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SEÇÃO: ARTIGO

Assédio moral e uso e abuso de substâncias no ensino superior: análise da relação entre os fenômenos

Moral harassment and substance use and abuse in higher education: analysis of the relationship between the phenomena

Acoso y uso y abuso de sustancias en la educación superior: análisis de la relación entre los fenómenos

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Resumo: Foi objetivo deste estudo estabelecer possíveis relações e diferenças entre os construtos assédio moral e o uso e abuso de substâncias. O assédio moral pode se manifestar por meio de comportamentos abusivos e hostis que ocorrem no ambiente de trabalho ou em outros contextos sociais. O uso e o abuso de substâncias referem-se ao consumo excessivo ou inadequado de substâncias psicoativas, como álcool, drogas ilícitas ou medicamentos. Participaram 1004 estudantes, de ambos os sexos, com média de idade de 23 anos e oito meses, de instituições públicas dos estados do Paraná e de São Paulo. Empregou-se o Questionário Adaptado sobre Assédio Moral no Ensino Superior e o Questionário Adaptado sobre o Uso e Abuso de Substâncias no Ensino Superior. Os dados indicaram o assédio moral como um preditor significativo possuindo um alto poder explicativo no abuso de substâncias. Recomenda-se a realização de novas pesquisas sobre o tema e de ações de intervenção.

Palavras-Chave: Assédio; Substâncias Psicoativas; Universidade.

Abstract: The objective of this study was to establish possible relationships and differences between the constructs of moral harassment and substance use and abuse. Moral harassment can manifest itself through abusive and hostile behaviors that occur in the workplace or in other social contexts. Substance use and abuse refers to the excessive or inappropriate consumption of psychoactive substances, such as alcohol, illicit drugs, or medications. Participants were 1,004 students, both genders, with a mean age of 23 years and eight months, from public institutions in the states of Paraná and São Paulo. The Adapted Questionnaire on Moral Harassment in Higher Education and the Adapted Questionnaire on the Use and Abuse of Substances in Higher Education were used. The data indicated that moral harassment was a significant predictor with high explanatory power. Further research on the topic and intervention actions are recommended.

Keywords: Harassment; Psychoactive Substances; University.

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio fue establecer posibles relaciones y diferencias entre los constructos de acoso moral y uso y abuso de sustancias. El acoso puede manifestarse a través de comportamientos abusivos y hostiles que ocurren en el lugar de trabajo o en otros contextos sociales. El uso y abuso de sustancias se refiere al consumo excesivo o inadecuado de sustancias psicoactivas como el alcohol, las drogas ilícitas o los medicamentos. Los participantes fueron 1.004 estudiantes, de ambos sexos, con una edad media de 23 años y ocho meses, de instituciones públicas en los estados de Paraná y São Paulo. Se utilizó el Cuestionario Adaptado sobre Acoso Moral en la Educación Superior y el Cuestionario Adaptado sobre Uso y Abuso de Sustancias en la Educación

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Superior. Los datos indicaron que el acoso era un predictor significativo con un alto poder explicativo. Se recomienda realizar más investigaciones sobre el tema y las acciones de intervención correspondientes.
Palabras clave: Acoso; Substancias Psicoactivas; Universidad.

Introduction

Moral harassment

Moral harassment (MA) is a form of violence that occurs in various social contexts, including the academic environment. It consists of abusive, repetitive, and hostile behavior aimed at harming, humiliating, intimidating, embarrassing, and causing general harm to victims. It can manifest itself in various ways, such as insults, ridicule, social exclusion, threats, and imposing excessive and/or unnecessary tasks, among others (Ferro et al., 2023). These actions are usually carried out systematically and persistently, causing a significant impact on the victims' mental and emotional health. Research has indicated that bullying can negatively affect the academic, professional, and personal performance of students who are victims of this violence (Freitas; Del Pino, 2023; Gill; Santos, 2023; Ferro et al., 2023).

Research into moral harassment began to stand out even more in 1998, with the publication of the book Moral Harassment: Perverse Violence in Everyday Life, written by Marie-France Hirigoyen (Paixão et al., 2013). According to Hirigoyen (2011), people who are victims of moral harassment may have their psyche altered in a lasting way, that is, what they think and feel is harmed by this violence. The victim sometimes doubts themselves and is led to think that they are to blame for the harassment they have suffered. This process culminates in moral destruction that can lead to mental illness or suicide. In this context, moral harassment begins with perverse behavior on the part of the aggressor, as it leads the victim to lose their self-esteem and can also culminate in sexual abuse (Hirigoyen, 2011). An important point to note is that moral harassment differs from bullying in that it does not usually occur between peers, but between people who are at different levels of hierarchy, i.e. the aggressor is in a superior position to the victim (unequal power relationship) (Hirigoyen, 2011).

Another relevant issue in the occurrence of bullying and moral harassment is that, normally, the victim chosen by the aggressor or group of aggressors is the person considered weak by the group, since they choose the classmate who has some distinction that is considered a weakness, and it is this characteristic that places the victim in a situation of power with their aggressors (Haile & Santos, 2021). The victim of bullying is considered inferior to their aggressors due to physical characteristics, lack of popularity, being considered socially incompetent, being shy, being poor, and not being considered to meet beauty standards, among other things. In moral harassment, the opposite is true (Haile & Santos, 2021). Victims usually become victims because they are people who, in the workplace, question the attitudes of their superiors, denounce events they don't agree with, such as the authoritarianism of the company or the boss, practices that occur in their daily lives, and so on. It is this ability to react that leads the victim to become a target. Victims also tend to be perfectionists or workaholics, which makes them suffer even more when they are attacked in the workplace, as it is a very important sphere in their lives (Hirigoyen, 2011).

In schools and universities, moral harassment can occur from student to student, in which case it is called horizontal harassment, or from teacher to student, in which case it is called vertical harassment (Andrade & Assis, 2021). This last case is called vertical harassment because in the institution the teacher is in a position of power concerning the student, taking into account that it is the teacher who guides the means of assessment by which the student will be considered fit or not in the subject or activity (internships, projects, among others) that they need to perform, in other words, the teacher is in a superior position to the student in this configuration. There are also indications in the scientific literature that this abuse occurs from teachers to civil servants, civil servants to teachers, and students to tea-

chers - in private universities, given that in this type of institution, the capitalist rationale places the student as a client of the institution while the teacher would be its employee (Andrade & Assis, 2021; Caran et al., 2010). In this research, the moral harassment investigated was the harassment that occurs from teachers toward students in public higher education institutions and is therefore classified as vertical moral harassment.

Faced with so many divisions, hierarchies, classifications, and competition, higher education institutions have become places with a configuration that tends to foster the occurrence of moral harassment, since numerous relationships of subordination may or may not changes at different times. In the research found (Caran et al., 2010; Sanchez, 2020; Valente & Sequeira, 2015), which focused on investigating the occurrence of moral harassment in Higher Education, the data showed the occurrence of acts in which the harasser intimidated, offended, shouted, criticized, prevented open discussion, directed or prohibited tributes made by students. The aggressor also used the victim's possible dismissal as blackmail or a threat, humiliated, devalued, or promoted the exclusion of the harassed person because they considered their curriculum to be irrelevant or because they considered the person's training to be in another area - less important. They imposed work on less qualified subordinates, considering the degree criterion as the determining factor for the distribution of activities refused by other teachers with higher qualifications, in other words, they took advantage of other people's work for personal gain.

Given the above, to explore different developments and relationships between this violence and other factors present in Higher Education, another construct chosen for this analysis was the use and abuse of psychoactive substances. This construct can be related to substance use and abuse, taking into account that, in addition to moral harassment damaging the psyche of victims, research has indicated that violence, hopelessness, suffering at work/in educational institutions and substance use and abuse may be related and there is a need for further research (Antunes & Bortolli, 2017; Araújo & Soares, 2018; Haile & Santos, 2021; Siebra et al., 2021; Silva, 2019).

Substance use and abuse

In terms of the use and abuse of psychoactive substances, this study used the definition provided by the World Health Organization (WHO), through the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10). This definition was revised in 1989 and came into force in January 1993, after which it was updated in 2022 with the publication of the new International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11). This, in turn, was launched in 2019 and came into force in January 2022. These documents therefore consider a drug to be any substance that is not produced by the body and which, when introduced into it, produces changes in its functioning, i.e. in its system.

In this context, it should be noted that drugs/substances that are considered to be psychoactive are defined as chemical substances capable of promoting alterations in the nervous system, specifically in such a way as to modify its functioning. As a result, they end up generating changes in mood, perception, behavior, and consciousness, among others, that is, they are drugs that act by altering the functioning of the central nervous system and, therefore, can cause addiction (United Nations Office On Drugs And Crime - UNODC, 2022).

According to the report, of the UNODC (2022) the portion of the population that uses psychoactive substances the most is made up of young people, since the most used illicit drugs in 2020 were cannabis, cocaine, and methamphetamine (UNODC, 2022). Data on the use and abuse of psychoactive substances in Brazil is still scarce, and it should be noted that the country does not have systematic monitoring surveys such as those carried out by the European Monitoring Center for Drugs. In addition, Brazil has a historical survey on drug use by high school students, which includes surveys and reports carried out in 1987, 1989, 1993, 1997, 2004, and 2010 by the National Secretariat for Drug Policy (Bastos et al., 2017). In

Brazil, the last survey conducted by the Oswaldo Cruz Foundation – FIOCRUZ (Bastos et al., 2017) was in 2017, presenting data revealing that marijuana is the most widely consumed substance (7.7%). Powder cocaine (3.1%) is the second most commonly consumed substance. Of those aged 12 to 65, 1.4 million reported having used crack.

Regarding the use of illicit substances and level of education, the results were significant in terms of lifetime use. In this sphere, the highest prevalence of use (16.6%) was recorded among people with higher education, while the lowest prevalence was found among people with no education (8.2%) (Bastos et al., (2017). The data from the survey by Bastos et al. (2017) indicates that the level of education can influence the consumption of substances, taking into account that the consumption of certain substances increases or decreases according to people's level of education, while the data from the UNODC report (2022) shows the high rate of substance use and abuse among young people, especially in developing countries such as Brazil.

The scientific literature (Trindade et al., 2018; Willhelm et al., 2018) has indicated that there is a tendency for people who have been weakened by violent contexts to seek refuge in substance use and abuse. This can also happen at work and in educational institutions, i.e. students also seek refuge in the use and abuse of substances when they find themselves in situations of stress or violence. With this in mind, the general aim of this study was to establish possible relationships and differences between the constructs of moral harassment and substance use and abuse. The research hypothesis is that there may be a relationship between the constructs studied.

Methods

Context for sensitive data

This topic will discuss how the data collection was handled for contexts with sensitive data, namely violence and the use of psychoactive substances. As the research used sensitive data and one of the constructs investigated was the occurrence of violence committed by teachers in educational institutions, the analysis ended up requiring more time in terms of contacting the institutions to obtain authorization and dealing with the Ethics Committees than in terms of data collection. That said, 32 requests for authorization to carry out the research were sent to 32 public higher education institutions in the states of São Paulo, Paraná, and Minas Gerais. Of these, only seven institutions responded to the requests and authorized the research.

It is worth noting that one of the determining factors for the survey to involve more institutions in Paraná was the fact that the requests for authorization were formalized/protocolized for the institutions in Paraná through the e-protocols. Based on this official protocol from the state of Paraná, state bodies and institutions are obliged to respond to all requests made and, as a result, they cannot be archived or remain unanswered. The states of São Paulo and Minas Gerais do not yet have a computerized protocol for citizens to process their requests. As a result, the contact made with the educational institutions in these states was filed via the institutions' official e-mail addresses, but most of the requests were not answered.

Sixteen months were needed to process all the files, answer all the institutions' questions, make adjustments as each institution deemed necessary, and finally obtain the authorizations to carry out the bureaucratic part of the documentation for the higher education institutions. Another aspect that delayed the research was the fact that when the co-participating institutions had their own ethics committees, the project also needed to be processed by them, which meant that the research project had to be processed by seven different Ethics Committees and thus went through seven evaluations.

After the due procedures in the committees, there was a need to make 10 amendments to the project, given that the institutions requested different adaptations from each other in the seven committees by which the project was evaluated. Another considerable reason for the increase in

the number of amendments was the fact that it was necessary to include the authorizations of several participating institutions, considering that each one issued the authorization document to be a co-participant on a different date.

Participants

This survey involved 1004 students from higher education courses at public institutions, six of which are located in the state of Paraná and one in the state of São Paulo. Of these, 57.8% (*n*=580) declared themselves to be female, 41.1% (*n*=413) declared themselves to be male and 1.1% (*n*=11) chose not to declare their gender. The average age of the participants was 23.8 (SD=5.21), with 18 being the minimum age and 58 being the maximum. Of the participants, 41.6% (n=418) were enrolled in bachelor's degree programs, 39.1% (n=392) in teacher education (licentiate) programs, and 19.3% (n=194) in higher education technology programs.

The courses were selected for convenience. As authorizations were granted, data collection was conducted in the available classes on the days and times previously scheduled with the universities. This sampling method was adopted because access to participants depended on institutional consent and ethical approval, a common procedure in studies involving sensitive topics such as workplace harassment and substance use. Although including students from different courses increased the diversity of the sample, the study did not aim to compare results between courses; the researchers focused on obtaining the largest possible number of participants, without seeking an equitable distribution of questionnaires across academic areas. The absence of comparisons between specific fields is therefore recognized as a limitation of the study.

Instruments

The data was obtained through the face-to-face application of two questionnaires: the Adapted Questionnaire on Moral Harassment in Higher Education (AQMH-HE) and the Adapted Questionnaire on the Use and Abuse of Substances in Higher Education. The Questionnaire on Moral Harassment (QMH), constructed and validated by Gomes (2010), consists of 63 items that cover violence understood as moral harassment. The questionnaire was created to map the occurrence of this abusive practice in the workplace in Portugal. The search for evidence of validity is justified to meet the specificity of the sample researched, namely, Brazilian university students. The adapted questionnaire was submitted via e-mail for content and semantic evaluation to three judges: one with a PhD in Education and two with a PhD in Psychology, aged 35, 37, and 55 respectively. The judges analyzed the modifications made to validate or invalidate the proposed reformulation of the instrument's items concerning their syntactic and semantic relevance for application in Higher Education. To evaluate them, they wrote the letter C in the column for agreement or the letters NC for disagreement. Based on this collaborative evaluation dynamic, the final versions of the questionnaires for this study were generated, and an adaptation was made in which the wording of some items was modified and other items were excluded to adapt the questionnaire to the academic reality and summarize it because it would be applied in conjunction with two other instruments. The adapted version of the questionnaire had 45 items, with content validity assessed by judges. The answers were scored in ascending order, according to frequency, and it was decided to distribute the score as follows: zero points for the answer never, one point for the answer rarely, two points for the answer sometimes, three points for the answer almost always and four points for the answer always. The total score of the instrument can vary from 0 to 180 points.

Chart 1 - *Example of the answers to the scale according to the version used in the collection.*

	ALWAYS	MANY TIMES	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
Were you exposed to an excessive work/study load?					
Were you not given any occupation or tasks, were you excluded or "left out"?					
Were you asked to do urgent work without any need?					

Source: The authors.

The questionnaire on substance use and abuse was made available by the World Health Organization (WHO). It was created by WHO researchers and published in 1980 (Smart et al., 1980). Given this, studies were conducted in different countries by the WHO, and so the original version was called the "Self-Administered Survey". These questions were adapted for use in Brazil and are used in various studies (Demenech et al., 2021; Siebra et al., 2021; Willhelm et al., 2018). This questionnaire has therefore been used in national surveys on alcohol and drug use carried out by the Brazilian Center for Information on Psychotropic Drugs.

For this survey, only the part (11 items) related to the use and frequency of psychoactive substances was adapted, with questions involving the student's family and other topics that the original version of the questionnaire covered and which were not part of the objectives of this research. After the modifications, the adapted questionnaire in question had 11 items. As a result, the answers now have the options never, rarely, sometimes, almost always, and always. They are scored in ascending order, according to frequency, and it was decided to distribute the score as follows: zero points for the answer never, one point for the answer rarely, two points for the answer sometimes, three points for the answer almost always and four points for the answer always. The total score for the instrument can vary from 0 to 44 points. Students who do not use substances will not score, but the more they use them, the higher they will score.

Chart 2. - *Example of the items in the adapted version of the questionnaire on substance use and abuse.*

Item on substance use and abuse	ALWAYS	MANY TIMES	SOMETIMES	RARELY	NEVER
1. Do you use alcoholic drinks?					
2. Do you smoke cigarettes (not marijuana)?					
3. Do you smoke marijuana?					

Source: The authors.

Procedure

To avoid identifying the students, they only filled in the two copies of the informed consent form (which was not attached to the instruments to avoid any possibility of identifying the student) and therefore only identified their age, grade, course, and gender. At the time of collection, the researcher explained the research process to the participants and the informed consent form. After the explanations, the participants signed the form, but the research did not involve underage students. Given this, the collection was carried out collectively in the classroom on a day and time agreed with the institutions, teachers, and course coordinators and lasted an average of 30

minutes. Authorization is given below: CAAE no. 60728422.4.0000.5231 and opinion no. 5.692.953.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data, we used the free RStudio software for statistical computing and graphics generation, which uses the R programming language for the analyses. Firstly, descriptive analyses were carried out to understand the characteristics of the sample. The variables subjected to descriptive statistics were age, gender, course modality, moral harassment, and substance use and abuse. After these analyses, linear regression was conducted to assess the predictive power of moral harassment on substance use and abuse. The estimator used was Ordinary Least Squares - OLS (Wooldridge, 2010) because it minimizes the differences between the observed values and those predicted by the estimated model. Finally, a series of ANOVAs and *t*-tests were conducted to investigate the extent to which the series and genders differ in the levels of moral harassment and substance use and abuse. Tests for homogeneity of variance and corrections for deviations from it and normality, using bootstrapping, were used when necessary.

Results

The number of students who answered positively to at least one question (AQMH-HE) about having been a victim of moral harassment was 44.9% (*n*=451). The number of students who responded positively to at least one question about substance use and abuse was 52.5% (*n*=528). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores for the questionnaires on harassment and substance use and abuse.

Table 1 - *Descriptive statistics of the scales.*

	M	SD	Min	Max
Harassment	3.0	5.3	0	52
Use and Abuse	2.3	3.7	0	22

Source: The authors.

Concerning the focus on whether there is a relationship between moral harassment and substance use and abuse. Table 2 shows the results of the regression analysis. It can be seen that moral harassment was a significant predictor of substance use and abuse, having a high explanatory power since for every one-point increase in the moral harassment scale, there is an increase in substance use and abuse.

Table 2 - *Regression of Moral Harassment on substance use and abuse.*

Outcome	R	B	R^2_{adj}	Statistics
Substance Use and Abuse	0.78	0.54	0.60	$F(1.1002) = 1508$; $p < 0.001$

Source: The authors.

To verify the differences and relationships between the series taken, considering the constructs presented, variance tests (ANOVA) were carried out. Again, Welch corrections and bootstrap techniques were used to correct for homogeneity of variance and normal distribution. On the other hand, grade 1 showed the lowest levels of harassment (*M*=1.0; *SD*=2.9), while grades 5 (*M*=6.2; *SD*=7.2) and 4 (*M*=4.7; *SD*=6.58) showed the highest levels of harassment. Finally, for substance use and abuse, grades 1 (*M*=1.4; *SD*=2.9) and 3 (*M*=1.6; SD=3.0) had the lowest levels, while grade 4 had the highest levels (*M*=4.1; *SD*=4.8). Table 3 shows the results for better organization. Effect

sizes were calculated from the reported ANOVA statistics to provide an estimate of practical significance. For the comparisons by academic year, the estimated eta-squared values were: intrinsic motivation $\eta^2 \approx 0.19$, moral harassment $\eta^2 \approx 0.28$, and substance use/abuse $\eta^2 \approx 0.16$, indicating large effects (Cohen, 1988). For analyses by course modality, estimated η^2 values were smaller (intrinsic motivation $\eta^2 \approx 0.02$; harassment $\eta^2 \approx 0.04$; substance use/abuse $\eta^2 \approx 0.01$), indicating small to small–moderate effects. These η^2 values were computed from the reported F-statistics and degrees of freedom in the present study.

Table 3 - *ANOVA between series and variables investigated.*

	Series 1 *M (SD)*	Series 2 *M (SD)*	Series 3 *M (SD)*	Series 4 *M (SD)*	Series 5 *M (SD)*	Statistics	Games-Howell Posthoc
Harassment	1.0 (2.93)	4.3 (6.1)	2.2 (3.8)	4.7 (6.5)	6.2 (7.2)	$F(4; 315.5) = 30.6$; $p < 0.001$	1 < 2,3,4,5; 3 < 2,4,5
Use and Abuse	1.4 (2.97)	2.6 (3.5)	1.6 (3.0)	4.1 (4.8)	3.3 (4.0)	$F(4; 335.5) = 16.0$; $p < 0.001$	1 < 2,4,5; 3 < 2,4,5; 4 > 3; 2 < 4

Source: The authors.
Note. The Welch test was applied to all variables to correct for homogeneity of variance. The bootstrap technique was used to correct deviations from normality and for greater reliability of the estimators. The bootstrap results confirmed the point estimates of the tests.

Regarding age, a Pearson correlation and an ANOVA with Welch correction were conducted to examine possible differences related to participants' ages in the analyzed constructs. The correlation showed a statistically significant but weak association between age and moral harassment ($r = 0.063$; $p = 0.05$), indicating minimal influence of age on the occurrence of harassment. No significant relationship was found between age and substance use and abuse. The ANOVA revealed a significant difference only between the 18–22 ($M = 2.69$; $SD = 5.07$) and 23–27 ($M = 3.07$; $SD = 5.78$) age groups ($p = 0.03$), confirming that age had little effect on the levels of harassment or substance use.

Table 4 - *Results of the anova test between harassment and substance use and abuse by age groups*

Variables	*M*	*DP*
Harassment		
18-22	2,69	5,07
23-27	3,07	5,78
28+	3,14	5,48
Use and Abuse		
18-22	2,26	3,65
23-27	2,63	3,95
28+	2,46	3,66

Concerning possible differences in the occurrence of the constructs in relation to the gender reported by the participants, significant differences were found. The results, obtained through t-tests, examined the extent to which men and women differed in their levels of harassment and substance use and abuse. As shown in Table 5, men and women differed significantly in both

assessed constructs.

Table 5 - *Results of the t-tests between gender and the variables investigated.*

Variables	Men		Women		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	Statistics
Harassment	2.3	4.0	3.5	6.0	$t(998.8) = 3.58$; $p = 0.003$; Cohen's d = 0.22
Use and Abuse	1.9	3.1	2.6	4.0	$t(984.6) = 3.26$; $p = 0.001$; Cohen's d =0.20

Source: The authors.
Note. The Welch test was applied to Harassment and Use and Abuse to correct for homogeneity of variance. The bootstrap technique was used to correct deviations from normality and for greater reliability of the estimators. The bootstrap results confirmed the t-test point estimates.

In particular, men (M=2.3; SD=4.0) had lower levels of harassment than women (M=3.50; SD=6.0). Similarly, they (M=1.92; SD=3.1) had lower levels of substance use and abuse than women (M=2.67; SD=4.0).

The exploratory factor analysis indicated that the instruments did not present satisfactory factorial adequacy according to most references in the literature, as the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) values were below 0.70. For the moral harassment construct, the KMO value was 0.64, while for substance use and abuse, it was 0.66.

Table 6 - *Factor Loadings of the Moral Harassment Scale*

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9	Factor 10	Factor 11	Factor 12	Factor 13
A1													
A2													
A3									0,66				
A4													
A5													
A6													
A7							0,41						
A8							0,55						
A9													
A10													
A11													
A12													
A13													
A14					0,70								
A15							0,40						
A16													
A17					0,68								
A18													
A19													
A20													
A21				0,43									
A22				0,58									
A23				0,42									
A24				0,48									
A25	0,97												
A26													

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Factor 6	Factor 7	Factor 8	Factor 9	Factor 10	Factor 11	Factor 12	Factor 13
A27	0,71												
A28													
A29								0,81					
A30										0,58			
A31										0,51			
A32													
A33													
A34		0,45											
A35		0,63											
A37		0,87											
A38			0,64										
A39			0,49										
A40											0,47		
A41													
A42			0,40										
A43						0,57							
A44													
A45													

Source: The authors.

As can be seen in Table 6, the results indicated that the factors have little explanatory power over the items. The second point concerns the proportion of variance explained by the factors. In total, the 13 factors explained 34% of the variance in the scale responses, indicating that the factors have extremely low explanatory power.

Discussion

The general aim of this study was to establish possible relationships and differences between the constructs of moral harassment and substance use and abuse. The results showed that, in relation to the incidence of moral harassment and substance use and abuse in higher education, the number of students who responded positively to at least one question about having been victims of moral harassment was 44.9%. This result can be considered high, given that the number was close to half of the sample. The subject of moral harassment has been little researched in higher education in terms of its practice against students, so there are few studies to compare the results of this research with. In the study by Gill and Santos (2023) "among the respondents, 64.4% admitted that cases of moral harassment at university recur. The data from this survey is even more alarming than the data from the present study. In the study carried out by Freitas and Del Pino (2023), the results showed that 57.9% of the participants had already suffered pedagogical moral harassment during their undergraduate course by a teacher or other professional. From the research, it can be seen that the number of students harassed in Higher Education is high, so the results indicated that more than half of the students taking part in the research had already suffered some form of moral harassment in Higher Education.

Regarding the incidence of substance use and abuse in higher education, 52.5% of the participants responded positively to the use/abuse of some substance. This result was in line with other studies on the subject. In the study by Barbosa et al. (2020), the results indicated that 51.72% of students use some psychoactive substance. Ferro et al. (2023) found through an investigation with 152 university students that 36.84% consumed tobacco and an almost absolute number of alcohol consumers 99.34% consumed alcohol.

Other investigations have also pointed to the relationship between psychological distress and

the use and abuse of psychoactive substances, especially alcohol and medication. These data corroborate the findings of this study since students who reported having experienced moral harassment scored higher on the instrument that assessed substance use and abuse than students who had not experienced moral harassment (Andrade et al., 2021; Pires et al., 2020, Siebra et al., 2021; Silva, 2019; Silva et al., 2019; Souza et al., 2019). It should also be noted that in the study by Andrade et al. (2021), substance use was seen as a coping strategy for academic burnout. This trend is worrying given that the use and abuse of substances as a coping strategy is considered harmful to physical and psychological health, especially when used over a long period.

Concerning identifying possible relationships between moral harassment and substance use and abuse, the results showed that moral harassment was a significant predictor of substance use and abuse, with high explanatory power. For every one-point increase in the moral harassment scale, there is an average increase of 0.54 points in the substance use and abuse scale. This result corroborates research on substance use and abuse that has shown that substance use can be related to some type of psychological distress that occurs in higher education investigations (Andrade et al., 2021; Pires et al., 2020, Siebra et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2019; Souza et al., 2019). This result is also in line with recent research (Ferro et al., 2023; Gill; Santos, 2023) on moral harassment in higher education. Given this, it can be seen that moral harassment has negative impacts on students concerning increased substance use and abuse as a coping strategy.

About the differences and relationships between the grades studied, considering the constructs presented. The data showed that with moral harassment, grade 1 had the lowest levels of harassment (M=1.02), while grades 5 (M=6.29) and 4 (M=4.79) had the highest levels of harassment. Finally, for substance use and abuse, grades 1 (M=1.44) and 3 (M=1.67) had the lowest levels, while grade 4 had the highest levels (M=4.14). No studies were found that analyzed the rate of moral harassment based on the grades studied, but it is possible to hypothesize that students suffer moral harassment throughout the course, which may explain why the motivational quality is higher in the early grades and lower in the final grades, as well as the consumption of substance use and abuse is lower in the first years and higher in the fourth year. It can also be hypothetically considered that the issue of professional internships and final course work are factors that may favor harassment.

Finally, when checking for possible differences in the occurrence of the constructs about variables such as gender and age, no significant differences were found in terms of age. Regarding gender. The male and female genders differed significantly in all the constructs assessed. In particular, men (M=2.3) had lower levels of harassment than women (M=3.5). Similarly, they (M=1.9) had lower levels of substance use and abuse than women (M=2.6).

These differences may be influenced by a combination of biological, social, and cultural factors. For example, hormonal differences may play a role in how men's and women's bodies metabolize and respond to substances. In addition, social norms and gender expectations can influence patterns of substance use, with different social pressures being exerted on men and women. Women may also face specific challenges and vulnerabilities when it comes to substance use (Sarmiento et al., 2019). For example, research (Gamboa-Solis, 2019; Pereira et al., 2022; Souza & Rocha, 2019) shows that women may be more likely to develop substance dependence more quickly than men. This can be attributed to factors such as differences in metabolism, greater sensitivity to the effects of substances, and a greater likelihood of experiencing trauma and mental health problems (Sarmiento et al., 2019).

Sexual harassment is a serious and complex problem that affects people of all genders, including women, men, and non-binary people. Although it is important to recognize that anyone can be a victim of sexual harassment. Several reasons can contribute to this disparity. One is

the persistence of cultural norms and gender stereotypes that perpetuate the objectification and devaluation of women. These norms can create an environment conducive to sexual harassment.

Regarding the analysis of instrument validation, the exploratory factor analysis indicated that the instruments did not function as satisfactory scales according to most of the literature, as the KMO values were below 0.70: 0.64 for moral harassment and 0.66 for substance use and abuse. The literature indicates that the closer the KMO value is to 1, the better the factorability of the scale, although there is no consensus on what value is considered adequate. Hair et al. (1987) consider values above 0.50 acceptable; Sofroniou and Hutcheson (1999) classify KMO values as follows: below 0.50 as unacceptable, 0.50–0.70 as mediocre, 0.70–0.80 as good, 0.80–0.90 as very good, and above 0.90 as excellent; Kaiser and Rice (1974) recommend values above 0.80, while Field (2013) considers values above 0.70 adequate.

From this perspective, the factorability of the scales was close to 0.70, indicating near adequacy according to Field (2013), acceptable results according to Hair et al. (1987), but a mediocre classification according to Sofroniou and Hutcheson (1999) and Kaiser and Rice (1974). These findings highlight the need for further research to explore ways to improve the factorability of the instruments, allowing them to function more effectively as scales. It is also worth noting that, as pointed out by Campos and Rueda (2016), there are still few initiatives aimed at developing instruments specifically to assess moral harassment.

Final considerations

As the data showed, victims of bullying tend to use more substances than people who have not been victims of this violence, so students may tend to resort to substance use as a way of coping with the emotional problems caused by exposure to situations of moral harassment. It is necessary to raise awareness among the academic community, the competent authorities, and other relevant stakeholders to promote awareness and effective actions to combat moral harassment in Higher Education. In light of this, universities must take measures to prevent, combat, and support victims. This includes implementing clear policies, awareness programs, training for staff and students, and creating a safe and inclusive environment for all. As limitations, we point out that markers of sex, race, class, and age could be explored in future studies. New studies are underway to better understand how these markers affect the university population.

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