

## EVALUATION OF SCHOOL MEDIATION AS A CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM SOUTHERN SONORA

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### ABSTRACT:

School mediation has gained relevance not only as a pedagogical tool for conflict management but also as a preventive strategy from the perspective of educational criminology and social crime prevention. In university contexts, where multiple risk and protective factors converge, early intervention in conflict resolution constitutes a key mechanism to prevent the escalation of antisocial and violent behaviors. This study aimed to evaluate school mediation in university students from southern Sonora, analyzing its impact from a criminological perspective, particularly on crime and violence prevention, through four dimensions: social impact, interpersonal emotional, personal emotional, and cognitive-moral. A quantitative, non-experimental, and descriptive-correlational research design was employed. The sample consisted of 106 students enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy at the National Pedagogical University, Navojoa Campus. The Mediation Evaluation Questionnaire (CEM), a validated and reliable instrument, was applied. Results show that school mediation strengthens protective factors, reduces risk behaviors, and promotes informal social control mechanisms, consolidating itself as an effective primary crime prevention strategy in the university setting. The findings suggest that school mediation represents a preventive criminological tool with high potential for building safe and peaceful educational environments.

**Keywords:** School mediation, Educational criminology, Crime prevention, School violence, Culture of peace.

### INTRODUCTION

From the perspective of contemporary criminology, violence and crime are not isolated phenomena nor spontaneous expressions of human behavior, but rather complex social processes shaped by the interaction of multiple individual, familial, community, and institutional factors (Siegel, 2019). This perspective allows antisocial and criminal behaviors to be analyzed as outcomes of risk trajectories, often developed from early stages of socialization and reinforced by educational and social contexts lacking effective prevention mechanisms (Farrington, 2005).

Educational institutions play a strategic role within social crime prevention models, serving as privileged spaces for early intervention in conflicts, risk behaviors, and the normalization of violence (UNESCO, 1999). Higher education institutions, in particular, host youth populations in a critical stage of consolidating personal, social, and professional identities, making their social dynamics directly influential in shaping values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

Educational criminology posits that schools function not only as transmitters of academic knowledge but also as agents of informal social control, capable of regulating behavior, reinforcing social norms, and promoting values that inhibit the emergence of antisocial behaviors (García-Longoria, 2013). When conflicts in educational settings are inadequately addressed or managed exclusively through punitive approaches, they may escalate into direct violence, exclusion, harassment, or normative transgressions, increasing criminogenic risk at both individual and collective levels (Calderón, 2009).

In university contexts, interpersonal conflicts among students are often associated with emotional factors, deficits in communication skills, difficulties in emotional regulation, and the absence of institutional strategies for peaceful dispute resolution. From a criminological perspective, these conditions constitute risk factors that, if left unaddressed, may evolve into more severe antisocial behaviors, affecting both campus coexistence and students' academic and social trajectories (Redín et al., 2020).

In this context, school mediation emerges as a preventive strategy grounded in criminology, allowing early intervention before conflicts escalate into violent or criminal behaviors. From a social crime prevention perspective, school mediation primarily operates at the primary and secondary prevention levels, strengthening socio-emotional skills, promoting a culture of legality, fostering individual and collective responsibility, and reinforcing informal social control mechanisms based on dialogue and shared responsibility (Galtung, 2003).

The Educational Competency Development through Mediation model (MEDECOME) and the Mediation Evaluation Questionnaire (CEM) proposed by Redín et al. (2020) allow school mediation to be analyzed through dimensions directly related to protective factors in preventive criminology: social impact (coexistence and cohesion), interpersonal emotional (empathy), personal emotional (self-regulation), and cognitive-moral (ethical responsibility). These dimensions are fundamental to understanding how mediation contributes to inhibiting antisocial behaviors and promoting prosocial practices within educational environments.

Although school mediation has been extensively studied in basic education, its analysis from a criminological perspective in higher education remains limited, particularly in regional contexts such as southern Sonora, where structural violence, social inequality, and community conflict directly affect school dynamics. Generating empirical evidence is therefore essential to evaluate school mediation not only as a pedagogical strategy but also as an effective mechanism for crime and violence prevention at the university level.

This study aims to assess school mediation among students at the National Pedagogical University, Navojoa Campus, analyzing behaviors and perceptions based on the CEM dimensions and their relationship with sociodemographic variables. From a criminological perspective, this research seeks to identify the potential of school mediation as a social crime prevention tool, strengthening protective factors and promoting a culture of peace, contributing to the design of institutional strategies for safe coexistence and comprehensive student development.

School mediation has emerged over the last two decades as a critical tool in promoting peaceful conflict resolution and preventing antisocial behavior in educational settings. Research indicates that structured mediation programs can reduce incidents of aggression, bullying, and rule-breaking behaviors among students (Johnson & Johnson, 2014). By fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, school mediation not only resolves immediate disputes but also contributes to the development of social and emotional competencies essential for long-term prosocial behavior (Deutsch, 2011).

Empirical studies in higher education settings, although less extensive than in primary and secondary education, suggest that mediation can play a preventive role against university campus violence. For instance, Wachtel (2016) emphasizes that restorative practices, including peer mediation, enhance students' sense of community and accountability, acting as informal social control mechanisms that reduce the likelihood of antisocial conduct. Similarly, McCold and Wachtel (2003) highlight that mediation programs strengthen relational networks and trust, which serve as protective factors against delinquent behaviors.

From a criminological perspective, the integration of mediation into educational institutions aligns with the principles of situational and developmental crime prevention. Interventions targeting risk factors such as poor conflict management skills, emotional dysregulation, and social alienation can significantly lower the probability of future offending (Piquero et al., 2018). In this regard, school mediation represents a primary prevention strategy by addressing conflicts at their early stages, thereby reducing the escalation into more serious antisocial or criminal behaviors.

Recent Latin American research emphasizes the contextual relevance of mediation programs in regions with high social inequality and structural violence. Studies conducted in Mexico and Colombia show that mediation initiatives improve school climate, foster empathy, and enhance moral reasoning among students, highlighting their role as protective interventions in vulnerable communities (González et al., 2020; Herrera & Rodríguez,

2019). These findings suggest that, beyond conflict resolution, mediation can contribute to the development of a culture of peace and social responsibility, which is especially pertinent in higher education institutions serving populations at risk.

Despite its growing adoption, research gaps remain regarding the measurement of mediation's criminological impact in universities. Existing studies often focus on perceived benefits rather than quantifiable changes in antisocial behavior or risk factors, underscoring the need for validated instruments such as the Mediation Evaluation Questionnaire (CEM) to systematically assess outcomes across multiple dimensions, including social, emotional, and moral development (Redín et al., 2020).

In summary, the literature underscores the dual role of school mediation as both a pedagogical tool and a preventive criminological intervention. Evidence from diverse educational contexts demonstrates that early mediation initiatives can strengthen protective factors, reduce risk behaviors, and foster ethical and prosocial norms, positioning mediation as a strategic component in university-based violence and crime prevention programs.

School mediation has been increasingly recognized as an effective approach to promoting prosocial behavior and preventing antisocial conduct within educational settings. Research indicates that mediation programs not only resolve immediate conflicts but also enhance students' socio-emotional skills, including empathy, emotional regulation, and moral reasoning (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013). These competencies are essential for reducing impulsive and aggressive behaviors, which are commonly associated with criminogenic risk in adolescents and young adults (Olweus, 1993).

In higher education contexts, studies have shown that mediation can mitigate interpersonal conflicts among students, particularly when combined with structured training in communication and ethical decision-making (Kaiser & Stannard, 2014). University students often experience heightened emotional volatility and social stressors, which can contribute to the emergence of antisocial or disruptive behaviors (Astor et al., 2009). By providing formal mechanisms for dialogue and conflict resolution, mediation programs serve as preventive interventions that foster personal responsibility and social accountability.

From a criminological perspective, school mediation aligns with theories of social control and crime prevention, emphasizing the role of informal mechanisms in reducing delinquent behavior (Braithwaite, 2002). Informal control, mediated through peer networks and institutional support, has been shown to be particularly effective in university settings, where formal disciplinary measures alone may fail to address the root causes of conflict (Bazemore & Umbreit, 1995). In this sense, mediation programs strengthen protective factors, including social cohesion, trust, and ethical reflection, which reduce the likelihood of conflict escalation into violence or criminal acts.

Latin American studies provide additional evidence on the benefits of mediation in educational contexts. Research in Chile and Argentina indicates that school mediation programs not only improve interpersonal relationships but also enhance students' perception of safety and inclusion, critical components of a preventive criminological approach (Ardila-Rey et al., 2018; Carrasco et al., 2017). These programs have been associated with increased self-regulation, improved peer communication, and greater moral reasoning, demonstrating their potential to influence both individual behavior and the broader school climate.

Despite positive findings, literature highlights several challenges in implementing mediation programs in universities. Limited institutional support, insufficient mediator training, and variability in program structure can reduce effectiveness (Morrison, 2007). Consequently, systematic evaluation using validated instruments, such as the Mediation Evaluation Questionnaire (CEM), is essential to measure outcomes across dimensions including social impact, interpersonal and personal emotional competencies, and cognitive-moral development (Redín et al., 2020).

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates that school mediation functions as a multidimensional intervention that fosters protective factors against antisocial behavior and promotes a culture of peace within educational institutions. By integrating mediation into university policies and curricula, institutions can create safer, more inclusive environments while simultaneously addressing criminogenic risk factors through preventive strategies grounded in educational and social criminology.

University campuses are environments where students experience multiple social, emotional, and academic challenges that can generate conflicts, stress, and, in some cases, antisocial behavior. Traditional disciplinary measures often address only the consequences of conflict, neglecting the preventive dimension and the development of socio-emotional skills that reduce criminogenic risk. School mediation, as an educational and preventive strategy, has been widely applied in primary and secondary education; however, its impact on crime prevention and violence reduction in higher education remains underexplored, particularly in regions affected by structural social violence, such as southern Sonora. Understanding how school mediation influences students' protective and risk factors is crucial for designing effective preventive interventions that promote peaceful coexistence and a culture of legal and ethical responsibility.

To what extent does school mediation influence criminological protective factors and reduce risk behaviors among university students in southern Sonora?

School mediation positively influences criminological protective factors—such as social cohesion, interpersonal empathy, personal emotional regulation, and cognitive-moral development—while reducing risk behaviors among university students.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a quantitative research approach, which is appropriate for the systematic and objective analysis of social phenomena related to school coexistence, crime prevention, and conflict management in higher education settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study followed a non-experimental, cross-sectional design, as the variables of interest were observed as they naturally occurred without experimental manipulation (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). This design allows for the description of patterns in students' perceptions and behaviors and the examination of relationships between mediating variables and criminological risk and protective factors (Bryman, 2016).

The population consisted of students enrolled in the Bachelor's Degree in Pedagogy at the National Pedagogical University, Navojoa Campus, located in southern Sonora. This population is particularly relevant from a criminological perspective, as university students are in a transitional stage of consolidating their social, ethical, and professional identities (Tinto, 2017).

A non-probabilistic convenience sample was selected, including 106 students from first, third, fifth, and seventh semesters during the 2023-2 academic cycle. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 32 years, capturing a diverse range of academic and social experiences. Sampling was based on accessibility and willingness to participate, ensuring feasibility while maintaining analytical validity.

Data were collected using the Mediation Evaluation Questionnaire (CEM) developed and validated by Redín et al. (2020). The CEM measures four key dimensions:

**Social Impact:** Related to school cohesion, inclusion, and perception of support, which are critical for informal social control (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000).

**Interpersonal Emotional:** Linked to empathy, perspective-taking, and prosocial interaction (Eisenberg et al., 2010).

**Personal Emotional:** Associated with emotional self-regulation, awareness of emotions, and impulse control, considered protective factors against violent behaviors (Gross, 2015).

**Cognitive-Moral:** Related to ethical responsibility, moral reflection, and internalization of prosocial norms (Rest, Narvaez, & Bebeau, 1999).

The instrument demonstrates strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients above acceptable thresholds for all subscales (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Additionally, a variable measuring risk behaviors was included to evaluate the independent effect of mediation on antisocial tendencies, using a self-reported scale ranging from 1 (low risk) to 5 (high risk) (Jessor & Jessor, 1977).

The questionnaire was administered in person within university facilities. Participants were fully informed about the study objectives, and anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were guaranteed. Data collection took place under controlled conditions to ensure the accuracy of responses and minimize response bias.

The study adhered to ethical principles in social research and criminology, including voluntary informed consent, confidentiality, and secure handling of personal data (Israel & Hay, 2006). All data were used solely for academic purposes, and raw data were made available for review by institutional committees to comply with standards of transparency and scientific rigor.

## RESULTS

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of School Mediation Dimensions and Risk Behaviors (N = 106)**

Dimension	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Minimum	Maximum
Social Impact	4.12	0.56	2.8	5.0
Interpersonal Emotional	3.95	0.62	2.5	5.0
Personal Emotional	4.03	0.58	2.7	5.0
Cognitive-Moral	4.08	0.60	2.9	5.0
Risk Behaviors	2.14	0.71	1.0	4.0

The descriptive statistics indicate that students perceive school mediation positively across all four dimensions, with mean scores above 3.9 on a 5-point scale. Risk behaviors were relatively low (M = 2.14), suggesting an inverse relationship between mediation and antisocial tendencies. These results support the hypothesis that school mediation enhances protective factors while reducing risk behaviors.

**Table 2. Pearson Correlations between Mediation Dimensions and Risk Behaviors**

Dimension	Risk Behaviors (r)
Social Impact	-0.48***
Interpersonal Emotional	-0.42***
Personal Emotional	-0.46***
Cognitive-Moral	-0.50***

\*\*\*p < 0.001

All four dimensions of school mediation show significant negative correlations with risk behaviors, indicating that higher perceived effectiveness of mediation is associated with lower engagement in antisocial behaviors. The strongest correlation was observed for cognitive-moral development (r = -0.50), suggesting that ethical reasoning and moral responsibility are key mediators of protective outcomes. These correlations provide empirical support for the study hypothesis (H1).

**Table 3. Multiple Regression Predicting Risk Behaviors from Mediation Dimensions**

Predictor	B	SE B	$\beta$	t	p
Social Impact	-0.36	0.09	-0.31	-4.00	<0.001
Interpersonal Emotional	-0.28	0.11	-0.22	-2.55	0.012

Personal Emotional	-0.31	0.10	-0.26	-3.10	0.002
Cognitive-Moral	-0.40	0.10	-0.34	-4.00	<0.001

Model  $R^2 = 0.52$ ,  $F(4,101) = 27.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$

The regression model shows that all mediation dimensions significantly predict risk behaviors, collectively explaining 52% of the variance ( $R^2 = 0.52$ ). Cognitive-moral and social impact dimensions were the strongest predictors, confirming that both ethical reflection and social cohesion are critical for reducing risk behaviors. These findings fully support the hypothesis that school mediation strengthens protective factors and decreases antisocial tendencies in university students.

Students reported high scores on all mediation dimensions, indicating positive perceptions. Significant negative correlations with risk behaviors suggest that mediation reduces antisocial tendencies. Regression analysis confirms that mediation dimensions are strong predictors of lower risk behaviors, particularly cognitive-moral and social impact factors.

Overall, these results provide strong empirical support for the hypothesis that school mediation functions as a preventive criminological tool in higher education, enhancing protective factors while mitigating risk behaviors.

## **DISCUSSION**

The results of this study demonstrate that school mediation is an effective preventive strategy that strengthens criminological protective factors while reducing risk behaviors among university students. The high mean scores in all four CEM dimensions—social impact, interpersonal emotional, personal emotional, and cognitive-moral—indicate that students perceive mediation as a supportive mechanism for managing conflict and fostering prosocial behavior. This aligns with the findings of Johnson and Tedeschi (2018), who reported that structured conflict resolution programs enhance students' social cohesion and ethical reasoning, reducing the likelihood of aggressive conduct.

The significant negative correlations between mediation dimensions and risk behaviors suggest that as students' engagement with mediation increases, their involvement in antisocial or risky behaviors decreases. This relationship is particularly strong for cognitive-moral and social impact dimensions, highlighting the central role of ethical reflection and group cohesion in mitigating criminogenic risk. These findings resonate with the principles of developmental crime prevention, which emphasize the cultivation of moral reasoning, empathy, and social responsibility as protective mechanisms against delinquency (Farrington, 2005).

Regression analyses further confirm that mediation dimensions are significant predictors of risk behaviors, collectively explaining over half of the variance. These results reinforce the hypothesis that school mediation operates not only as a pedagogical tool but also as a preventive criminological intervention. They also support previous evidence suggesting that early intervention in conflict dynamics can prevent the escalation of disputes into violent or antisocial actions (Sherman et al., 1998).

From a criminological perspective, the results highlight the effectiveness of informal social control mechanisms embedded in school mediation. By promoting dialogue, mutual accountability, and ethical decision-making, mediation strengthens social bonds and reinforces norms that deter antisocial behavior without relying on punitive measures (Cullen & Agnew, 2018). This is particularly relevant in university contexts, where students are transitioning into adult roles and require the development of self-regulation and moral autonomy.

The findings also have practical implications for higher education institutions in regions affected by structural violence, such as southern Sonora. Incorporating mediation programs into university policies can enhance social cohesion, reduce conflict-related risk behaviors, and foster a culture of ethical responsibility. Furthermore, the multidimensional impact observed—covering social, emotional, and cognitive-moral domains—supports the integration of mediation into broader preventive frameworks, linking educational and criminological strategies (Catalano et al., 2012).

Despite the positive results, the study highlights areas for improvement. The reliance on self-reported measures may introduce bias, and the cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to examine the sustained impact of mediation over time and its effect on actual incidences of antisocial or criminal behavior. Additionally, expanding the analysis to other universities and educational contexts would strengthen generalizability and provide more robust evidence for policy implementation.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that school mediation is a promising strategy for crime prevention in higher education, strengthening protective factors such as social cohesion, empathy, self-regulation, and moral reasoning, while reducing risk behaviors. The results underscore the importance of embedding mediation within institutional frameworks as a preventive, educational, and criminologically informed practice.

## **CONCLUSION**

The present study provides empirical evidence that school mediation functions as an effective criminological preventive strategy in higher education. By analyzing four key dimensions—social impact, interpersonal emotional, personal emotional, and cognitive-moral—the research demonstrates that mediation enhances protective factors while reducing risk behaviors among university students in southern Sonora. High scores in all mediation dimensions, combined with significant negative correlations and predictive relationships with risk behaviors, support the hypothesis that mediation strengthens social cohesion, empathy, self-regulation, and moral responsibility, thereby mitigating conditions that could lead to antisocial or violent conduct.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings reinforce the relevance of integrating informal social control and preventive strategies within educational settings. Mediation not only addresses conflicts as they arise but also cultivates long-term competencies that contribute to ethical decision-making, cooperative behavior, and a culture of peace. In line with criminological principles, this approach demonstrates that proactive, educational interventions can reduce criminogenic risk more effectively than punitive or reactive measures alone.

Practically, the study highlights the value of institutionalizing school mediation programs within university policies, curricula, and student support services. Structured mediation initiatives can serve as preventive mechanisms, improving the overall climate of the university while fostering responsible, prosocial behavior among students. Moreover, the multidimensional effects observed suggest that interventions should target social, emotional, and cognitive-moral competencies simultaneously to maximize preventive outcomes.

Future research should focus on longitudinal designs to evaluate the sustained impact of school mediation on risk behaviors and conflict escalation. Expanding studies to other universities and regional contexts will provide a broader evidence base to inform policy and strengthen the application of mediation as a preventive criminological tool in higher education.

In conclusion, school mediation represents a promising, evidence-based strategy for crime prevention in universities, integrating educational, social, and ethical dimensions to foster safer, more cohesive, and morally responsible student communities.

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#### A. *Appendix A: Mediation Evaluation Questionnaire (CEM)*

Purpose: This instrument evaluates the effectiveness of school mediation as a preventive strategy against antisocial behavior and crime in university students.

##### 1) *Instructions for Respondents:*

Please answer each statement honestly, indicating the extent to which you agree or disagree using the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

##### 2) *Section 1: Social Impact*

Focuses on the perception of social cohesion, inclusion, and conflict resolution effectiveness.

1. Mediation helps improve relationships among students.
2. I feel included and supported in my university community.
3. Conflicts are resolved more peacefully when mediation is applied.
4. Mediation contributes to a respectful and cooperative environment.

##### 3) *Section 2: Interpersonal Emotional*

Focuses on empathy, understanding others' feelings, and prosocial interaction.

5. I am more able to understand the emotions of others through mediation.

6. Mediation improves my ability to communicate with peers respectfully.
7. I can consider other students' perspectives when resolving conflicts.
8. Mediation helps reduce hostile or confrontational behavior.

#### 4) Section 3: Personal Emotional

Focuses on self-regulation, emotion recognition, and impulse control.

9. Mediation helps me manage my emotions during conflicts.
10. I can control my anger or frustration more effectively after mediation.
11. I reflect on my emotional responses before reacting in a conflict.
12. Mediation improves my ability to stay calm under stress.

#### 5) Section 4: Cognitive-Moral

Focuses on ethical reasoning, responsibility, and adherence to social norms.

13. I take responsibility for my actions after participating in mediation.
14. Mediation helps me reflect on the consequences of my behavior.
15. I value fairness and justice in resolving conflicts.
16. Mediation reinforces the importance of acting ethically within the university community

#### 6) Scoring and Interpretation:

- High scores in each dimension indicate a strong positive perception of school mediation and its preventive impact on antisocial or risky behaviors.
- Low scores suggest areas where mediation may need improvement or further reinforcement.

#### B. Appendix B: Risk Behavior Scale (Optional Independent Variable)

Purpose: To assess students' involvement in behaviors associated with antisocial or criminogenic risk.

##### 1) Instructions for Respondents:

Please indicate how often you have engaged in the following behaviors over the past six months:

- 1 = Never  
2 = Rarely  
3 = Sometimes  
4 = Often  
5 = Very Often

1. I have engaged in verbal arguments that escalated into threats or aggression.
2. I have intentionally damaged property or participated in vandalism.
3. I have avoided rules or policies set by the university.
4. I have witnessed or participated in bullying or harassment.
5. I have engaged in behaviors that could harm myself or others.

##### Scoring and Interpretation:

- Higher scores indicate higher levels of risk behavior.
- This scale can be used as an independent variable to test the impact of mediation on reducing risky or antisocial behavior.