

## Bullying as Seen by Its Student Victims, Perpetrators and Witnesses — A Case Study Conducted in A School Near the Brazilian Capital

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**Abstract:** This study set out to verify the occurrence of bullying in a school given the serious effects it has not only on victims but also on the onlookers and the aggressors themselves; all of them victims according to Ortega and Del Rey (2002). It also sought to identify what actions the school unfolds to address bullying. Notwithstanding the number of studies of the phenomenon made to date it continues to be a major source of concern for parents and schools given its frequent occurrence among children and pre-adolescents. In that light the authors conducted a quanti-qualitative research survey, based on a questionnaire, to register students' perceptions of bullying. The Questionnaire was elaborated on the basis of the respective literature and composed of closed and open-ended questions making it possible to analyze the profiles of the student protagonists (victims, authors and witnesses) of bullying and to gather information for an analysis designed to provide greater understanding of the phenomenon as it occurs in schools. The results show that bullying is regarded as almost natural in the school environment and the article concludes that the school team needs to invest more effort in prevention activities and closely accompany any cases of it that appear.

**Key words:** school violence, bullying, authorship, victimization, witness

### 1. Introduction

According to Article 5 of the Children and Adolescents Rights Act nº 8.069/90 (cf. Brasil, 2008) no child or adolescent shall be subject to any form of neglect, discrimination, exploitation, violence, cruelty or oppression and any attempt by action or omission against their fundamental rights shall be punishable by sanctions foreseen in law. The same Act (cf. Brasil, 2008), in Article 17 declares that the right to respect consists of the inviolability of the physical, psychological and moral integrity of the child and of the adolescent, preserving their personal image, identity, autonomy, values, integrity, ideas and beliefs, spaces and objects. What we find in practice, however, is that like so many other Laws this one has not effectively come into force, even in spaces dedicated to education like schools, for we constantly hear reports of indiscriminate violence unfolding in the school environment and it is not restricted to any particular social class, gender, age group or belief. Television and other news media regularly report the common use of abusive language, cursing, physical and verbal aggression, students threatening students, students threatening teachers and depredation of school property, all jeopardizing the very identity of the educational space as such. Such aggressive events, according to Chalita (2008), are typical of the

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phenomenon of bullying; a term widely used in the literature but, nevertheless, little known to the Brazilian public at large and sometimes, even inside schools. Chalita reports that the direct form of bullying is commonest among boy aggressors, consisting of slaps, punches, cursing and verbal abuse. Indirect bullying is commoner among girls and younger boys tending to induce the individuals to isolate themselves and consisting mainly of gossip, intrigue and spreading rumors about the victims and their families. That means it is essential that school and family should join forces to address the evil that is bullying, now widespread in Brazil and on the increase. Above all, parents and educators need to be on the lookout for it with a sensitive, patient, affectionate eye and keep themselves open and receptive to the fears and anguish of those that are the target of bullying so that they can help them, but also so that they can help the perpetrators. The bully is also a victim and very often an individual who has suffered aggression in the home, or the street and for that reason has become an aggressor of others as a way of discounting or compensating for what he or she has suffered.

We do not intend to indulge in a long discussion of the definition violence but will adopt the definition of school violence proposed by Lopes Neto (2005), who considers it to embrace all aggressive and antisocial forms of behavior including inter-personal conflicts, damage to property, criminal acts, etc. Among the various types we would highlight the one that has most attracted the attention of educators, teachers, psychologists and parents, and that is bullying as it is practiced in the school environment. Although it cannot be considered a new phenomenon, in recent years it has become the focus of a lot of media attention and investigation in the wake of outstandingly violent acts carried out by children and young people (Almeida, 2003). That has meant that violence has become confused with other terms like ill-use, mistreatment or taken to be the same as bullying or aggression. The focus here, however, is on the physical and verbal aggression that has affected most of our students at some time or other. Many of the situations that arise are due to external factors such as the prevalence of violence in society at large and the de-structuring of families, so that intervention in them is beyond the possibilities of the teaching institution or its staff. However, for a great number of the situations a possible solution can be found in the school environment itself. Thus we will take bullying to be a form of violence that embraces all those repeated and intentional aggressive attitudes that are adopted by one or more students against another or others, for no apparent reason, in situations of unequal power relations and which give rise to anxiety and pain in the target. It is a type of inter-personal affirmation of power effectuated by means of aggression that has negative consequences on the students' cognitive and psychic development processes (Lopes Neto, 2005).

Concerned at the occurrence of violence inside schools, the authors have dedicated their efforts to collecting information on bullying from students in the primary education years 1 to 5 of Brazilian fundamental (mandatory) education in a school in the region surrounding Brasilia. Information has been gleaned from student aggressors, victims and onlookers alike. A brief discussion of the phenomenon is presented, followed by a formal presentation of the results and ending with remarks that may contribute towards aiding teachers, parents and school administrators to improve school actions designed to address and overcome the problem of bullying as one of the forms of violence that erupts inside schools.

What the authors consider the greatest causes for concern are that, apart from the family, the school is the first locus for the child's socialization and that the violence has highly deleterious psychic effects on the students (cf. Minayo, 2003) and on the work undertaken in schools, insofar as the presence of such violence makes the school an insecure place where all are fearful of becoming victims. In that light the institution cannot allow itself to be complacent or connive with the problem in any way.

## **2. Bullying — Just One of the Forms of Violence in Schools**

Today violence in schools is on the increase and, irrespective of social class, foul and abusive language, cursing, physical and verbal aggression, damaging school property, threats exchanged among students, or directed at teachers by students and vice versa are liable to appear in any of them. However, the main form of violence currently afflicting the environment in our schools is bullying.

According to Silva (2010), the origin of the term “bullying” is English and there is no satisfactory translation for it in Portuguese so the English tem is used in Brazil to refer to aggressive behavior on the part of boys or girls in the school environment. The violent acts it involves (whether physical or verbal) are always intentional and repetitive and directed at one or various students that are incapable of facing up to the aggressions they receive. Such behavior is usually devoid of any specific motivation or justification which means that the stronger take advantage of the weaker for their own amusement, pleasure or exercise of power, with the intention of mistreating, intimidating, humiliating and making their victims afraid of them.

It can be said that bullying is both universal and democratic for it occurs all over the world wherever there are human relations and school life is part of young people’s upbringing. Again according to Chalita (2008) and Fante (2005), bullying consists of frequent, intentional aggressive physical and psychological attitudes with no apparent motivation that occur among peers in unequal power relations. While it is recognized as occurring more frequently among children and adolescents in school environments, it can also occur among adults. Bullying is an expression of “inequality among equals”, states Fante (2005) and leads to a process whereby the stronger manifest their aggressiveness with touches of cruelty and in such a way that it can go undetected in the school where it occurs.

According to Fante (2005), in Brazil, the common use of the term bullying to define violence among peers began in the 1990s. However, in the report of the research project “School Bullying in Brazil” coordinated by Fischer (2010), it was only with the advent of the new millennium that school bullying began to receive attention from the Brazilian and international media and become widely diffused in the digital media with innumerable sites dedicated to the issue appearing in the Internet. The same report (cf. Fischer, 2010) registers a high incidence of occurrence of the phenomenon in Brazil’s Central-western macro-region with students figuring as both authors and victims of the bullying.

The phenomenon is not a recent one, according to Fante (2005), and in fact it is a form of violence that has almost always been present in schools, whereby the bullies who are the aggressors continue, up to today, to repress and frighten their victims for banal, pseudo-reasons and it continues to go unnoticed by most of the professional staff involved in education. Fante (2005) considers that the study of bullying is highly relevant insofar there is evidence of increasing numbers of cases of violence committed by students in schools today but that author agrees that the subject has begun to be more thoroughly investigated in recent years. The challenge that faces researchers is to discover what leads students to engage in bullying, exposing and undermining their weaker colleagues. Although it is present in most schools, it can occur in different ways and for different reasons. In most cases it is treated lightly as a banal occurrence by adults who consider it to be something to be expected among children and adolescents and accordingly they refrain from interfering or addressing the problem; something they consider to be the children’s and youngsters’ prerogative.

The commonest form of ill treatment among students is verbal aggression in the form of insulting name-calling and cursing and it can become a habit among students (cf. Fischer, 2010). When these milder occurrences are not addressed, they can evolve into more violent forms of aggression among students that are

incapable of solving their conflicts through dialogue, as Jares (2002) suggests. That underscores the importance of interventions on the part of teachers to mediate conflicts among students by establishing dialogue (Jares, 2002) and enabling them to learn how to live sociably with one another (Fernandez, 2005).

Thus Fernandez (2005) considers that when neither of the parties takes any interest, the individual ends up being deprived affection, love and personal empathy, living and growing up in unharmonious environment and that leads to the eventual outbreaks of violence that will affect at least two of the protagonists, the one that practices the violence and the one that suffers it. The person that unleashes the violence may have been the target of violence in his or her childhood and now attempts to discharge the pent up rage on other defenseless individuals who are far too afraid to defend themselves and face the violence, unless they receive support from someone nearby who pays attention to what is going on around them. It is all the worse when we consider that this violence that we are endeavoring to understand makes no sense either biologically or socially; it is unjustified and cruel or, as Rojas Marcos (1995) called it, malignant aggressiveness.

In turn, Silva (2010) points out that the consequences of bullying are extremely varied and depend very much on the individual's structure, living and sociability experiences, genetic predisposition, and on the form and intensity of the aggressions. However, it can be safely said that all victims of bullying suffer in one way or another and to a greater or lesser extent. Many of them will carry deep, inner scars left by the bullying into their adult lives and will need psychiatric and/or psychological support to overcome the problem. Among the common consequences of bullying are: loss of interest in school, psycho-somatic problems, behavioral and psychic problems like irrational panic, depression, anorexia and bulimia, school phobia, social phobia, generalized anxiety, and other conditions. Bullying may also exacerbate pre-existing problems because of the prolonged periods of stress the victim is subjected to. In more serious cases it may lead to schizophrenic disorders, murder or suicide. Various Brazilian studies have reported that the children and adolescents involved may be the victims of violence in their own household environments (cf. Meneghel, Giuglaini, Falceto, 1998; Maldonado & Williams, 2005; Sisto, 2005).

The findings of Maldonado and Williams (2005) identified an association between the authorship of bullying and cases of victimization in the family environment, that is, they concluded that the child's aggressive behavior in school could be seen as a "cry for help" on the child's part so that the presentation of violent behavior in school could be seen as indication that the child was living in a situation of risk, insofar as it was being exposed to severe violence. The same study warns of the need to develop prevention and intervention services in regard to children in such situations. That fact underscores the importance of a greater degree of interaction between families and school, considering that it is usual for one party to blame the other as the only one responsible for the situation's arising at all.

The fact is that, whether in the role of witness, author or victim, all have their performances jeopardized by the tensions arising from the manifestations of violence and their moral formation also suffers negative influences; aspects that will be further examined below.

### **3. The Role Players in School Bullying — Spectator, Victim and Aggressor**

Cunha and Weber (2010) indicate that whichever one of the three protagonist roles a person plays in bullying (spectator, victim or aggressor), their well being is affected because the occurrences affect the psychic health of the students involved. Thus it can be seen that these forms of violence have a cost for those involved and for

society at large. In that light, authors Ortega; Del Rey (2002) consider that all of those involved in any way, are victims of violence. Nevertheless we will now present the characteristics associated to each role situation.

### **3.1 The Student Witness or Spectator**

The witnesses, according to Lopes Neto (2005) are those students that take no direct part in the bullying acts and generally do not speak about them because they are afraid of becoming victims themselves, or because they take some pleasure in watching acts of aggression among their peers. The student witnesses of violence suffer negative effects insofar as it generates feelings of fear and insecurity in them and in another way because they may choose to deal with their own problems by reproducing the behavior they have witnessed. There have already been some studies investigating the role of those that are not directly involved in the acts. Some react by keeping quiet about it and others even “have fun” supporting the aggressors. The silence of the former can also be interpreted as a forceful imposition stemming from the original violence and it is a position that is just as harmful to the students that adopt it as the actions of the aggressor on the victim.

To Chalita (2008) the student spectators watch all the violence perpetrated by the aggressors and do nothing to help preferring to just look on; probably, they prefer to keep out of it because they are afraid.

### **3.2 The Student Victim**

According to Olweus (1998), a student can be considered to be a victim of bullying when he or she is constantly, and for long periods, targeted by negative actions carried out by another student or group of students. In the view of Pereira (2000) students are victims irrespective of whether their involvement in the incident of violence has been direct or indirect because in both cases the consequences are very serious and cause considerable harm to them. Generally speaking, the victims, according to Silva (2010) have some characteristic that is different from those of the group (they may be timid, or nerds, or very thin or have a different belief, skin color or sexual orientation). The studies of Olweus (1998) and Fischer (2010) have shown that boys are more frequently the victims of bullying than girls and in regard to age groups, Sebastião (2009), in studies carried out in Lisbon, found that most of the victims were in the age group 10 to 14.

Again according to Fischer (2010), the student victims are usually those with little voice and with timid or inhibited personalities. Physical characteristics may also be associated to their victimizations such as using spectacles, or being overweight or again the color of their skin.

Chalita (2008) states that the victims singled out are usually weak individuals that are insecure and too frightened to face up to their aggressors who subject them to humiliation, threats and intimidation.

In his analysis Calbo (2009) found that in 66.7% of cases the bullies were boys and on the victim side 80% were boys, as boys involve themselves more in situations involving violence than girls.

### **3.3 The Student Aggressor**

Chalita (2008) reports that the aggressors are individuals that like to show off, need an audience and think themselves tough. However, it should not be forgotten that they too may be the victims of fear they have experienced in past situations of suffering of their own, and that drives them to choose victims on whom to vent their pent up anger.

In the view of Olweus (1998) the aggressor is the one that victimizes the weaker individuals and usually evinces very little empathy with his peers or understanding of their problems. The aggressors generally feel a need to subjugate and dominate their colleagues by threatening them. They are usually impulsive and intolerant of frustration.

In the studies Sebastião (2009) conducted in Lisbon, it was found that the aggressors tended to be a little older (13 to 15 age group) than the victims and study in higher academic years. The same tendency to be older and study in higher classes is registered by Olweus (1998) and also the fact that most are males. There are however many cases of girl aggressors, even though the incidence may be lower than that of the male sex. The girl aggressors tend to be less visible as indiscipline is generally held to be more of a male trait (cf. Olweus, 1998; Lira, 2010).

Calbo (2009) also found that boys tended to be more involved in bullying as authors and victims than girls because they are more liable to get involved in violence as a whole.

Psychology, according to Fernandes (2005) has always tried to discover the real reasons for people's acting in such aggressive ways. She and other authors in the field of Psychoanalysis (cf. for example Amoretti, 1992) explain that aggressiveness is part of the person's make up and therefore can never be ignored in the school context. The person manifesting it should also be seen as a victim. Psychoanalysis helps us to gain an understanding of individuals' development processes and in doing so to grasp what is behind the violent behavior.

#### **4. Methodology**

This exploratory descriptive research sought to investigate bullying as it affects students and was conducted from September to October 2012. It took the form of a case study targeting two classes in year five of mandatory education in a school in the outlying areas of the Federal District and involved 40 students altogether. The case study method, according to Duarte (2002), allows for a deeper understanding of the research problem. The research used a quanti-qualitative approach. Data gathering was achieved using a questionnaire for students to complete and containing both closed and open-ended questions; 41 altogether. The questionnaire was organized in 3 blocks; the first designed to delineate the students' profile, the second to gather information on their family backgrounds and the third contained questions on bullying in the school environment from the perspectives of the victims, the perpetrators and the onlookers. The data were organized in Excel spreadsheets and compared to the open-ended questions. The authors also made three *in loco* observations of students' behavior. On those occasions they took the opportunity of talking to students about bullying and registered their observations in field notebooks. Subsequently all the data and information gathered were brought together for the purpose of analysis in the light of the research objective.

##### **4.1 The School Context**

The government run school offering primary and lower secondary education (Fundamental Education in the Brazilian classification) is situated on the outskirts of the Federal District and has been functioning for 07 years. Currently it offers morning classes and afternoon classes to 1,200 students residing in the area but the two classes that were studied were both morning classes. It is important to bear in mind that the current school administration had only taken office 2 months prior to the research period.

The two-floor school building is large with 21 classrooms, a covered sports court and a recreation area but it has no auditorium. It is pleasant and spacious in appearance and is kept clean. The students are usually seated in pairs but sometimes the teachers put them to sit in a circle depending on the needs of the class. There are notice boards on the walls with allusions to commemorative dates.

In addition to observing the organization of the classrooms and classes the researchers observed the students during break times as the literature identifies this period as the moment when violence among students chiefly

occurs. There are two break periods, the first 25-minutes long is restricted to the youngest students in the primary education years 1 to 3 and after that there is a 20-minute break for the students in primary education years 4 and 5. The decision to separate those age groups was made by the previous school administration when it perceived that violence was mainly practiced by older students against younger ones. Still on the subject of break time, it was possible to observe the presence of school staff accompanying the children's break periods and in that way minimizing the possibilities of occurrences of any violent practices directed at the children. Another important is that the police do not provide any services to this school which does not necessarily mean that it does not need them.

When asked about the projects it was unfolding the school cited the following: Readers Meetings, a Culture Fair, a Maths Circuit, a Spelling project and the Resisting Drugs and Violence Educational Project (PROERD is the Portuguese acronym) which is unfolded in schools by the Uniformed Police Force. Nevertheless we felt the lack of projects specifically directed at fostering a culture of peace and of others directed at preventing rather than addressing violence in school.

#### **4.2 The Sample**

The sample consisted of 40 students drawn from the final year of Primary Education (year 5 under the present system) all of them studying in the morning classes, of whom 55.0% were girls and 45% boys. Half of the sample group (50.0%) was 10 years old, 45% declared they were 11 years old and only 2 students (5.0%) were 12 years old. In regard to religious persuasions, 18.0% said they were Evangelists, 42.5% declared themselves to be Catholics and only one (2.5%) declared himself to be a Spiritualist. In regard to skin color, most are brown-skinned (57.5%) according to their registration cards in the school files. According to that registration, 20.0% are whites, 17.5 % are blacks, 2.5% are mulattos and 2.5% are Amerindians.

It was found that 75.0% of them have been in this school for four years and only 7.5% of the students have had to repeat a schooling year. Half of the students (50.0%) do not participate in any extra-school activity whatsoever.

As part of the effort to gain a better understanding of the bullying phenomenon, the question of internet access was also investigated. Most of the students (62.5%) in the sample group had Internet at home. A high percentage of them (32.5%) declared that they do not live with their parents or that they live with their mothers only (25.0%) and in that way revealed the existence of a new single-parent family model.

In regard to parent participation in the school life of their offspring, 32.5% of the students declared that their parents only turned up at a school if they were called upon to do so, and that is a reason for concern in regard to preventing and overcoming violence in schools. In the same sphere of the family, most students feel that their relations with their families are good. However, 10% declare that they do not have good relations with their families. 5% have at some time been the victims of some kind of domestic violence or have witnessed some kind of violence in their own homes (20.0%).

### **5. The Results — The Occurrence of Bullying**

A high percentage of the students considered their school to be violent (35.0%). However, 97.5% of the students declared that in spite of that they liked their school. To the open-ended questions they proffered answers such as: *"The school is violent, yes, but the teachers teach very well and they treat the students decently"* (10 year-old student). That is an aspect that undoubtedly favors overcoming violence in schools. A second response

reveals another danger however, “*The school is violent, yes, but I have already got used to it!*”; an 11-year old girl. More than half of those interviewed (57.5%) mentioned that they were glad to come to school and remarked on how much they liked their teachers and enjoyed playing with their schoolmates. In response to the question as to what was lacking to make the school a better place most of the answers were associated to the options: not enough toys, no science laboratory, no IT teacher, no swimming pool, no arts room, no video projection room, and, lastly, putting an end to bullying. It was perceptible in the midst of all those responses that the students were not making any exaggerated demands but also that their reality was not able to count on a minimal fraction of what other schools normally enjoy, beyond the classrooms.

Table 1 below gives a panoramic view of the occurrence of bullying in the school as envisaged by the victim, the author of the bullying and the onlookers.

**Table 1 The Occurrence of Violence in Your School**

Questions	Yes			No			No answer	Total
	Masc.	Fem.	Total	Masc.	Fem.	Total		
Does bullying take place in this school?	14	16	30 (75.0%)	6	3	9 (22.5%)	1	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been the victim of bullying in this school?	4	7	11 (27.5%)	16	13	29 (72.5%)	0	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been a bully in this school	4	3	7 (17.5%)	16	29	33 (82.5%)	0	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever witnessed acts of bullying in this school?	9	9	18 (45.0%)	11	10	21 (52.5%)	1	40 (100.0%)
	-	-	100.0%	-	-	100.0%	-	(100.0%)

Source: Elaborated by the authors

It can be seen from the results displayed in the table that the students are quite aware of the phenomenon of bullying and know what it is all about. In the opinion of 75.0% of the sample group, bullying effectively occurs in their school and 45.0% of them declared that they have actually witnessed bullying being practiced or have themselves been the victims of it. Among the students there are those that admit to having been the authors of such practices (17.5%). There is a notable degree of omission in regard to the admitting the practice of bullying insofar as 82.25% of the sample group declared that they themselves had never practiced bullying. The authors of this article intended to carry out preliminary work before administering the questionnaire, in the sense of defining the concept of bullying, but informal conversations with the students showed that they were all capable of defining the practice because work had been carried out in the school to address it. When asked directly what bullying was they replied that it was a situation in which one person wants to humiliate, discriminate, or insult another or give them embarrassing nicknames, or discriminate them racially, or practice physical or verbal aggression against them or offend them in some other way. They added that the person suffering the bullying feels bad, threatened and disrespected and may even lose their appetite because of it. When asked why they thought certain people practiced bullying, the following answers were obtained. “Because they have suffered themselves and they want to get revenge” (10 year-old girl), “Because they enjoy being bad” (10 year-old boy), “Because of anger or envy” (11 year-old girl), “Because they are racist” (10 year-old girl), and “because they are insecure and need to attract attention to themselves” (12 year-old girl).



### 5.1 The Victims of Bullying

Table 1 also shows that 27.5% of students declare they have been victims of bullying (17.5% of them being girls). The student victims reported that they had felt humiliated, afraid, ashamed, revolted, embarrassed and uneasy among other feelings. Table 2 shows the distribution of the types of bullying events among student victims.

**Table 2 Victims of Bullying**

<b>In this school</b>	<b>Every day</b>	<b>Many times</b>	<b>Some times</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Never</b>	<b>Overall total</b>
Have you ever been called by an offensive nickname by your fellow students?	5	1	15	21 (52.5%)	19 (47.5)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been threatened by others?	-	1	6	7 (17.5%)	33 (82.5)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been humiliated?	-	4	9	13 (32.5%)	27 (67.5%)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been the target of practical jokes in bad taste?	-	2	13	15 (37.5%)	25 (62.5%)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been despised, rejected or excluded?	-	3	10	13 (32.5%)	27 (67.5%)	40 (100.0%)
Have your fellow students ever spread gossip or intrigue about you?	2	6	11	19 (47.5%)	21 (52.5%)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been forced to hand over material or some object of yours or money?	-	-	1	1 (2.5%)	39 (97.5)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever had your belongings damaged or spoiled by others?	-	-	12	12 (30.0%)	28 (70.0%)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been hit, punched or pushed?	-	3	3	6 (15.0%)	34 (85.0%)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been the target of violence transmitted via Internet or cell phone?	-	-	2	2 (5.0)	38 (95.0%)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever felt yourself to be persecuted in school?	-	1	6	7 (17.5)	33 (82.5%)	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever been discriminated in school?	-	2	1	3 (7.5%)	37 (92.5%)	40 (100.0%)

Source: elaborated by the authors

Table 2 shows that the most common form of bullying reported by student victims was offensive nickname-calling (52.5%) followed by gossip and intrigue (47.5%) then practical jokes in dubious taste (37.5%), humiliation (32.5%), and scorning and exclusion (32.5%). All of those acts have serious effects on the psychic development of children and pre-adolescents. When the categories of victimization were analyzed according to the sex of the victims it was found that girls were more frequently victims of offensive nickname calling, humiliations, intrigue and gossip, scorn or exclusion, violence via Internet, and practical jokes in poor taste. Boys were victims of practical jokes, punching or pushing, having their things taken away or spoiled by force, and threats.

### 5.2 The Bully — Bullying Practices

The practice is not always admitted by the practitioners as witness the fact that 82.5% of the sample group declared never having bullied anyone in school (Table 1). When an analysis is made according to the sex of the practitioner, slightly more boys (10.0%) declared themselves to be aggressors than girls (7.5%). Nevertheless the overall percentage of those declaring themselves to be the authors of bullying (17.5%) is considered to be high.

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**Table 3 Bullying Practices**

In this school	Every day	Many times	Some times	Total	Never	Overall total
Have you ever given anyone an offensive nickname in this school?	-	2	10	12 (30.0%)	28	40
Have you ever threatened a fellow student in this school?	-	-	3	3 (7.5%)	37	(100.0%)
Have you ever mocked or humiliated a fellow student?	-	-	7	7 (17.5%)	33	40
Have you ever played practical jokes in bad taste on a fellow student?	-	-	6	6 (15.0%)	34	(100.0%)
Have ever, ignored, scorned or excluded a fellow student?	-	2	4	6 (15.0%)	34	40
Have you ever spread gossip or intrigue concerning a fellow student?	-	3	10	13 (32.5%)	27	(100.0%)
Have you ever forced a fellow student to hand over any material, object or money to you?	-	-	1	1 (2.5%)	39	40
Have you ever damaged the property of a fellow student?	-	-	-	-	40	(100.0%)
Have you ever punched or pushed a fellow student?	-	1	7	8 (20.0%)	32	40
Have you ever perpetrated any form of violence via Internet or cell phone?	-	-	1	1	39	(100.0%)
Have you ever persecuted a fellow student in school?	-	-	2	2	38	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever discriminated a fellow student in school?	-	-	1	1	39	40 (100.0%)

Source: elaborated by the authors

Table 3 shows that only one of the forms of bullying is not admitted to by the aggressors, that is, “spoiling fellow students’ belongings” because all 40 students (100%) declare they have never done that, but in Table 2 it was apparent that 30% of students declared they had suffered such actions.

The main practices that aggressors admitted to were: spreading intrigue and gossip involving a fellow student (32.5%), calling fellow students by offensive nicknames (30.0%), punching, pushing and humiliating (17.5%) and playing practical jokes in poor taste (15.0%). The justifications for those behaviors varied from “because of a lack of parental education” (10 year-old girl), “I think a person like that has suffered himself and wants revenge (10 year-old boy), “because of their insecurity” (11 year-old girl), because of prejudice, racism” (10 year-old girl).

Another interesting fact was that most of them (42.5%) failed to answer the item asking about how they felt during acts of bullying. However 15% of them mentioned an interesting aspect, namely that they felt they had been appointed (to practice bullying) by their group so that may be one of the reasons that lead students to bullying, namely to become and feel themselves to be accepted by their group. There were smaller percentages of those who declared that they took pleasure in aggressions (2.5%), that it made them feel confident (2.5%), or strong (2.5%) or superior (2.5%)

### 5.3 The Bullying Spectator

Another position occupied in the practice of bullying is that of the spectator who is liable to suffer consequences just as serious as those that affect the aggressors and the victims because the violence they witness creates feelings of fear and insecurity. In the literature however, most of the attention is directed at the aggressors and their direct victims (cf. Olweus, 1998; Fante, 2005).

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Table 1 shows that almost half the students (45%) in the sample group stated that they had witnessed scenes of bullying in the school at some time. The witnesses are equally divided among boys (9) and girls (9).

**Table 4 Bullying Onlookers**

In this school	Every day	Many times	Some times	Total	Never	Overall total
Have you ever seen insulting nicknames being used by students?	-	6	14	20 (50.0%)	20	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen anyone threatening others?	-	2	7	9 (22.5)	31	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen anyone mocking or humiliating others?	-	3	9	12 (30.0)	28	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen practical jokes in bad taste being practiced?	3	3	12	18 (45.0%)	22	40 (100.0%)
Have ever seen fellow students scorned or excluded?	1	3	12	16 (40.0%)	24	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen situations of intrigue or spreading gossip among students?	5	4	9	18 (45.0%)	22	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen a fellow student being forced to hand over material, object or money?	-	-	3	3 (7.5%)	37	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen anyone damaging the property of a fellow student?	-	1	7	8 (20.0%)	32	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen anyone punch or push a fellow student?	-	5	13	18 (45.0%)	22	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever heard about any form of violence perpetrated by students via Internet or cell phone?	1	4	10	15 (37.5%)	25	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever heard about the persecution of a fellow student in school?	-	5	6	11 (27.5%)	29	40 (100.0%)
Have you ever seen anyone discriminate a fellow student in school?	-	5	9	14 (35.0%)	26	40 (100.0%)

Source: elaborated by the authors

Table 4 shows that all the categories of victimization have been witnessed by students in school especially offensive nicknaming (50.0%), bad practical jokes (45%), intrigue and gossip among students (45%), punching and pushing (45%), scorn and exclusion (40%), and so on.

All involved in bullying, according to Ortega and Del Rey (2002), are victims of the process. The students themselves recognize the negative effects it has on them and on the school environment as a whole.

The last questions on the questionnaire targeted the school's actions in addressing bullying. The presence of adults during the children's break times and the separation of the break times of older and younger classes as well as the schools project "Enough of Bullying" were all considered to have contributed towards reducing the occurrence of violence inside the school. The students identified what they consider to be a weak point and that is the habit that teachers have of sending those involved in incidents to be dealt with by the principal's office, that is, taking the students out of the classroom; and the same habit has been identified by other studies.

## 6. Final Remarks

This research work sought to characterize and map student victims, authors and witnesses of bullying in school as an important aide to planning preventative actions. It is essential that those responsible for the educational processes should identify the type of aggressor they are dealing with given that the driving forces behind the aggressive behaviors are varied.

In the school in question there were no actions in course designed to prevent or overcome bullying. The various types of violence tend to occur as if they were something natural among students and are viewed as part of the behavior of children still undergoing formative processes. Those aspects will have an influence on their moral and psychic formations. That means there is an urgent need to closely observe students' behavior in order to correct the violence as soon as it occurs. Sociability must be fostered and students must be taught to put themselves in the place of others and imagine how they would like it if they were subjected to offensive nicknaming, bad practical jokes and so on.

One thing that made both researchers uneasy was the separation of the children by age groups in the break times as if that were something educational that contributed to overcoming bullying. They believe it would be far more useful to actively foster and stimulate sociability among older and younger children so that they could learn to respect one another and live together peaceably.

Another important aspect is parents' participation in their children's school lives because we were able to see that there are some children in the group that are the victims of violence in their homes. According to Silva (2010), parents and school need to communicate constantly and observe the children's behavior for any signs of victimization or of practicing aggression so that measures can be taken right away. Everyone has the obligation to assist them and guide them in the construction of a fairer less violent society. Unfortunately, 10% of the students declared that they did not have good relations with their families. Would that not be a powerful factor in influencing children to adopt bullying tactics? Bullying is a phenomenon that afflicts parents, teachers and school management staff. It is found in practically all schools around the world (cf. Berger, 2007). Greater interaction among parents, schools and the community is required for society to overcome it. We need to fight against bullying and take pains to protect victims, aggressors and witnesses alike because, in the end, all of them end up being victimized by the phenomenon.

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