

Article

Assessing Violence Against Children and Adolescents: A Developmental Victimology Approach in Spain

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ABSTRACT

Despite recent legislative and social progress, violence against children and adolescents remains a serious and unaddressed public health issue. This article examines the prevalence of child and adolescent victimization in Spain assessed using different versions of the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ), framed in the developmental victimology approach. The JVQ assesses multiple forms of violence (including conventional crime, caregiver maltreatment, peer victimization, sexual victimization, community violence, and electronic victimization) based on minors' self-reports. Several Spanish-adapted versions of the JVQ are examined and data presented from different regions and at-risk populations. The findings reveal a high prevalence of polyvictimization, particularly among adolescents in clinical, judicial, or child protection settings. The article concludes that there is an urgent need for enhanced early detection and assessment of child victimization using tools adapted and grounded in developmental victimology. It also calls for expanded research on vulnerable groups and children under the age of 12. The importance of translating empirical findings into professional practice and evidence-based public policy design and evaluation is also highlighted.

Evaluación de la Victimización en la Infancia y Adolescencia: un Enfoque desde la Victimología del Desarrollo en España

RESUMEN

Palabras clave

Victimología del desarrollo

JVQ

Prevalencia

Evaluación

Victimización infantojuvenil

A pesar de los avances legislativos y sociales, la violencia contra niños, niñas y adolescentes sigue siendo un problema de salud pública poco abordado con herramientas de evaluación específicas. Este artículo examina la prevalencia de la victimización infantil y adolescente en España evaluada a través del Cuestionario de Victimización Juvenil (JVQ) desde la perspectiva de la victimología del desarrollo. Este instrumento permite evaluar múltiples formas de violencia (por delitos comunes, maltrato por cuidadores, entre iguales, sexual, comunitaria y electrónica) desde la perspectiva de los propios menores. Se analizan diversas versiones del JVQ adaptadas al contexto español y se presentan datos obtenidos en diferentes comunidades y grupos de riesgo. Los resultados muestran una alta prevalencia de polivictimización, especialmente en adolescentes en contextos clínicos, judiciales y de protección. Se concluye que es urgente mejorar la detección temprana y la evaluación de la violencia infantil mediante herramientas adaptadas y fundamentadas en la victimología del desarrollo, así como ampliar la investigación a poblaciones vulnerables y menores de 12 años. Se destaca también la necesidad de trasladar estos hallazgos e instrumentos a la práctica profesional y al diseño y evaluación de políticas públicas.

Introduction

Violence against children and adolescents continues to represent a serious social and public health problem in Spain due to its widespread nature and consequences (Hillis et al., 2017), despite the growing attention it has received in recent years from the academic and professional community (Shawar & Shiffman, 2021). This concern has been recognized internationally, as evidenced by its inclusion in [United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16 \(2019\)](#), which underscores the urgent need to prevent and address violence against children as a means of promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, ensuring access to justice, and strengthening effective, responsible, and transparent institutions at all levels. Likewise, the political and legislative spheres have begun to take on a more active role, reflected in the approval of regulations such as the *Ley Orgánica 8/2021, de 4 de junio, de protección integral a la infancia y la adolescencia frente a la violencia* [Organic Law 8/2021, of June 4, on comprehensive protection for children and adolescents against violence], and in the recent creation, in 2023, of the *Ministerio de Juventud e Infancia* [Ministry of Youth and Children], which is responsible for proposing and implementing government policies on youth and child protection.

The developmental victimology perspective offers a framework for analysis that places the cause of this violence in the inequality that exists between adults and minors—an emotional, physical, and dependence-based inequality—which, in turn, generates a marked asymmetry of power (Finkelhor, 2007). Understanding this particularity is essential to addressing the issue effectively and inclusively, ensuring that all victims are taken into account.

Developmental victimology has been incorporated into academia and research in Spain; however, it remains little known or scarcely applied in many professional settings. These tend to have a relatively low level of knowledge (Greco et al., 2020) and to base their intervention on theories developed to explain violence between adults, such as violence against women, which, while sharing certain elements with violence against children and adolescents (Guedes et al., 2016), does not allow for a complete and adequate explanation of its dynamics and particularities. Although the incorporation of an intersectional perspective in working with victims is indisputably necessary—considering variables such as gender or ethnicity—the theory that must underpin the understanding and explanation of violence against children and adolescents is, necessarily, developmental victimology. Consequently, the instruments used for assessment must be constructed from this theoretical framework.

Assessment of Violence Against Children and Adolescents

The high prevalence of violence during childhood and adolescence (Moody et al., 2018), as well as the resulting psychological harm to its victims (Hillis et al., 2017), requires priority attention from professionals trained in early detection and specialized assessment. To this end, it is essential to have specific instruments with adequate psychometric properties that respond to the particularities of this field of work. Early, accurate assessment tailored to the characteristics of child and adolescent violence not only increases the chances of interrupting the mistreatment and preventing new situations of abuse but also allows for the

identification of the resulting psychological consequences and the effective guidance of intervention, contributing to the improved well-being of the children and adolescents affected.

However, professionals are often unaware of the existence of standardized and validated assessment tools for the early detection of these cases. Many of the instruments used—such as risk factor lists—lack standardization, the specific instruments available have not been adequately validated, and in those cases where there are standards for their use, there is no sufficiently developed body of validity studies available (Meinck et al., 2023). Faced with this problem, many studies choose to develop ad hoc instruments or use questionnaires focused on only one form of violence, which limits the possibility of comparing results between studies and hinders the consolidation of a solid, cumulative body of scientific knowledge.

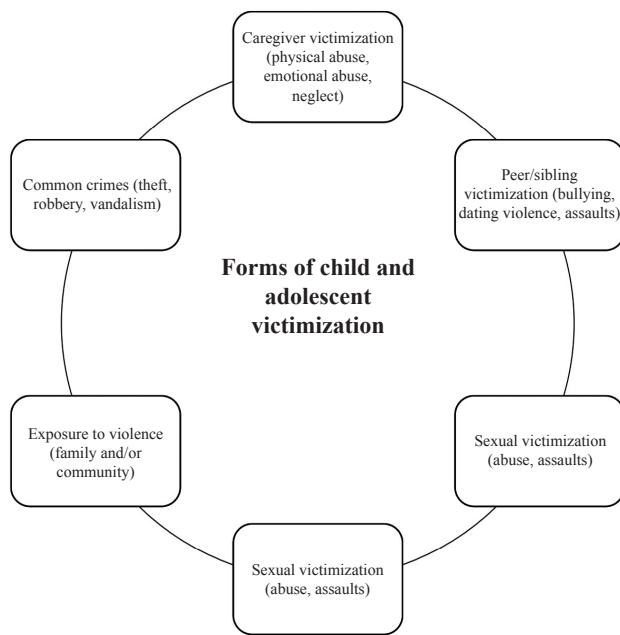
Most research on child and adolescent victimization has been based on retrospective accounts by adults, which makes it difficult to obtain up-to-date and contextualized information (Pereda, 2016). This approach has limitations, as adults may have forgotten or reinterpreted their experiences, and the characteristics of violence may have changed in recent generations. Furthermore, relying on parents or caregivers as informants is also inappropriate, given the existence of discrepancies with the accounts of the minors themselves (Carroll-Lind et al., 2006) and the fact that, in many cases, these adults are responsible for the violence (Devries et al., 2018).

Developmental victimology emphasizes the importance of asking children and adolescents directly about their experiences of victimization, in line with the right to be heard enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). Evidence indicates that participating in these studies does not cause them significant emotional harm and, on the contrary, they value the opportunity to express themselves (Mathews et al., 2022). Excluding them restricts the collection of up-to-date and rigorous data, which is necessary for designing effective interventions (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2006).

To properly understand the reality of child victimization, it is essential that researchers obtain comprehensive victimization profiles, given that many children do not experience a single form of violence but multiple forms simultaneously. Polyvictimization has been a little-considered aspect in the assessment of child victimization. Only in recent years has research begun to explore the interrelationship between different types of victimization (Pereda, 2019a). The study of the coexistence of various forms of victimization, based on the idea that they do not occur in isolation but are interconnected, offers a more appropriate approach to understanding the complexity of victimology (Hamby & Grych, 2013).

In this sense, developmental victimology promotes an approach to violence against children and adolescents from a comprehensive and integrative perspective, which considers the multiple forms of victimization to which they may be exposed throughout their development. With this purpose, the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; Finkelhor et al., 2005) was designed, an instrument that considers not only violence perpetrated by parents or primary caregivers but also other forms of victimization to which children and adolescents may be exposed, organized into six thematic modules (see [Figure 1](#)). The modular structure of the instrument makes it remarkably versatile, facilitating its adaptation

Figure 1
Grouping of Forms of Victimization Against Children and Adolescents



to the specific objectives and characteristics of various studies without compromising the psychometric soundness of its results. As a result, the JVQ has established itself as one of the most robust and representative instruments for assessing experiences of victimization in the under-18 population (Meinck et al., 2023).

In summary, it is necessary to have adequate tools to assess the multiple experiences of victimization in childhood from the perspective of children and adolescents themselves, addressing the diversity of forms of victimization and avoiding the fragmentation of data (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2000). Only through this type of tool can valid and reliable prevalence data be obtained, which can also be compared and interpreted in relation to other studies conducted with the same instrument in other contexts.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this review is to provide an updated description of child and adolescent victimization in Spain from the perspective of developmental victimology. To this end, the different versions of the JVQ instrument are first presented, and their main methodological characteristics are analyzed. Next, the findings of studies conducted in Spain that have applied this instrument to samples of minors are summarized. The aim is to provide professionals, researchers, and public policy makers with a rigorous and accessible overview of both the available data and the opportunities and limitations of existing tools for the detection and analysis of child and adolescent victimization.

Method

A narrative review was conducted (Greenhalgh et al., 2018), given the specificity of the topic and the limited availability of publications applying the JVQ to minors in Spain. This type of

review makes it possible to integrate and contextualize existing findings from a specific theoretical perspective—in this case, developmental victimology—and is particularly useful in emerging fields where there is not yet a critical mass of studies to allow for systematic reviews or rigorous meta-analyses.

The literature search was conducted in the Google Scholar database, using the following key terms in English and Spanish: *developmental victimology, victimología del desarrollo, JVQ, juvenile victimization questionnaire, cuestionario de victimización juvenil, Spain, España*. A manual search was also conducted in the references of the identified studies in order to detect additional works that were not adequately indexed.

Clear and specific inclusion criteria were established: (1) studies published in scientific journals in English or Spanish; (2) conducted with populations under 18 years of age residing in Spain; and (3) using the JVQ, in any of its versions, as the main instrument for assessing experiences of victimization. All studies were excluded that: (a) used exclusively adult samples, (b) applied other instruments not based on developmental victimology or that were not adaptations of the JVQ, or (c) did not provide prevalence data.

Initially, 49 documents were identified, of which 34 were rejected for not meeting the above criteria, mainly because they were studies with adult populations or referred to other Spanish-speaking countries (Chile, Mexico). In cases where the same research group had published several articles based on the same sample, only the publication that presented the most comprehensive prevalence data was selected. The final number of studies included was 15.

This process was carried out manually by the research team, ensuring the relevance and thematic consistency of the studies analyzed. Although the narrative methodology has limitations in terms of the replicability of the search process, this approach was chosen because it is well suited to critically synthesizing an emerging body of literature in the Spanish context, where studies applying the JVQ to child and adolescent samples remain scarce and dispersed.

Results

Adaptations and use of the JVQ in Spain

The JVQ (Finkelhor et al., 2005) has been validated as a self-report measure for adolescents aged 12 to 17 in the general population (Pereda et al., 2018), demonstrating excellent psychometric properties. The instrument provides a comprehensive assessment, both in the past year and over the course of a lifetime, of six general areas of child and adolescent victimization, such as common crimes (9 items), victimization by caregivers (4 items), victimization by peers and siblings (6 items), sexual victimization (6 items), exposure/indirect victimization (9 items), and electronic victimization (2 items). The validated version thus includes 36 forms of victimization and some follow-up questions on the frequency of the event, the perpetrator, and the age of onset of abuse, among others. The psychometric properties of an earlier version of the JVQ, with 34 items, which excludes the electronic victimization module, have also been presented with similar results (Kirchner et al., 2013).

More recent versions of the instrument have expanded the assessment to include a greater number of experiences of electronic, peer, and sexual victimization, reducing some forms of common crimes and exposure to community violence, given their low incidence in the national context (Pereda et al., 2024). The JVQ is also available in Spanish in a structured interview format (Segura et al., 2015), as well as in a retrospective version for adults (Pereda & Gallardo-Pujol, 2014) and for parents or caregivers of victims (Aguado-Gracia et al., 2021).

The JVQ even has a single screening question (Hamby et al., 2011) translated into Spanish, which can be used routinely in contexts such as healthcare or education. This question, which focuses on whether the child has suffered harm or felt scared or unsafe in different environments over a certain period of time, allows for the rapid detection of possible cases of victimization and, if necessary, the application of more extensive versions of the questionnaire. Although the Spanish version of this screening question, translated with the permission of the original authors, has not been formally published, it is available upon request through the Research Group on Child and Adolescent Victimization (GReVIA) at the University of Barcelona.

A self-report version of the JVQ aimed at children and adolescents aged 8 to 12 has recently been published (Montiel et al., 2025). This adaptation is based on the Spanish version for adolescents (Pereda et al., 2018) and has been developed following specific methodological recommendations for use with children (Bell, 2007), ensuring its suitability for the cognitive and communicative abilities of this age group. These guidelines include simple language, the use of five response options—considered the optimal number according to previous studies—and the inclusion of an audio option to listen to the items, in order to reduce the cognitive load on children with varying reading levels. The adapted version consists of 15 items distributed across five modules, which allow for the exploration of victimization by caregivers (3 items), peer victimization (2 items), sexual victimization (2 items), exposure/indirect victimization (5 items), and electronic victimization (3 items). This tool facilitates the collection of epidemiological data on experiences of violence from the age of 8 onwards, using a measure that is comprehensible and adapted to the children's own perceptions, with adequate indicators of reliability, content validity, and construct validity, and designed specifically to capture their unique understanding of child victimization.

Table 1 summarizes the different versions of the instrument used in Spain.

Table 1
Versions of the JVQ Translated and Validated in Spain

Version	Number of items	Validation/Translation	Sample	Citation
Self-report for children and adolescents	15 items	Translation and validation into Spanish	Children aged 8 to 12	Montiel et al. (2025)
Self-report for adolescents	36 items	Translation and validation into Spanish	Young people aged 12 to 17	Pereda et al. (2018)
Adolescent self-report	34 items	Translation and validation into Spanish	Young people aged 13 to 18	Kirchner et al. (2013)
Adolescent self-report	31 items	Translation into Spanish	Young people aged 14 to 17	Pereda et al. (2024)
Adolescent interview	36 items and follow-up questions	Translation into Spanish	Young people aged 12 to 17	Pereda et al. (2015, 2017); Segura et al. (2015)
Retrospective self-report for adults	36 items	Translation into Spanish	Adults aged 18 and over	Pereda & Gallardo-Pujol (2014)
Parent or caregiver report	36 items	Translation into Spanish	Parents or caregivers	Aguado-Gracia et al. (2021)

Prevalence of Child and Adolescent Victimization in Spain

The first study published in Spain from the perspective of developmental victimology was conducted by Pereda et al. (2014), who applied the 36-item self-report version of the JVQ to a sample of 1,107 adolescents aged 12 to 17 attending school in Catalonia. The results showed that 83% of participants had experienced some form of violence over their lifetime and 69% in the last year. In addition, 30.1% of adolescents were classified as polyvictims in the previous 12 months and 37.8% across their lifetime, as they scored above the mean number of victimizations for their group. In the Valencian Community, Játiva and Cerezo (2014), working with a sample of school-attending adolescents aged 15 to 18 years, found that 90.8% had been victims of violence in the last year and that 57.8% reported four or more victimization experiences during that period, and were therefore considered polyvictims. In the Basque Country, Indias and De Paúl (2017) studied a sample of 608 adolescents aged 12 to 18, finding that 91% had experienced some form of victimization over their lifetime and that 34.7% could be considered polyvictims, reporting experiences of victimization above the group average. In all three studies, the most prevalent forms of victimization were common crimes—such as theft and robbery—while sexual violence was the least reported. Likewise, the data show that polyvictimization affects a significant percentage of adolescents, despite the methodological difficulties in defining and measuring it (Segura et al., 2018).

To date, the only study conducted with a nationally representative sample of school-aged adolescents in Spain is that of Pereda et al. (2024), using the 31-item version of the JVQ. A total of 4,024 adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 participated in the study. The results showed that 49.6% had suffered at least one form of violence in the last year. The most prevalent forms of victimization were electronic (21.3%), followed by victimization by caregivers (20.7%) and peers (19.1%). The least frequent form was sexual exploitation—which included the exchange of sexual material, touching, or penetration in exchange for benefits—although it affected 2.6% of adolescents. In addition, 31.1% of victims presented levels of victimization above the mean and were classified as polyvictims.

Also in a community sample, Montiel et al. (2025) surveyed 782 children and adolescents between the ages of 8 and 12 in Catalonia. Sixty-eight point two percent of participants reported having suffered at least one form of victimization across their lifetime, and 66.4% during the past school year. In addition, 29.7% reported

having experienced four or more types of violence over their lifetime, and 17.6% in the last school year, classifying them as polyvictims. The most frequently reported forms of victimization were those committed by peers (52.1%) across their lifetime and exposure to violence (53.7%) during the past school year, while sexual violence was the least reported in both periods (2.4% and 1.4%, respectively).

Focusing specifically on at-risk groups, Pereda et al. (2015) applied the 36-item interview version of the JVQ to a sample of 149 adolescents aged 12 to 17 undergoing clinical evaluation at child and adolescent mental health centers. The results showed that 99.3% of participants had experienced some form of victimization across their lifetime, and 84.6% in the past year. Common crimes, followed by exposure to family and community violence, and peer violence were the most frequent forms of victimization, both across the lifetime (81.9%, 81.9%, and 62.4%) and in the past year (63.1%, 55.7%, and 37.6%). In contrast, sexual violence was the least reported in both periods (16.1% and 7.4%, respectively). In addition, 38.9% were classified as polyvictims across their lifetime and 40.3% in the last year, as they had scores above the average victimization rate for their group. Aguado-Gracia et al. (2021) applied the 34-item version of the JVQ, without the electronic victimization module, to a clinical sample of 106 children and adolescents between the ages of 6 and 18 diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Those over the age of 11 were given the self-administered survey, and those aged 11 and under were given the same version, but for parents or caregivers. The most frequently reported lifetime form of victimization was common crimes (75.5%), followed by peer victimization (67.9%), whereas sexual victimization was the least reported (6.6%).

In the area of the protection system, Segura et al. (2015) interviewed 129 adolescents aged between 12 and 17 in residential and shelter centers. The data showed that 100% of participants had experienced some form of victimization over their lifetime, while 85.3% had suffered it in the past year. The most frequent forms of victimization were exposure to family and community violence, common crimes, and peer violence, both across their lifetime (90.7%, 88.4%, and 73.6%) and in the past year (51.9%, 66.7%, and 45.7%). Sexual violence was the least reported in both periods, with prevalence rates of 29.5% across the lifetime and 12.4% in

the past year. In addition, 46.9% were classified as polyvictims across their lifetime and 34.3% in the past year, which was also above the average for their group. Indias et al. (2019) used 13 items from the self-administered JVQ version to assess experiences of victimization by caregivers, peer victimization, sexual victimization, and exposure to family violence in a sample of 107 adolescents, aged 12 to 17, residing in 24 centers of the protection system in two Spanish autonomous communities. The results showed that 86.9% of the participants had suffered at least one of the 13 forms of victimization explored across their lifetime. The most prevalent forms were victimization by peers and siblings (76.6%), victimization by caregivers (66.4%), exposure to family violence (50.5%), and sexual victimization (41.1%). Polyvictimization was not assessed. Fernández-Artamendi et al. (2020) interviewed 321 adolescents between the ages of 11 and 18 who were cared for in residential centers within the protection system using the 36-item version, obtaining lifetime victimization prevalence rates ranging from 91.0% for exposure to community violence and common crimes against the person to 25.5% for sexual victimization. A total of 74.3% of participants reported polyvictimization.

Continuing with at-risk groups, Pereda et al. (2017) studied a sample of 101 young people between the ages of 14 and 17 recruited from the juvenile justice system. In this case, the entire sample (100%) reported some experience of victimization over their lifetime, and 92.1% in the past year. The results indicated that the most common forms of victimization were exposure to violence, common crimes, and peer victimization, with high prevalence rates both across the lifetime (97.0%, 96.0%, and 86.1%, respectively) and in the past year (75.2%, 72.3%, and 65.3%, respectively). In contrast, sexual violence was the least reported form in both periods, with rates of 15.8% across the lifetime and 6.9% in the past year. Polyvictimization affected 55.4% of adolescents at some point in their lives and 41.6% in the past 12 months. In turn, García Montoliu et al. (2023) evaluated 30 adolescents between the ages of 15 and 17 serving judicial measures in a socio-educational residence, using the JVQ sexual victimization subscale, obtaining a lifetime prevalence of 20%.

Table 2 presents the prevalence of victimization reported across different samples of children and adolescents in Spain.

Table 2
Prevalence of Victimization in Spanish Samples of Children and Adolescents

Reference	Sample	Origin	N	Age	Prevalence past year	Lifetime prevalence
Játiva & Cerezo (2014)	Community	Valencia	109	15-18	90.8%	-
Pereda et al. (2014)	Community	Catalonia	1,107	12-17	69.0%	83.0%
Indias & de Paúl (2017)	Community	Basque Country and Navarre	608	12-18	-	91.0%
Pereda et al. (2024)	Community	Spain	4,024	14-17	49.6%	-
Montiel et al. (2025)	Community	Catalonia	782	8-12	66.4%*	68.2%
Pereda et al. (2015)	Clinical	Catalonia	149	12-17	84.6%	99.3%
Aguado-Gracia et al. (2021)**	Clinical	Catalonia	106	6-18	-	6.6-75.5%
Pereda et al. (2017)	Justice	Catalonia	101	14-17	92.1%	100%
García Montoliu et al. (2023)	Justice	Castellón	30	15-17	-	20.0% sexual
Segura et al. (2015)	Protection	Catalonia	129	12-17	85.3%	100%
Fernández-Artamendi et al. (2020)**	Protection	Asturias	321	11-18	-	25.5-91%
Indias et al. (2019)	Protection	Not specified	107	12-17	-	86.9%

Note. *This case refers to the past school year. **Since the study does not report the total percentage of participants with at least one instance of victimization, the table shows the range of prevalence rates by module.

Discussion

The detection and assessment of child victimization is an issue of unquestionable social relevance in Spain, requiring the use of robust, validated instruments based on the principles of developmental victimology. The purpose of this study was to synthesize the results of research conducted in Spain within the field of developmental victimology, with the aim of familiarizing professional teams with the different adaptations of the JVQ used to assess violence against children from this perspective. It also provides the necessary reference sources for accessing the most up-to-date versions of the instrument and its respective adaptations to the national context.

Studies that have directly asked children and adolescents about their experiences of victimization are still scarce in Spain. Only 15 studies have been identified that include samples of minors, and of these, only two (Aguado-Gracia et al., 2021; Montiel et al., 2025) included participants under the age of 10. This limited representation highlights a significant gap in the inclusion of younger children's voices in research on violence, despite the fact that they constitute a particularly vulnerable group. Addressing the study of victimization at these ages involves overcoming various ethical and methodological challenges, including ensuring their informed, respectful, and safe participation, as well as implementing effective mechanisms to protect their well-being throughout the process (Pereda, 2019b). Although this balance between research and protection is not always easy to achieve, it is an unavoidable responsibility of the scientific community to ensure compliance with the right of children and adolescents to be heard in all matters that affect them (Lundy, 2007).

Thus, in recent years, the importance of gathering information from minors themselves about the violence they suffer has been emphasized (Devries et al., 2015), incorporating their perception of the situation and allowing them, in some cases for the first time, to report these types of experiences (Becker-Blease & Freyd, 2006). The high prevalence of victimization detected in all studies conducted in Spain, ranging from 49.9% (Pereda et al., 2024) to 92.1% (Pereda et al., 2017) for the past year, depending on the different samples analyzed, highlights the importance of continuing to ask children and adolescents about this issue in order to obtain updated data that will contribute to a more accurate understanding of this problem and to the improvement of prevention and intervention strategies.

In order to overcome the limitations of other instruments used to assess experiences of victimization in childhood and adolescence—which often have significant restrictions in terms of their scope and suitability for the Spanish context—the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ; Finkelhor et al., 2005) was developed. For example, the Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ) (Bernstein et al., 1997), adapted in Spain for adults in clinical samples (Hernández et al., 2013), focuses exclusively on lifetime abuse by caregivers, without considering other relevant contexts such as school or community. In contrast, the different versions of the JVQ, which include between 15 and 36 items and have been adapted and validated in our environment, allow for a comprehensive assessment of victimization experiences in children aged 8 years and older. Similar to what has been observed at the international level (Mathews et al., 2020), this instrument can be

considered the reference standard for the self-reported measurement of violence in childhood and adolescence, theoretically grounded in the developmental victimology framework.

Studies conducted in Spain using this instrument have shown that common crimes, exposure to violence, and peer victimization are highly prevalent forms of violence among children and adolescents. Although sexual violence is the least reported, the figures remain significant and require a response from society. In fact, previous research has indicated that the figures may be underestimated, not because these events do not occur, but because children and adolescents may not identify certain experiences as forms of sexual violence until years later (Pereda et al., 2014). Furthermore, analysis of the accumulation of violent experiences or polyvictimization—a variable that has gained increasing importance in the specialized literature (Haahr-Pedersen et al., 2020)—reveals the existence of a group of children and adolescents who require priority attention and specialized intervention tailored to their needs.

The theoretical framework of developmental victimology, together with the concept of polyvictimization, has significantly transformed the last two decades of research in the field of child and adolescent victimology.

This approach has made it possible to broaden the assessment of violence beyond physical maltreatment and child sexual abuse, incorporating other forms of victimization and analyzing the profound effects that the accumulation of violent experiences in childhood has on the psychological, social, and emotional development of children and adolescents (Finkelhor, 2008). However, the practical implications of this concept have not yet been effectively translated into the professional sphere, nor have they been systematically incorporated into the design of evidence-based public policies for the comprehensive prevention of violence against children and adolescents. This situation can be explained by the numerous challenges involved in transferring scientific knowledge into practice in the field of violence, such as the difficulty professionals have in accessing up-to-date and rigorous information, as well as the lack of resources and incentives for researchers to synthesize and disseminate their findings in the professional field (Saul et al., 2008). Even in the field of prevention, recent reviews show a scarcity of rigorous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of programs addressing violence in the school context (Del Campo & Fávero, 2020; Fondren et al., 2020). In Spain, programs designed based on this theoretical framework are particularly limited, with the Barça Foundation's #EscolaSenseViolències program standing out as a pioneering initiative that has recently been piloted and validated by Greco et al. (2025).

The assessment of children and adolescents who have experienced violence continues to present significant challenges for professionals, due both to the multidimensional and complex nature of the phenomenon and to the methodological limitations of the available studies.

To date, only one study has been conducted with a large, representative sample of school-attending adolescents in Spain (Pereda et al., 2024), representing an important step forward in the field of developmental victimology. In that study, 49% of participants reported having experienced some form of violence in the past year, a figure considerably lower than that reported in studies conducted approximately a decade earlier, where prevalence

ranged from 69% (Pereda et al., 2024) to 90% (Játilva & Cerezo, 2014). This disparity could be interpreted as an indication of a possible reduction in the prevalence of victimization today; however, it is essential to consider that this percentage remains alarmingly high and evidence of the persistence of the problem. In addition, these differences may be influenced by different methodological and demographic variables. For example, previous studies included samples with minors aged 12 and older, whereas the present study included only participants aged 14 and older, which may affect the comparability of the data due to age-related differences in exposure to and perception of violence. Similarly, previous studies were with non-representative samples, which limits the generalization of their results to the Spanish population as a whole. In contrast, the more recent study used a larger sample with more representative characteristics, which could more accurately reflect the actual prevalence of victimization in the child and adolescent population. Finally, it should be noted that developments in methodology, measurement instruments, and social and educational contexts over the years may also have influenced the differences observed, underscoring the need to interpret these results with caution and to continue conducting up-to-date and rigorous research to monitor trends and guide effective prevention policies.

Likewise, it remains a priority to expand research to children under the age of 12—as proposed by Montiel et al. (2025)—as well as to particularly vulnerable or at-risk groups. To date, the available studies have been based mainly on convenience samples and have been conducted in specific geographical contexts within Spain, which limits the possibility of generalizing the results to the entire child and youth population. In this regard, it is essential to advance in the design and execution of research that not only provides robust and representative estimates of the prevalence and types of victimization, but also promotes the effective transfer of scientific findings to the clinical, forensic, and child protection fields, as already pointed out in pioneering work in this field (Hamby & Finkelhor, 2001). In summary, the field of developmental victimology still presents significant challenges and areas of opportunity that require a coordinated effort between the academic community and professionals responsible for preventing violence against children and adolescents, as well as providing comprehensive care to victims. If we aspire to effectively protect the rights and well-being of children and adolescents, it is essential to base interventions and public policies on solid and up-to-date empirical evidence.

Limitations

As has been shown throughout this review, the JVQ is one of the most robust and widely supported tools for comprehensively estimating the magnitude of child and adolescent victimization in Spain. Its versatility allows it to be applied to different age groups and contexts, and its self-report format—valid for ages 8 and up—enables the direct inclusion of the perspectives of children and adolescents, avoiding dependence on adult informants. Therefore, its use for this purpose is recommended, always following the methodological guidelines published with the selected version and adapting both the content and the conditions of administration to the specific objectives of each study (Devries et al., 2015).

However, this review has also revealed some significant difficulties that must be taken into account in future research. One of the main difficulties is that, in many cases, the studies conducted exclude certain groups of children and adolescents in situations of greater vulnerability, which can lead to a lack of representation in the samples and, consequently, to an underestimation of the most serious experiences of victimization. For example, the significant presence of minors born in Morocco and sub-Saharan African countries who do not speak Spanish, especially in residential centers within the protection system, constitutes a methodological challenge that must be considered when designing and conducting research in this area (Pereda, 2019b). Therefore, future research in developmental victimology needs to move towards the inclusion of specific groups of children and adolescents at risk, such as ethnic, sexual, and gender minorities, as well as minors with disabilities, to ensure that their voices and experiences of victimization are recognized and documented. It is also a priority to address the challenge of assessing victimization in early childhood, a particularly vulnerable group that is currently underrepresented due to the methodological and ethical difficulties posed by their participation in studies of this type.

Practical Implications

Finally, based on the limitations identified in this review, several areas for improvement in the assessment of victimization during childhood and adolescence can be identified. First, it is essential to move towards instruments that, without sacrificing the breadth needed to detect different forms of violence, integrate greater depth in the analysis of variables such as frequency, duration, the context in which victimization occurs, the relationship with the aggressor, and the impact perceived by the victim. Likewise, it is necessary to develop and validate specific versions of the JVQ or other equivalent instruments that are understandable and culturally sensitive for different age groups, especially for children under 10, whose participation in this type of research remains very limited. These improvements must be accompanied by implementation strategies that promote their use in clinical, educational, forensic, and social contexts, ensuring their applicability in diverse populations and in real-world detection and prevention settings.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this manuscript.

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- *Indicates the studies that were included in the review.
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