

Qualitative Research on Preventing Gender-based Violence

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Abstract

Gender-based violence is a comprehensive and complex issue that, also due to its variety of manifestations, has been researched within a vast number of subjects - from Sociology to Psychology to Education, among others – spawning a useful and great number of perspectives and lenses to approach this topic. This panel proposes that, while focusing more on qualitative research methods, both qualitative and quantitative methods combined, can produce “mutually illuminating” (Bryman, 2012, p.628) data.

Over the past two decades, violence against women and girls and gender-based violence have been, in specific, acknowledged as a human rights issue and a health problem, with serious damage to the development of children and adolescents (Walker, Tokar & Fischer, 2000; Murnen, 2015; Banyard et al., 2019). Since 2004, schools have been considered privileged settings for primary prevention intervention (Rosewater, 2004) and there has been a growing number of programs being implemented in different countries, and with a variety of participants who plan and develop it with young people (from teachers to organizations, from activists to education professionals, etc.). However, for all the many promising strategies for preventing violence in schools, evaluation of these programs is still scarce and their long-term impact has rarely been studied (Magalhães et al, 2017; Cahill et al., 2019; Crooks, Jaffe, Dunlop, Kerry, & Exner-Cortens 2019). Nevertheless, in recent years it has been discussed the paramount role that educators and the entire educational community involved in the lives of students can have through the learning and apprehension of skills and strategies capable of recognizing and preventing violence (Noletto, 2008; Baker-Henningham, Scott, Bowers & Francis, 2019).

Based on this theoretical nucleus the *BO(U)NDS Project: Bonds, Boundaries and Violence*, aims at understanding and evaluating which strategies effectively work in primary prevention of gender-based violence, as well as the long-term effects that these prevention strategies have on the lives of young people, against the background of the school context and the pedagogical and educational perspective. Our assumption is, then, that primary prevention is a tool for social change. The focus of this study is twofold: listening to young people about their experiences attending those programmes and combining the knowledge and experiences of professionals and policy-decision makers to produce knowledge about how, when, where, and with whom primary prevention in schools can be effective. The bulk of this research will be carried out in Portugal, although one of its main objectives is to establish a hermeneutic comparison between this country and other four partner countries: Brazil, Germany, Greece and the UK, where data collection will also take place.

In order to respond to our research questions, that are transversal to what has been previously mentioned, the methodological design of the BO(U)NDS Project was based on a collaborative vision of methodologies and techniques of data collection. Therefore, and grounded on the premise that,



nowadays, research in the education implies the capacity to reflect in a broad, diversified and heterogeneous way on different phenomena and problems, the BO(U)NDS Project proposed to think and reflect on two methodologies – qualitative and quantitative – understanding the possibility of foreseeing complementary ways of developing a research within the framework of social, educational and human sciences (Bogdan & Biklen 1994). These two methodologies, which are perceived as collaborative and not opposed, influenced the whole construction of the research design, resulting in the choice of four data collection techniques: questionnaires; focus groups; interviews and biographical narratives. Assuming, therefore, that the "coexistence of alternative paradigms and the crossing of the epistemological and methodological traditions of the various social sciences give rise to a multifaceted and complex scientific field" (Afonso, 2005, p. 1). This mixed methodological approach aims, on the one hand, to underline the importance of the comprehensive, interpretative nature, capable of analyzing in depth the data collected (Bell, 1997), present in the qualitative approach, and in the specific case of Project BO(U)NDS, through the work of hermeneutic comparison. On the other hand, this methodological option also recognizes that the capacity to do scientific work in education, has widened its scale of thought and action, since studies capable of covering large numbers of subjects, in fact appear as the most appropriate answer to different research question towards certain phenomena (Mertens, 2014). In other words, having the possibility of carrying out studies that allow a broader approach, in terms of numbers, and therefore in terms of quantity and representativeness, may in fact present itself as the best study option for a specific part of a research design even in the field of educational and social sciences (Lewin & Somekh, 2015).

Another crucial central topic developed in the field of gender-based violence research is the concept of intersectionality. "As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, class, nation, ability, ethnicity and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one other" (Collins & Bilge, 2020. Preface). Through this concept, it is possible to understand that gender-based violence does not affect everyone in the same way, and women with intellectual disabilities remain at an aggravated risk to experience abuse during their lifetime (Pestka & Wendt, 2014). Trying to fill the gap regarding specific policy responses to support intellectually disabled victims of domestic violence, the project *ATHENA BEGIN: European cooperation against gender-based violence towards people with intellectual disabilities* aims to offer resources and tools to professionals who assist this vulnerable group and, in the same way, to empower victims, improving their quality of life by developing their skills and personal abilities. A mixed-method approach will be used to achieve the main objectives of the project, namely, questionnaires and focus groups with professionals implicated in assisting victims in Portuguese Institutions and interviews with caregivers for a needs assessment. After this first approach, professional training and workshops with people with intellectual disabilities will be designed and carried out with the target groups. The project is an international consortium held simultaneously in Portugal, Greece and Spain. In Portugal, ATHENA BEGIN is developed in the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto in partnership with Alternative and Response Women's Association (UMAR), a feminist non-governmental organization.

Keywords: gender-based violence; gender-based prevention approach; mixed methods; education

Necessary resources: video projector and internet.



Overview of the Panel Session

1- Brief context

Primary prevention of gender-based violence has been integrated into the Portuguese political agenda, to a large extent, as a consequence of the work that has been continuously developed by different social actors and that is thought out according to the action and reflection guidelines of the Istanbul Convention (Rosewater, 2003). It is important to underline that for several decades, gender-based violence and violence against women and girls has been recognized as a human rights issue and a public health concern (Magalhães, 2007; FRA, 2015; Crooks, Jaffe, Dunlop, Kerry, & Exner-Cortens, 2019), and that, therefore, understanding and identifying which strategies work best for the prevention of gender-based violence at the primary level, particularly in the school context, is increasingly urgent.

At the same time, gender-based violence, namely domestic violence against people with intellectual disabilities, is also a concern. In Portugal, there is a lack of specialized services to assist this vulnerable group, and the intersection between gender and domestic violence creates an even bigger challenge for the professionals and services. Women with intellectual disabilities victims of domestic violence remain neglected from policy measures in an invisible intersection (Meer & Combrinck, 2015). In this way, it is essential to develop more appropriate resources that can be used by professionals to assist this vulnerable group. Also, intellectually disabled victims of domestic violence need to be empowered in order to improve their quality of life by developing the necessary skills and personal abilities to cope with violent relationships.

2- Objective(s);

To work reflectively on the following dimensions: prevention, training and action-research in the field of gender-based violence, based on two Research Projects (BO(U)NDS Project: Bonds, Boundaries and Violence: Longitudinal Study on school-based gender violence prevention programs and ATHENA BEGIN: European cooperation against gender-based violence towards people with intellectual disabilities) and on the significant teaching and research experience of the panel participants.

3- Dynamics / Strategy:

a. Presentation (Group Activity)

The panel will begin with a brief oral presentation by the moderators integrating the following aspects: work they have been doing in the areas under reflection; working and research groups they integrate; outlining the main focus of the panel discussion. (10 minutes). Next, a contextual presentation of the different working teams that make up the projects mentioned in this panel, as well as their lines of action and research, will be made. (10 minutes).

b. Theoretical Exposition of the theme (define the content and time of intervention for each member)

The theoretical exposition of the panel theme will be developed through oral presentation and use of slides by the moderators. In this case, it refers to the research work developed by the two projects



mentioned and also to the investigative journey of the researchers and Professors Maria José Magalhães (10 minutes), Susana Coimbra (10 minutes) and Isabel Viana (10 minutes). (30 minutes)

c. Application in other contexts

Examples of Focus Group Guides, Interviews, Biographical Narratives and Questionnaires will be shared with participants. Also, excerpts, duly anonymized, from these data collection techniques, in order to ensure an open dialogue with panel participants and at the same time the sharing of knowledge and learning. (20 minutes)

d. Discussion

Panel discussions can be held in two formats, to be designated: i) on the free initiative of the participants, formulating questions or problematizations to the speakers, from the data presented or doubts generated during the different presentations; ii) or they can refer to direct questions formulated by the speakers to the participants. (20 minutes)

4- Application of the proposal in reality / practical examples;

Through mixed methods both projects draw from participants' experiences in order to understand what works best in each type of intervention - be it gender-based violence primary prevention programs or intervention with domestic violence victims with intellectual disabilities. The findings from both accounts aim to provide guidance for future research projects and further encourage the application of a mixed methodology, enriching the comprehension about the researched topics. Moreover, the panel will facilitate the discussion about innovative approaches to already well-known methods (e.g. biographical narratives with young people).

5- Expected results

It is expected that the panel will be able to contribute to the dissemination of the work being done in the field of prevention, training and action-research on gender-based violence. At the same time, the panel aims to foster a space for reflection on what are the different methodologies to be used in the investigative fields of education and gender-based violence.

Biographical notes

Maria José Magalhães. Ph.D in Educational Sciences, is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences in the University of Porto, and is a researcher at the Center of Research and Intervention in Education and in the Interdisciplinary Centre for Gender Studies. Currently, she coordinates Project BO(U)NDS. She has (co-)authored multiple education and gender-based violence themed papers and books. Maria José is also the President of the Portuguese feminist NGO UMAR.

Raquel Rodrigues. Ph.D researcher at the Centre for Research and Intervention in Education of the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto. She is currently working as a



Ph.D researcher in the Project BO(U)NDS: Bonds, Boundaries and Violence: Longitudinal Study on school-based gender violence prevention programs, at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences of the University of Porto, project, in which the present survey of information was carried out.

Susana Coimbra. Full Professor at the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences of the University of Porto. She has a Ph.D in Psychology and has been currently working as a researcher in the Project ATHENA BEGIN: European cooperation against gender-based violence towards people with intellectual Disabilities. She has strong experience in conducting quantitative and qualitative research, namely related to inequality and vulnerable populations such as disabled people, immigrants and refugees.

Isabel Viana. Ph.D in Education and is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Education of the University of Minho, in the Department of Curricular Studies and Educational Technology. She is also a researcher in the Project B(O)UNDS, a member of the International Bureau of Education, UNESCO's specialist body for curriculum, Global Curriculum Network. She is a reviewer of national and international Journals, and has a significant body of work published in curriculum and education.

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