Author's response to reviews

Title: Validation of a Self-Administered Questionnaire to Assess Bullying in a Highly Violent Mexican Communities

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Author's response to reviews: see over
We send to your consideration the modified manuscript originally entitled: Validation of a self-administered questionnaire to assess bullying in a highly violent Mexican communities (MS: 186519061814151). Besides addressing all reviewers’ comments within the manuscript, we also send a point-by-point response to all these concerns.

Reviewer 1 (Angeles Aedo)
Any modification request

Reviewer 2 (Alfgeir Logi Kristjansson)

A) Main concerns

1. Narrative, grammar and extensive editing of the manuscript.

R. One native English speaker and one colleague have edited the manuscript, appendix, tables and figure.

2. Validity and reliability of the scale

R. It is our opinion that all confusion emerged from the fact that all validation indicators included in our study, were simply mentioned without any description about their importance or contribution to the overall validation process. So, we decided to add a brief description of each validation indicator and its contribution to the validation process, ordering them in a step by step fashion. We think that these changes improved the comprehension and reading fluency of this section. However, we recognize that the external validity required by this reviewer could contribute even more to the process of validation. Taking this into account, we have made two additional changes that reflect the “preliminar status” of our manuscript:

* Improvement on “limitations section”, with special emphasis on the need to perform some additional validation tests (including external validity) and their potential contribution.

3. Invariant analysis in two different populations.

R. We agree with this reviewer that “This paper is merely the first to demonstrate the potential of the measure” and so, we have assume this fact throughout the manuscript, highlighting the need for further external validity not only in multiple populations (as suggested) but also including other measurements for criteria validity (e.g. parenthood and teachers perception analysis), particularly in “limitations’ section”: 

“The authors recognize that there are many validation factors that need to be addressed in order to sustain even more the reliability and criterion validity of Bull-M. First, internal consistency and reproducibility, although commonly used in social sciences, are just two of many reliability criterions. External validation conducted in different populations and with different social condition, could argue even more on the reliability of bull-M. Second, given the inherent subjectivity of any test that attempts to evaluate Bull behaviors, the calibration or criterion validity is difficult to evaluate, since there is no “golden” criterion to contrast with; nevertheless, it has to be analyzed somehow. Third, although Bull-M was designed originally to be applied on subjects between the ages of 8 and 15, it has to be also validated with elementary school students, because Bull at this age is somewhat different.”

B) Specific Points

6. (Title) Needs alterations in line with comments above.
R. Modified accordingly

7. (Abstract) Conclusions need to be updated in line with previous comments.
R. Modified accordingly.

8. (Title and Abstract) Throughout it is not clear how “violent communities” are defined. This is central to the arguments put forth in the paper that addresses bullying in “violent communities” that therefore need to be clearly defined.
R. Initially, it was decided to conduct the study in Ciudad Juarez, a highly violent Mexican city. This was based on the fact that bullying (and thus the prevalence of aggressors and victims) could be higher and therefore the validation of Bull-M could be simpler. However, as noted by this reviewer, selecting this city to validate Bull-M does not imply that this test is specific for violent cities. For this reason, we decided to skip this regard and only offered a series of arguments throughout the text, supporting the importance of this city for the selection of the sample:

- “(Introduction, Page 3)... In Mexico, it goes from 10% to 83%, being particularly vulnerable those living in highly violent, poor and insecure US-border cities”
- “(Methods, Page 6)... at schools with a high incidence of violence and drug abuse in Ciudad Juarez (Chihuahua)”

9. (Introduction) a cleared will be definition of bullying will be welcomed in the paper
R. We add the definition of Dan Olweus (one of the first researchers who studied this issue) starting the introduction section (page 3)

10. (Introduction) Sentence beginning with “Moderate (56%)...” refers to Peruvian adolescents that I cannot recognize. The sentence is also hard to understand.
R. As a consequence of the copyediting (requested by the associate editor) and with the intention to make more fluid the introduction section (requested by this reviewer), the introduction section was almost completely reformulated. As part of this process, the Peruvian study reference was deleted.
11. (Introduction) The term “suffered from aggressions” is another term that needs clarification.
R. Same as in requirement 10

12. (Introduction) First sentence in paragraph 2 (“Structured and unstructured...”), odd context that needs clarification.
R. Same as in requirement 10

13. (Introduction) Lines 3 and 4 on page 4 (“However, the associated...”), odd context that I cannot understand.
R. Same as in requirement 10

14. (Introduction) Overall the introduction is very hard to follow. Many sentences are not connected to one another and the flow of the text is never smooth.
R. Same as in requirement 10

15. (Methods) under “Design and Instrumentation”. Somehow it appears to me that 8+1=10?. Please explain.
R. We have described in more detail within "Design & Structure of Bull-M" (page 6) the number of items, their distribution within the questionnaire and the process of integration of each one of the ten questions

16. (Methods) under “Questionnaire and scale development”: “previously trained researchers”, please clarify.
R. We have added the following sentence to the final (page 7) of section "Design & Structure of Bull-M" (formerly "Questionnaire and Scale Development"): 
"...The test was efficiently applied in 10-15 minutes by two collaborators (ARJ, OEDV), collectively within the classroom while the teacher was not present". The collaborators’ initials correspond to the names of two authors of this article.

17. (Methods) Last sentence: “Given the multiple options…” is not understandable.
R. Because the entire statement containing this phrase was confusing, it was decided to reformulate it as follows:
" (Page 6)...Also, in order to evaluate the frequency of each experienced situation or the student involvement in them, a 5-point linkert scale was added: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and every day. Only for validation purposes, this frequency was coded on a scale of 0-5”.

18. (Methods) Top of page 6: I would welcome more and clearer information about the representativeness of the sample
R. The sample, although completely sampled randomly, was not representative of the population at all high schools of Ciudad Juarez. Therefore, the phrase “The students were selected by simple random technique and with a replacement” was omitted and replaced by the former sentence (Page 7).
19. (Methods) Mid of page 6: Not clear what “students were selected by simple random technique” means.
R. Same as in requirement 18

20. (Methods) I have never heard of “Appearance validity”. Please clarify.
R. Was changed by content validity (Logical or Judge validity, Page 7)

21. (Methods) Ending sentences with words such as “among other things” should be discouraged. This whole paragraph is very hard to understand. I would recommend rewriting it totally.
R. Modified accordingly

22. (Results) The result section is in my mind the clearest and best part of the manuscript and relatively easy to follow.
R. There was no substantial change to this section only restructured and added titles to each outcome according to the methods section

23. (Discussion) First’s sentence cannot stand as is and needs adjustment with other comments in mind.
R. As a consequence of the copyediting (requested by the associate editor) and with the intention to make more fluid this section (requested by this reviewer), this section was almost completely reformulated (see text).

24. (Discussion) Upper part of page 10: Sentence beginning with “On the other hand, due to the…” is not understandable as is and needs rewriting.
R. Same as in requirement 23

25. (Discussion) Mid of page 12: I could not understand the ratios.
R. We did not know for sure what do the reviewer meant with "ratio". However, as explained in 23, all the discussion section was restructured and therefore that contained the referred statement could also change.

26. (Discussion) Conclusions need to be change in line with other comments.
R. In line with discussion and limitations sections, all conclusions were reedited (see text).

Associate editor (Prof. Inga Dora Sigfusdottir)

27. Paragraphs editing with strong topic sentence, body and strong closing sentence.
R. Modified accordingly

28. Improvement of English used and copyediting.
R. One native English speaker and one colleague have edited the manuscript, appendix, tables and figure.

29. Context information in abstract
Since "highly violent Mexican communities" is no longer the focus of the manuscript, that "context" is not necessary. However, we have changed the background on the abstract from:

"...The aim of the project was to design and validate a self-administered instrument (Bullying-M) which would enable the confidential, economic, simple, and reliable measuring of the prevalence of bullying at schools settled in highly violent communities"

to:

"Bullying (Bull) is a public health problem worldwide and Mexico is not exempt. However, its epidemiology and early detection in our country is limited, in part, by the lack of validated tests to ensure the respondent`s anonymity. The aim of this study was to validate a self-administered test (Bull-M) for assessing Bull among high-school Mexicans"

30. Declaration of competing interests

R. We have added this session, before the references section

31. Authors contributions & acknowledgements

R. We have added this session, before the references section

Sincerely

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c.c. Mr. Jimmar Dizon