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A study with adolescents with delinquent behavior: impact of juvenile victimization and resilience on empathy

Um estudo com adolescentes com comportamento delinquente: impacto da vitimização juvenil e da resiliência na empatia

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Abstract

Objective

This study aims to verify the relationship between victimization, empathy, and resilience in a sample of young delinquents, to analyze gender differences in resilience and empathy, and to explore the predictive value of these variables in empathy.

Method

The sample comprised 41 individuals aged 14 to 19, including 23 young males and 18 young females.

Results

The findings confirm a negative relationship between resilience and victimization, a positive correlation between empathy and resilience, and gender-based variations in resilience. This research shows that gender, age, victimization, and resilience are predictors of empathy in young delinquents.

Conclusion

Our results contributed significantly to the understanding of victimization, resilience, and empathy in the context of juvenile delinquency.

Keywords: Empathy; Impact; Juvenile delinquency; Juvenile victimization.

Resumo

Objetivo

Os objetivos deste estudo incluíam verificar a relação entre a vitimização, empatia e resiliência numa amostra de jovens delinquentes, analisar as diferenças de sexo relativamente à resiliência e à empatia e explorar o valor preditivo destas variáveis na empatia.

Método

A amostra foi composta por 41 jovens, com idades entre os 14 e 19 anos, 23 do sexo masculino e 18 do sexo feminino.

Resultados

Esta investigação confirma a relação negativa entre a resiliência e a vitimização, uma relação positiva entre a empatia e a resiliência e diferenças entre os sexos na resiliência. Os resultados do modelo de regressão linear múltipla identificaram o sexo, a idade, a vitimização e a resiliência como fatores preditores da empatia nestes jovens.

Conclusão

Os nossos resultados forneceram uma importante contribuição para o estudo da vitimização, resiliência e empatia em jovens que apresentam comportamento delincente.

Palavras-chave: Empatia, Impacto; Delinquência juvenil; Vitimização juvenil.

Children are often the most vulnerable victims of various forms of victimization perpetrated by different actors (Finkelhor, 2011). Approximately three-quarters of the child and adolescent population has encountered some form of violence in their lifetime (Hillis et al., 2016). Finkelhor et al. (2005) categorize juvenile victimization into five areas: conventional crime, child abuse, peer and sibling victimization, sexual victimization, and witnessing victimization or being an indirect victim.

Young people who have experienced victimization tend to develop externalizing and internalizing problems, increasing the probability of deviant conduct and higher levels of hyperactivity, violence, depression, anxiety, and stress (Butcher et al., 2016; Schoeler et al., 2018), with an impact on overall development (Mitchell et al., 2019).

The experience of adverse childhood events tends to impact the child's overall development (Almeida, Cardoso, et al., 2024, Almeida, Guarda, et al., 2024; Mitchell et al., 2019; Pires & Almeida, 2023a, 2023b). It can change the functioning of the neurocognitive system (Brito & Noble, 2014). Young victims tend to find it more challenging to regulate their emotions (van Goozen, 2015), especially regarding fear, sadness, and perceiving other's negative emotions (Zonneveld et al., 2017). They tend to have low social and emotional skills, self-awareness, and moral emotions (Espejo-Siles et al., 2020). They may also be more likely to feel anger and hostility and have lower self-esteem (Glowacz & Buzitu, 2014).

Many of these young individuals come from single-parent families and tend to have lower levels of education, less self-control, more substance use, live in neighborhoods with a higher criminogenic tendency, and their peer group tends to have antisocial behaviors (Bobbio et al., 2020; Carvalho & Gomide, 2005; Maruschi et al., 2012). Some of these behaviors may be perpetrated to make young people feel they control their personal and emotional lives (Conde & Teixeira, 2018). Carvalho (2010) emphasizes delinquency's familial and transgenerational nature, highlighting the significant impact of parental learning styles and processes on their children's behavior. A family environment that fosters open communication and listening provides essential tools for children to navigate society, promoting models of behavior rooted in self-respect and respect for others (Carvalho & Gomide, 2005). These models, which are more adaptable to society, tend to have an impact on the way individuals behave, making them less prone to violence and drug use. According to Barbosa (2021), in addition to socio-familial conditions, socio-economic conditions and the environment in which young people live are predominant factors in their societal development.

Although no single factor is responsible for the development of delinquent behavior, child victimization is increasingly recognized as a risk for delinquency (English et al., 2002; Pires & Almeida, 2023a, 2023b). The relationship between juvenile victimization and delinquency is well established in the literature (Cuevas et al., 2007; Loeber et al., 2001; Pires & Almeida, 2023b). Notably, a study by

Pereda et al. (2015) involving young people in the juvenile justice system revealed that all participants had experienced victimization in the past. These factors and the tendency to disobey social norms can increase violent behavior (Espejo-Siles et al., 2020).

A study by Clements-Nolle and Waddington (2019) focusing on young victims identified that over half were under the supervision of the justice system, with some even incarcerated. The study emphasized the importance of good communication with family, positive school relationships, and the presence of adult/parent role models in enhancing resilience and reducing psychological suffering among these young people. Resilience, the ability to cope with problems, overcome obstacles, or withstand the pressures of adverse situations (Fernandes et al., 2018), is pivotal in maintaining mental health and well-being during adversity (Roberson & Cooper, 2013). Consequently, it becomes a crucial factor in delinquency reduction (Mansouri et al., 2015; Poletto & Koller, 2008).

According to Kirchner et al. (2017), young victims with higher levels of resilience tend to rely more on their families, perceive positive aspects of life, and navigate adverse situations more effectively. They also tend to use coping strategies, such as seeking support from family and friends and discussing their problems. In contrast, less resilient young victims often resort to avoidance rather than coping strategies. Moreover, studies have consistently demonstrated that the more resilient a young person is, the less likely they are to engage in delinquent behavior or develop disorders in adverse life situations (Mansouri et al., 2015; Newsome et al., 2015).

The motivation of individuals to inhibit violent behavior is contingent on their empathic abilities, encompassing both affective (feeling the other person's emotions) and cognitive (understanding the other person's emotions) aspects (Blair, 2005). Empathy provides individuals with the capacity to perceive the feelings of others (Riess, 2017), acting as a broad category that includes emotional contagion, sympathy, and compassion (Preston & De Waal, 2002). This interpersonal and social function of empathy allows sharing of experiences, needs, and desires among individuals, serving as an emotional bridge promoting pro-social behavior (Riess, 2017).

Studies consistently emphasize the relationship between a lack of social sensitivity, absence of empathy, and limited interaction with society in the emergence of delinquent behavior (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004). Similar patterns emerge in adolescents with low affection acceptance and reduced levels of remorse and empathy (Oberth et al., 2017). Empathy significantly impacts promoting pro-social behavior and inhibits antisocial behavior (Morris, 2019). Notably, the interplay between resilience and empathy plays a pivotal role in adolescent's psychological well-being (Vinayak & Judge, 2018).

The purpose of this study is to analyze the relationship between victimization, empathy, and resilience in a sample of juvenile delinquents. Additionally, it seeks to investigate potential gender differences and explore the predictive value of the variables under consideration in empathy among these young individuals.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 41 young people from Portuguese juvenile detention centers (Table 1), 23 young males (56%) and 18 young females (44%), aged between 14 and 19 ($M = 16.4$, $SD = 1.2$). Most participants repeated a year at school ($n = 21$, 51.2%) and attended the ninth grade at the educational center ($n = 25$, 61%). Regarding living arrangements, most participants resided solely

with their parents ($n = 14$, 34.1%), and a significant portion were children of separated/divorced or single parents ($n = 15$, 36.6%).

Among the participants, 36 individuals ($n = 36$, 87.8%) reported experiencing victimization in the last year. Of these victims, 23 (56.1%) were identified as poly-victims, indicating that they reported four or more types of victimization within the previous year.

Procedure

To collect the data on young delinquents, authorization was requested from the General Directorate of Reintegration and Prison Services – Ministry of Justice (DGRSP) for data collection in the juvenile detention centers. Upon receiving that approval, data collection occurred between January and September 2020 in three juvenile detention facilities.

Table 1
Sociodemographic characteristics of the sample ($n = 41$)

Variables	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Young males	23	56.0
Young females	18	44.0
Age		
14	4	9.8
15	4	9.8
16	11	26.9
17	16	39.2
18	5	12.2
19	1	2.4
Repeater		
Yes	21	51.2
No	18	43.9
Year attended		
6	5	12.2
7	3	7.3
8	3	7.3
9	25	61.0
10	3	7.3
12	2	4.9
With whom he lived		
Mother	14	34.1
Stepmother/stepfather	2	4.9
Mother and father	5	12.2
Mother, father and sibling(s)	9	22.0
Mother/father and sibling(s)	6	14.7
Mother and stepfather	1	2.4
Father and stepmother	2	4.9
Mother, stepfather and brother(s)	1	2.4
Parent's marital status		
Single	15	36.6
Married or in a civil partnership	10	24.4
Separated or divorced	15	36.6
Victimization		
Victim	36	87.8
Poly-victimization		
Poly-victim	23	56.1

The research objectives and procedures were thoroughly explained, emphasizing the voluntary and confidential nature of participation in the study. Subsequently, participants provided informed consent and completed the research protocol in a single session.

The confidentiality of results and anonymity of subjects were assured. The study was conducted according to the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (World Medical Association, 2024), and the Egas Moniz School of Health & Science Ethics Committee approved the research.

Measures

Sociodemographic questionnaire: A questionnaire was administered to the young participants, evaluating sociodemographic variables: age, gender, year of schooling, whether they were repeaters, and who they lived with.

Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire (JVQ) (Finkelhor et al., 2005): The Portuguese version by Almeida et al. (2020) was employed to assess child maltreatment and other types of victimization experienced during childhood and youth. It is a questionnaire made up of 34 items, divided into five modules: Module A – Conventional Crime; Module B – Child Abuse; Module C – Victimization by Friends and Siblings; Module D – Sexual Victimization; Module E – Witness to Victimization or Indirect Victim. Specifically designed for self-administration by individuals aged 12 and above, the questionnaire focuses on victimization experiences within the “last year.” Respondents answer the items in a dichotomous response format (0 – No, 1 – Yes). The instrument demonstrates robust psychometric properties, with a *Cronbach’s Alpha* coefficient 0.94.

Resilience Scale (Wagnild & Yung, 1993): The Portuguese version by Felgueiras et al. (2010) was utilized in this study. The resilience scale is a self-assessment instrument comprising 25 items that evaluate how individuals organize themselves in adverse events and their ability to overcome and adapt to a situation. This instrument includes 5 dimensions of positive psychosocial adaptation: Perseverance, Self-confidence, Serenity, Sense of Life, and Self-sufficiency. The items are coded on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 – disagree to 5 – agree) and are rated according to the frequency with which they occur. The result is obtained by adding the dimensions, with higher scores translating into high resilience. This scale has a *Cronbach’s Alpha* value of 0.82, showing good internal consistency.

Questionnaire to Assess Affective and Cognitive Empathy in Children (QACEC) (Zoll & Enz, 2010): The Portuguese version by Veiga and Santos (2011) was employed in this study. The QACEC is a multidimensional scale designed to evaluate affective and cognitive empathy. The validated version for the Portuguese population, the questionnaire comprises 28 items measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree). The instrument boasts a *Cronbach’s Alpha* coefficient of 0.86, demonstrating robust internal consistency.

Results

Descriptive Analysis

Based on the descriptive analysis (Table 2), the total score of the JVQ ranged from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 16 ($M = 4.95$, $SD = 4.04$). Examining the JVQ subscales, Module A – conventional crime revealed a sample score ranging from a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 0.63 ($M = 0.12$, $SD = 0.17$); Module B – child abuse ranged from a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1 ($M = 0.13$,

$SD = 0.22$); Module C - victimization by friends and siblings ranged from a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 0.50 ($M = 0.10, SD = 0.15$); Module D - sexual victimization ranged from a minimum of 0, and a maximum of 0.29 ($M = 0.10, SD = 0.09$) and Module E - witness to victimization or indirect victim ranged a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 0.78 ($M = 0.24, SD = 0.22$).

Regarding resilience, the total scale exhibited a minimum value of 67 and a maximum of 98 ($M = 83.90, SD = 9.88$). The subscale perseverance has a minimum of 24 and a maximum of 47 ($M = 35.39, SD = 6.13$), self-confidence has a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 28 ($M = 21.98, SD = 4.35$), serenity a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 42 ($M = 32.07, SD = 7.16$), sense of life a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 75 ($M = 28.44, SD = 9.62$) and self-reliance a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 14 ($M = 10.17, SD = 2.66$).

Concerning the empathy scale, the minimum was 67, and the maximum was 98 ($M = 83.90, SD = 9.89$). In the affective dimension, the participants indicated a minimum of 26 and a maximum of 50 ($M = 43.66, SD = 5.75$). The cognitive dimension ranged from a minimum of 30 to a maximum of 50 ($M = 40.24, SD = 5.82$).

Table 2

Descriptive analysis of all scales, sub-scales and family and friend support (n = 41)

Variables	n	Minimum	Maximum	Average	SD
JVQ - Total	41	0	16.0	4.95	4.04
JVQ - Module A - Conventional crime	41	0	0.63	0.12	0.17
JVQ - Module B - Child abuse	41	0	1.0	0.13	0.22
JVQ - Module C - Victimization by friends and siblings	41	0	0.50	0.10	0.15
JVQ - Module D - Sexual victimization	41	0	0.29	0.10	0.09
JVQ - Module E - Victim witness or indirect victim	41	0	0.78	0.24	0.22
Resilience - Total	41	67	98	83.90	9.88
Resilience - Perseverance	41	24	47	35.39	6.13
Resilience - Self-confidence	41	13	28	21.98	4.35
Resilience - Serenity	41	15	42	32.07	7.16
Resilience - Sense of Life	41	13	75	28.44	9.62
Resilience - Self-sufficiency	41	3	14	10.17	2.66
Empathy - Total	41	67	98	83.90	9.89
Empathy - Affective dimension	41	26	50	43.66	5.75
Empathy - Cognitive dimension	41	30	50	40.24	5.82

Note: JVQ: Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire.

Correlation Analysis

The study's results reveal statistically significant positive correlations (Table 3) among various victimization subscales. Specifically, between conventional crime and child abuse ($r = 0.43, p < 0.001$), victimization by friends and siblings ($r = 0.44, p < 0.001$), and being a witness to victimization ($r = 0.35, p = 0.02$). Child abuse also shows a statistically positive correlation with victimization by friends and siblings ($r = 0.42, p = 0.01$), and sexual victimization shows a statistically positive correlation with witnessing victimization ($r = 0.44, p < 0.001$). Additionally, there are statistically significant positive correlations between total victimization and all its subscales, that is, with conventional crime ($r = 0.75, p < 0.001$), child abuse ($r = 0.63, p < 0.001$), victimization by friends and siblings ($r = 0.60, p < 0.001$), sexual victimization ($r = 0.54, p < 0.001$) and witnessing victimization ($r = 0.79, p < 0.001$).

Regarding the relationship between resilience and victimization (Table 3), a statistically significant negative correlation is observed between victimization by friends and siblings and the

resilience subscale related to serenity ($r = -0.43, p = 0.01$). Moreover, statistically significant positive correlations exist between total empathy and resilience, specifically with the perseverance subscale ($r = 0.46, p < 0.001$) and self-confidence ($r = 0.44, p = 0.01$). Specifically examining the affective dimension of empathy, statistically significant positive correlations are found with the resilience subscales related to perseverance ($r = 0.46, p = 0.02$) and self-confidence ($r = 0.35, p = 0.03$). Similarly, the cognitive dimension of the empathy scale demonstrates statistically significant positive correlations with the resilience subscales related to perseverance ($r = 0.42, p = 0.01$) and self-confidence ($r = 0.40, p = 0.01$).

Table 3

Pearson correlations between victimization, resilience, and empathy ($n = 41$)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. JVQ - Module A - Conventional crime	-	0.43**	0.44**	0.25	0.35*	0.75**	0.01	0.20	0.12	-0.14	-0.05	0.27	-0.10	0.25
2. JVQ - Module B - Child abuse		-	0.42**	0.24	0.27	0.63**	-0.25	-0.15	-0.16	-0.24	-0.18	-0.06	-0.17	0.08
3. JVQ - Module C - Victimization by friends and siblings			-	0.17	0.21	0.60**	-0.28	-0.14	-0.26	-0.43**	-0.02	-0.23	0.23	0.16
4. JVQ - Module D - Sexual victimization				-	0.44**	0.54**	0.23	0.10	0.28	0.05	0.25	0.22	-0.24	-0.10
5. JVQ - Module E - Witness to victimization or indirect victim					-	0.79**	0.08	0.01	0.09	0.04	0.07	0.13	-0.28	-0.04
6. JVQ - Total						-	-0.04	0.03	0.03	-0.17	0.01	0.20	-0.2	0.11
7. Resilience - Total							-	0.80**	0.73**	0.83**	0.68**	0.59**	0.18	0.27
8. Resilience - Perseverance								-	0.67**	0.64**	0.32*	0.43**	0.36*	0.42**
9. Resilience - Self-confidence									-	0.66**	0.21	0.46**	0.35*	0.40**
10. Resilience - Serenity										-	0.30	0.50**	0.13	0.22
11. Resilience - Sense of life											-	0.21	-0.04	-0.01
12. Resilience - Self-sufficiency												-	-0.06	-0.04
13. Empathy - Affective													-	0.46**
14. Empathy - Cognitive														-

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. JVQ: Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire.

Group Comparison Analysis

Gender-based results highlight statistically significant differences in the resilience subscale related to the sense of life. Specifically, males exhibit higher values ($M = 6.24, SD = 2.05$), [$F(39) = 4.79, p = 0.04$]. However, the analysis does not reveal statistically significant gender differences regarding empathy.

Regression Analysis

The results of the Multiple Linear Regression indicate the significance of the empathy explanatory model. The Durbin-Watson value is 2.01, and the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) is < 3 . Among the variables considered, conventional crime, child abuse, serenity, and meaning of life did not emerge as significant (Table 4). Consequently, only the significant variables were included in the model. The model itself proves statistically significant ($F(8,12) = 87.37, p < 0.001$) and successfully accounts for 97% of the variance in empathy. Gender ($\beta = 0.12, p = 0.028$), age ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.001$), victimization by friends and siblings ($\beta = 0.69, p \leq 0.001$), sexual victimization ($\beta = -0.63, p < 0.001$), witnessing victimization or indirect victimization ($\beta = -0.25, p < 0.001$), perseverance ($\beta = 0.29$,

$p < 0.001$), self-confidence ($\beta = 0.89, p < 0.001$) and self-reliance ($\beta = -0.48, p < 0.001$) are significant predictors of empathy in this sample of young people with delinquent behavior.

Table 4*Multiple linear regression with empathy (n = 41)*

Variables	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adj R ²	ΔR^2	<i>F</i>
				0.97	0.98	$F(8,12) = 87.37, p < 0.001$
Gender	0.12	2.50	0.028			
Age	0.27	5.64	< 0.001			
JVQ - Victimization by friends and siblings	0.69	15.21	< 0.001			
JVQ - Sexual victimization	-0.63	-12.15	< 0.001			
JVQ - Victim witness or indirect victim	-0.25	-5.70	< 0.001			
Resilience - Perseverance	0.29	4.41	0.001			
Resilience - Self-confidence	0.89	15.85	< 0.001			
Resilience - Self-sufficiency	-0.48	-8.66	< 0.001			

Note: JVQ: Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire.

Discussion and Conclusion

Given that children and adolescents are the target group most affected by victimization (Finkelhor, 2011), it is essential to study the various consequences so that it is possible to reduce its adverse effects (Almeida, Cardoso, et al., 2024; Almeida, Guarda, et al., 2024; Ford & Delker, 2018; Pires & Almeida, 2023a, 2023b). Specifically, research has shown the relationship between victimization and delinquency (Kerig, 2018; Pereda et al., 2015; Pires & Almeida, 2023a), and in this sense, our study also showed a high number of young people involved in juvenile justice who had already been victims of some victimization in the last year. There was a relationship between these (types of victimization). These results are corroborated by Pires and Almeida's systematic review (2023b), which showed that young people who have early contact with the justice system tend to be more likely to experience several types of victimization.

This research observed that the young people with delinquent behavior who were part of our sample showed a high percentage of resilience. Although there are not many studies linking delinquency and resilience, according to some of them (Pires & Almeida, 2024a; Rajabi & Salmanpour, 2019), delinquent young people, compared to a group of non-delinquent young people, tend to have lower levels of resilience. Since these two samples were not compared in our study, given the results shown in other research (Pires & Almeida, 2024a; Rajabi & Salmanpour, 2019), the sample of young people with delinquent behavior could have even higher resilience levels than ours. In this sense, it seems pertinent that future studies present this comparison of samples. Even though these young people with delinquent behavior are victimized by various agents, with multiple factors that can hinder the development of resilience, the fact that they are in an institution where there are intervention programs can enable them to establish emotional connections that mitigate the existing risk factors. These connections can help develop various personal and social skills that promote the more adaptive development of these young people (Mota & Matos, 2010; Silveira et al., 2003), such as increased resilience.

According to Barbosa (2021), social vulnerabilities, where young people live, and other problems are situations where there is a need to create effective public policies aimed at social transformation. She pointed to education as an important factor in including these young people,

although it is insufficient when it acts alone. According to the author, for social transformation, it is essential to have adequate public policies regardless of the social environment in which the young person is placed.

Our results point to the identification of less serenity on the part of young people who have experienced victimization perpetrated by friends or siblings. According to the study by Glowacz and Buzitu (2014), young victims tend to be more aggressive, hostile, and angry. Piggott et al. (2018) state that child victims tend to be more likely to become aggressors and perpetrate crime. These children tend to have more impulsive personality traits and low self-control. They may also be more vulnerable to victimization by their peers due to their delinquent behavior (Griffin et al., 2012), which can lead to a lower perception of serenity.

In this research, the relationship between empathy and resilience was well established, specifically in the affective and cognitive spheres with perseverance and self-confidence. Resilience plays an important role in promoting the well-being of individuals (Di Fabio & Palazzeschi, 2015), and empathy is important for increasing social and emotional skills (Allemand et al., 2014). Since the cognitive sphere of empathy is designated by understanding the emotions of others and the emotional sphere by sharing them (Abramson et al., 2020), empathy has an impact on promoting pro-social behavior, as there is a significant motivation to promote interpersonal relationships (Morris, 2019). These adjusted relationships are beneficial in many ways, such as increasing the self-confidence of these young people (Soucisse et al., 2015). According to Weissberg et al. (2015), there is a relationship between emotional variables (such as self-awareness and self-control), empathy, perseverance, decision-making, and pro-social behavior, thus promoting the healthy development of young people. According to Vinayak and Judge (2018), empathy and resilience play an important role in developing adolescent's psychological well-being. Since resilience plays an essential role in promoting well-being and empathy in social skills, their relationship could enhance the possibility of more adjusted interpersonal relationships, leading to a possible increase in self-confidence (Morris, 2019).

In terms of gender differences in empathy, there were no differences, but regarding resilience, our study showed higher values for sense of life in males. These results corroborate the study by Zhao et al. (2020), in which males also had higher values. These authors also identified a sense of life as an important psychological protector, moderating adversity and the adverse outcomes that come with it.

Our results point to gender, age, victimization, and resilience as predictors of empathy. According to the study by Robinson et al. (2007), having victimization experiences contributes to differences in empathy. At the same time, the development of empathy in females and males up to 10 tends to increase steadily. However, from that age onwards, the empathic capacity in males tends to decrease, with a lower emotional response (Broidy et al., 2003), and may increase again after age 18 (O'Neill, 2020). Other studies have also identified the link between resilience and empathy; the more resilient individuals are, the more empathy they tend to show (Feddes et al., 2015).

This study has some limitations that need to be addressed. Firstly, the fact that this study has a challenging target population meant that only a tiny percentage of potential participants agreed to participate, compromising the acquisition of a larger sample. The second limitation concerns that only three out of six juvenile detention centers consented to collect data, making it impossible to collect a representative sample of the Portuguese population. In future studies, the sample should be taken from all the juvenile detention centers in the country so that the results can be generalized.

Despite the limitations, this study confirms that there is a relationship between different forms of victimization, as adolescents who have experienced multiple traumatic events tend to suffer from revictimization or poly-victimization (Dierkhising et al., 2018). Our study also allowed us to identify some critical variables to explain empathy in these adolescents with delinquent behavior.

In a sample of young people with delinquent behavior in juvenile detention centers, this research showed that the vast majority had been victims of some victimization in the last year of their lives. Nevertheless, some of these young people showed high levels of resilience, which could be an essential factor for effective intervention with these young people, as it enhances their skills and could increase levels of empathy in children and young people.

It should be noted that this is an important research in Portugal that studied victimization, resilience, and empathy in a sample of delinquents. Studying empathy and resilience in young people with delinquent behavior who have been victims can help identify the impact of victimization experiences on this specific population, making it possible to create prevention programs in this area and at an early developmental stage or intervention programs specifically with victims of violence and young people with delinquent behavior.

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