

The prevalence of bullying in two educational centers in Melilla (Spain)

Epelde-Larrañaga, Amaya; Oñederra-Ramírez, José Antonio; Chacón-Cuberos, Ramón

 Amaya Epelde-Larrañaga

aepelde@ugr.es

Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación y del Deporte de Melilla, Universidad de Granada, España

 José Antonio Oñederra-Ramírez

joxeano@hotmail.com

Instituto de Educación Secundaria Bideberri de Donostia-San Sebastián, España

 Ramón Chacón-Cuberos

rchacon@ugr.es

Facultad de Ciencias de la Educación, Universidad de Granada, España

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Abstract: The abuse of power is a scourge that harms today's society and is revealed through aggressive actions between perpetrators and victims, causing direct consequences for their lives. The aim of this study is to describe the levels of bullying in two educational centers in Melilla (Spain). A descriptive study was carried out using a sample of 227 adolescents. The Garaigordóbil "cyberbullying" test was used as the main instrument. The data reveal that verbal aggression is the most commonly used mode; boys use mostly physical aggression while girls use social aggression. Physical aggression is more frequent in primary education, while social aggression is more frequent in secondary education.

Keywords: bullying, adolescence, prevalence, education.

Resumen: El abuso de poder es una lacra que devora la sociedad actual y que se revela a través de actuaciones agresivas entre perpetradores y víctimas, provocando consecuencias nefastas para su vida. El objetivo de este estudio consiste en describir los niveles de bullying de dos centros educativos de Melilla (España). Se ha realizado un estudio de tipo descriptivo con una muestra de 227 adolescentes. Se ha empleado como principal instrumento el test "Cyberbullying" de Garaigordóbil. Los datos revelan que la agresión verbal es la modalidad más utilizada; los varones utilizan sobre todo la modalidad de agresión física mientras que las chicas, la agresión social. La agresión física es más frecuente en Educación Primaria, mientras que la agresión social lo es en Educación Secundaria.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a social phenomenon that has been occurring for many years in every country around the world and is characterized by an abuse of power by an individual or group against another person or persons with the purpose of inflicting harm. It results in aggressive actions that are repeated over time and can be physical, verbal, relational or social and psychological. The most frequent behaviors are mockery, threats, intimidation, physical aggression, insults (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017; Carrascosa, Buelga, Cava and Ortega, 2016; Lucas, Pulido and Solbes, 2011; Garaigordóbil and Oñederra, 2010; Loredó, Perea and López, 2008; Trautmann, 2008; Benitez and Justicia, 2006).

It is usually very difficult for the victim to deal with this problem, which has irreversible negative consequences in the short and long term. The immediate effects are depression, lack of self-esteem and

self-confidence (Mizuta, Okada, Nakamura, Yamaguchi and Ojima, 2018; Stewart, Valeri, Esposito and Auerbach, 2018; Polo del Río, León del Barco, Fajardo Bullón, Felipe Castaño and Palacios García, 2014), and in the long term victims may even develop suicidal ideas and substance abuse (Canbaz and Terzi, 2018; Khuzwayo, Taylor and Connolly, 2018; Mizuta et al. 2018; Cardoso, Szlyk, Goldbach, Swank and Zvolensky, 2018; Stewart et al. 2018; Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017). To a slight degree, it changes the natural personality with which a person is born and therefore influences his or her behavior (Gerenni and Fridman, 2015). The greatest emotional loneliness and depressed mood of adolescents is in those who play the roles of both passive and aggressive victims in situations of school violence (Carrascosa et al. 2016). A frequent consequence is that these victims become aggressors (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017; Loredó et al. 2008) and in the case of the aggressors, if not resolved in time, they may end up being habitual offenders. Bullying is therefore considered to be a direct route to crime (Randa and Hayes, 2018).

Several studies have argued that good relationships between students and teachers, as well as the intermediary role of teachers in cases of harassment, have led to a decrease in peer violence (Lucas-Molina, Williamson, Pulido and Pérez-Albéniz, 2015; Casas, Ortega-Ruiz and Del Rey, 2015). However, we live a very different reality; when an aggressive act occurs at an educational center, the student victims want to receive a satisfactory response from their teachers. They expect to be understood and defended. However, teachers are generally not prepared to deal with such problems and their reaction is usually not adequate (Boulton, Boulton, Down, Sanders and Craddock, 2017; Bjereld, 2018). In addition, it may be that the desire of teachers to demonstrate how exemplary their students are, favors the adoption of a minimalist attitude to taking action. They often hide problems, to the point of ignoring them, which turns out to be to the detriment of the victim who feels alone, unprotected and powerless in the face of his or her aggressor. The consequence of this unprotected situation is the secrecy of the victim, who suffers in silence and continuously disguises it from teachers and parents; this fact is corroborated by Nocito Muñoz (2017) who shows that the older the students, the more the problems of bullying are hidden from adults. Exposing the bullying does not guarantee any solution either; externalizing the aggression can lead to even greater problems, as victims lose their autonomy, feel weaker and even become afraid of possible reprisals by aggressors (Boulton et al. 2017).

Despite the programs and measures implemented in Spanish educational centers, the data obtained in recent studies reveal that the incidence of bullying has not decreased but has remained constant over time. The report *Yo a eso no juego* (2016) published by the Save the Children association states that 9.3% of Spanish children have suffered harassment. The results conclude that 10.6% of girls and 8% of boys are victims. The report reveals that this violence is produced “through direct or indirect insults, rumors, theft of belongings, threats or blows” (Nocito Muñoz, 2017, p.107).

Of great concern are the results revealed by several studies that claim that students with specific educational support needs are more vulnerable and tend to suffer more from bullying, especially of a social nature (Sánchez and Cerezo, 2010; Monjas, Martín-Antón, García Bacety y Sanchiz, 2014).

This study has the following main objectives:

- To analyze the levels of bullying, according to gender, course and typology of each center in a sample composed of adolescents from sixth grade of primary education and first year of mandatory secondary education in Melilla.

- To describe the roles of the different people involved, in a sample composed of adolescents from sixth grade of primary education and first compulsory year of secondary education (CSE) in Melilla.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Experimental design and participants

Non-experimental, ex-post facto, descriptive and transversal study was conducted on a single group. The sample was made up of 227 adolescents, 45.4% of whom were boys ($n = 103$) and 54.6% girls ($n = 124$). The age range was between 11 and 15 years (12.06 ± 0.77). For the 2017/2018 school year, a total of 2,536 students were enrolled in Melilla, with 1,165 students in the sixth year of primary education and 1,371 students in the CSE (1,371 students). The representative sample consisted of 227 schoolchildren (sampling error of 0.05; CI = 90%). The educational centers IES Enrique Nieto (a public secondary school) and La Salle (a semi-public school (1) participated in the study, with 46.3% ($n = 105$) and 53.7% ($n = 122$) of students, respectively. Following the criteria of Merino-Marban, Mayorga-Vega, Fernández-Rodríguez, Estrada and Vicianá (2015), the selection of participants, who took part voluntarily, was made taking into account randomization by natural groups.

Instruments

The cyberbullying test

The cyberbullying test, validated by Garaigordóbil (2013) in its Spanish version: this instrument offers excellent reliability indices in its original version, specifying good stability through the Pearson's correlation index, with an R value above 0.65, and a high internal consistency determined through alpha-Cronbach's coefficient, with a value above 0.80. In this respect, it also shows adequate validity, considering content validity given by experts, as well as construct validity, established through exploratory factor analysis of the original scale with good adjustment indexes. Addressing its structure, this scale has 12 items linked to the assessment of bullying and 45 items associated with cyberbullying. All of these items are distributed according to roles (victim, aggressor or witness). For bullying, which represents the variable analyzed in this research, this instrument measures its incidence in its different manifestations, considering physical, verbal, social and psychological aggressions in the three mentioned roles. It should be noted that the 12 items are valued through a Likert-type scale of four answer options, where 0 = Never and 3 = Always. From these items the total scores for each role and manifestation can be calculated. Finally, it should be noted that this instrument has an acceptable internal consistency and reliability in the sample of this study, with a value of $\alpha = 0.802$ for items related to bullying.

A self-registration sheet

An Ad Hoc type of questionnaire was used to record sociodemographic variables, such as gender, age, educational center or course.

Procedure

Firstly, a meeting was held between the Department of Didactics of Musical, Plastic and Body Expression of the University of Granada (Spain) and the management team of the educational centers involved; in this meeting, issues relating to the nature and objectives of the research were discussed. Afterwards, the

Department of Didactics of Musical, Plastic and Body Expression of the University of Granada prepared a letter of informed consent to be signed by the legal guardians of the adolescents.

Once the informed consent forms were collected, the instrument was applied. This task was carried out with the researchers present at all times, during school hours, without any type of incident occurring.

Anonymity was assured for all students, who participated voluntarily and in accordance with the 1975 Helsinki agreement on research ethics.

Data analysis

The statistical analysis was performed using the IBM SPSS® 22.0 software. The basic descriptive variables were analyzed by means of frequencies and means, while contingency tables were used for the relations between variables. The internal reliability of the instruments used was evaluated by means of alpha-Cronbach's coefficient, setting the reliability index at 95.5%. The reliability was established at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Firstly the general data of victims, aggressors and witnesses are presented and then the relationship of each one of them to gender, educational level and type of educational center.

Bullying total data

As a general rule, it is worth noting that the students surveyed show themselves more as witnesses than as victims and aggressors; very few declare themselves as aggressors.

Table 1 shows that as victims, verbal aggression is by far the most common form of aggression suffered (37% verbal aggression vs. 14.6% physical aggression, 13.7% social aggression and 14.1% psychological aggression). As regards aggressors, the use of verbal aggression is also detected as the most common method to harass their peers (20.2% verbal aggression vs 6.2% physical aggression, 4% social aggression and 3.5% psychological aggression). Both social and psychological aggression present much lower values than the other two types. In respect of witnesses, the data on aggression are alarming for all modalities, but once again it is verbal aggression that is most commonly seen by witnesses (59.4% verbal aggression vs 39.6% physical aggression, 35.2% social aggression and 26.4% psychological aggression).

TABLE 1

Bullying total data (% and n) according to the type of role (victim, aggressor or witness), type of aggression (physical, verbal, social or psychological) and frequency of aggression.

Role/type of aggression	Never	Sometimes	Quite often	Always
Vic/physical	85.5% (n=194)	11.9% (n=27)	1.8% (n=4)	0.9% (n=2)
Vic/verbal	63.0% (n=143)	25.1% (n=57)	10.1% (n=23)	1.8% (n=4)
Vic/social	86.3% (n=196)	9.3% (n=21)	3.5% (n=8)	0.9% (n=2)
Vic/psychological	85.9% (n=195)	8.8% (n=20)	3.5% (n=8)	1.8% (n=4)
Aggr/physical	93.8% (n=213)	5.3% (n=12)	0.9% (n=2)	0% (n=0)
Aggr/verbal	79.7% (n=181)	17.6% (n=40)	2.6% (n=6)	0% (n=0)
Aggr/social	96.0% (n=218)	3.1% (n=7)	0.9% (n=2)	0% (n=0)
Aggr/psychological	96.5% (n=219)	3.1% (n=7)	0.4% (n=1)	0% (n=0)
Wit/physical	60.4% (n=137)	25.1% (n=57)	11.9% (n=27)	2.6% (n=6)
Wit/verbal	40.5% (n=92)	31.7% (n=72)	22.9% (n=52)	4.8% (n=11)
Wit/social	64.8% (n=147)	25.1% (n=57)	7.5% (n=17)	2.6% (n=6)
Wit/psychological	73.6% (n=167)	17.6% (n=40)	6.2% (n=14)	2.6% (n=6)

Note: Vic – victim; Aggr – aggressor; Wit – witness

This means that aggression between peers is abundant and quite widespread among children of this age. Verbal aggression is the most common modality used by students, both in victims, aggressors and witnesses, although we cannot ignore the others, since the incidences are also very high.

Bullying and gender

In the cross between bullying and gender, no significant differences were found in any of the questions. However, when asked as victims whether they had been assaulted or molested using social aggression, there was a small tendency for girls to suffer more social aggression (16.9%) than men (9.8%) (Table 2).

TABLE 2

Relationship between bullying and gender in victims, according to the type of aggression (physical, verbal, social or psychological) and frequency of the aggression.

Type of aggression	Gender	Never	Sometimes	Quite often	Always	P value
Physical	Boys	82.5% (n=85)	14.6% (n=15)	1.9% (n=2)	1.0% (n=1)	0.712
	Girls	87.9% (n=109)	9.7% (n=12)	1.6% (n=2)	0.8% (n=1)	
Verbal	Boys	66.0% (n=68)	21.4% (n=22)	11.7% (n=12)	1.0% (n=1)	0.488
	Girls	60.5% (n=75)	28.2% (n=35)	8.9% (n=11)	2.4% (n=3)	
Social	Boys	90.3% (n=93)	4.9% (n=5)	4.9% (n=5)	0% (n=0)	0.076
	Girls	83.1% (n=103)	12.9% (n=16)	2.4% (n=3)	1.6% (n=2)	
Psychological	Boys	84.5% (n=87)	9.7% (n=10)	4.9% (n=5)	1.0% (n=1)	0.607
	Girls	87.1% (n=108)	8.1% (n=10)	2.4% (n=3)	2.4% (n=3)	

Bullying and the educational center

In the crossover between bullying and the type of educational center (public or semi-public), no significant differences were found for any of the questions asked. However, in the question to witnesses about whether they saw a colleague being physically assaulted or disturbed, a clear tendency was detected that these physical aggressions were observed more often in the semi-public La Salle educational center (46%) than in the Enrique Nieto educational center (32.3%) (Table 3).

TABLE 3

Relationship between bullying and the educational center of witnesses, according to the type of aggression (physical, verbal, social or psychological), and frequency of aggression.

Type of aggression	Educational center	Never	Sometimes	Quite often	Always	P value
Physical	E. Nieto	67.6% (n=71)	17.1% (n=18)	13.3% (n=14)	1.9% (n=2)	0.060
	La Salle	54.1% (n=66)	32.0% (n=39)	10.7% (n=13)	3.3% (n=4)	
Verbal	E. Nieto	39.0% (n=41)	31.4% (n=33)	22.9% (n=24)	6.7% (n=7)	0.694
	La Salle	41.8% (n=51)	32.0% (n=39)	23.0% (n=28)	3.3% (n=4)	
Social	E. Nieto	65.7% (n=69)	21.0% (n=22)	11.4% (n=12)	1.9% (n=2)	0.120
	La Salle	63.9% (n=78)	28.7% (n=35)	4.1% (n=5)	3.3% (n=4)	
Psychological	E. Nieto	74.3% (n=78)	15.2% (n=16)	7.6% (n=8)	2.9% (n=3)	0.719
	La Salle	73.0% (n=89)	19.7% (n=24)	4.9% (n=6)	2.5% (n=3)	

Bullying and educational level

As seen from the results shown in Table 4, a significant difference was obtained in the victimization of students in relation to physical aggression. In the sixth year of primary education there were more victims of physical aggression (21.6%) than in the CSE (12%). The “always” frequency range is remarkable, since no student in the CSE was physically assaulted, while in the sixth year of primary education there were 3.3% of students who had suffered this type of aggression. Likewise, in the “quite often” range, the percentage obtained in the sixth year of primary education (3.3%) is higher than in the CSE (1.2%). The same happens in the “sometimes” range, where 15% of students in the sixth year of primary education were victims of physical aggression, compared to 10.8% in the CSE.

However, when witnesses were asked about social aggression, the results indicate that in the CSE they saw more acts of aggression of this type than in the sixth year of primary education, since in the CSE 10.2% of the students saw “quite often”, while in the sixth year of primary education nobody witnessed it (0%). Given this, although in the other modalities there is hardly any difference between the two educational levels, there is a slight tendency for students in the CSE to see more social aggression than in the sixth year of primary education (37.2% in the CSE and 30.0% in the sixth year of primary education).

TABLE 4

Relationship between bullying and the educational level of victims and witnesses, according to the type of aggression (physical, verbal, social or psychological), and frequency of aggression.

Type of aggression	Educational level	Never	Sometimes	Quite often	Always	P value
Vic/physical	CSE	88.0% (n=147)	10.8% (n=18)	1.2% (n=2)	0% (n=0)	0.049*
	Primary education	78.3% (n=47)	15.0% (n=9)	3.3% (n=2)	3.3% (n=2)	
Vic/verbal	CSE	61.7% (n=103)	25.7% (n=43)	10.8% (n=18)	1.8% (n=3)	0.910
	Primary education	66.7% (n=40)	23.3% (n=14)	8.3% (n=5)	1.7% (n=1)	
Vic/social	CSE	83.2% (n=139)	11.4% (n=19)	4.2% (n=7)	1.2% (n=2)	0.150
	Primary education	95.0% (n=57)	3.3% (n=2)	1.7% (n=1)	0% (n=0)	
Vic/psychological	CSE	85.0% (n=142)	9.0% (n=15)	4.2% (n=7)	1.8% (n=3)	0.830
	Primary education	88.3% (n=53)	8.3% (n=5)	1.7% (n=1)	1.7% (n=1)	
Wit/physical	CSE	62.3% (n=104)	23.4% (n=39)	12.6% (n=21)	1.8% (n=3)	0.373
	Primary education	55.0% (n=33)	30% (n=18)	10.0% (n=6)	5.0% (n=3)	
Wit/verbal	CSE	40.1% (n=67)	28.1% (n=47)	26.3% (n=44)	5.4% (n=9)	0.101
	Primary education	41.7% (n=25)	41.7% (n=25)	13.3% (n=8)	3.3% (n=2)	
Wit/social	CSE	62.9% (n=105)	24.6% (n=41)	10.2% (n=17)	2.4% (n=4)	0.083
	Primary education	70.0% (n=42)	26.7% (n=16)	0% (n=0)	3.3% (n=2)	
Wit/psychological	CSE	74.3% (n=124)	16.8% (n=28)	6.0% (n=10)	3.0% (n=5)	0.890
	Primary education	71.7% (n=43)	20.0% (n=12)	6.7% (n=4)	1.7% (n=1)	

Note: Vic – victim; Wit – witness

DISCUSSION

Our data reveal that more than half of the adolescents have witnessed some type of aggression and that the type of aggression they are suffering from the most, as victims, aggressors and witnesses, is verbal aggression. These results have been found previously in various investigations such as those of Cerezo (2009), Sáenz and Vergara (2016) and Triviño, Iriarte and González (2017) who showed that verbal aggression was the most common for these ages.

There is a clear tendency for social aggression to be carried out more frequently against females. In this regard, Benítez and Justicia (2006), Cerezo (2009), Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) and Triviño et al. (2017), state that girls generally tend to be victims of aggression of all kinds, while Cerezo (2009, p. 384) turns

this statement around by asserting that “social exclusion is the indirect form most used by girls”. Girls then become aggressor victims, because by being victims of this form of aggression, they also use it to attack. Social aggression is a more subtle, invisible and indirect form of aggression than others, and for this reason women use it more easily than men. Benítez and Justicia (2006), Cerezo (2009), Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) highlight that boys are much more involved in bullying as aggressors, particularly in the form of physical harassment. Likewise, Sáenz and Vergara (2016), although they state that bullying is very generalized, show that boys attack mainly using the visible forms of intimidation. They agree with Benítez and Justicia (2006), Cerezo (2009), Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) and with Cano and Vargas (2018) who find that men exercise more physical, and more direct aggression, while women are more subtle in their way of attacking, with less visible damage. This corroborates our data on social aggression, which was found to be the form suffered most by female victims and the most used by female aggressors, since it is a less striking form of aggression on first sight.

Mizuta et al. (2018) have also revealed data that confirm that males perform aggressive acts more frequently than females, and that girls are more often victims than boys.

Cerezo (2009, p. 392) states that “the most common forms of abuse are insults and threats, followed by physical violence in primary school and social exclusion in secondary school”. Our data coincide with those of the aforementioned research, since we found a clear tendency for primary education students to witness physical aggression in greater numbers than secondary education students. Likewise, Polo del Río, León del Barco, Felipe, Gómez and López Ramos (2011) affirm that situations of harassment occur more frequently in semi-public schools than in public schools, as also corroborated by our study. Furthermore, these results are complemented by those obtained relating to victimization because it was observed that there were more victims of physical assault in the sixth year of primary education than in the CSE. On this point, our findings agree with the study carried out by Cano and Vargas (2018) who observed the same differences between the stated educational levels.

However, with regard to social aggression, our data show that the trend is for the percentage of witnesses to be higher in the CSE. These data confirm what Bjereld (2018) found, when he said that identities are created from social interaction. When a student shows himself to others individually, these other peers act on the perception received. In the CSE, when changing the educational level, and in many cases the school, there are new classmates to whom a student presents his identity, and at this time the quality of the interaction with new classmates will depend on the perception received by them. Likewise, De la Poza, Jódar and Ramírez (2018) stated that the imitation of behavior among adolescents is something deeply rooted in the need to be liked by others, thus bullying is normally carried out by social groups, with aggressors as the leaders, defended and supported by their social group.

Thus, social aggression occurs more frequently in educational centers where the student goes for the first time and with new classmates. For this reason, it can be deduced that social aggression is greater in the CSE than in the sixth year of primary education, and that the opposite occurs with physical aggression.

Certain limitations of this research should be highlighted. On the one hand, the design of the study is of a descriptive type and transversal, which does not allow for the establishing of relationships of cause and effect, in spite of identifying the extent of a problem. In addition, the size of the sample is limited to two educational levels from two educational centers; extending it to more levels and centers would allow the findings to be more representative. These provide possibilities for future research.

CONCLUSION

The main conclusions of this study are:

- Verbal aggression is the most frequent form of bullying.
- Males attack more frequently than females and they do so mainly using the form of physical aggression.

- Females suffer bullying as victims more often than males.
- Females are mainly victims of social aggression.
- Female aggressors use subtle forms of attack, unlike males.
- Physical harassment is more frequent in primary education than in secondary education.
- Social aggression is more frequent in secondary education than in primary education.
- There is a tendency for cases of bullying to be more frequent in semi-public schools than in public ones.

Our data show that there is a lot of aggression among students in schools. They mainly declare themselves as witnesses of these acts of aggression. The numbers of witnesses have no relation to the numbers of victims and aggressors. If they are witnessing bullying, it means that there are many victims and aggressors who are hiding. Hiding these facts may be due to a lack of trust in adults. Once the adult is aware of the presence of bullying, his reaction is often inadequate for the victim, which makes the victim decide to bear his suffering in solitude and above all in absolute concealment of the reality. Society advises victims of bullying to express, exteriorize and make their problem known, but there is no guarantee that this will solve or improve the situation.

Therefore, it is essential to find the causes of these actions in students and identify the necessary elements to solve or diminish the problem. The causes may be multiple and be related firstly to the family environment and secondly to the social environment in which these students find themselves. The values that are transmitted, and the way they are transmitted in both areas, are very important in the development of attitudes that avoid these behaviors. It is necessary therefore to work on emotional intelligence and to develop the education on values in schools because, as Menesini and Salmivalli (2017) state, aggressors show lower levels of social and emotional competencies, and the development of these competencies improves students' behavior. This education, together with parental affection, the involvement of parents in their children's lives, the confidence of children in their parents and teachers, and dialogue and communication between parents and children are very important factors that must be nurtured in schools to avoid the harmful effects of bullying. All these elements must be taken into account in future research to reduce and solve this problem in schools.

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NOTES

- [1] In a public school, both the administration and the financing are attributed to the state, while in these schools the administration is private but the financing is mostly subsidized by the state, along with occasional contributions from parents.