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The Relationship between Personal Variables and Perceived Appropriateness of Coping Strategies against Cybervictimisation among Pre-Service Teachers

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Abstract: Cyberbullying behaviours begin at primary school, so the actions taken by pre-teachers will play a key role in achieving the goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More specifically, active coping strategies are essential in reducing victimisation. The aim of this study was to identify the coping strategies considered effective by pre-service teachers and to analyse the perceived appropriateness of active and passive strategies in relation to personal variables. The participants were 1122 students on the Bachelor's Degree in Education at the University of Castile-La Mancha in Spain. The study measured the perceived appropriateness of five active coping strategies and four passive coping strategies, moral disengagement, experiences of bullying and cyberbullying, emotions in response to bullying and gender stereotypes. The results show that more than 25% of pre-service teachers are not prepared to manage cyberbullying effectively. Prior experiences of victimisation, personal masculinity in men and moral emotions in women are related to active strategies, while moral disengagement, and pleasant emotions in women, are related to passive strategies. Universities must implement initiatives to ensure that pre-service teachers receive training on effective coping strategies and reflect on the personal factors influencing their decisions.

Keywords: pre-service teachers; cybervictimisation; coping strategies; personal variables; training

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1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development [1] includes a target to reduce all forms of violence (SDG 16.1). Among these forms of violence, research has shown that bullying is a risk factor for the wellbeing of those involved [2].

In the 21st century, social changes have given rise to new demands in which psychological, social and educational intervention plays an increasingly central role. These new demands include intervention to address violence between peers using new technologies. Research indicates that children have access to information and communication technology and are making use of it from a young age. In Spain, the National Institute of Statistics reported in 2020 that almost 86.7% of children aged 10 years and over were internet users [3]. There is also a high level of mobile phone access among children [4]. The expansion of new technologies has led to the emergence of online victimisation or cyberbullying. Cyberbullying is "[a]n aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself" ([5], p. 376). Cyberbullying represents a social and health issue for children [6,7], with a severe impact on their schooling [8,9]. It has serious consequences for the development of a sustainable school environment and quality

education (SDG 4: 'Quality Education'), undermining the health of victimised children and negatively affecting their wellbeing (SDG 3: 'Good Health and Wellbeing'). Therefore, a key objective within the education system is to reduce cybervictimisation among children.

The Spanish Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport launched the Strategic Plan for School Coexistence in 2015 in an attempt to make schools safe spaces rather than places of violence. Teacher training plays a key role in achieving this objective [10–12]. It is important to acknowledge the efforts made by teachers and institutions to prevent and address bullying, although their impact remains limited [13]. Understanding the degree of preparation among pre-service teachers will allow us to identify weaknesses and improve their training as in-service teachers in the future [14]. However, there has been little research into pre-service teachers to date. Existing research has pointed to the need to train pre-service teachers on cyberbullying [15–18] and increase their commitment to eradicating it [19]. The coping strategies adopted within the school environment are key to addressing victimisation [20]. Helping students to develop coping strategies has a very relevant role in reducing the prevalence and harmful consequences of bullying [21]. Responses to avoid victimisation, such as seeking support (active strategies), has been shown to be more effective against cyberbullying and contribute to reducing victim distress [22,23]. In contrast, passive strategies (e.g., blocking messages, ignoring the behaviour) do not change perpetrators' behaviours, so they have little success, and have been associated with increased victim distress [22].

For most children, teachers are significant figures in their everyday lives [24], so the decisions made by pre-service teachers in response to bullying and cyberbullying behaviours are highly relevant [12,21,25]. We are not aware of any study analysing the influence of pre-service teachers' personal variables on their perceptions of different coping strategies that children may adopt in response to cyberbullying. Understanding the ways in which the characteristics of pre-service teachers encourage active intervention by victims in educational settings may play a fundamental part in the successful design and application of school coexistence programmes and help higher education institutions prepare teachers for professional practice more effectively. In order to ensure that schools respond appropriately to cyberbullying in the immediate term, we must draw on knowledge of the coping strategies considered appropriate by pre-service teachers and the variables that can explain their support for these strategies. Only by being aware of the variables that influence the coping strategies considered most appropriate to halt cyberbullying by teachers can we effectively intervene to encourage them.

1.1. Experiences of Cyberbullying among Primary School Pupils

Most prior studies on cyberbullying have focused on adolescents. However, a number of studies have situated the emergence of cyberbullying behaviours among pre-adolescents (primary school) [26–30]. It has been estimated that around 10% of pupils at primary schools are cybervictimised [31]. Studies based on samples of Spanish primary school pupils place the prevalence of cybervictimisation between 6.6% [32] and 18% [33], depending on the number of items on the scale used to measure the phenomenon.

Moreover, being a victim has been shown to be a risk factor for subsequent victimisation [34–37]. Some children are unable to escape bullying and remain victims throughout the different stages of their education [38,39], becoming chronic victims [34]. Recent research has identified the percentage of chronic victims from primary to secondary school as 24% [40]. Chronic bullying victims display more frequent health problems, higher levels of anxiety, loneliness, stress and poorer performance than sporadic victims [34,41,42].

The vulnerable situation in which some children find themselves starting at the primary school level jeopardises achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The severity of cyberbullying and its consequences over time make it very important to prevent its emergence from the early stages of education.

1.2. The Role of Teachers in Combating Cyberbullying

The socioecological approach to bullying is based on the premise that bullying behaviours are influenced by interactions with classmates and adults [43]. Primary schools are characterised by small groups of pupils who are taught by very few teachers with whom they spend a lot of time and have a very close relationship [44], making the teacher a very important adult figure for their pupils in this setting [24]. As a result, teachers are in an optimal position to observe and intervene in school bullying [45]. Moreover, pupils expect their teachers to take action against bullying [44]. Teachers are more likely to intervene if they witness bullying [46], but less likely to intervene if the victim ignores the bullying [47]. A longitudinal study by Troop-Gordon and Ladd concluded that the incidence of bullying declined when teachers took consistent action against it [48]. By contrast, higher levels of victimisation are documented in classrooms where teachers do not intervene [49,50]. In addition to this, pupils interpret their teachers' failure to intervene as a form of implicit consent for bullying [51] and a consequence of higher levels of teachers' pro-bullying attitudes [52]. When teachers' response to bullying is adequate, they strengthen bonds with students, creating an appropriate learning and development environment [53].

Pre-service teachers think they can play a central role in bullying intervention [54], but are not confident about their knowledge of coping strategies to handle it [55]. They feel prepared to support victims and their parents, but do not feel confident to intervene with bullies or their parents [56]. Research into the role of teachers in tackling cyberbullying is more limited [57]. The results of existing studies suggest that in order to reduce the risk of cyberbullying, a social environment with clear rules against violence is needed [52], with a person who stops the bullying behaviour and provides support to victims [58]. The coping strategy of asking a teacher for help is the most frequently selected among primary school pupils, with up to 57% of pupils backing this strategy among those in fourth year. Only 11.1% of secondary school pupils supported this strategy [59]. It is vital that children have teachers that they trust to support them against cyberbullying [60]. Since cyberbullying begins at primary level, action from teachers is key in successfully tackling cybervictimisation.

1.3. Coping Strategies against Cyberbullying

Coping strategies have been defined as the response that individuals employ to manage the stress caused by their environment (e.g., peer relationships) and the resulting emotions [61]. The coping strategies adopted by the people around them play a part in helping victims overcome the negative consequences of bullying [36] and reduce victimisation [20]. Coping strategies are expressed through the victim's response to aggression and encompass behaviour by bystanders [62].

Teachers' responses to victimisation can influence whether or not the victimisation continues and affect the wellbeing of the pupils involved [63,64]. These responses may play an active or passive role in preventing victimisation. Active responses consist of adopting measures to avoid victimisation, while passive responses leave the victim to face the situation alone [65]. Active strategies are the most effective in the case of cyberbullying [10,21–23]. Among these strategies, seeking support from peers and adults has proven to be the most effective [22,23,66]. Dialogue between the victim and the bully has also been shown to be successful [67,68]. Passive avoidance strategies are the least effective [69,70]. Moreover, ignoring the incident increases the negative impact of cyberbullying [22,71]. Failure to intervene contributes to cyberperpetration [36,72].

1.4. Personal Variables Related to Coping Strategies against Bullying

The characteristics of teachers have been identified as explanatory variables for the use of different strategies [73]. Ettekal et al. [74] pointed out that teachers' interventions against bullying were associated with different personal variables. Research has highlighted the influence of mainly three variables: self-efficacy (or the ability to cope with a bullying situation), perceived seriousness (or how unacceptable a bullying situation is thought to

be), and empathy or feelings for the victim [15,25,54]. One of the priorities identified in prevention programmes is to understand the personal characteristics that predict effective responses to bullying among teachers [11].

Additionally, although results are mixed, prior research has found sex differences in the tendency to intervene and strategies employed. Regarding coping strategies, the main difference is that women attach more importance to social support [21,75]. Girls are more likely to talk about the incident of cyberbullying [21], also with the teacher [76]. In relation to the tendency to help, several studies found that male teachers reported that they tended to ignore bullying incidents, while female teachers considered important to intervene [51,77–79]. However, other studies found no differences by sex [80,81]. Research on pre-service teachers reported similar differences by sex [15,18]. Meanwhile, a systematic review of the factors influencing bystander intervention in cyberbullying showed that the results on sex are contradictory [82]. Studies have shown that women display a greater tendency to help than men [83,84], while others found no differences between the two groups [15,85]. These results suggest that possible differences by sex in the teachers' personal variables and their relationship with coping strategies should be analysed.

Teachers' beliefs about bullying and cyberbullying are linked to the strategies they use to coping with it [86]. Teacher perceiving bullying as a serious problem are more prone to intervene to stop it [46,73,87]. Teachers who perceive bullying as a normative phenomenon are less inclined to intervene [40]. Troop-Gordon and Ladd observed that teachers who believed that bullying is a normal part of adolescence were more likely to recommend avoidance strategies [48]. Moral disengagement is also related to the bystander response, although few studies have focused on this area and the results of existing studies are inconsistent [88]. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory [89] defines moral disengagement as a cognitive process through which people justify their aggressive behaviour or distort its potential impact on victims. A high level of moral disengagement is negatively associated with behaviours defending the victim and positively associated with passive behaviours [88,90], although other studies found no significant relationship [91–93]. Based on these results, moral disengagement could be expected to correlate with approval of the use of passive strategies against cyberbullying victimisation.

Some pre-service teachers have acknowledged difficulties in managing bullying when they have been bullied in the past [94]. Pre-service teachers' own experiences of bullying are related to their subsequent responses to bullying incidents [95]. However, the direction of the relationship is unclear. In the study by Cleemput et al., teachers were more likely to help victims when they had experienced bullying themselves [96]. Other studies reported the opposite: the less involvement they had had in perpetration and victimisation, the more teachers were inclined to help bullying victims [97,98]. Among school aged students, victims mainly employ passive strategies. For example, victims of traditional bullying ignore the bully; victims of cyberbullying are more likely to ignore the aggression and take technological measures such as changing their mobile phone number or email [21,99]. Among adults, previous victimisation can also lead to difficulties in employing effective coping strategies [100]. In young adult victims of cyberstalking, women had a tendency to use avoidance coping strategies [101]. Given the contradictory results of previous studies, we expect past experiences of bullying and cyberbullying to be related to perceptions of the appropriateness of coping strategies but given the mixed results we make no predictions about the direction of this relationship.

Teachers' beliefs about the seriousness of bullying differs according to the types of bullying [80,102]. They perceived physical bullying as more serious than verbal bullying and verbal bullying as more serious than relational bullying [87,103]. Additionally, Domínguez-Hernández et al. [82] systematic review showed that perceived feelings influenced the seriousness attributed to cyberbullying. For example, adolescents viewed cyberbullying as more serious when they perceived the victim to be distressed [104]. Research indicates that teachers who had been bullied in the past were more likely to feel empathy towards the victim [105], therefore, presumably they can recognise the negative emotions generated by

victimisation to a greater extent. In fact, perceived severity of bullying was associated with greater empathy towards victims [54]. Moreover, previous studies suggest that bystanders who experience pleasant emotions in response to bullying tend to side with the bully [106], while experiencing unpleasant emotions in response to bullying increases support for the victim [107]. Meanwhile, moral emotions (such as guilt and shame) are important regulators of helping behaviours [108], as they are closely correlated with a sense of responsibility towards others [109,110]. We expect moral emotions and unpleasant emotions to be related to acceptance of active coping strategies against cyberbullying, and pleasant emotions to be related to acceptance of passive strategies.

The results of the study by Bjärehed et al. pointed to the importance of considering the relationship between gender stereotypical traits and bystander behaviour [91]. The gender stereotypical traits refer to "the beliefs people hold about members of the categories man or woman" ([111], p. 19). Girls tend to have been socialised to be more submissive, subordinate and pleasant, whereas boys are socialised to be more dominant, competitive and aggressive [112]. However, it is important to bear in mind that there is more than one kind of masculinity [113]. Choi et al. presented a three-factor model of gender stereotypes comprising one feminine factor and two masculine factors, one with personality dimensions and another with social dimensions representing control over others [114]. A study by Morales et al. showed that social masculinity is a factor related to bullying among boys and girls [115]. The construction of gender also influences our perceptions of others' behaviour [116], so it could influence bystander behaviour. We expect social masculinity to be related to acceptance of passive coping strategies by teachers.

1.5. The Current Study

Eden et al. [117] suggest that the first step towards helping teachers manage bullying is to understand the perceptions and beliefs that affect their response to it. To promote the use of effective strategies to prevent cyberbullying, it is important to be aware of the variables that can influence pre-service teachers' decision-making with regard to children's coping strategies. The primary aim of this study was to enhance our knowledge of the coping strategies considered appropriate by pre-service teachers and analyse the personal factors related to their perceptions of the appropriateness of different coping strategies against cyberbullying used by children.

Teachers play a key role in influencing the type of coping strategies adopted by their pupils in response to cyberbullying [51]. If pre-service teachers encourage victims of cyberbullying to use active coping strategies, they could play a central role in preventing cybervictimisation from continuing and becoming chronic among children. The first objective of this study was to analyse the coping strategies considered effective by pre-service teachers. Brody and Vangelisti report that proximity to the victim influences the likelihood of intervention in bullying incidents [118]. At primary school, pupils have a close personal relationship with their teacher [119], so it is expected that pre-service teachers will perceive active coping strategies against cyberbullying to be more appropriate than passive strategies (H1).

The second study objective was to analyse the relationship between pre-service teachers' personal characteristics and their perception of the appropriateness of coping strategies, with the expectation that their own experiences of bullying and cyberbullying in their current university context, as well as the fact of experiencing moral emotions and unpleasant emotions in response to bullying, will be related to greater support for the use of active coping strategies against cyberbullying (H2).

It is predicted that pre-service teachers' own experiences of bullying and cyberbullying in their current university context, moral disengagement, experiencing pleasant emotions in response to bullying and social masculinity will be related to acceptance of the use of passive strategies against cybervictimisation (H3).

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

The questionnaires were distributed to over 1217 students; 95 (7.8%) questionnaires were not fully completed and were removed. The participants in the study were 1122 students from the four academic years on the Bachelor's Degree in Education on the four campuses at the University of Castile-La Mancha in Spain. The sample was 78.3% female and 21.2% male, with a mean age of 20.82 (*SD* = 3.26; female: *M* = 20.66, *SD* = 3.07; male: *M* = 21.44, *SD* = 3.84). By year group, 421 participants were in the first year of their degree (83.1% women, 16.9% men), 372 were in their second year (80.1% women, 19.9% men), 221 were in their third year (71.9% women, 28.1% men) and 108 were in their final year (71.0% women, 29.0% men).

2.2. Instruments

2.2.1. Coping Strategies

These were measured by adapting the coping strategies instrument used by Nicolaides et al. [56] to cyberbullying. This questionnaire allowed us to measure pre-service teachers' perceptions of the appropriateness of different strategies used by pupils against cybervictimisation ("For each of the following coping strategies, please indicate the extent to which you consider them appropriate for use by pupils against cyberbullying"). The instrument comprises nine items with a Likert-type scale offering five options (1-Very inappropriate, 2-Inappropriate, 3-Neither appropriate nor inappropriate, 4-Appropriate and 5-Very appropriate). Following the model by Ortega et al. [120], the items were divided into two dimensions: five items describe active coping strategies (telling friends, telling parents, telling a teacher, calling the bullying helpline and asking the bully to stop) and four items describe passive coping strategies (switching off the phone, ignoring what is happening, skipping class, waiting for the bully to stop on their own). Previous studies in Spain have reported Cronbach's alpha values of 0.70 to 0.80 [10]. In the current sample, Cronbach's alpha values were 0.90 for active coping strategies and 0.71 for passive coping strategies. Higher item scores indicated higher perceptions of appropriateness of the coping strategies [121].

2.2.2. Bullying and Cyberbullying

To measure experiences of bullying and cyberbullying at university, the Bullying Harassment and Aggression Receipt Measure [122] was used. It comprises 14 items that describe bullying (physical, verbal and social exclusion) and cyberbullying behaviours. Participants were asked to state how often they had experienced and/or perpetrated the different bullying behaviours on the scale in the last month. A Likert-type scale with four response options was used: 0-Has not happened to me, 1-Has happened to me once or twice in the last month, 2-Has happened to me at least once a week, 3-Has happened to me twice a week or more. Previous studies with undergraduate students reported an internal consistency for the victimization scale of 0.77 [123]. Hall et al. [122] reported Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.82 to 0.91. In the current sample, the reliability values of the victimisation scale for this sample were: physical $\alpha = 0.78$, verbal $\alpha = 0.82$, exclusion $\alpha = 0.80$ and cyberbullying $\alpha = 0.75$. The reliability values of the aggression scale were: physical $\alpha = 0.75$, verbal $\alpha = 0.62$, exclusion $\alpha = 0.61$ and cyberbullying $\alpha = 0.73$.

2.2.3. Moral Disengagement

The questionnaire on moral disengagement in response to cyberbullying by Bussey et al. [124] was applied. It comprises eight items (for example "It is alright to send a mean message using a mobile phone or the internet to someone if they have poked fun at your friends"). A Likert-type scale with five response options was used: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. Previous studies with Spaniards university students reported Cronbach's alpha values around 0.70 [125,126]. The scale's consistency for the current study sample was adequate, $\alpha = 0.73$.

2.2.4. Emotions

To evaluate the emotional component, the scale created by Larrañaga et al. [127] was applied. The scale asks about emotions relating to experiences of bullying ("Based on your experience, how do you feel about bullying?"). The intensity of each emotion was measured using a Likert-type scale with five response options ranging from 1-Not at all to 5-A lot. We added moral emotions to the scale. The scale consists of four negative/unpleasant emotions (anger, sadness, worry and distress), three positive/pleasant emotions (joy/fun, comfort, satisfaction) and two moral emotions (guilt and shame). In the original study the Cronbach's alpha value was $\alpha = 0.68$ for pleasant emotions and $\alpha = 0.86$ for unpleasant emotions [127]. In the current sample, the Cronbach's alpha values were 0.81 for pleasant emotions, 0.90 for unpleasant emotions and 0.57 for moral emotions.

2.2.5. Gender Stereotypical Traits

Gender stereotypical traits were measured using the Three-Factor Model [114]. Subjects assessed themselves on each trait on a 7-point Likert scale, with 1 signifying that the content of the item did not reflect them at all, and 7 meaning that the item completely reflected them. The remaining numbers on the scale represent intermediate values. The traits used to evaluate femininity were: affectionate, warm, compassionate, gentle, tender, sympathetic, sensitive to needs of others, soothe hurt feelings, understanding; to evaluate social masculinity: powerful, forceful, dominant, aggressive, willing to take risks; and to evaluate personal masculinity: willing to take a stand, defends own beliefs, independent, has leadership abilities, strong personality. Coefficient alphas in previous studies with university students were between 0.84 to 0.92 [128]. In the current sample, the reliability was $\alpha = 0.75$ for femininity, $\alpha = 0.71$ for social masculinity and $\alpha = 0.68$ for personal masculinity.

2.3. Procedure

The questionnaire was administered during the 2018/2019 academic year in classrooms at the various Faculties of Education, after consent had been obtained from the university deans and teachers. The approximate mean response time was 30 min. The questionnaire was completed and returned immediately. The study complied with the ethical principles set out in the Declaration of Helsinki, ensuring participants' anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary participation. Participants did not receive any compensation or extra credit for their participation in the investigation. The Clinical Research Ethics Committee at the Virgen de la Luz Hospital in Cuenca approved the study protocol (PI0519).

2.4. Data Analysis

Firstly, the responses regarding the appropriateness of the coping strategies were recoded. A strategy was considered appropriate when it scored either 4 or 5 (appropriate or very appropriate) [121]. The percentage of participants who had considered each of the strategies included in the study to be appropriate was calculated and the responses were compared by participants' year of study using a contingency analysis with chi-square. The sum of the active and passive coping strategies was established, then the percentage of acceptance for each group was calculated. The differences in acceptance by sex were analysed using a contingency analysis with chi-square. Secondly, the correlations between the study variables were calculated using Pearson's correlation coefficient and the difference by sex for each variable was calculated using Student's t-test. To identify the personal characteristics of the pre-service teachers that were most closely related to acceptance of coping strategies, a logistic regression was performed for the active strategies and another for the passive strategies. In both cases, a separate regression was performed for men and for women. Statistical analyses were performed using the software package SPSS 24.0.

3. Results

3.1. Appropriateness of Coping Strategies

5.3% of the sample did not respond to this variable, while responses were received from 3.4% of first-year students, 5.4% of second-year students, 2.3% of third-year students and 56% of fourth-year students, with no significant differences observed by year of study ($\chi^2 = 5.21$, $p = 0.157$). When the participants scored a strategy 4 (appropriate) or 5 (very appropriate), they were deemed to consider the strategy to be appropriate to address cyberbullying. As Table 1 shows, there were no statistically significant differences by year of study in the participants' assessments of the appropriateness of any of the strategies. However, active strategies were considered to be more appropriate than passive strategies, with seeking support from an adult, telling parents, telling teachers and requesting specialist advice from a bullying helpline identified as particularly appropriate. A total of 32% deemed it appropriate not to intervene in incidents of cyberbullying, 22% believed that cybervictims should ignore the attack and 10% believed that cybervictimisation would stop on its own.

Table 1. Percentages of respondents deeming coping strategies to be appropriate by study year.

	Total	**Year**				χ^2
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	
Switching off mobile phone	29.1	32.3	27.4	26.2	29.0	3.47
Ignoring what is happening	22.2	23.3	19.4	27.6	16.8	7.55
Telling the aggressor to stop	49.0	49.4	45.7	53.8	49.5	3.74
Telling friends	57.0	56.8	55.9	57.5	61.7	1.16
Telling parents	68.0	68.9	64.5	75.6	61.7	8.01
Telling teachers	60.6	60.8	57.5	66.1	59.8	4.27
Skipping class	12.6	15.0	9.9	11.8	14.0	4.86
Calling the bullying helpline	62.1	62.5	61.6	66.5	54.2	4.74
Nothing, it will stop on its own	10.3	10.9	10.2	10.4	8.4	0.59

When participants' sex was taken into consideration, 3.4% of men and 5.8% of women did not respond to this variable, with no significant differences observed by sex ($\chi^2 = 2.18$, $p = 0.090$). A total of 14.1% (men: 11.8%, women: 14.7%) did not consider any of the proposed strategies to be appropriate but did not suggest any alternatives; 49.6% (men: 48.3%, women: 49.9%) only considered the active strategies to be appropriate; 8.8% (men: 9.8%, women: 8.6%) only considered the passive strategies to be appropriate and 23.2% (men: 26.7%, women: 22%) considered both active and passive strategies to be appropriate, with no significant differences observed by sex ($\chi^2 = 1.89$, $p = 0.590$).

3.2. Relationship between Study Variables, Differences by Sex

The correlations between the pre-service teachers' personal variables and their assessments of the active and passive strategies were analysed (Table 2). Moral disengagement was correlated with support for passive strategies. Past experiences of bullying were negatively correlated with support for active strategies. Pleasant emotions were negatively related to support for active strategies and positively related to support for passive strategies. The only gender factor that proved significant was personal masculinity, which was positively correlated with active strategies. Men scored significantly higher than women in moral disengagement, victimisation and perpetration of physical and verbal bullying, and social masculinity. Women experienced more unpleasant emotions in response to bullying than men.

Table 2. Correlations and differences in means by sex.

	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**	**17**
1. AS1	–																
2. PS1	0.07 *	–															
3. MD1	0.02	0.10 ***	–														
4. PV2	−0.09 **	0.02	0.20 ***	–													
5. VV2	−0.07 *	0.02	0.16 ***	0.68 ***	–												
6. EV2	−0.10 ***	0.03	0.19 ***	0.52 ***	0.72 ***	–											
7. CV2	−0.08 **	0.02	0.26 ***	0.50 ***	0.50 ***	0.55 ***	–										
8. PP2	−0.06 *	0.00	0.19 ***	0.50 ***	0.36 ***	0.27 ***	0.34 ***	–									
9. VP2	−0.08 **	0.00	0.16 ***	0.39 ***	0.45 ***	0.35 ***	0.31 ***	0.53 ***	–								
10. EP2	−0.07 *	0.06	0.22 ***	0.30 ***	0.27 ***	0.28 ***	0.31 ***	0.45 ***	0.46 ***	–							
11. CP2	−0.06 *	0.06	0.19 ***	0.30 ***	0.23 ***	0.20 ***	0.40 ***	0.42 ***	0.30 ***	0.48 ***	–						
12. UE1	0.01	−0.06	−0.15 ***	−0.04	0.01	0.04	0.01	−0.10 **	−0.08 *	−0.04	−0.04	–					
13. PE1	−0.07 *	0.12 ***	0.14 ***	0.11 ***	0.08 **	0.05	0.06 *	0.12 ***	0.08 **	0.16 ***	0.21 ***	−0.20 ***	–				
14. ME1	0.07 *	−0.00	−0.03	−0.04	0.08 **	0.06	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.07 *	0.01	0.45 ***	0.05	–			
15. F3	0.04	0.02	−0.06 *	−0.03	0.01	−0.04	−0.04	−0.06 *	−0.09 **	−0.06	−0.04	0.07 *	0.02	0.00	–		
16. PM3	0.08 **	0.05	−0.01	−0.01	−0.00	−0.00	0.02	−0.01	0.01	−0.01	0.03	0.02	0.00	−0.02	0.27 ***	–	
17. SM3	−0.01	0.04	0.12 ***	0.09 **	0.07 **	0.06 *	0.11 ***	0.17 ***	0.18 ***	0.13 ***	0.11 ***	−0.12 ***	0.08 *	0.01	−0.01	0.38 ***	–
*M*m	3.51	2.30	1.57	0.25	0.46	0.34	0.09	0.20	0.36	0.09	0.02	3.31	1.24	2.75	5.79	5.32	3.45
*SD*m	1.28	1.05	0.40	0.36	0.60	0.50	0.32	0.37	0.45	0.25	0.11	1.00	0.66	1.01	0.77	0.91	0.91
*M*w	3.44	2.19	1.39	0.14	0.32	0.34	0.08	0.06	0.22	0.08	0.02	3.72	1.21	2.65	5.80	5.31	2.91
*SD*w	1.45	1.08	0.38	0.29	0.57	0.58	0.28	0.19	0.36	0.22	0.16	0.98	0.68	1.06	0.83	1.09	0.97
t	0.69	1.38	6.15 ***	4.62 ***	3.28 ***	−0.06	0.62	7.66 ***	4.83 ***	0.81	−0.53	−5.63 ***	0.43	1.24	−0.19	0.18	7.65 ***

Nb: AS = Active Strategies, PS = Passive Strategies, MD = Moral Disengagement, PV = Physical Victimisation, VV = Verbal Victimisation, EV = Exclusion Victimisation, CV = Cyberbullying Victimisation, PP = Physical Perpetration, VP = Verbal Perpetration, EP = Exclusion Perpetration, CP = Cyberbullying Perpetration, UE = Unpleasant Emotions, PE = Pleasant Emotions, ME = Moral Emotions, F = Femininity, PM = Personal Masculinity, SM = Social Masculinity. Measurement scale: 1 = 1–5, 2 = 0–3, 3 = 1–7. *M* = mean, *SD* = standard deviation, m = men, w = women, *t* = Student test; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

3.3. Regressions for Active Coping Strategies

To estimate the association between pre-service teachers' personal variables and the appropriateness of active coping strategies, a binary logistic regression analysis was performed separately for men (Table 3) and women (Table 4). The models were significant for men and for women, explaining 25% and 6% of variance, respectively.

Table 3. Linear regression to predict support for active strategies among men.

	β	Wald	OR	CI 95%
Moral disengagement	−0.26	0.41	0.77	0.34–1.72
Physical victim	1.55	10.47 ***	4.73	1.84–12.14
Verbal victim	−1.17	5.45 *	0.31	0.12–0.83
Exclusion victim	−0.16	0.14	0.85	0.36–2.02
Cyberbullying victim	0.29	0.22	1.34	0.39–4.59
Physical aggressor	−0.32	0.57	0.73	0.32–1.66
Verbal aggressor	−0.58	2.09	0.56	0.25–1.23
Exclusion aggressor	0.36	0.56	1.43	0.56–3.63
Cyberbullying aggressor	−1.09	1.16	0.33	0.05–2.44
Unpleasant emotions	0.17	0.74	1.19	0.80–1.76
Pleasant emotions	−0.41	2.03	0.67	0.38–1.17
Moral emotions	0.19	1.63	1.21	0.90–1.62
Femininity	0.26	1.37	1.30	0.84–2.02
Personal masculinity	0.69	9.01 **	1.99	1.27–3.12
Social masculinity	−0.08	0.16	0.92	0.61–1.38
Nagelkerke R2		0.25		
χ^2		40.99 ***		

Nb: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Linear regression to predict support for active strategies among women.

	β	Wald	OR	CI 95%
Moral disengagement	0.10	0.22	1.10	0.73–1.68
Physical victim	−0.01	0.00	0.99	0.64–1.55
Verbal victim	0.13	0.35	1.14	0.73–1.79
Exclusion victim	−0.19	0.87	0.83	0.56–1.23
Cyberbullying victim	−0.82	7.66 **	0.44	0.25–0.79
Physical aggressor	−0.02	0.01	0.98	0.59–1.64
Verbal aggressor	−0.01	0.00	0.99	0.68–1.46
Exclusion aggressor	0.25	1.06	1.29	0.79–2.08
Cyberbullying aggressor	−0.34	0.55	0.71	0.29–1.75
Unpleasant emotions	−0.08	0.66	0.92	0.75–1.12
Pleasant emotions	−0.22	2.72	0.80	0.62–1.04
Moral emotions	0.23	11.45 ***	1.26	1.10–1.44
Femininity	0.09	0.75	1.09	0.89–1.34
Personal masculinity	0.03	0.15	1.03	0.88–1.21
Social masculinity	−0.05	0.25	0.96	0.80–1.14
Nagelkerke R2		0.06		
χ^2		32.02 **		

Nb: ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Among men, the probability of considering active strategies to be appropriate increased with past experience as a victim of physical bullying (β = 1.55, OR = 4.73, $p < 0.001$) and high personal masculinity (β = 0.69, OR = 1.99, $p < 0.01$). Past experience as a victim of verbal bullying had the opposite effect (β = −1.17, OR = 0.31, $p < 0.05$).

Among women, the probability of considering active strategies to be appropriate increased with experiencing moral emotions in response to bullying (β = 0.23, OR = 1.26, $p < 0.001$). Past experience as a victim of cyberbullying had the opposite effect (β = −0.82, OR = 0.44, $p < 0.01$).

3.4. Regressions for Passive Coping Strategies

To estimate the association between pre-service teachers' personal variables and the appropriateness of passive coping strategies, a binary logistic regression analysis was performed separately for men (Table 5) and women (Table 6). The models were significant for men and for women, explaining 33% and 15% of variance, respectively.

Table 5. Linear regression to identify predictors of passive strategies, men.

	β	Wald	OR	CI 95%
Moral disengagement	1.68	5.78 *	5.35	1.36–21.02
Physical victim	−0.10	0.01	0.90	0.16–4.98
Verbal victim	−1.26	1.10	0.28	0.03–2.99
Exclusion victim	−1.20	1.61	0.30	0.05–1.92
Cyberbullying victim	−0.64	0.43	0.52	0.08–3.55
Physical aggressor	−0.79	0.62	0.45	0.06–3.23
Verbal aggressor	1.03	1.13	2.81	0.42–18.92
Exclusion aggressor	−0.19	0.03	0.83	0.09–7.25
Cyberbullying aggressor	0.95	0.47	2.57	0.17–38.66
Unpleasant emotions	−0.53	1.17	0.59	0.23–1.53
Pleasant emotions	0.77	3.50	2.16	0.96–4.84
Moral emotions	0.52	1.66	1.68	0.76–3.68
Femininity	−0.10	0.01	0.90	0.16–4.98
Personal masculinity	−0.19	0.13	0.83	0.29–2.33
Social masculinity	0.48	1.14	1.61	0.67–3.89
Nagelkerke R2			0.33	
χ^2			34.06 *	

Nb: * $p < 0.05$.

Table 6. Linear regression to identify predictors of passive strategies, women.

	β	Wald	OR	CI 95%
Moral disengagement	0.67	4.36 *	1.96	1.04–3.68
Physical victim	0.92	3.61	2.52	0.97–6.54
Verbal victim	−0.58	1.25	0.56	0.20–1.55
Exclusion victim	0.67	2.29	1.95	0.82–4.62
Cyberbullying victim	−0.44	0.53	0.64	0.20–2.11
Physical aggressor	−0.74	1.39	0.48	0.14–1.63
Verbal aggressor	−0.47	1.07	0.62	0.25–1.53
Exclusion aggressor	0.09	0.03	1.09	0.39–3.06
Cyberbullying aggressor	1.25	3.17	3.48	0.88–13.72
Unpleasant emotions	0.01	0.00	1.00	0.64–1.55
Pleasant emotions	0.60	10.25 **	1.82	1.26–2.65
Moral emotions	0.17	1.25	1.19	0.88–1.62
Femininity	0.19	0.58	1.20	0.75–1.94
Personal masculinity	0.17	1.20	1.18	0.87–1.60
Social masculinity	−0.11	0.28	0.90	0.61–1.33
Nagelkerke R2			0.15	
χ^2			36.36 **	

Nb: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

In both cases, moral disengagement in response to cyberbullying increased the probability of support for passive strategies: men (β = 1.68, OR = 5.35, $p < 0.05$), women (β = 0.67, OR = 1.96, $p < 0.05$). Among women, experiencing pleasant emotions in response to bullying also increased the probability of considering passive strategies to be appropriate (β = 0.60, OR = 1.82, $p < 0.01$). None of the other study variables were significant in the models for passive strategies.

4. Discussion

The first objective of this study was to analyse the coping strategies considered appropriate by pre-service teachers. We expected to find greater support for active strategies than for passive strategies (H1). The results confirmed the initial hypothesis: active coping strategies against cyberbullying displayed the highest percentages in the assessments of appropriateness made by pre-service teachers. These results are important given that active strategies have been shown to be more effective against cyberbullying [10,21–23] and improve children's well-being [22,23,63,64]. No significant differences were observed by sex for any of the strategies evaluated. Previous research has found that women, teachers, and pre-service teachers report a greater tendency to intervene in bullying situations [15,18,51,77–79]. However, results in the present study are in line with past research not finding sex differences [15,80,81,85].

Telling parents (68.0%), telling teachers (60.6%) and calling the bullying helpline (62.1%) were the strategies with the highest levels of support. These data corroborate existing research into pre-service teachers' coping strategies against bullying. Nicolaides et al. report that the strategies most recommended by pre-service teachers are telling teachers and telling parents about bullying incidents [56]. Results confirm pre-service teachers perceptions of playing an important role to prevent and intervene on bullying behaviours [54] and cyberbullying. Pre-service teachers also value positively seeking social support as a good strategy, which has been shown to be very effective coping with bullying [22,23,66].

However, it is concerning that more than 30% would take no action in response to cyberbullying (10% would do nothing and 22% considered it appropriate to ignore what was happening). Analysing the responses of bullying victims, Wachs et al. found that teachers failed to intervene in approximately one in six bullying incidents at schools [129].

Previous research has shown that a passive attitude from teachers derives from feeling inadequately trained to intervene in bullying [129,130]. It could also be related with a lack of knowledge of effective coping strategies [55], especially to intervene with the perpetrator of cyberbullying [56]. When assessing the coping strategies alongside one another, 28% of pre-service teachers in this study did not appear to know what strategy to adopt. A total of 19% did not respond or failed to indicate any strategy as appropriate, while 9% only deemed the passive strategies to be appropriate. The results corroborate research into in-service teachers, which has highlighted their ignorance of strategies for intervening in bullying [131,132]. In the study by van Verseveld et al. with primary school teachers, 32% of teachers reported having difficulty responding to bullying [133]. However, it is important to bear in mind that other studies have shown that some teachers believe that as behaviours such as cyberbullying occur outside school, it is not their place to intervene [134]. It could also be explained by the lower perception of severity in cases of relational bullying [87,130] or because pre-service teachers may not witness cyberbullying episodes, which has been shown to be related to less intervention actions [46].

Previous research has pointed to the relevance of teachers' personal variables for their interventions in response to bullying [11,25,54,73,74]. Therefore, the second objective of this study was to analyse the relationship between pre-service teachers' personal characteristics and their perceptions of the appropriateness of coping strategies. Moral disengagement was significantly correlated with acceptance of passive coping strategies. Past experiences of bullying and cyberbullying at university were negatively correlated with support for active strategies. Emotions in response to bullying were significant for all strategies. More specifically, pleasant emotions were negatively related to support for active strategies and pleasant emotions were positively related to support for passive strategies. Gender was only significant through personal masculinity in the active strategies. Echoing previous studies, men displayed higher levels of moral disengagement [135] and social masculinity [114] and assigned less importance to the negative effects of bullying [73], displaying fewer unpleasant emotions in response to bullying.

With regard to the associations between the study variables, it was expected that the probability of greater support for active strategies would increase with past experiences of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as with experiencing moral emotions and unpleasant emotions in response to bullying (H2). We expected to see greater support for passive coping strategies among those with past experiences of bullying and cyberbullying, moral disengagement, pleasant emotions in response to bullying and social masculinity (H3). The regression models were significant for both men and women, but less variance was explained in the models for women. However, the hypotheses were not completely confirmed. It could be related with the sex differences in the study variables commented above.

In the regression models for men, the emotions they experienced in response to bullying were found not to be significant. This could be related with past research finding that men pay less attention to the emotions [73] and have less negative attitudes towards bullying [15]. With regard to gender stereotypical traits, the results were rather unexpected. Among men, social masculinity was not found to be significant in the models of acceptance of passive strategies, but personal masculinity entered the model of acceptance of active strategies. No factors related to gender stereotypical traits entered the regression models for women. We had not established a hypothesis as to the relationship between gender stereotypes and acceptance of active strategies. Since the construction of gender influences perceptions of others' behaviour [116] and social masculinity is related to perpetration [115], we expected to find a relationship between acceptance of passive coping strategies and the social characteristics of masculinity. However, the results show that it is personal characteristics (willing to take a stand, defends own beliefs, independent, has leadership abilities, strong personality) that are related to acceptance of active strategies. Previous research corroborates this result, pointing to the fact that perceived self-efficacy among teachers is related to their ability to stop bullying in the classroom [25,54,80,136]. It is plausible that pre-service teachers with higher perceptions of their own self-efficacy are more willing to take a stand, defend their own beliefs, and act as a leader in the classroom intervening against cyberbullying, and those traits define personal masculinity.

In the models of acceptance of active strategies, victimisation was significant for men and women but with different types of bullying according to sex. For men, being a victim of physical bullying increased the probability of considering active strategies to be appropriate, but being a victim of verbal bullying decreased the probability of viewing active strategies as appropriate. For women, being a cybervictim decreased the probability of considering active strategies to be appropriate. Previous research has shown that school aged cyberbullying victims and also adult women suffering cyberstalking use fewer active strategies and try to avoid the confrontation [21,99,101].

The literature displays conflicting results regarding the relationship between prior experience of bullying and active behaviour in response to bullying [96–98]. The results of this study appear to show that this depends on the type of bullying. This could be explained by the perceived seriousness of the behaviour in question [80]. Since social bullying is perceived as less serious [137], prior experience of verbal bullying for men and cyberbullying for women may have appeared less serious to them and led them to underestimate the consequences of victimisation. Similarly, previous studies have shown that teachers underestimate the seriousness of cyberbullying [138] and dismiss it as a joke [139]. This is in line with previous research showing that pre-service teachers who have been previously victimized may have more difficulties acting against bullying [94] and cyberbullying, when they finally intervene as a formal teacher in their classroom. It could also be plausible that pre-service teachers not only have problems to develop effective strategies against bullying but also develop fatalistic beliefs. Fatalism includes thoughts related to the inability to intervene and influence over one's own and others' events, which leads to an attitude of resignation in the face of future events [140]. Previous studies have found that suffering victimization contributes to the development of fatalism [141,142].

As for the emotions experienced by pre-service teachers in response to bullying, experiencing moral emotions increased the probability of accepting active strategies among

women. This result confirmed that female pre-service teachers are influenced by feelings of shame and guilt, giving rise to a sense of responsibility to actively intervene [143]. Finally, the regression models confirmed the relationship between moral disengagement and acceptance of passive coping strategies in response to cyberbullying among men and women. These results corroborate previous studies on in-service teachers [48] and bystanders [88,90]. In the model for women, experiencing pleasant emotions in response to bullying was also significant, as was bystander response [106]. Moral disengagement and experiencing fewer negative emotions toward bullying episodes may contribute to misleading the impact that cyberbullying has on students. Previous research has shown that teacher's intervention against bullying is related with their perceptions of these episodes as something serious and hurtful [46,73,87]. Both mechanisms (one cognitive and the other emotional) may reduce the perception of the severity of cyberbullying, which may lead pre-service teachers not to intervene, considering bullying as a normative behaviour [40,48]. Moreover, moral disengagement and experiencing fewer negative emotions toward cyberbullying may be a sign of low empathy towards cyberbullying victims. Empathy has also been associated with the perception of the severity of bullying [54].

4.1. Limitations

One of the limitations of this study concerns the types of instruments used, as self-reports can lead to social desirability bias in participants' responses. Moreover, this study is correlational and based on pre-service teachers' reports of what they consider appropriate, so it only reveals their intentions to act in a particular way rather than their actual behaviour. Another limitation of the study is its cross-sectional design. It will be necessary to repeat the study with a longitudinal methodology to ascertain pre-service teachers' actual behaviour at school in response to cyberbullying. Meanwhile, research into bystander roles has identified relationships between prior experiences of victimisation and moral disengagement [144] and prior experiences of victimisation and the emotions experienced in response to bullying [108]. Gender stereotypes are correlated with involvement in bullying [145,146] and moral disengagement [135]. It would be interesting to expand the study to include structural equations to analyse the relationships between the study variables.

With regard to future lines of research, the regression models for women explained a lower percentage of variance than the models for men, which suggests that other variables that were not included in the study are relevant to women. Empathy towards victims is a moderating variable in teachers' use of different strategies in response to bullying [15,79]. In an experimental situation, previous research has demonstrated the influence of empathy on bystander behaviour [85]. Therefore, it would be interesting to include empathy as a variable in future studies.

The results show that personal masculinity may be related to support for different coping strategies in response to cyberbullying. It would be useful to identify the specific characteristics of personal masculinity that are related to acceptance of effective coping strategies in response to cyberbullying. This information would help inform professional training for pre-service teachers. We believe that it is also important to replicate the study with in-service teachers in order to ascertain the influence of personal variables on responses to actual incidents of cyberbullying.

4.2. Practical Implications

Pre-service teachers must incorporate intervention against cyberbullying into their professional profiles. Since cyberbullying begins at primary level, action from teachers is key in successfully tackling cybervictimisation and preventing it from continuing and becoming chronic among children. As other scholars have already stated, university education must be reviewed in order to train pre-service teachers to intervene competently in incidents of cyberbullying [13,15]. Our results can help university managers provide more comprehensive training to equip pre-service teachers with the skills they need to minimise cyberbullying. Course contents and competencies must be updated, as perpetra-

tion of cyberbullying can increase if teachers do not take responsibility for stopping these behaviours [91] and instead support passive coping strategies [36,72]. As well as specific training on the concept of cyberbullying [17,60], it is necessary to enhance pre-service teachers' knowledge of coping strategies and change their perspective of cyberbullying in order to enhance the efficacy of their interventions in their future professional lives.

Pre-service teachers must acknowledge the importance of active coping strategies in intervening effectively to stop cyberbullying [10,66] and work to encourage pupils not to use passive strategies. A number of anti-bullying programmes include coping strategies on their syllabuses [147,148]. University courses must be designed to incorporate analysis of coping strategies against cyberbullying.

In addition, pre-service teachers must reflect on their own experiences of bullying and cyberbullying, analysing their behaviours, reactions and emotions in relation to these phenomena. They must eradicate any perception of bullying as an amusing behaviour and understand how their previous experiences of bullying affect their decision-making as teachers. They must be aware of the damage caused by all types of bullying and of the fact that failure to intervene increases the negative impact on those involved in cyberbullying incidents. The results of this study also point to the importance of encouraging positive traits with regard to personal masculinity. Pre-service teachers must be equipped with tools to allow them to lead their pupils and feel confident when making decisions in response to cyberbullying incidents.

It is vital that any beliefs justifying cyberbullying among pre-service teachers are deconstructed by addressing the moral disengagement associated with acceptance of passive coping strategies. This is also relevant to their position as role models for their pupils [149,150]. Moral disengagement among teachers has been related to the strategies used by students in response to bullying [86] and with levels of moral disengagement among pupils [45]. Moral disengagement has been shown to be associated with bullying behaviours among primary school pupils [151] and with pupils' bystander behaviour [152].

Similarly, the results of recent studies emphasise the importance of pupils' perceptions of teachers' responses to bullying [52], which can persist over time [64]. Perceiving the teacher to be actively tackling victimisation reduces victimisation [153,154] and increases disclosure of bullying [86,155]. Effective intervention from teachers when cyberbullying is disclosed can help other pupils seek help in turn, contributing to the identification and prevention of further cyberbullying incidents. By contrast, the perception that the teacher is doing nothing to intervene increases cyberperpetration [36,72], behavioural problems [64] and maladjustment among children [156].

Therefore, it is important to encourage analysis and reflection among teachers on their own behaviours, beliefs, emotions and personality traits and their association with their perceptions of coping strategies. Promoting greater reflection has been linked to a reduction in cyberbullying [157] and a greater use of effective coping strategies [158].

Moreover, intervention is more effective when teachers work with children on these issues before problematic behaviours emerge [159] and they risk becoming chronic victims over the course of their education. Research has shown that children who suffer more intensely from cyberbullying use ineffective strategies, such as ignoring the problem [160]; it is essential that teachers support their pupils in using effective coping strategies so that they can escape victimisation as soon as it begins. However, it is also important to remember that teachers are not alone. Intervention to stop cyberbullying is a responsibility shared by the entire community [161], so other contexts and professionals must be included in any action taken [107,162].

5. Conclusions

This study has explored coping strategies against cyberbullying among pre-service teachers, analysing the strategies they consider most appropriate to stop cyberbullying. However, almost 20% of the participants displayed ignorance of the issue and 9% only deemed passive strategies to be effective. Prior experiences of victimisation, personal

masculinity in men and moral emotions in women are related to active strategies, while moral disengagement, and pleasant emotions in women, are related to passive strategies.

The results of this study point to the importance of designing and implementing training programmes to prevent and/or reduce cyberbullying as part of student primary school teachers' education. One promising way of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in schools is to encourage pre-service teachers to use active strategies to intervene in cyberbullying and to abandon ineffective strategies in their future professional lives. It is important that pre-service teachers' knowledge of effective coping strategies is enhanced and that any beliefs justifying cyberbullying are deconstructed.

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