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Parental Perceived Usefulness on a School-Integrated App to Prevent Bullying and Eating Disorders

Diana Cembreros Castaño *, Álvaro Moraleda Ruano and Natalia Lara Nieto-Márquez

Faculty of Education, University Camilo José Cela, 28692 Madrid, Spain; amoraleda@ucjc.edu (Á.M.R.); natalia.lara@ucjc.edu (N.L.N.-M.)
* Correspondence: dcembreros@ucjc.edu

Abstract: The prevalence of bullying and eating disorders among adolescents is alarmingly high. In response to these issues, a mobile application called "Searching Help" was designed to be incorporated into school environments. This study aims to understand parents' views on a school-integrated app designed to prevent bullying and eating disorders. Additionally, it sought to identify potential gender differences in these perceptions. Utilizing a retrospective research approach, we gathered insights from 201 parents of Spanish adolescents aged 12–18. The findings highlighted that a school-integrated app to prevent bullying and eating disorders was positively received by parents. Regarding gender, mothers were more aware of eating disorders and had greater concerns about unauthorized data access compared to fathers. Conversely, fathers were more optimistic about the potential of the app in creating a secure school environment against bullying and eating disorders. Notably, it was observed that although parents had a decent understanding of the problems associated with bullying and eating disorders independently, their knowledge of the technological solutions available to address these issues was considerably limited. In conclusion, this research confirms the gender-specific variations in parents' attitudes and views toward technology-based solutions in schools and emphasizes a need for enhanced awareness initiatives to familiarize parents with relevant technological solutions for their children's safety.

Keywords: educational technology; parental perceptions; bullying; eating disorders

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1. Introduction

In our rapidly evolving digital age, where technology blends into our everyday lives, the safety and well-being of adolescents are becoming increasingly pressing concerns. Among these issues, bullying and eating disorders (EDs) in adolescents stand out as particularly significant challenges. Global statistics indicate that around 30% of students experience bullying from their peers during their childhood or adolescent years. While eating disorders are uncommon, impacting fewer than 2% of the general population, a significant number of teenagers, particularly girls, exhibit behaviors associated with disordered eating patterns [1,2]. While mobile applications (apps) have emerged as potential tools for addressing such problems, they are not commonly integrated into school environments. To this end, "Searching Help" is an app specifically designed for integration into schools, aiming to address and mitigate bullying and EDs among students.

While the efficacy of mobile apps in addressing student well-being is recognized, it remains uncertain whether parents would be receptive to the integration of such tools within school environments. Given their pivotal role in their children's education and well-being, understanding parents' perceptions becomes crucial.

This study aimed to evaluate parents' perceptions of a school-integrated mobile application designed to mitigate issues like bullying and eating disorders among their children, and to uncover gender-based differences in parent's perceptions regarding the app's effectiveness.

As we continue to witness an unprecedented evolution in technology, it is fascinating to see how these advancements are increasingly being regarded as potential preventive aids. Mobile applications provide an opportunity for parents and schools to actively engage in the well-being of their children. Therefore, understanding parents' perceptions regarding technological solutions can significantly influence their adoption and efficacy [3,4]. Today, a variety of mobile apps have been developed to help, mitigate, or even alert users to potential mental and emotional health concerns. Ferreira et al. [5] specifically researched apps that counteract bullying, but their findings indicated that many of these apps provide limited solutions: they primarily focus on identifying bullying incidents or suggesting coping methods. Similarly, in a recent review of eating disorder apps [6], researchers concluded that the apps primarily emphasize providing information on minimizing negative behaviors, rather than encouraging the adoption of positive, healthy behaviors. To put it simply, most of these apps are more reactive than proactive, dealing mainly with the aftermath or consequences rather than preventing incidents in the first place.

In our examination, the specific apps that deal with bullying and EDs are mostly designed for individual download and use, instead of incorporated into school settings. Table 1 presents a concise overview of some of these apps, with their main objectives and functionalities.

Table 1. Apps focused on bullying and eating disorders.

App Name	Primary Focus	Description
BullStop	Cyberbullying	Deep-learning to flag and auto-delete offensive content on social platforms.
MY3	Suicide ideation	Outreach to contacts during emotional lows. Provides a safety plan tool.
Netsafe's ReThink	Cyberbullying	Detects and stops hurtful messages. Aims to reduce cyberbullying impact.
Recovery Record	Eating disorders	Recovery with meal and emotion tracking. Integrates with treatment teams.
Rise Up + Recover	Eating disorders	Logs meals, emotions, and behaviors. Provides coping strategies.
SafeUT	Crisis support	Offers real-time crisis support through live chat and a tip program.
Wysa	Mental health	AI chatbot for stress and mental health issues. Offers coping strategies.

The efficacy and adoption of prevention apps can depend on multiple factors including their design, ease of use, accuracy of alerts, the scope of issues addressed, and integration into institutions [7,8]. According to Wiberg et al. [9], such digital interventions can reduce the risk factors associated with eating disorders when used as supplementary tools to traditional therapies. Similarly, a study [10] that explored the potential of apps in reducing bullying found that students who engaged with these platforms reported reduced victimization. While some studies advocate for prevention apps to be integrated in educational settings, others cite concerns about data privacy, unauthorized access, and possible tech dependency for their children. Overall, the potential of mobile apps in addressing these pressing issues is evident, but their effective and ethical integration into schools warrants further exploration [11–13].

A review of the literature on gender differences in technology use indicates that gender is related to people's perceived usefulness about technology use [14–16]. Research suggests that while both parents play a significant role in their children's well-being, their perspectives and concerns, especially about technology, may vary. Mothers and fathers may have different perceptions and concerns related to their children's well-being, with gender differences in attitudes toward technology adoption. Particularly, the literature suggests that women are often more anxious than men about technology use. Conversely, men perceive technology as more useful and easy to use and show a higher intention to use technology [17–20]. This higher sensitivity could lead mothers to be more cautious about incorporating technology into their children's lives, emphasizing the need for secure, age-appropriate, and engaging digital solutions. Additionally, the potential for technology to disrupt traditional play and learning methods might further fuel these anxieties, highlighting the importance of balanced tech integration that supports developmental needs without overshadowing vital non-digital experiences.

This increased willingness to embrace technology could lead to more proactive engagement with educational and well-being apps within the family, possibly influencing decision-making around technology use and setting a more technology-positive tone in the household. Consequently, understanding these gender-based perspectives is crucial for tailoring app features and communication strategies to both mothers and fathers, thereby enhancing the likelihood of their acceptance and effective use.

The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) is an information systems theory that models how users come to accept and use a technology [21]. The TAM postulates that the acceptance of technology is predicted by the users' perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of the technology. Perceived usefulness is defined as the degree to which a person believes that using a particular technology will enhance their job performance or the accomplishment of a task. On the other hand, perceived ease of use refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a particular technology will be free of effort [22]. Importantly, individuals can assess the perceived usefulness of a technology based on its anticipated benefits and functionalities, without the necessity of direct experience with the technology itself. This means that understanding the potential applications and advantages of a technology can lead to a perception of its usefulness, irrespective of hands-on interaction. On the contrary, evaluating the ease of use typically requires direct experience with the technology. This is because ease of use is often influenced by the user interface design, intuitiveness, and the user's personal experience with the technology, which can only be fully assessed through interaction. The TAM is a well-known, validated, and established user acceptance model that can provide insight into what factors influence parental acceptance and technology use. The TAM has previously been used to analyze parents' acceptance and use of educational technology, computing majors, gamification, and e-learning platforms [21–25].

In the case of anti-bullying apps, a study [26] used a comprehensive model based on TAM to gain insights into the dimensions of mobile service adoption. The study found that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and social influence were significant predictors of intention to use anti-bullying apps. Additionally, Wheeler et al. [27] examined the factors influencing parental acceptance of anti-bullying apps. Their research revealed that a stronger predisposition to utilize anti-bullying apps was directly proportional to their concerns about cyberbullying. Additionally, the significance of social recommendations, perceived utility of the apps, and favorable attitudes towards them played crucial roles in predicting this intention.

In this research, we explore parents' perspectives on the deployment of a school-integrated app aimed at preventing and mitigating bullying and eating disorders (EDs) among students, while also examining potential gender differences in these views to understand how mothers and fathers perceive the utility of such apps in addressing these critical concerns.

2. Materials and Methods

An ex post facto research design was employed for this preliminary study, which is the type of research applied when seeking the causes and awareness of a phenomenon that cannot be manipulated because it has already occurred [28–30].

A group of 201 parents of teenagers aged 12 to 18 years who attend Spanish schools was selected using non-probabilistic sampling. Descriptive statistical analyses, as seen in Table 2, indicated an average age (M) of 43.91 and a standard deviation (SD) of 7.04, with an age range spanning from 29 to 64 years. The sample was dichotomized by gender, with men comprising 48.76% of the sample (M = 45.62; SD = 7.63; N = 98) and women making up the remaining 51.24% (M = 42.33; SD = 6.04; N = 103).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the age of the sample dichotomized by gender.

		Mean	SD	*N*	%
Gender	Women	42.33	6.04	103	51.24%
	Men	45.62	7.63	98	48.76%
	Total	43.91	7.04	201	100.00%

A specific research instrument was designed to assess parents' perceptions regarding bullying, eating disorders, and the feasibility of installing mobile applications on their children's devices as a preventive measure.

Participants in our study were not familiar with the specific app but were asked about their perception of its potential utility based on general information regarding the app's purpose. This methodology is grounded in the Technology Acceptance Model's (TAM) concept of perceived usefulness, according to which individuals can form perceptions about the potential usefulness of a technology based on information about its functionality and intended benefits, even in the absence of direct experience with the technology itself.

Since there was no previously validated questionnaire addressing these specific issues, a conditional six-point Likert scale was created ad hoc, considering the uniqueness of the study's subject matter. No pilot testing was conducted, and the scale's formulation was guided by a comprehensive review of scientific literature and the identification of relevant variables.

This instrument consists of seven dimensions subdivided into 24 items, as detailed in Table 3. Its reliability was evaluated using a Cronbach's alpha coefficient, yielding a value of 0.921 with the study sample. The dimensions exhibit Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging between 0.508 and 0.873, demonstrating a satisfactory level of internal consistency within each dimension.

Table 3. Dimensions and items of the Parental Perception Assessment Instrument.

Dimension	Item Description
1. Self-Perceived Knowledge	Level of knowledge about bullying.
	Level of knowledge about eating disorders.
	Level of knowledge about mobile applications designed to prevent bullying and EDs in adolescents
2. Risk for the Child	Assessment of the risk of the child developing eating disorders.
	Assessment of the risk of the child being a victim of bullying.
	Assessment of the risk of the child being an aggressor in bullying situations.
3. Concerns about Negative Aspects	Concern about the negative impact on family privacy.
	Concern about the invasion of privacy by the school.
	Concern about possible unauthorized access to the child's data.
	Concern about excessive dependency on technology.
4. Evaluation of Positive Factors	Evaluation of the positive influence of recommendations from health professionals or educators.
	Evaluation of the positive influence of detailed knowledge of how the APP works and what information it collects.
	Evaluation of the positive influence of knowledge about successful cases where the APP has prevented bullying or ED situations.
	Evaluation of the positive influence of the ability to customize and tailor the APP to the child's individual needs.

Table 3. *Cont.*

Dimension		Item Description
5.	Benefits for the School Relationship	Evaluation of the benefits of increased communication and collaboration between parents and school professionals regarding the child's well-being.
		Evaluation of the benefits of greater trust in the school's ability to address bullying and EDs.
		Evaluation of the benefits of having relevant and up-to-date information about the child's progress and needs.
		Evaluation of the benefits of increased participation and awareness of prevention activities and programs implemented by the school.
6.	Importance of Information	Evaluation of the importance of receiving immediate alerts about bullying or ED-related behaviors detected.
		Evaluation of the importance of receiving a periodic summary of the child's activities and behaviors related to bullying and EDs.
		Evaluation of the importance of receiving recommendations and resources to address bullying and EDs.
		Evaluation of the importance of receiving statistics and analysis on the incidence of bullying and EDs in the school community.
7.	Overall Evaluation	Overall evaluation of the utility of installing the APP for preventing bullying and ED at school.
		Overall evaluation of the willingness to install the APP on the child's mobile phone to prevent bullying and EDs.

Data were collected using the online platform Google Forms. Exclusion criteria were based on non-acceptance of informed consent and failure to meet the evaluation deadline.

The procedure for data collection was based on the principle of non-intervention, seeking complete independence of the analyzed population. This approach allowed total freedom to respond to the survey and resulted in the voluntary participation of subjects, without financial compensation for participating in the study, while respecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Furthermore, consent was obtained for the transfer of data to be used solely for research purposes, with the aim of adhering to ethical principles regarding scientific research, as outlined in the Helsinki Declaration.

Regarding data analysis, prior to exploring the data, the normality assumption was verified using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test ($p < 0.001$). Given the data's deviation from the normality criterion, non-parametric methods were employed for analysis. The tools chosen were the Spearman correlation coefficient (ρ) and the Mann–Whitney U test's comparison, with the rank biserial correlation (r_{bis}) employed as an effect size estimator. The analyses were conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 26.0.

3. Results

In relation to the study's objectives and prior to detailing the findings, the Spearman correlation coefficient was used to ascertain the relationship between variables and the significance of the final criterion items, as depicted in Table 4.

Data shown in Table 4 suggest a clear proportional correlation between the perceived utility of the app and the inclination to install it on offsprings' phones ($p < 0.001$). Moreover, both aspects display a relationship with items concerning self-perceived understanding of bullying, eating disorders (EDs), and apps ($p < 0.050$). Similarly, there is a correlation with the positive attributes of apps ($p < 0.001$), the combined advantages of the app and school intervention to mitigate these issues ($p < 0.001$), and the significance of the feedback provided by the app ($p < 0.001$). Notably, an inclination to install the app corresponds to heightened concerns about the potential risks adolescents may face with bullying and EDs

($p < 0.050$). These observed connections validate the relevance and precision of the criterion items in representing the broader evaluation.

Table 4. Spearman correlation: utility and predisposition to install the app and the rest of the items.

	App Utility		Predisposition to Install the App	
	ρ	*p* Value	ρ	*p* Value
Predisposition to install the app	0.575	<0.001 ***	—	—
Knowledge of school bullying	0.374	<0.001 ***	0.384	<0.001 ***
Knowledge of eating disorders	0.266	<0.001 ***	0.390	<0.001 ***
Knowledge of mobile applications	0.174	0.014 *	0.244	<0.001 ***
Risk of eating disorders	0.116	0.100	0.234	<0.001 ***
Risk of being a victim of bullying	0.098	0.168	0.265	<0.001 ***
Risk of engaging in bullying	0.064	0.366	0.146	0.039 *
Negative impact on family privacy	0.063	0.375	−0.009	0.898
Concern about school privacy invasion	0.124	0.080	−0.006	0.930
Possible unauthorized access	0.047	0.503	0.055	0.436
Excessive dependence on technology	−0.053	0.458	0.022	0.754
Recommendation from professionals	0.517	<0.001 ***	0.632	<0.001 ***
Detailed knowledge of the app	0.381	<0.001 ***	0.476	<0.001 ***
Knowledge of successful cases	0.522	<0.001 ***	0.590	<0.001 ***
App customization	0.449	<0.001 ***	0.639	<0.001 ***
Increased communication and collaboration	0.495	<0.001 ***	0.672	<0.001 ***
Enhanced trust in the school	0.398	<0.001 ***	0.596	<0.001 ***
Relevant and up-to-date information	0.360	<0.001 ***	0.590	<0.001 ***
Increased participation in programs	0.421	<0.001 ***	0.598	<0.001 ***
Immediate alerts on behaviors	0.451	<0.001 ***	0.487	<0.001 ***
Periodic activity summaries	0.394	<0.001 ***	0.448	<0.001 ***
Recommendations and resources	0.400	<0.001 ***	0.517	<0.001 ***
Statistics and incidence of bullying	0.363	<0.001 ***	0.555	<0.001 ***

Note: Correlation is significant at the * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed) level.

Addressing the primary research objective, we present the results from the descriptive statistical analysis, specifically the mean and standard deviation. In the context of this study, various dimensions related to participants' perceptions of the 24 items were evaluated, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for the variables under analysis.

	Women			Men			Total		
	N	Mean	SD	*N*	Mean	SD	*N*	Mean	SD
Knowledge of school bullying	103	3.94	1.34	98	3.94	1.18	201	3.93	1.26
Knowledge of eating disorders	103	3.75	1.29	98	3.35	1.24	201	3.56	1.28
Knowledge of mobile applications	103	1.32	1.32	98	2.60	1.33	201	1.45	1.32
Risk of eating disorders	103	2.67	1.56	98	2.61	1.50	201	2.64	1.52
Risk of being a victim of bullying	103	2.73	1.50	98	2.60	1.38	201	2.67	1.44
Risk of engaging in bullying	103	2.48	1.27	98	2.14	1.26	201	2.31	1.27
Negative impact on family privacy	103	3.10	1.73	98	3.04	1.62	201	3.07	1.67
Concern about school privacy invasion	103	3.53	1.73	98	3.16	1.50	201	3.35	1.63
Possible unauthorized access	103	3.74	1.78	98	3.28	1.46	201	3.51	1.64
Excessive dependence on technology	103	3.11	1.68	98	3.07	1.69	201	3.09	1.68
Recommendation from professionals	103	4.24	1.52	98	4.27	1.61	201	4.25	1.56
Detailed knowledge of the app	103	4.55	1.50	98	4.26	1.59	201	4.41	1.55
Knowledge of successful cases	103	4.33	1.56	98	4.27	1.36	201	4.30	1.46
App customization	103	4.24	1.61	98	4.23	1.41	201	4.24	1.51
Increased communication and collaboration	103	4.08	1.61	98	4.34	1.25	201	4.20	1.45
Enhanced trust in the school	103	4.11	1.69	98	4.23	1.51	201	4.17	1.60
Relevant and up-to-date information	103	4.02	1.55	98	4.06	1.35	201	4.04	1.45
Increased participation in programs	103	3.86	1.62	98	4.00	1.49	201	3.93	1.55
Immediate alerts on behaviors	103	4.38	1.37	98	4.12	1.43	201	4.25	1.40
Periodic activity summaries	103	4.22	1.69	98	4.17	1.44	201	4.20	1.57
Recommendations and resources	103	3.78	1.66	98	3.98	1.46	201	3.88	1.56
Statistics and incidence of bullying	103	4.07	1.78	98	4.43	1.36	201	4.24	1.60
Utility of the APP	103	3.79	1.58	98	4.38	1.35	201	4.07	1.50
Predisposition to install the APP	103	3.89	1.62	98	4.15	1.43	201	4.01	1.53

Participants exhibited moderate levels of knowledge about bullying and eating disorders, with average scores of approximately 3.93 and 3.56, respectively. However, their knowledge about mobile apps designed to address these issues was significantly lower, with an average score of around 1.45.

On the other hand, factors that could positively influence the decision to install the app were rated positively. Professional recommendations and detailed knowledge of the app received notably high scores, surpassing 4.25 on average. Furthermore, awareness of successful cases and app personalization received positive evaluations, with scores close to 4.41.

Benefits related to installing the app to strengthen the relationship between parents and the school were also positively assessed. Participants emphasized the importance of increased communication and collaboration, greater trust in the school, relevant and up-to-date information, and greater participation in programs, with average scores around 4.20.

Regarding the importance of the information provided by the app to parents, the results were positive. Immediate alerts about behaviors, periodic activity summaries, recommendations and resources, and statistics and bullying incidence received positive ratings, with scores close to 4.25 on average.

Finally, in general terms, participants had a positive perception of installing the app to prevent bullying and EDs at school, with an average score of around 4.07. Additionally, they showed a favorable predisposition to installing the app on their mobile devices, with average scores close to 4.01.

To address the second research objective, paired analysis of these variables was conducted to identify statistically significant differences between them, as shown in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of the Mann–Whitney signed-rank test. Comparison of items by gender.

	U	*p* Value	r_{bis}
Knowledge of school bullying	5020	0.948	0.005
Knowledge of eating disorders	4140	0.026 *	0.180
Knowledge of mobile applications	4448	0.140	0.119
Risk of eating disorders	4990	0.888	0.011
Risk of being a victim of bullying	4847	0.620	0.034
Risk of engaging in bullying	4270	0.051	0.154
Negative impact on family privacy	4960	0.831	0.017
Concern about school privacy invasion	4387	0.104	0.131
Possible unauthorized access	4247	0.049 *	0.159
Excessive dependence on technology	5005	0.918	0.008
Recommendation from professionals	4921	0.754	0.025
Detailed knowledge of the app	4492	0.166	0.110
Knowledge of successful cases	4775	0.500	0.054
App customization	4910	0.734	0.027
Increased communication and collaboration	4748	0.458	0.059
Enhanced trust in the school	4915	0.744	0.026
Relevant and up-to-date information	5028	0.962	0.004
Increased participation in programs	4841	0.612	0.041
Immediate alerts on behaviors	4550	0.218	0.098
Periodic activity summaries	4789	0.523	0.051
Recommendations and resources	4711	0.408	0.067
Statistics and incidence of bullying	4602	0.269	0.088
Utility of the APP	3969	0.008 **	0.214
Predisposition to install the APP	4711	0.412	0.067

Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

After conducting the Mann–Whitney signed-rank test, statistically significant differences were found in two out of the 24 items, with higher scores in measurements from women and with a small effect size ($r_{bis} < 0.300$) [31]. Specifically, mothers showed statistically higher scores than fathers in their perception of knowledge about eating disorders ($U = 4140$, $p < 0.026$, $r_{bis} = 0.180$) and in how the possible unauthorized access to their

child's data can negatively influence their decision to install the app (U = 4247, $p < 0.049$, $r_{bis} = 0.159$). Interestingly, the opposite occurred regarding the overall assessment of the utility of installing the app to promote a safe environment and prevent bullying and eating disorders in school; fathers had a statistically higher assessment than mothers (U = 3969, $p < 0.008$, $r_{bis} = 0.214$).

4. Discussion

Our study set out with two primary objectives: assessing parents' perceptions of a school-integrated mobile application to prevent bullying and eating disorders, and uncovering gender differences in these perceptions. The questionnaire provided valuable insights into how parents perceive and evaluate the app and the topics it addresses. Furthermore, understanding their baseline perceptions facilitates future tailored interventions to address concerns and misconceptions.

Regarding knowledge discrepancies and their implications, the initial findings of this study revealed that parents possess a moderate level of awareness regarding bullying and eating disorders, with descriptive statistics showing average scores of 3.93 and 3.56, respectively, indicating a self-reported general understanding of these issues among parents. This finding aligns with concerns raised in the literature about the varying interpretations of bullying among parents [32], suggesting that there may be variability in understanding and perceptions, which could affect their readiness to adopt technological solutions for prevention. However, their knowledge about mobile applications designed to address these problems is notably lower, with an average score of only 1.45, highlighting a significant gap in understanding technology-based solutions. The limited knowledge parents have about mobile applications designed for these issues emphasizes the need for more proactive educational initiatives, as suggested in previous studies [7–10], to enhance their understanding of how such technologies can be beneficial. This discovery highlights the importance of efforts to inform parents about the benefits of technology-based solutions. Their reservations regarding mobile applications might stem from a lack of familiarity, potentially influencing the acceptance and effectiveness of these technological approaches. Increasing parental awareness through educational programs can be an effective strategy to bridge this knowledge gap, as detailed in previous studies [2,3].

Parents, in general, recognized the potential benefits of the application. Key influencing factors for a positive disposition towards the application included professional recommendations, knowledge about the app's functioning, success stories, and customization features. This aligns with the previous research on parental TAM [26,27], yet offers fresh perspectives. The impact of peer testimonials or feedback from other parents who have had a positive experience with the application might also serve as a powerful incentive. This is consistent with the broader literature that emphasizes the role of social influence in technology adoption [23,27]. Leveraging these insights, future studies could explore targeted strategies for app development and user engagement, focusing on customization and peer feedback mechanisms.

The results indicated that the application serves as a significant tool in enhancing the rapport between parents and educational institutions. Participants notably responded to features such as immediate notifications about specific behaviors, periodic activity summaries and pertinent recommendations. This underscores the importance of transparent communication between school and families regarding the application's features and the potential positive outcomes.

A notable outcome from our data is the differential perception between genders. Mothers reported a higher knowledge about EDs, and also more concerns about unauthorized access to their child's data. In contrast, fathers were more optimistic about the overall utility of the app in creating a safer school environment. This observed gender difference aligns with the previous findings discussed in the literature review [15–19] and reaffirms the need of tailoring informational campaigns: while mothers might benefit from detailed

breakdowns of data privacy and security features, fathers might be more receptive to education on EDs and bullying.

Regarding the limitations of the study, the sample size and method, while effective for a preliminary study, come with inherent limitations. The lack of a control group, the use of non-parametric variables, limited control over variables, and reliance on parents' self-perceptions are areas that could be addressed in future studies. These limitations might have influenced the generalizability and robustness of our findings. In future research, we aim to address these constraints by considering larger and more diverse samples, implementing control groups, utilizing parametric variables, enhancing experimental control, and exploring additional objective measures alongside self-perceptions.

A larger and more diverse sample might offer deeper insights and more generalizable results. Additionally, future studies could benefit from involving students, teachers, and school administrators, as their perspectives could enrich the understanding of the proposed interventions. Finally, while this study is primarily centered on one of the factors of the Technology Acceptance Model, perception of utility, it is suggested to conduct a second study focused on the ease of use of the interface of the specific tool "Searching Help".

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, our study reveals that parents acknowledge the value of a mobile app for preventing bullying and EDs in schools but require more detailed information about these digital solutions to fully embrace them. The findings underscore the need for targeted communication, particularly addressing the distinct concerns of mothers and fathers, to enhance app acceptance.

Future strategies should focus on privacy, customization, and professional endorsements to build parental trust. Future research should also explore the app's perceived ease of use, following the TAM framework. Addressing these areas, alongside broader and more inclusive research involving all stakeholders, will be crucial for the successful integration of such apps in educational settings.

By adopting these research methods, we aim to refine technological solutions and ensure their effective implementation in addressing school-related challenges.

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