

## Forestalling Bullying in Primary and Secondary Schools in Spain

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Bullying refers to degrading actions, recurring and prolonged, exerted by minors on an equal. Physical or virtual assaults and insults, rejections or intimidations that hinder the victims' school activity and cause them to feel continually threatened are examples of bullying and cyberbullying, which have serious repercussions, not only on the emotional well-being and academic performance, but also on physical and mental health. It is necessary to build a citizenship engaged to education (Global Citizenship Education) to prevent bullying, and to work in other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The solutions must involve families and teachers, particularly in the context of regulated education, where participation can be promoted in a more planned and controlled way. Expert approaches insist on the relevance of the school to prevent aggression and discrimination through critical and reflective attitudes towards the violence that surrounds these situations. It is about teaching students to reject them *ab initio* as inappropriate. The aim of this paper is to identify the characteristics of the interventions aimed at the prevention and detection of physical and psychological violence among school children in various settings and populations, specifically in Spain, as well as their results and controversial aspects.

*Keywords:* bullying, violence, harassment, prevention, global citizen education, sustainable development goals

### Introduction

Bullying is seen as degrading actions, recurrent and prolonged over time, exercised by minors on an equal. Aggressions and insults, physical or virtual, rejections or intimidation that hinder the victims' school activity and make them feel continually threatened are examples of bullying and cyberbullying, which have serious repercussions, not only on their emotional well-being and academic performance, but also on their physical and mental health. We will discuss here harassment in primary and secondary schools.

Although harassment among minors can be studied paying attention to each act or specific case, we can also consider it as a certain type of "climate" of opinion. In this sense, experts speak of violence as a psychosocial illness that is generated in the habituation to violent environments, caused by a lack of democratic

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consciousness. However, it is necessary to be aware that “whoever verbally assaults, does not have to go beyond the barrier of physical injury. Frequently, however, those who physically attack also do so verbally” (Saneleuterio & López-García-Torres, 2017, p. 268, translation). Psychological abuse, instead, presents greater subtleties precisely because they are not usually accompanied by verbal abuse or physical aggression. For this reason, psychological abuse is not usually measured as precisely as direct violence, much less in school settings, such as those discussed herein.

First, the aggressor and the victim must be clearly defined. For the study of the casuistry and prevention in childhood, we can agree that both must be minors, which would leave aside cases of aggression where the age is very unequal and shows a factor of dominance or evident power. In this regard, it must be considered that, as Prats (2015) has established, bullying by peers, especially in the school environment “leaves more consequences than abuse by adults”, probably because it is more difficult to assume, since it cannot be related to an excess of authority.

Focusing consequently on peer problems, a study by Cerezo (2009) showed that, when the distribution is seen according to sex, violent behaviour during the first years of school occurs more frequently among boys than among girls. Although the data is not particularly striking, what stands out is to find that both types of violence (boy-boy and girl-girl) are dominant with respect to those that occur between the sexes; these are rare in childhood, increasing with puberty and adolescence, and specializing in sexual or sexist violence. However, if we extend to harassing behaviours without violence, these stereotypes are nuanced. Globally, the latest UNESCO (2018) report advances that the prevalence of bullying is not significantly higher, in general, in one sex than in the other. The difference would come in its typology, and, for this reason, it is necessary to investigate it in order to adapt prevention measures that act precisely at the origins of the problems, according to their nature.

There are several terms related to bullying that are worth explaining here. People, and especially young people, tend to follow the crowds. According to Schmitt-Beck (2015), professor of political sociology at the University of Mannheim, Germany, this phenomenon is called the “bandwagon effect” or “contagion effect”.

The term [...] denotes a phenomenon of public opinion impinging upon [itself] [...] In their political preferences and positions people join what they perceive to be existing or expected majorities or dominant positions in society. It implies that success breeds further success, and alternatives that appear to enjoy a broad popular backing are likely to gain even stronger support.

Human beings are social beings, and to share ideas with others helps to maintain harmony. This happens often, and stronger, on social media. The dangers of this are obvious when it comes to negative content; for example, hate speech or cyberbullying. Without having a deeper knowledge of an issue, people get carried away by the comments of others, especially teenagers.

Crowd psychologist Gustave Le Bon states,

We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts; these, we see, are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will" (Leary, 2018).

In the cyberspace, there are many users keen to linguistic violence. Language abusers in the social media are known as "internet trolls", whose act is defined by Buckles, Trapnell, and Paulhus (2014), as "the practice of behaving in a deceptive, destructive, or disruptive manner in a social setting on the Internet with no apparent instrumental purpose" (p. 97). What these people want when they post is to irritate others. According to the Center for Mobile Communication Studies (2018), "Groshek and Cutino (2016) conclude that mobile or web-based content tends to show more incivility and impoliteness (p. 1). Therefore, today's Internet environment provides a broader place for the breeding of malicious speeches". These comments are contagious, mainly due to that crowd or bandwagon effect, and rational discussion is lost forever. This is shown, for example, in the Chinese director Kaige Chen's movie *Caught in the Web* (2012), where the heroine becomes embroiled in controversy after a cell phone video of her being disrespectful to an elderly person goes viral. She had a justification to do that, but she begins to face a public pressure that destroys her life.

This *trolling* attitude is common between young population, who inundates the social media, what causes more school bullying, since they have an easy access to those media through the cell phones and tablets/laptops everywhere. According to the Center for Mobile Communication Studies (2018), "The Internet allows these young people to send harassing e-mails or instant messages, post obscene, insulting, and slanderous messages to online bulletin boards, or even develop Web sites to promote and disseminate defamatory content (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 153)".

Other concepts deserving some attention are "intimacy" and "extimacy" in social networks. There is a need to discuss how ethical principles are violated due to the ignorance and confidence of users. The Web 2.0. distorts privacy, through the constant communication and feedback; users consider that is more important to share their privacy. As Tello (2013) indicates,

[...] the way we constitute and define ourselves as subjects has changed. Introspective view is deteriorated. We increasingly define ourselves as what we exhibit and what the others can see. Intimacy is so important to shape who we are that we have to show it (Pérez-Lanzac & Rincón, 2009).

This debilitation of the introspective process was already stated by Jacques Lacan (1958), who created the label "extimacy", linked to the expression of once-private information through social networks. Privacy is made public through new communication networks; it is an "exposed intimacy".

The solution to this problem seems to be "literacy", "the first step towards freedom, towards liberation from social and economic constraints. It is the

prerequisite for development, both individual and collective”, according to Azoulay (n.d.), Director-General of UNESCO. Also, becoming emotionally literate can help prevent bullying. “Students who have emotional literacy are more able to recognize the signs of bullying” (Gerds, n.d.).

There are also interesting attempts to increase “modesty” among students, for example, Comer and Schwartz (2020), discuss how they have raised their students’ awareness that modesty matters, clarified for them what it is, and given them techniques to help them work towards it. This is something all schools should incorporate, apart from the advice at home. Leviner’s (2018) action research study is also a proposal of implementing education on social media responsibility as a means of curtailing cyberbullying, a pressing problem in 21st century education. This study was carried out in a high school in North Carolina, where the researcher gathered information on students’ knowledge and experience using the internet and social media appropriately and the dangers and effects of inappropriate use of the same. Their personal views and opinions about how this responsibility correlates with cyberbullying were also collected. As the author states,

In embracing the internet and social media in the school environment, schools must accept the responsibility that comes with its incorporation and the larger impact it has outside of traditional education purposes. Developing education on how to use social media properly and how to be a responsible digital citizen can provide lasting effects for adolescents’ entire high school careers, preparing them to be responsible citizens as adults. More broadly, it is also important for educators to continue to evaluate their schools for areas of academic and social improvement (23).

## Method

This article discusses bullying in various forms, and the objective is to identify the characteristics of the interventions aimed at the prevention and detection of physical and psychological violence among primary and secondary school children and young adults in various settings and populations, as well as their results and controversial aspects.

This is a qualitative descriptive study, through the review of various articles and materials, a widely used technique in social and educational studies, which we have considered as the most appropriate way for the purpose of our work, which is to determine the current state of scientific knowledge regarding this topic (or problem). Thus, a review was carried out based on the search in different bibliographic sources, reading of the appropriate literature, synthesis of the results, and evaluation of these in relation to the objective of this work. We will focus mainly in some studies done in Spain.

## Sustainable Development Goals, Global Citizenship and Bullying

As indicated in the *Guía didáctica. Conecta con los ODS*, by the Generalitat Valenciana (2019), globalization has a positive side, which allows us to connect

and interact with other people around the world. But globalization is also making exclusion more visible: hunger, poverty, inequalities, the violation of Human Rights in many parts of the planet, the depletion of natural resources, forced migrations that produce problems integration...

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup>, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing– in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests (United Nations, 2019).

Those sustainable goals are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals



Source: United Nations, 2020.

The implementation of the SDGs or #GlobalGoals is necessary to empower women and the youth to live in a world in which all people can thrive as global citizens. But, how can citizenship be formed with a sense of belonging to a world community of equals, committed to the problems caused by inequalities? Once again, education seems to be the answer, according to the *Guía didáctica*. Building this citizenship, having global awareness, and at the same time being actively engaged in transformative local action, is what has been called Global Citizenship Education, and it draws upon experience from other education processes,

<sup>1</sup>See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

including human rights education, peace education, education or sustainable development, and education for international and intercultural understanding. It does not have a formal status, since it is not a predefined subject or school subject. Global Citizenship Education evolves from the pedagogical tradition of Education for Development (promoted by specialized NGOs in international development cooperation since 1980), and expands its horizon incorporating in a comprehensive manner various content related to education for peace, education in values, education for gender equality, environmental education, education for health, education for sustainable consumption...

The goal of global citizenship education is to empower students to participate and take active roles both locally and globally, to confront and resolve global challenges, and ultimately to be proactive in their contribution to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Thus, it is about incorporating 3 dimensions of learning (UNESCO, 2016),

The goal of global citizenship education is to empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Global citizenship education has three conceptual dimensions. The cognitive dimension concerns the learners' acquisition of knowledge, understanding and critical thinking. The socio-emotional dimension relates to the learners' sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity. The behavioural dimension expects the learners to act responsibly at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

To address the cognitive dimension of Education for Global Citizenship, it is necessary to work in the classroom, accessing and analysing other sources of information, aimed at facilitating the understanding of the relationships that exist between life in our contexts and the lives of people from other parts of the world, to develop critical and resolute thinking in students. However, to address the socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions, pedagogy must be complemented by a more holistic approach, so information and knowledge can be combined with practice and direct experience. This methodological approach should provide students with experiences and opportunities to develop, contrast and build their own views, values and attitudes to understand how to take actions responsibly. Participating in community activities, taking advantage of cultural diversity in the classroom and in the close community, confronting different points of view... are some of the key pedagogical components for progress towards critical citizenship, according to this guide.

According to UNESCO (2019, foreword), "Addressing school violence and bullying is essential in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies". And it continues,

To ensure safe and inclusive learning environments, UNESCO advocates a

comprehensive school health approach that encompasses policy and systems, skills-based health education, safe learning environments and links to health services. National education sectors must adopt and implement measures to prevent and address violence and discrimination, both because of their impact on education, health and well-being, and because they stop children and young people from achieving their potential (UNESCO, n.d.).

UNESCO's work in school violence and bullying is divided into four main areas (UNESCO, n.d.):

- To provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive global evidence on school violence and bullying.
- To support the development of effective policies to prevent and address school violence and bullying, including school-related gender-based violence.
- To improve the measurement of violence and bullying within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- To strengthen national responses to school violence and bullying, particularly education sector responses.

The actions are diverse, and include, among others, the declaration of the first Thursday of November of every year as the International Day against Violence and Bullying at School, Including Cyberbullying<sup>2</sup>, recognizing that school-related violence in all its forms is an infringement of children and adolescents' rights to education and to health and well-being. It has also published, during the World Education Forum in 2019, *Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying*. This publication contains the most recent and complete data on issues related to violence and bullying, and it presents the most up to date and comprehensive evidence on the school violence and bullying, analysing global and regional prevalence and trends, the nature and impact, and successful national responses<sup>3</sup>.

### **Bullying: Evolution of the Concept**

The concept of "bullying" has to do with the recurring, and prolonged in time, degrading actions that a boy, a girl or a group exert on an equal in a school. According to Olweus (1978) –the first author who called the aggressor "bully"—, apart from physical assaults and insults, rejections or intimidations that hinder the victims' school activity and cause them to feel continually threatened are also included. As we have already shown in López-García-Torres and Saneleuterio (2015), bullying is determined by the compulsory relationship between schoolchildren, or at least their difficult evasion, by sharing a classroom or patio daily:

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<sup>2</sup>See <https://es.unesco.org/commemorations/dayagainstschoolviolenceandbullying>.

<sup>3</sup>See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366486>.

Thus, it is in the school where the subject has the least ability to choose, since the possibilities are limited –and forced– to those enrolled in each grade. In other words, there are fewer friends to choose from and, if there are undesirables, there is a greater probability of finding them, given that they share the same square meters for many hours a week (p. 419, own translation).

Indeed, people will feel more harassed by others in a relationship inversely proportional to the possibilities that they have to avoid interacting, as it happens in the school or at work. Apart from these two areas linked to limited contexts, the most widespread aspect of harassment would be sexual, which can occur within or outside of these contexts.

For the Anglo-Saxon concept of stalking or harassment, the patrimonial equivalent *acoso* has been taken in Spanish. The term *acoso* comes from the old Spanish *cosso* (“career”); *acosar* (“to harass”) means “to make somebody run” and, in other meaning of the Dictionary of the Spanish Language, “to persecute, without giving truce or rest” or “insistently urge someone with discomfort or requirements” (RAE, 2014). These actions constitute a crime according to the penal code. Thus, according to the glossary of De la Encarnación (2015),

[...] there is harassment when watching, persecuting, or seeking physical closeness; establishing or attempting to establish contact with a person through any means of communication, or through third parties; misusing their personal data, purchasing products or merchandise, or contract services, or having third parties contacting that person; infringing their freedom or their assets, or against the freedom or assets of another person close to them (p. 448, translation).

According to the *Ley Orgánica (Organic Law) 1/2015, of March 30, which modifies Organic Law 10/1995, of November 23, of the Penal Code*, in Spain harassment is classified as a crime punishable by penalties ranging from three months to two years in prison, among others.

Bullying is among the most common typologies of harassment, so much so that it even has its own international name: *bullying*, similar to *mobbing*, which is used for harassing in the work domain; although the latter term was first used to describe certain behaviours of the animal world. The fact that these anglicisms are widespread in the studies and literature of the Hispanic tradition shows their extensive social incidence.

The student who begins to have relations of arrogance and excessive dominance, especially if this is accompanied by someone who accepts the submission, is activating an indicator that problems of violence or school abuse will surely appear. The rigid dominance-submission scheme is characterized by one person dominating and another being dominated; one is controlling while another is controlled; one exercises abusive power and the other must submit. It is a relationship of arrogance that ends up turning the abuser into a bully or intimidator who can present overt violent behaviours –physical or verbal–, but also violent relational behaviours such as spreading rumours or excluding the victim from a group (Povedano et al., 2015).



UNESCO (2018) released updated data about the world panorama regarding bullying and school violence; in this report, there are generalized improvements related to the anti-bullying proposals and plans that have been implemented during the recent years in different countries (Álvarez, 2016; Félix, Soriano, Godoy, & Martínez, 2008; Hidalgo, 2015; Kärnä et al., 2013; López-García-Torres & Saneleuterio, 2016; Muñoz & Fragueiro, 2013; Sánchez et al., 2001; Teixeira Bautista, 2017; Zaitegi, 2017).

All in all, UNESCO (2018) maintains the warning that these situations have serious repercussions, not only on the well-being and academic performance of those who suffer them, but also on their physical and mental health. Indeed, these types of victims are more susceptible to future mental health problems, especially anxiety, but also depression, a tendency to self-harm or to have suicidal thoughts. Rosario Ortega, vice-president of the International Observatory on School Violence, explains that suffering bullying “supposes an imbalance and wear on the subject’s personality in a very strong way” (Prats, 2015, translation). Its consequences are exponentially aggravated if it is prolonged in time, since it ends up destroying in the victim “extremely relevant factors of the subject’s personality” (Prats, 2015, translation), insofar as it involves physical, psychological or both types of damage, which causes the humiliation of being considered a *stupid* person, *weak* and *social outcast*. The self-esteem is devalued, and the self-image deteriorates, which increasingly isolates the victim and ends up affecting very seriously their academic performance, although the latter is especially evident among men.

The differences between abused men and women are shown in numerous empirical studies, and in the abovementioned UNESCO (2018) report. According to Romito and Grassi (2007), male victims would be more likely to fall into alcohol, while women would suffer more frequent panic attacks. The profile of the bully is more frequently identified among boys, therefore pointing to the sex variable (UNESCO, 2018). Other variables of risk include the fact that there are few academically brilliant students (Gage, Overpeck, Nansel, & Kogan, 2005), whereas other statistics from some countries indicate that a large majority, 80%, of gifted boys and girls have been attacked or bullied at school.

Now, as Ortega (1998) explained and we mentioned in Saneleuterio and López-García-Torres (2017), to some extent, people who are cruel and unjustifiably aggressive should also be considered victims of the process, in addition to those who are the object of their cruelty and violence. And, thirdly, victims are also those who, without having become involved as agents, unintentionally fall into the observer role without deciding to intervene and end up living in social spaces soaked in violence. This last group, mostly neglected by the least evidence of their suffering, harbours potential abusive people who have become accustomed to this type of environment; by living in continuous fear and normalizing these behaviours, they may even develop, conversely, a weak profile as future victims.

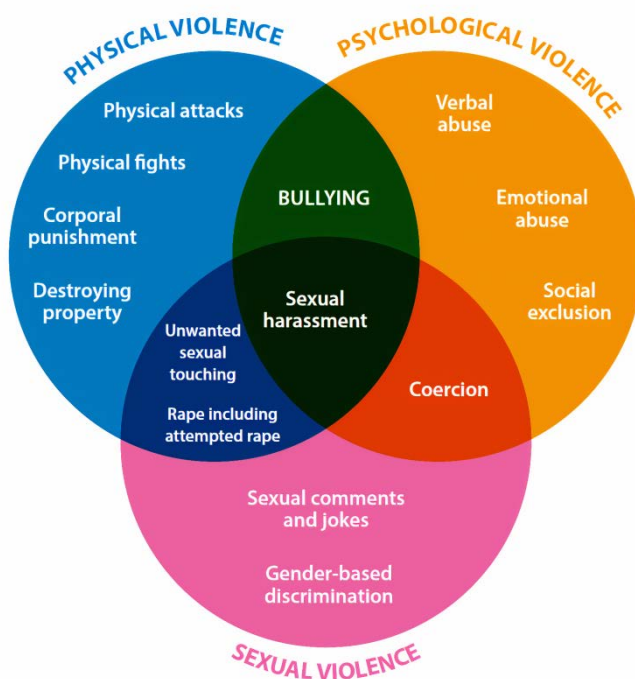
In the first sense, although with much less weight, many television series undermine sensitivity, especially the more realistic and closer they are to the viewer. Real or fictitious, the indirect effect of getting used to certain attitudes leads to perceiving a subsequent normalization of abusive practices –first in the

mind– and then in the elevation of the threshold of what aggression is and what is not, what is admissible and what is not, etc.

### Identification and Forestalling

UNESCO (2019) addresses bullying and its different types –physical, psychological and sexual– as the most common form of school violence (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of School Violence and Bullying



Source: UNESCO, 2019, p. 11.

Starting from other classifications of school violence (Grado & Uruñuela, 2017), this paper proposes a double characterization. On one side, according to the effect, that is, whether psychological, verbal, physical or a combination of these abuses occurs. And, on the other side, according to the motivation, that it may be due to personal (physical, psychological, sexual orientation or identity) or collective factors (ethnicity, religion, belonging to a social group, etc.).

Among the behaviours, it is possible to find several that must have the characteristics of intent, recurrence, and persistence over time to be considered “bullying”: social exclusion and marginalization, verbal aggression, humiliation and vexation, indirect or direct physical aggression, intimidation, threats or blackmail, among others. In other words, a specific attack due to a disagreement or offense that may have occurred would not be a harassing behaviour. The victim could be anyone, but in cases of harassment the identity of the victim is decisive,

and, in addition, it presents an additional characteristic: defencelessness, since the victim shows less power, whether on a physical, psychological or social level.

In effect, the person subject to harassment is usually a single student; this decreases individual's chances to defend himself or herself, or to achieve synergy with another victim. In bullying there is usually a collective or group component; there are many passive observers who, as silent witnesses, know the situation, but do not contribute sufficiently to the end of the attack. As a result, and a symptom of the perpetuation of the problem, the entire process is invisible to external (adult) agents who would be the ones who could act.

It is worth highlighting, within the different types of bullying and its manifestations, what experts have called *cyberbullying*, where the aggressor uses electronic means that transcend the school context. This conduct is defined as harassment between equals in the environment of information and communication technologies (ICT), and includes acts of blackmail, harassment and insults, with or without sexual content, towards a student. Being virtual, aggressors usually protect themselves with anonymity, and cases have been reported where an adult person was behind the screen. Sexual content recurrently sent to minors through digital media by paedophiles who hide their identity in order to gain their trust, is called *grooming*. This is a phenomenon with very different procedures and effects, not at all comparable to the psychological effects of bullying or cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying also involves dissemination of harmful or defamatory information about the victim in a technological format. Sometimes, these practices are combined with direct physical or verbal ones. School cyberbullying is a phenomenon of great relevance –and concern– due to its prevalence, the severity of its consequences and the difficulties it presents for its prevention and approach. Cyberbullying can consist of “sending emails to someone who does not want to receive more, threatening, sending malware, humiliating others, distributing tricked photos, creating defamatory websites or impersonating their identity”, as described by Luengo (2014).

Bearing in mind the general characteristics of bullying, the following nuances are added to cyberbullying: first, and most striking, is that the intention to cause harm does not always occur in the early stages of the process; second, that the repetition also occurs in virtual messages or actions, which are frequent and lasting over time; third, the fact that there is usually previous contact or relationship between those involved in the physical world; fourth, that it is not always linked to situations of harassment in the physical environment and, if they are, they usually precede virtual attacks; finally, and as a defining condition, the attacks materialize through ICT media: SMS, WhatsApp, email, mobile phones, social networks, blogs, forums, chat rooms, among other virtual realities.

According to the Information Society Area of the European Commission, this practice among adolescents, together with the *grooming* phenomenon, is “the greatest problem currently evident among the set of detestable or risky behaviors” (Luengo, 2014, p. 115). It is particularly interesting that, although bullying in general seems to be declining, cases of cyberbullying are increasing (UNESCO, 2018), which forces to rethink prevention strategies and reinforce media education.

For this reason, educational centres that design and apply prevention and action protocols are seeing an increase in cases of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as for those behaviours that alter coexistence in a serious and repeated way: insults, threats, assaults, fights, vandalism, child abuse and gender violence, whether these situations occur within the school or outside the school domain, provided they are motivated or directly related to school life.

These practices are consistent with research on bullying, as more and more studies are trying to discover the different influences of educators. Podestá (2019), for example, conceptualizes the roles of teachers in five metaphors: the spectator, the gardener, the judge, the bridge and the ally. Those descriptions help to show the limitations and strengths of each way of acting and, above all, the perverse effects that they can cause in the behaviours that are intended to be reduced. Along the same line of thought, Ruiz-Hernández et al. (2019) have also recently studied parental styles and their relationship with violent manifestations in adolescents. These researchers found that what is not advisable is the authoritarian style, coercive practices, physical punishment or the imposing character. In addition, they showed that the dimensions of affection, communication and promotion of autonomy guarantee positive behaviours, as De Vicente Abad (2017) had already partially showed.

Thus, the triangulation of the solution must involve families and teachers, this particularly in the context of regulated education where other more cautious solutions may be recommended. Indeed, all expert approaches insist on the relevance of the school in the prevention and detection of violence and discrimination, for example, through “serious and effective programs framed in a preventive pedagogy” (Aroca, Ros & Varela, 2016, p. 27). For this reason, nowadays, educational centres are supporting the explicit promotion of the so-called “culture of peace” (*cultura de la paz*) (Sánchez Fernández, 2017) or the “good treatment” (*buen trato*) (Pastor Fasquelle & Cruz Velasco, 2017; Sanz Ramón, 2017). Among these initiatives, we can mention the TEI program “Tutoría Entre Iguales” (peer tutoring). It is a coexistence program for the prevention of bullying and violence (physical, emotional or psychological). This is an institutional plan that involves the entire educational community, and whose objective is to work for an inclusive and non-violent school, promoting and improving the centre or school culture regarding coexistence without conflict (González Bellido, 2015).

The promotion of “good treatment” in classrooms must consider that the main reasons for bullying among children and adolescents fall into two areas. On the one hand, that of the physical appearance: being overweight focuses on the distance from beauty standards, lack of hygiene or general neglect, especially if they are accompanied by a weak or easily dominated character; these attitudes merit vigilance. On the other hand, and as long as leadership skills do not converge, bullying is directed to people who question the sex-gender system with their clothing, hairstyle or gestures (De Stéfano, Puche, & Pichardo, 2015). The prevention of violent behaviour must, therefore, see them as inescapable strategic points in teacher training (De Botton, Puigdemívol, & De Vicente, 2012; Santos, Bas, & Irazo, 2012).

The democratic decision-making, the pre-eminence of peaceful forms in conflict resolution, and facing social tensions using dialogue and negotiation are essential measures for the prevention of school violence. It is necessary to educate in respect and harmonious coexistence, which is aimed at avoiding the generation of personalities who foster a profile of aggressors and victims. Furthermore, in the specific case of sexual abuse and discrimination based on sex, in order to build a future society free of machismo, it is necessary to believe in co-education (López-García-Torres & Saneleuterio, 2016).

The pandemic situation is no reason to postpone the preventive and proactive response that schools should give to bullying. The AVE© Program for the Prevention of School Harassment and Violence (Oñate & Piñuel, 2005), which pays attention to physical and psychological violence in the school environment, places the emphasis on proactive and preventive psychological evaluation to early identify the behaviors of abuse that may be having their start in the classroom. In other words, it is about “measuring early to prevent harassment from occurring from its first manifestations” (Oñate & Piñuel, 2005). This program was designed and created to help schools to contain or eradicate bullying dynamics, proactively and early, before they become fatal. For this, the AVE© Program involves the entire educational community (parents, students, playground and dining room staff, buses...) in a dynamic and participatory way, offering the schools some psychological tools and early responses to the behaviors that generate cases of violence or bullying, and favoring a culture of zero tolerance. On the other hand, the prestigious Finnish KiVa program is also applied in Spain, as demonstrated by the recent doctoral thesis by Martínez Jiménez (2021). See also Martínez Jiménez and Alcantud Díaz (2018).

### Conclusion

Within the SDGs related to equality and quality education, in the context of the Global Citizenship Education goals, schools have a duty regarding the children who go to school and suffer fear and the psychological damage caused by recurrent harassment behaviors. There are many programs and interventions that fail to achieve an effective reduction in the rates of bullying in schools. The right approach here seems to deal with school abuse and psychological harassment before it happened, as the AVE© and TEI programs do. This means, for those responsible of education, to be attentive to its first manifestations and to stop it at its roots.

Teaching must be oriented to show behaviours that promote lack of solidarity and exclusion among students, emphasizing that these are detestable actions. Instructors must highlight through real examples the consequences that these dynamics entail for aggressors, victims and spectators of violence. In general, it must become clear that aggression is never an effective action to manoeuvre any situation or achieve goals.

To favour the suppression of this trend in schools, it is important to promote a critical and reflective attitude towards the violence that surrounds students,

teaching them to reject it in any of its manifestations. The intervention that is programmed to prevent or address the problems of violence between equals in the educational centres should not be directed exclusively to the victims, but also to the aggressors and the spectators; since it has negative consequences for everyone involved.

All institutions, but especially schools, must implement an educational policy of zero tolerance towards any type of violence. To guarantee this, the educational project of the centre has the obligation to include the values, objectives and priorities for action into the curriculum. Effective actions promote involvement by engaging the educational community in the elaboration, control of compliance, and evaluation of the rules of coexistence of the centre, being equally important the participation of both teachers and students in the specific rules for each classroom.

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## Forestalling Bullying in Primary and Secondary Schools in Spain

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Bullying refers to degrading actions, recurring and prolonged, exerted by minors on an equal. Physical or virtual assaults and insults, rejections or intimidations that hinder the victims' school activity and cause them to feel continually threatened are examples of bullying and cyberbullying, which have serious repercussions, not only on the emotional well-being and academic performance, but also on physical and mental health. It is necessary to build a citizenship engaged to education (Global Citizenship Education) to prevent bullying, and to work in other Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The solutions must involve families and teachers, particularly in the context of regulated education, where participation can be promoted in a more planned and controlled way. Expert approaches insist on the relevance of the school to prevent aggression and discrimination through critical and reflective attitudes towards the violence that surrounds these situations. It is about teaching students to reject them *ab initio* as inappropriate. The aim of this paper is to identify the characteristics of the interventions aimed at the prevention and detection of physical and psychological violence among school children in various settings and populations, specifically in Spain, as well as their results and controversial aspects.

*Keywords:* bullying, violence, harassment, prevention, global citizen education, sustainable development goals

### Introduction

Bullying is seen as degrading actions, recurrent and prolonged over time, exercised by minors on an equal. Aggressions and insults, physical or virtual, rejections or intimidation that hinder the victims' school activity and make them feel continually threatened are examples of bullying and cyberbullying, which have serious repercussions, not only on their emotional well-being and academic performance, but also on their physical and mental health. We will discuss here harassment in primary and secondary schools.

Although harassment among minors can be studied paying attention to each act or specific case, we can also consider it as a certain type of "climate" of opinion. In this sense, experts speak of violence as a psychosocial illness that is generated in the habituation to violent environments, caused by a lack of democratic

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consciousness. However, it is necessary to be aware that “whoever verbally assaults, does not have to go beyond the barrier of physical injury. Frequently, however, those who physically attack also do so verbally” (Saneleuterio & López-García-Torres, 2017, p. 268, translation). Psychological abuse, instead, presents greater subtleties precisely because they are not usually accompanied by verbal abuse or physical aggression. For this reason, psychological abuse is not usually measured as precisely as direct violence, much less in school settings, such as those discussed herein.

First, the aggressor and the victim must be clearly defined. For the study of the casuistry and prevention in childhood, we can agree that both must be minors, which would leave aside cases of aggression where the age is very unequal and shows a factor of dominance or evident power. In this regard, it must be considered that, as Prats (2015) has established, bullying by peers, especially in the school environment “leaves more consequences than abuse by adults”, probably because it is more difficult to assume, since it cannot be related to an excess of authority.

Focusing consequently on peer problems, a study by Cerezo (2009) showed that, when the distribution is seen according to sex, violent behaviour during the first years of school occurs more frequently among boys than among girls. Although the data is not particularly striking, what stands out is to find that both types of violence (boy-boy and girl-girl) are dominant with respect to those that occur between the sexes; these are rare in childhood, increasing with puberty and adolescence, and specializing in sexual or sexist violence. However, if we extend to harassing behaviours without violence, these stereotypes are nuanced. Globally, the latest UNESCO (2018) report advances that the prevalence of bullying is not significantly higher, in general, in one sex than in the other. The difference would come in its typology, and, for this reason, it is necessary to investigate it in order to adapt prevention measures that act precisely at the origins of the problems, according to their nature.

There are several terms related to bullying that are worth explaining here. People, and especially young people, tend to follow the crowds. According to Schmitt-Beck (2015), professor of political sociology at the University of Mannheim, Germany, this phenomenon is called the “bandwagon effect” or “contagion effect”.

The term [...] denotes a phenomenon of public opinion impinging upon [itself] [...] In their political preferences and positions people join what they perceive to be existing or expected majorities or dominant positions in society. It implies that success breeds further success, and alternatives that appear to enjoy a broad popular backing are likely to gain even stronger support.

Human beings are social beings, and to share ideas with others helps to maintain harmony. This happens often, and stronger, on social media. The dangers of this are obvious when it comes to negative content; for example, hate speech or cyberbullying. Without having a deeper knowledge of an issue, people get carried away by the comments of others, especially teenagers.

Crowd psychologist Gustave Le Bon states,

We see, then, that the disappearance of the conscious personality, the predominance of the unconscious personality, the turning by means of suggestion and contagion of feelings and ideas in an identical direction, the tendency to immediately transform the suggested ideas into acts; these, we see, are the principal characteristics of the individual forming part of a crowd. He is no longer himself, but has become an automaton who has ceased to be guided by his will" (Leary, 2018).

In the cyberspace, there are many users keen to linguistic violence. Language abusers in the social media are known as "internet trolls", whose act is defined by Buckles, Trapnell, and Paulhus (2014), as "the practice of behaving in a deceptive, destructive, or disruptive manner in a social setting on the Internet with no apparent instrumental purpose" (p. 97). What these people want when they post is to irritate others. According to the Center for Mobile Communication Studies (2018), "Groshek and Cutino (2016) conclude that mobile or web-based content tends to show more incivility and impoliteness (p. 1). Therefore, today's Internet environment provides a broader place for the breeding of malicious speeches". These comments are contagious, mainly due to that crowd or bandwagon effect, and rational discussion is lost forever. This is shown, for example, in the Chinese director Kaige Chen's movie *Caught in the Web* (2012), where the heroine becomes embroiled in controversy after a cell phone video of her being disrespectful to an elderly person goes viral. She had a justification to do that, but she begins to face a public pressure that destroys her life.

This *trolling* attitude is common between young population, who inundates the social media, what causes more school bullying, since they have an easy access to those media through the cell phones and tablets/laptops everywhere. According to the Center for Mobile Communication Studies (2018), "The Internet allows these young people to send harassing e-mails or instant messages, post obscene, insulting, and slanderous messages to online bulletin boards, or even develop Web sites to promote and disseminate defamatory content (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006, p. 153)".

Other concepts deserving some attention are "intimacy" and "extimacy" in social networks. There is a need to discuss how ethical principles are violated due to the ignorance and confidence of users. The Web 2.0. distorts privacy, through the constant communication and feedback; users consider that is more important to share their privacy. As Tello (2013) indicates,

[...] the way we constitute and define ourselves as subjects has changed. Introspective view is deteriorated. We increasingly define ourselves as what we exhibit and what the others can see. Intimacy is so important to shape who we are that we have to show it (Pérez-Lanzac & Rincón, 2009).

This debilitation of the introspective process was already stated by Jacques Lacan (1958), who created the label "extimacy", linked to the expression of once-private information through social networks. Privacy is made public through new communication networks; it is an "exposed intimacy".

The solution to this problem seems to be "literacy", "the first step towards freedom, towards liberation from social and economic constraints. It is the

prerequisite for development, both individual and collective”, according to Azoulay (n.d.), Director-General of UNESCO. Also, becoming emotionally literate can help prevent bullying. “Students who have emotional literacy are more able to recognize the signs of bullying” (Gerds, n.d.).

There are also interesting attempts to increase “modesty” among students, for example, Comer and Schwartz (2020), discuss how they have raised their students’ awareness that modesty matters, clarified for them what it is, and given them techniques to help them work towards it. This is something all schools should incorporate, apart from the advice at home. Leviner’s (2018) action research study is also a proposal of implementing education on social media responsibility as a means of curtailing cyberbullying, a pressing problem in 21st century education. This study was carried out in a high school in North Carolina, where the researcher gathered information on students’ knowledge and experience using the internet and social media appropriately and the dangers and effects of inappropriate use of the same. Their personal views and opinions about how this responsibility correlates with cyberbullying were also collected. As the author states,

In embracing the internet and social media in the school environment, schools must accept the responsibility that comes with its incorporation and the larger impact it has outside of traditional education purposes. Developing education on how to use social media properly and how to be a responsible digital citizen can provide lasting effects for adolescents’ entire high school careers, preparing them to be responsible citizens as adults. More broadly, it is also important for educators to continue to evaluate their schools for areas of academic and social improvement (23).

## Method

This article discusses bullying in various forms, and the objective is to identify the characteristics of the interventions aimed at the prevention and detection of physical and psychological violence among primary and secondary school children and young adults in various settings and populations, as well as their results and controversial aspects.

This is a qualitative descriptive study, through the review of various articles and materials, a widely used technique in social and educational studies, which we have considered as the most appropriate way for the purpose of our work, which is to determine the current state of scientific knowledge regarding this topic (or problem). Thus, a review was carried out based on the search in different bibliographic sources, reading of the appropriate literature, synthesis of the results, and evaluation of these in relation to the objective of this work. We will focus mainly in some studies done in Spain.

## Sustainable Development Goals, Global Citizenship and Bullying

As indicated in the *Guía didáctica. Conecta con los ODS*, by the Generalitat Valenciana (2019), globalization has a positive side, which allows us to connect

and interact with other people around the world. But globalization is also making exclusion more visible: hunger, poverty, inequalities, the violation of Human Rights in many parts of the planet, the depletion of natural resources, forced migrations that produce problems integration...

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development<sup>1</sup>, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future. At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries – developed and developing– in a global partnership. They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests (United Nations, 2019).

Those sustainable goals are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Sustainable Development Goals



Source: United Nations, 2020.

The implementation of the SDGs or #GlobalGoals is necessary to empower women and the youth to live in a world in which all people can thrive as global citizens. But, how can citizenship be formed with a sense of belonging to a world community of equals, committed to the problems caused by inequalities? Once again, education seems to be the answer, according to the *Guía didáctica*. Building this citizenship, having global awareness, and at the same time being actively engaged in transformative local action, is what has been called Global Citizenship Education, and it draws upon experience from other education processes,

<sup>1</sup>See <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld>.

including human rights education, peace education, education or sustainable development, and education for international and intercultural understanding. It does not have a formal status, since it is not a predefined subject or school subject. Global Citizenship Education evolves from the pedagogical tradition of Education for Development (promoted by specialized NGOs in international development cooperation since 1980), and expands its horizon incorporating in a comprehensive manner various content related to education for peace, education in values, education for gender equality, environmental education, education for health, education for sustainable consumption...

The goal of global citizenship education is to empower students to participate and take active roles both locally and globally, to confront and resolve global challenges, and ultimately to be proactive in their contribution to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Thus, it is about incorporating 3 dimensions of learning (UNESCO, 2016),

The goal of global citizenship education is to empower learners to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Global citizenship education has three conceptual dimensions. The cognitive dimension concerns the learners' acquisition of knowledge, understanding and critical thinking. The socio-emotional dimension relates to the learners' sense of belonging to a common humanity, sharing values and responsibilities, empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity. The behavioural dimension expects the learners to act responsibly at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world.

To address the cognitive dimension of Education for Global Citizenship, it is necessary to work in the classroom, accessing and analysing other sources of information, aimed at facilitating the understanding of the relationships that exist between life in our contexts and the lives of people from other parts of the world, to develop critical and resolute thinking in students. However, to address the socio-emotional and behavioural dimensions, pedagogy must be complemented by a more holistic approach, so information and knowledge can be combined with practice and direct experience. This methodological approach should provide students with experiences and opportunities to develop, contrast and build their own views, values and attitudes to understand how to take actions responsibly. Participating in community activities, taking advantage of cultural diversity in the classroom and in the close community, confronting different points of view... are some of the key pedagogical components for progress towards critical citizenship, according to this guide.

According to UNESCO (2019, foreword), "Addressing school violence and bullying is essential in order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular SDG 4, which aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and SDG 16, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies". And it continues,

To ensure safe and inclusive learning environments, UNESCO advocates a



comprehensive school health approach that encompasses policy and systems, skills-based health education, safe learning environments and links to health services. National education sectors must adopt and implement measures to prevent and address violence and discrimination, both because of their impact on education, health and well-being, and because they stop children and young people from achieving their potential (UNESCO, n.d.).

UNESCO's work in school violence and bullying is divided into four main areas (UNESCO, n.d.):

- To provide the most up-to-date and comprehensive global evidence on school violence and bullying.
- To support the development of effective policies to prevent and address school violence and bullying, including school-related gender-based violence.
- To improve the measurement of violence and bullying within the framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- To strengthen national responses to school violence and bullying, particularly education sector responses.

The actions are diverse, and include, among others, the declaration of the first Thursday of November of every year as the International Day against Violence and Bullying at School, Including Cyberbullying<sup>2</sup>, recognizing that school-related violence in all its forms is an infringement of children and adolescents' rights to education and to health and well-being. It has also published, during the World Education Forum in 2019, *Behind the Numbers: Ending School Violence and Bullying*. This publication contains the most recent and complete data on issues related to violence and bullying, and it presents the most up to date and comprehensive evidence on the school violence and bullying, analysing global and regional prevalence and trends, the nature and impact, and successful national responses<sup>3</sup>.

### **Bullying: Evolution of the Concept**

The concept of "bullying" has to do with the recurring, and prolonged in time, degrading actions that a boy, a girl or a group exert on an equal in a school. According to Olweus (1978) –the first author who called the aggressor "bully"—, apart from physical assaults and insults, rejections or intimidations that hinder the victims' school activity and cause them to feel continually threatened are also included. As we have already shown in López-García-Torres and Saneleuterio (2015), bullying is determined by the compulsory relationship between schoolchildren, or at least their difficult evasion, by sharing a classroom or patio daily:

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<sup>2</sup>See <https://es.unesco.org/commemorations/dayagainschoolviolenceandbullying>.

<sup>3</sup>See <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000366486>.

Thus, it is in the school where the subject has the least ability to choose, since the possibilities are limited –and forced– to those enrolled in each grade. In other words, there are fewer friends to choose from and, if there are undesirables, there is a greater probability of finding them, given that they share the same square meters for many hours a week (p. 419, own translation).

Indeed, people will feel more harassed by others in a relationship inversely proportional to the possibilities that they have to avoid interacting, as it happens in the school or at work. Apart from these two areas linked to limited contexts, the most widespread aspect of harassment would be sexual, which can occur within or outside of these contexts.

For the Anglo-Saxon concept of stalking or harassment, the patrimonial equivalent *acoso* has been taken in Spanish. The term *acoso* comes from the old Spanish *cosso* (“career”); *acosar* (“to harass”) means “to make somebody run” and, in other meaning of the Dictionary of the Spanish Language, “to persecute, without giving truce or rest” or “insistently urge someone with discomfort or requirements” (RAE, 2014). These actions constitute a crime according to the penal code. Thus, according to the glossary of De la Encarnación (2015),

[...] there is harassment when watching, persecuting, or seeking physical closeness; establishing or attempting to establish contact with a person through any means of communication, or through third parties; misusing their personal data, purchasing products or merchandise, or contract services, or having third parties contacting that person; infringing their freedom or their assets, or against the freedom or assets of another person close to them (p. 448, translation).

According to the *Ley Orgánica (Organic Law) 1/2015, of March 30, which modifies Organic Law 10/1995, of November 23, of the Penal Code*, in Spain harassment is classified as a crime punishable by penalties ranging from three months to two years in prison, among others.

Bullying is among the most common typologies of harassment, so much so that it even has its own international name: *bullying*, similar to *mobbing*, which is used for harassing in the work domain; although the latter term was first used to describe certain behaviours of the animal world. The fact that these anglicisms are widespread in the studies and literature of the Hispanic tradition shows their extensive social incidence.

The student who begins to have relations of arrogance and excessive dominance, especially if this is accompanied by someone who accepts the submission, is activating an indicator that problems of violence or school abuse will surely appear. The rigid dominance-submission scheme is characterized by one person dominating and another being dominated; one is controlling while another is controlled; one exercises abusive power and the other must submit. It is a relationship of arrogance that ends up turning the abuser into a bully or intimidator who can present overt violent behaviours –physical or verbal–, but also violent relational behaviours such as spreading rumours or excluding the victim from a group (Povedano et al., 2015).

UNESCO (2018) released updated data about the world panorama regarding bullying and school violence; in this report, there are generalized improvements related to the anti-bullying proposals and plans that have been implemented during the recent years in different countries (Álvarez, 2016; Félix, Soriano, Godoy, & Martínez, 2008; Hidalgo, 2015; Kärnä et al., 2013; López-García-Torres & Saneleuterio, 2016; Muñoz & Fragueiro, 2013; Sánchez et al., 2001; Teixeira Bautista, 2017; Zaitegi, 2017).

All in all, UNESCO (2018) maintains the warning that these situations have serious repercussions, not only on the well-being and academic performance of those who suffer them, but also on their physical and mental health. Indeed, these types of victims are more susceptible to future mental health problems, especially anxiety, but also depression, a tendency to self-harm or to have suicidal thoughts. Rosario Ortega, vice-president of the International Observatory on School Violence, explains that suffering bullying “supposes an imbalance and wear on the subject’s personality in a very strong way” (Prats, 2015, translation). Its consequences are exponentially aggravated if it is prolonged in time, since it ends up destroying in the victim “extremely relevant factors of the subject’s personality” (Prats, 2015, translation), insofar as it involves physical, psychological or both types of damage, which causes the humiliation of being considered a *stupid* person, *weak* and *social outcast*. The self-esteem is devalued, and the self-image deteriorates, which increasingly isolates the victim and ends up affecting very seriously their academic performance, although the latter is especially evident among men.

The differences between abused men and women are shown in numerous empirical studies, and in the abovementioned UNESCO (2018) report. According to Romito and Grassi (2007), male victims would be more likely to fall into alcohol, while women would suffer more frequent panic attacks. The profile of the bully is more frequently identified among boys, therefore pointing to the sex variable (UNESCO, 2018). Other variables of risk include the fact that there are few academically brilliant students (Gage, Overpeck, Nansel, & Kogan, 2005), whereas other statistics from some countries indicate that a large majority, 80%, of gifted boys and girls have been attacked or bullied at school.

Now, as Ortega (1998) explained and we mentioned in Saneleuterio and López-García-Torres (2017), to some extent, people who are cruel and unjustifiably aggressive should also be considered victims of the process, in addition to those who are the object of their cruelty and violence. And, thirdly, victims are also those who, without having become involved as agents, unintentionally fall into the observer role without deciding to intervene and end up living in social spaces soaked in violence. This last group, mostly neglected by the least evidence of their suffering, harbours potential abusive people who have become accustomed to this type of environment; by living in continuous fear and normalizing these behaviours, they may even develop, conversely, a weak profile as future victims.

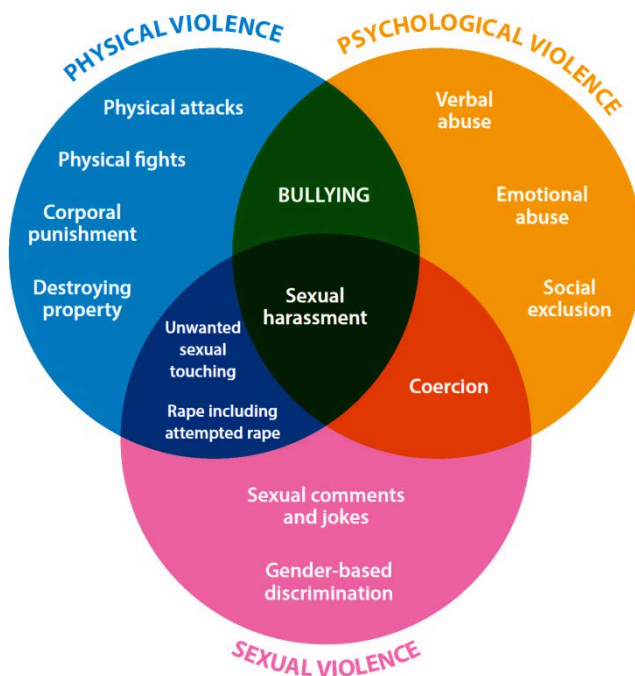
In the first sense, although with much less weight, many television series undermine sensitivity, especially the more realistic and closer they are to the viewer. Real or fictitious, the indirect effect of getting used to certain attitudes leads to perceiving a subsequent normalization of abusive practices –first in the

mind– and then in the elevation of the threshold of what aggression is and what is not, what is admissible and what is not, etc.

### Identification and Forestalling

UNESCO (2019) addresses bullying and its different types –physical, psychological and sexual– as the most common form of school violence (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of School Violence and Bullying



Source: UNESCO, 2019, p. 11.

Starting from other classifications of school violence (Grado & Uruñuela, 2017), this paper proposes a double characterization. On one side, according to the effect, that is, whether psychological, verbal, physical or a combination of these abuses occurs. And, on the other side, according to the motivation, that it may be due to personal (physical, psychological, sexual orientation or identity) or collective factors (ethnicity, religion, belonging to a social group, etc.).

Among the behaviours, it is possible to find several that must have the characteristics of intent, recurrence, and persistence over time to be considered “bullying”: social exclusion and marginalization, verbal aggression, humiliation and vexation, indirect or direct physical aggression, intimidation, threats or blackmail, among others. In other words, a specific attack due to a disagreement or offense that may have occurred would not be a harassing behaviour. The victim could be anyone, but in cases of harassment the identity of the victim is decisive,

and, in addition, it presents an additional characteristic: defencelessness, since the victim shows less power, whether on a physical, psychological or social level.

In effect, the person subject to harassment is usually a single student; this decreases individual's chances to defend himself or herself, or to achieve synergy with another victim. In bullying there is usually a collective or group component; there are many passive observers who, as silent witnesses, know the situation, but do not contribute sufficiently to the end of the attack. As a result, and a symptom of the perpetuation of the problem, the entire process is invisible to external (adult) agents who would be the ones who could act.

It is worth highlighting, within the different types of bullying and its manifestations, what experts have called *cyberbullying*, where the aggressor uses electronic means that transcend the school context. This conduct is defined as harassment between equals in the environment of information and communication technologies (ICT), and includes acts of blackmail, harassment and insults, with or without sexual content, towards a student. Being virtual, aggressors usually protect themselves with anonymity, and cases have been reported where an adult person was behind the screen. Sexual content recurrently sent to minors through digital media by paedophiles who hide their identity in order to gain their trust, is called *grooming*. This is a phenomenon with very different procedures and effects, not at all comparable to the psychological effects of bullying or cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying also involves dissemination of harmful or defamatory information about the victim in a technological format. Sometimes, these practices are combined with direct physical or verbal ones. School cyberbullying is a phenomenon of great relevance –and concern– due to its prevalence, the severity of its consequences and the difficulties it presents for its prevention and approach. Cyberbullying can consist of “sending emails to someone who does not want to receive more, threatening, sending malware, humiliating others, distributing tricked photos, creating defamatory websites or impersonating their identity”, as described by Luengo (2014).

Bearing in mind the general characteristics of bullying, the following nuances are added to cyberbullying: first, and most striking, is that the intention to cause harm does not always occur in the early stages of the process; second, that the repetition also occurs in virtual messages or actions, which are frequent and lasting over time; third, the fact that there is usually previous contact or relationship between those involved in the physical world; fourth, that it is not always linked to situations of harassment in the physical environment and, if they are, they usually precede virtual attacks; finally, and as a defining condition, the attacks materialize through ICT media: SMS, WhatsApp, email, mobile phones, social networks, blogs, forums, chat rooms, among other virtual realities.

According to the Information Society Area of the European Commission, this practice among adolescents, together with the *grooming* phenomenon, is “the greatest problem currently evident among the set of detestable or risky behaviors” (Luengo, 2014, p. 115). It is particularly interesting that, although bullying in general seems to be declining, cases of cyberbullying are increasing (UNESCO, 2018), which forces to rethink prevention strategies and reinforce media education.

For this reason, educational centres that design and apply prevention and action protocols are seeing an increase in cases of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as for those behaviours that alter coexistence in a serious and repeated way: insults, threats, assaults, fights, vandalism, child abuse and gender violence, whether these situations occur within the school or outside the school domain, provided they are motivated or directly related to school life.

These practices are consistent with research on bullying, as more and more studies are trying to discover the different influences of educators. Podestá (2019), for example, conceptualizes the roles of teachers in five metaphors: the spectator, the gardener, the judge, the bridge and the ally. Those descriptions help to show the limitations and strengths of each way of acting and, above all, the perverse effects that they can cause in the behaviours that are intended to be reduced. Along the same line of thought, Ruiz-Hernández et al. (2019) have also recently studied parental styles and their relationship with violent manifestations in adolescents. These researchers found that what is not advisable is the authoritarian style, coercive practices, physical punishment or the imposing character. In addition, they showed that the dimensions of affection, communication and promotion of autonomy guarantee positive behaviours, as De Vicente Abad (2017) had already partially showed.

Thus, the triangulation of the solution must involve families and teachers, this particularly in the context of regulated education where other more cautious solutions may be recommended. Indeed, all expert approaches insist on the relevance of the school in the prevention and detection of violence and discrimination, for example, through “serious and effective programs framed in a preventive pedagogy” (Aroca, Ros & Varela, 2016, p. 27). For this reason, nowadays, educational centres are supporting the explicit promotion of the so-called “culture of peace” (*cultura de la paz*) (Sánchez Fernández, 2017) or the “good treatment” (*buen trato*) (Pastor Fasquelle & Cruz Velasco, 2017; Sanz Ramón, 2017). Among these initiatives, we can mention the TEI program “Tutoría Entre Iguales” (peer tutoring). It is a coexistence program for the prevention of bullying and violence (physical, emotional or psychological). This is an institutional plan that involves the entire educational community, and whose objective is to work for an inclusive and non-violent school, promoting and improving the centre or school culture regarding coexistence without conflict (González Bellido, 2015).

The promotion of “good treatment” in classrooms must consider that the main reasons for bullying among children and adolescents fall into two areas. On the one hand, that of the physical appearance: being overweight focuses on the distance from beauty standards, lack of hygiene or general neglect, especially if they are accompanied by a weak or easily dominated character; these attitudes merit vigilance. On the other hand, and as long as leadership skills do not converge, bullying is directed to people who question the sex-gender system with their clothing, hairstyle or gestures (De Stéfano, Puche, & Pichardo, 2015). The prevention of violent behaviour must, therefore, see them as inescapable strategic points in teacher training (De Botton, Puigdemívol, & De Vicente, 2012; Santos, Bas, & Irazo, 2012).

The democratic decision-making, the pre-eminence of peaceful forms in conflict resolution, and facing social tensions using dialogue and negotiation are essential measures for the prevention of school violence. It is necessary to educate in respect and harmonious coexistence, which is aimed at avoiding the generation of personalities who foster a profile of aggressors and victims. Furthermore, in the specific case of sexual abuse and discrimination based on sex, in order to build a future society free of machismo, it is necessary to believe in co-education (López-García-Torres & Saneleuterio, 2016).

The pandemic situation is no reason to postpone the preventive and proactive response that schools should give to bullying. The AVE© Program for the Prevention of School Harassment and Violence (Oñate & Piñuel, 2005), which pays attention to physical and psychological violence in the school environment, places the emphasis on proactive and preventive psychological evaluation to early identify the behaviors of abuse that may be having their start in the classroom. In other words, it is about “measuring early to prevent harassment from occurring from its first manifestations” (Oñate & Piñuel, 2005). This program was designed and created to help schools to contain or eradicate bullying dynamics, proactively and early, before they become fatal. For this, the AVE© Program involves the entire educational community (parents, students, playground and dining room staff, buses...) in a dynamic and participatory way, offering the schools some psychological tools and early responses to the behaviors that generate cases of violence or bullying, and favoring a culture of zero tolerance. On the other hand, the prestigious Finnish KiVa program is also applied in Spain, as demonstrated by the recent doctoral thesis by Martínez Jiménez (2021). See also Martínez Jiménez and Alcantud Díaz (2018).

### Conclusion

Within the SDGs related to equality and quality education, in the context of the Global Citizenship Education goals, schools have a duty regarding the children who go to school and suffer fear and the psychological damage caused by recurrent harassment behaviors. There are many programs and interventions that fail to achieve an effective reduction in the rates of bullying in schools. The right approach here seems to deal with school abuse and psychological harassment before it happened, as the AVE© and TEI programs do. This means, for those responsible of education, to be attentive to its first manifestations and to stop it at its roots.

Teaching must be oriented to show behaviours that promote lack of solidarity and exclusion among students, emphasizing that these are detestable actions. Instructors must highlight through real examples the consequences that these dynamics entail for aggressors, victims and spectators of violence. In general, it must become clear that aggression is never an effective action to manoeuvre any situation or achieve goals.

To favour the suppression of this trend in schools, it is important to promote a critical and reflective attitude towards the violence that surrounds students,

teaching them to reject it in any of its manifestations. The intervention that is programmed to prevent or address the problems of violence between equals in the educational centres should not be directed exclusively to the victims, but also to the aggressors and the spectators; since it has negative consequences for everyone involved.

All institutions, but especially schools, must implement an educational policy of zero tolerance towards any type of violence. To guarantee this, the educational project of the centre has the obligation to include the values, objectives and priorities for action into the curriculum. Effective actions promote involvement by engaging the educational community in the elaboration, control of compliance, and evaluation of the rules of coexistence of the centre, being equally important the participation of both teachers and students in the specific rules for each classroom.

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