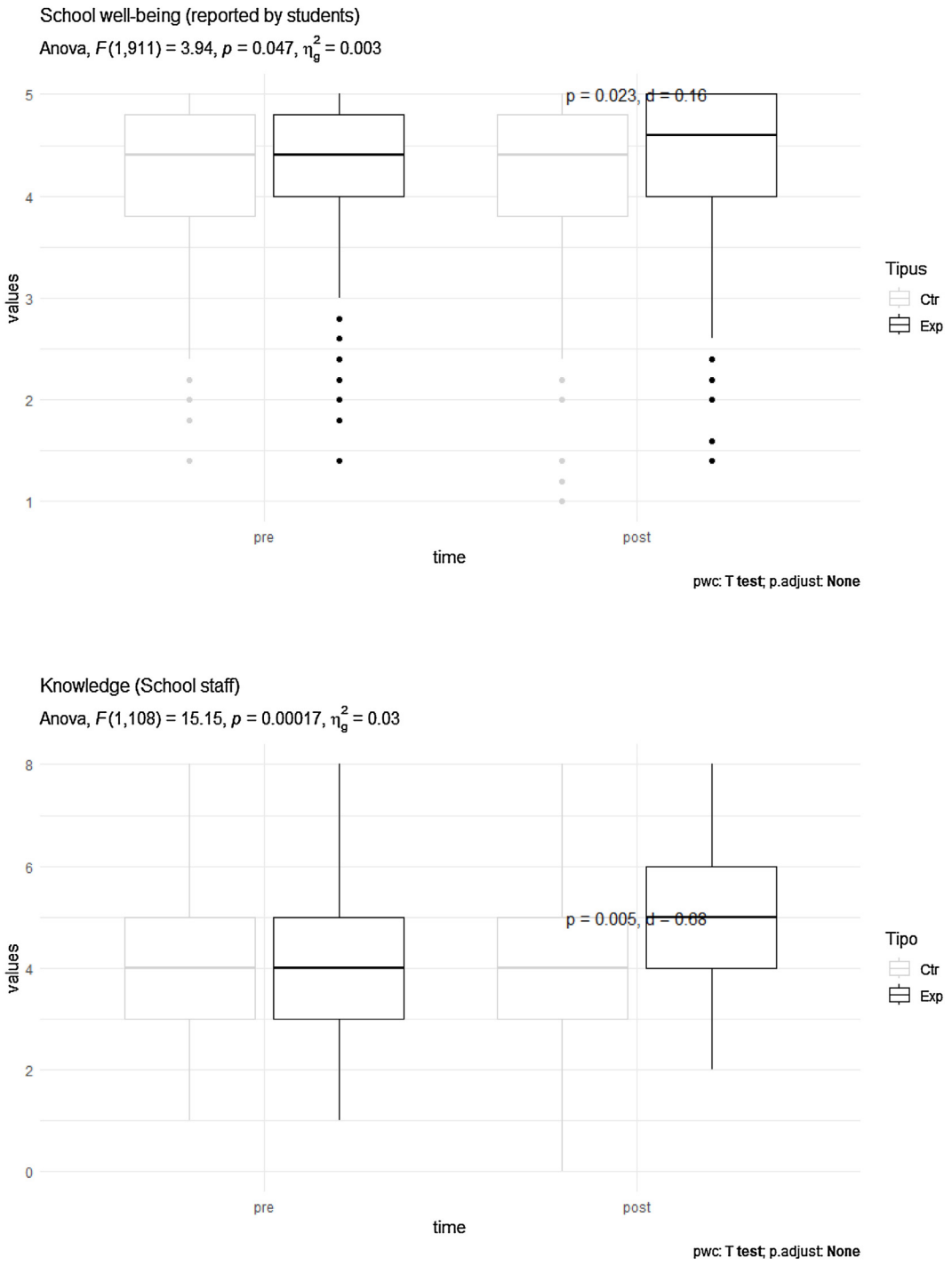

Figure 1. Box plots for the quantitative variables analysed with significant effects found in the repeated measures ANOVA.
Note. Ctr = Control schools, Exp = Experimental schools.

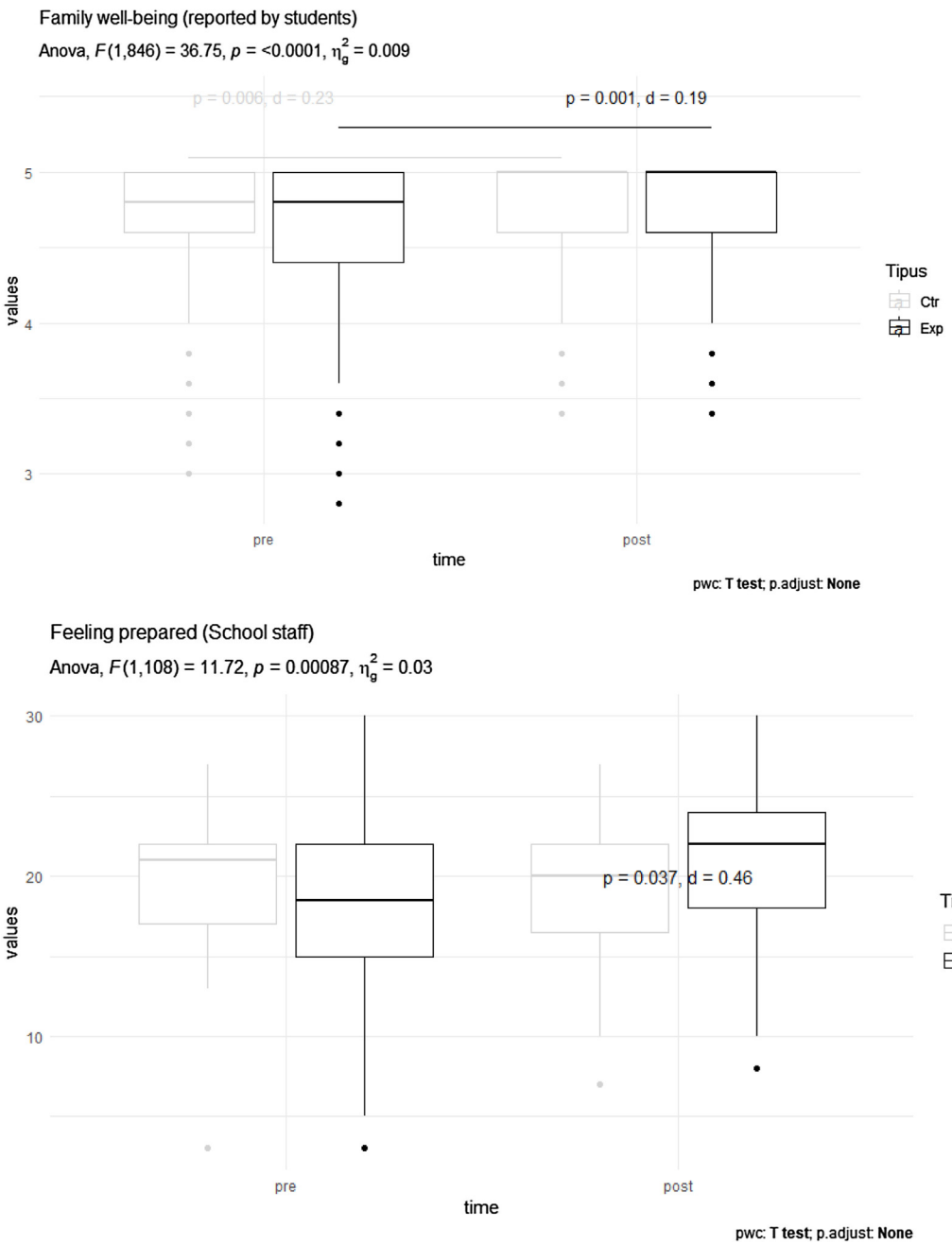

Figure 1. (*Continued*)

the school context or among peers (González Bellido, 2021). There are also qualitative studies (López et al., 2022; Roca-Campos et al., 2021), but none of the published research assessing performed in our country to assess a violence prevention programme from the school context uses the full pre-post with control group design, as our study does.

As expected, (see hypothesis 1), the school staff trained through the programme's online campus showed a significantly greater increase in knowledge and preparation than the control group. In fact, in the control group, these variables decreased between the first and second measurement. This suggests that the programme is effective in increasing school staff's knowledge of violence and their sense of preparedness to handle detection, manage disclosures, and communicate potential cases, which has been highlighted as crucially important in previous research (Greco et al., 2017; Mathews et al., 2017). The effect size found for knowledge was small, but when comparing the post-interventions scores between groups an effect size of $d = 0.68$ was observed, above the average reported by the WHO database (2022), which is $d = 0.39$. The same occurs for preparation, with an effect size of $d = 0.46$. These effects were detected even in a small sample, suggesting that it is an impact of considerable importance. School staff with greater knowledge and preparation tend to report more potential cases (Greco et al., 2017), and students' perception about their availability also influence their decision to disclosure (Lev-Wiesel et al., 2019; Van der Ploeg et al., 2022). Adult victims have also suggested than an institutional coherent attitude towards violence against children is key to improve victims' support (Greco et al., 2022). So, the programme may be effectively contributing to spot more potential cases on an early basis by increasing school staff competences. On the other hand, the trend observed in the control schools may suggest the need for ongoing updates, since both knowledge and a sense of

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and MLGM for qualitative variables

	Group	Wave	Answer	*n* (%)	MLGM	OR [95% CI]
Student body						
1.Do you know the rights of boys and girls?	Control	Pre	Nothing or a little	75(34.4)	Intercept: 0.90(0.20)###	2.48(1.67-3.67)
			Quite a bit or a lot	143(65.6)	Group (Exp): -0.26(0.24)	0.77(0.481.21)
		post	Nothing or a little	55(25.2)	Wave (Post): 0.59(0.25)#	1.81(1.11-2.94)
			Quite a bit or a lot	163(74.8)	Interaction (Group*Wave):	2.31(1.26-4.25)
	Experimental	Pre	Nothing or a little	165(38.8)	0.84(.31)##	
			Quite a bit or a lot	260(61.2)	Random effect variance: 1.81(1.35)	
		post	Nothing or a little	75(17.6)	R^2 Conditional: .39, R^2 Marginal:	
			Quite a bit or a lot	350(82.4)	.07	
2.Do you think that children have the right for adults to listen to you and protect you?	Control	Pre	No or I don't know	26(7.7)		2379.52(730.35-7752.65)
			Yes	312(92.3)		
		post	No or I don't know	24(7.1)	Intercept: 7.78(0.60)###	0.77(0.26-2.35)
			Yes	314(92.9)	Group (Exp): -0.25(0.57)	1.27(0.49-3.32)
	Experimental	Pre	No or I don't know	52(8.3)	Wave (Post): 0.24(0.49)	2.68(0.76-9.45)
			Yes	573(91.7)	Interaction (Group*Wave):	
		post	No or I don't know	36(5.8)	0.99(0.64)	
			Yes	589(94.2)	Random effect variance:	
3.If you feel in danger, does the law say that you can go to the police alone, without an adult accompanying you?	Control	Pre	No or I don't know	250(74.0)	60.16(7.76)	
			Yes	88(26.0)	R^2 Conditional: .95, R^2 Marginal:	0.25(0.18-0.35)
		post	No or I don't know	252(74.6)	.004	0.95(0.65-1.38)
			Yes	86(25.4)		0.96(0.65-1.42)
	Experimental	Pre	No or I don't know	467(74.8)		1.62(1.0003-2.61)
			Yes	157(25.2)	Intercept: -1.38(.17)###	
		post	No or I don't know	423(67.8)	Group (Exp): -0.05(0.19)	
			Yes	201(32.2)	Wave (Post): -0.04(0.20)	
					Interaction (Group*Wave):	
					0.49(0.24)#	
					Random effect variance:	
					60.16(7.76)	
					R^2 Conditional: .95, R^2 Marginal:	
					.004	

Note. The percentages have been calculated by group excluding the points without response. Statistical significance is expressed by multiple asterisks # $p < .05$. ##$p < .01$. ### $p < .001$.

preparation decline in the absence of any programme or intervention.

Regarding the perception that school staff have about how protective and safe is students' environment, a trend opposite to what was expected has been found. That is, in both the family environment and the school environment, the staff trained by the programme showed a decrease in the perception of these contexts as a safe space, while in the control schools the perception of the family as a protective environment also decreased, but that of the school environment increased. Although none of these effects were significant, some explanation for this trend can be hypothesized. The programme may have made school staff more aware of risks that they were unable to identify previously. Participants may have become more critical; they might be able to include within the "violence" conceptualization some behaviours that were seen as natural and normalized before the training. They could also better grasp the complexity in these situations, or they may have discovered situations that previously remained hidden thanks to the students being able to share their experiences more openly. Similar explanations have been provided by Sorrenti et al. (2020), when they analysed the causal impact of an intervention targeting children's socio-emotional skills and observed that children were perceived by teachers and caregivers as more impulsive and disruptive during the intervention period. Studies about human rights awareness among teachers show that the increased knowledge may be applied differently according to the context and situation (Birnhack & Perry-Hazan, 2021; Sharma, 2022), while in our study we gathered their general perceptions. Hence, specific circumstantial factors not considered in our research may also influence these trends.

The programme #EscolaSenseViolencies appears to fulfil its primary objective of enhancing the perception of safety, care, and protection that children have in their school, as we found an increasing trend in school well-being, in line with our hypothesis 2. Those who participated in the teaching units implemented by professionals who had received online training showed a significant improvement in their school well-being compared to those who did not undergo the programme. This means that children in schools applying the programme perceived their environment as more supportive, feel they can rely on peers and adults at school and feel valued by them (Rees et al., 2020). This finding exceeded our expectation, since we were hoping just to buffer the natural decreasing effect of this variable (see hypothesis 2). When comparing the scores of both groups after the programme, a moderate and significant effect was observed, of a similar magnitude to that reported by a meta-analysis on the subject ($d = 0.13$ in Euser et al., 2015). This suggests that the programme positively influences school well-being, as perceived by children.

However, psychological well-being in students from experimental schools did not vary significantly after the programme, while it decreased in the control group. Taking into account the general trends (Aymerich et al., 2004; Marquez et al., 2024), it was expected that experimental group would show a less important decrease than control groups. There is even evidence reporting that when awareness is raised among children's rights, abused students may feel discomfort from discovering they were not being treating as they should (Henry, 2002). So, in this context, finding an increasing albeit not significant trend, calls for further analysis and interpretation. It is possible that the psychological well-being construct is also influenced by other factors not considered in the present study (e.g., pre-existing internalizing or externalizing symptomatology), or there may be situations affecting psychological well-being (e.g., familiar situations like someone unemployed or dramatically ill) that were not addressed by the programme. In any case, no negative impact was identified, which is of great importance, considering that the fear of causing discom-

fort to children is often a reason adults hesitate to discuss abuse or violence. This finding aligns with recent insights highlighted in a review (Del Campo & Fávero, 2020) emphasizing the beneficial effects of openly addressing these topics. The misconception that avoiding these issues protects children from harm does not seem to have empirical support in the present findings and may also limit the effectiveness of training, although it should be verified with periodic or follow-up evaluations.

Contrary to expectations, family well-being increased in both groups, with no significant differences between them. However, it should be borne in mind that available evidence that state that well-being tends to decrease within the age ranges of our study is limited to cross-sectional designs comparing different age groups (Aymerich et al., 2004; Rees et al., 2020). It is also hard to establish whether the programme had any indirect effect in families, through the children's experiences. Some research suggest that other variables, like self-esteem, may play a role in the link between parent's respect for children opinion and awareness about human rights (Jeong, 2022), so new studies including these other aspects may be insightful. It could also be possible that the perception of family well-being tends to improve as the academic course progresses and routines are established, or this may be a natural trend. Another possible explanation is that families were aware that children would be asked about their feelings at home when consenting their participation, prompting them to promote well-being within the home environment throughout the academic course. But then again, this is only possible interpretations based on initial evidence that future research may confirm or complement.

Finally, regarding knowledge, a higher percentage of children who have received the programme are aware of children's rights and the possibility of autonomously communicating to an external agency when they are at risk, as proposed in our hypothesis 2. It is noteworthy that both the experimental and control groups show an increase in knowledge of children's rights throughout the course, as it is a topic that is usually addressed in all educational centres (Jeong, 2022). Nevertheless, the impact of participation in the programme is significant, and with a little assistance, the improvement is much greater, especially in specific aspects of reporting which have been found to be important at least in grown-up training (Greco et al., 2020).

Limitations

Although the present study fills the gap by assessing a comprehensive violence programme including teachers and children under ten years of age with at least two measurements over time and a control group, some limitations must be considered for the proper interpretation of the results. Firstly, the proportion of participating schools compared to those invited has been minimal. Likewise, the voluntary of the participation that may have led only the most motivated schools to participate, and the non-totally random assignment of schools and participants to each condition (i.e., experimental or control) may have influenced the results and compromise the representativeness of the sample. Furthermore, the sample loss in the second wave can also affect the results, especially in the school staff sample.

It is also important to note that the variance of the random effect in all models is much larger than that explained by the fixed effect. This may be because the outcome variables are influenced by many other factors, not solely by the awareness acquired during the programme.

Conclusions

The #EscolaSenseViolencies programme enhances knowledge of children's rights and violence against children among both students and school staff. Additionally, school staff participating in the programme report feeling more prepared to detect possible cases, handle disclosures, and communicate with external agencies. On the other hand, students experience an improvement in their school well-being while maintaining their psychological well-being. This programme is the first in Spain to address violence in the elementary school context through a comprehensive protection approach, based in the theoretical framework of Developmental Victimology. It is also the first one whose positive impact on the well-being of children in Primary Education is supported by empirical evidence coming from a quasi-experimental design including children and adults.

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Ana M. Greco: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Project administration, Writing - Original draft.

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Marc Balcells: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing.

Antonia Linde-García: Conceptualization, Methodology, Resources, Writing – Review & Editing.

Irene Montiel: Conceptualization, Data curation, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Supervision, Writing - Original draft and Writing - Review & Editing.

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