

## SCHOOL BULLYING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE VICTIM'S GENDER

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### Summary

Bullying is a phenomenon that occurs to a greater or lesser extent in most schools. Nevertheless, statements that for example the schools in a given region or country present a rate of 10%, 15%, or 20% of bullying only contribute to alarmism while providing little information as to how to prevent it or how to intervene. The present work analyzes the prevalence of different types of school bullying in Extremadura (Spain), the types of scenario in which they occur, the characteristics of the aggressor, and the resources that the victims use to communicate the problem. We also analyze the correlation between these variables and the gender of the victim. The results show that the commonest forms of aggression are verbal, albeit with a light degree of intensity, that the commonest scenario is the classroom, and that boys comprise the greater percentage of both victims and aggressors in the different types of bullying.

**Palabras clave:** Bullying in school, peer harassment, secondary education, victim, gender differences.

### 1. Introduction

Society has long been aware of school bullying, which is in no way just a contemporary phenomenon. Nevertheless, until the 1980s it received neither the necessary public attention nor the scientific coverage that it merited. For example, in the period 1900-1970 there are only 27 references related to school bullying in the PsycINFO database. In the 1980s the number ascended to 35 (Stassen, 2007). Thenceforward, the subject began to awaken the interest of researchers as reflected by

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an increase of some 88% in work published in the 1990s as given in PsycINFO and other databases such as ERIC (Furlong & Morrison, 2000; Stassen, 2007). In 2000-2004 the number reached 592, after which the annual rate dropped by around 15% in 2005.

The proliferation of this type of work has allowed one to define, delimit, and differentiate the concept of harassment and bullying at school from other episodes of peer violence. In this sense, the most recent research concurs in defining bullying as the set of negative actions to which a person is continually exposed and which are executed with the intention of causing either physical, psychological, or social harm, by another person or persons who are stronger than the victim (Olweus, 1993, 2001; Smith & Sharp, 1994; Geen, 2001; Anderson & Bushman, 2002; Smith et al., 2002; Nansel & Overpeck, 2003).

The interest and preoccupation that the subject provokes have led to the development of numerous instruments for the collection, measurement, etc., of information aimed at facilitating its detection (Ortega et al., 1995; Olweus, 1996; Naylor & Cowie, 1999; Defensor del Pueblo/UNICEF, 2000), and to the implementation of a multitude of prevention and intervention programs oriented at fostering prosocial skills and values (Nelson, 1996; Rigby, 1996; Ortega, 1997; Fernández, 1999; Salmivalli, 1999; Cuadrado & Fernández, 2002; Elliot et al., 2002; Larson et al., 2002; Ortega et al., 2003; Díaz-Aguado et al., 2004; Lawrence & Green, 2005). The design of these programs is based on the results of other studies centred on the analysis of the cause, forms of manifestation, and consequences deriving from school bullying (Beale, 2001; Brockenbrough et al., 2002; Bulach et al., 2003). Knowledge of the influence of such variables as gender, the pupils' age and educational level, the context, and culture, among other factors, favours the adjustment and effectiveness of these programs (Olweus, 1996; Brame et al., 2001; Pellegrini & Long,

2002; Lucena, 2004; Archer & Cote, 2005; Eisenbraun, 2007; Richardson & Hammock, 2007).

## **2. The Amplitude of the Problem of Bullying**

With respect to research aimed at determining the prevalence of school bullying, studies in Norway, England, Italy, the United States, Germany, and Denmark report that the fraction of students who feel bullied by their classmates is around 10-13% (Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993; Fonzi et al., 1999; Nansel et al., 2001; Hanewinkel, 2004; Fekkes et al., 2005). Nevertheless, studies in Australia, Canada, Malta, Turkey, and Portugal find a higher value of 20–30% (Borg, 1999; Rigby & Slee, 1999; Alikasifoglu et al., 2002; Craig & Pepler, 2003; Pereira et al., 2004). Other workers report an ampler margin of prevalence, extending from 9 to 54% (Nansel et al., 2004). Because the samples were of different sizes, different information collection instruments were used, and the statistical analyses were not the same, comparisons between these percentages can not be established. They do, however, reflect the concern with determining the real prevalence of school bullying, at the same time as demonstrating how difficult it is to determine that parameter. In the case of Spain, one of the latest studies on the prevalence of bullying among adolescents in school (Defensor del Pueblo/UNICEF, 2007) does not conclude with a particular index of bullying, but presents the different degrees of prevalence based on the type of aggression received. In Table 1, one observes that the percentage of victims is considerably larger when the type of bullying that they are subjected to is verbal. Nevertheless, one also sees that some forms of indirect physical aggression or of social exclusion reach equally high percentages.

Table 1. Percentages of pupils who state they have been victims of the different situations of bullying in Spain in 2007.

Category	Types of bullying	Boy	Girl	Total
Social exclusion	Ignoring me (n=2788)	10,1	11,0	10,5%
	Not letting me participate (n=2824)	9,8	7,4	8,6%
Verbal aggression	Insulting me (n=2716)	28,9	25,4	27,1%
	Giving me offensive nicknames (n= 2760)	30,4	23,0	26,7% *
	Speaking bad about me (n=2684)	25,4	37,7	31,6% *
Indirect physical aggression	Hiding things (n=2792)	16,7	15,3	16,0%
	Breaking my things (n=2897)	4,2	2,8	3,5%
	Stealing my things (n=2900)	6,8	5,8	6,3%
Direct physical aggression	Hitting me (n=2909)	5,9	1,9	3,9% *
Threats/blackmail	Threatening to make me scared (n=2870)	7,8	5,1	6,4%
	Threats to make me do things (n=2973)	1,0	0,3	0,6%
	Threatening me with weapons (n=2974)	0,9	0,1	0,5%
Sexual harassment	Harassing me sexually (n=2974)	0,7	1,0	0,9%

\* Statistically significant differences (p<.001)

Source: Defensor del Pueblo/UNICEF, 2007, p.144, 152.

The results of that study also show the prevalence of bullying based on the pupil's educational level, and include not only the figure of the victim, but also those of the aggressor and witness.

The present work is centred on the study of bullying from the victims' perspective and on the forms of bullying that they suffer, establishing comparisons in terms of the variable 'gender'. In this sense, many studies agree in indicating that both aggressor and victim are more likely to be boys than girls (Carra & Sicot, 1996; Bijttebier & Vertomen, 1998; Pellegrini et al., 1999; Smith et al., 1999; Wolke et al., 2001; Del Barrio et al., 2003; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Solberg et al., 2007). Also they add that the most frequent form of aggression used and suffered by boys is physical and generally direct, whereas with girls it is more indirect related to social isolation (Olweus, 1994; Österman et al., 1998; Baldry & Farrington, 1999; Boulton et al., 1999; Smith et al., 1999; Kaltiala-Heino et al., 1999; Rigby, 2000).

The objectives of the present work are the following:

1. To analyze the prevalence of the different forms of school bullying in Extremadura (one of Spain's Autonomous Communities).

2. To describe the scenario of bullying in the school context, and the characteristics of the pupils who bully their companions (gender, year, individual versus group action).
3. To determine the communication routes that the victims establish to make the situation of bullying that they are suffering public.
4. To study the relevance of the gender variable in the degree of intensity of the different types of bullying.

The results to be presented form part of a research project financed by the Junta of Extremadura, and whose purpose is to analyze the prevalence of school bullying in the secondary schools of Extremadura, and to design educational materials oriented to the development of prosocial skills and values as a prevention measure.

### **3. Method**

The study is descriptive in nature, and its objectives condition the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods and techniques of data analysis. We used the survey technique with *questionnaires* as the data collection instrument. One of the basic aspects of the questionnaire as a data collection technique is its *representativity*, and hence the form of choosing the participant sample.

#### **3.1 *Sample***

According to the statistical yearbook of Extremadura of 2005, the population of students of Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO) in public schools in the year 2004-2005 was 43780. The final sample participating in the present study was 2091 students, which represented 4.8% of the total population. Considering for this sample size a 95% confidence level, the estimated sample error is around 2.1%, which can be considered as a very acceptable level in this type of descriptive study. The pupils' ages were between

12 and 16 years; 1046 were boys, 1042 girls, and since the gender of the remaining 3 is not known, they were considered to be statistically lost by the system.

In order to obtain a representative sample and thus guarantee the reliability and validity of the results, 24 secondary schools were selected, satisfying the following criteria: (a) *the type of school* (20 state schools, and 4 state-assisted private schools); (b) *the size of the town* where these schools were located in terms of the number of inhabitants (more than 50000, between 25000 and 50000, and less than 25000); (c) *geographic zone* of Extremadura (North, South, East, and West); and (d) *the Province* (Cáceres and Badajoz).

The distribution of the sample by school year was: 540 from the first year, 525 from the second, 547 from the third, and 476 from the fourth (Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the sample population (ESO, Compulsory Secondary Education).

		Educational level				Total
		1st ESO	2nd ESO	3rd ESO	4th ESO	
Gender	Male	267	252	298	229	1046
	Female	273	273	249	247	1042
Total		540	525	547	476	2088

The schools were chosen as the result of applying three criteria. First, we considered schools located in towns of less than 25000 inhabitants, in towns with between 25000 and 50000 inhabitants, and in towns with more than 50000 inhabitants. Second, we required that these towns were not very close to each other, but were distributed over the entire geography of Extremadura, from the county-sized 'comarcas' located most to the north to those located in the south. And third, considering the number of pupils matriculated in each school – when one of the towns selected had more than one secondary school, the one with most students was chosen.

### 3.2. Procedure

Using the school as the unit of analysis, we applied the questionnaires in each one for the four levels of compulsory secondary education without consideration of the subjects' gender, for which parameter we were later able to verify a balanced distribution. These questionnaires were applied by a member of the research team to ensure that the terms in each item were understood, taking care to clarify whatever doubts the students expressed. The time taken ranged from 40 to 50 minutes approximately, depending on the age of the students.

### *3.3 Instrument*

The data collection questionnaire was that used in Spain by the Defensor del Pueblo/UNICEF in 1999 to study bullying in schools (Defensor del Pueblo/UNICEF, 2000). It consists of 26 items organized in 5 core themes: (a) analysis of the prevalence of the different forms of bullying (physical, verbal, and social); (b) description of the problem from the points of view of victim, aggressor, and witness; (c) knowledge of the scenario in which bullying takes place in the school context; (d) description of the strategies of communication and conflict resolution that the students use; and (e) study of the prevalence of bullying in terms of the variables gender, educational level, context, and type (state or private) of school. As is indicated in the original study, this questionnaire is characterized by going beyond other instruments developed on the basis of that initially designed by Olweus in that the information comes from statements made by the victims and aggressors themselves and that relate to the different types of abuse.

The present work is centred on the analysis of 5 of the 26 items of the questionnaire which refer to the figure of the victim. Four of these five items concern the type of bullying that the victims claim to suffer. They are arranged into the six categories listed in Table 1. In the first, an ordinal scale was used to assess the prevalence of the different types of aggression (never, sometimes, often, and always).

The second concerned the place where the bullying occurs (classroom, playground, corridors, dining room, etc.). The third asked whether the aggressors act in groups or individually and whether they are boys or girls. The fourth analyzes the aggressor or aggressors' educational level (year). Finally, the fifth item is to gather information on the people to whom the victim resorts to try to resolve the problem, or at least to denounce it (communicative aspect).

#### **4. Results and Analysis**

##### *4.1 Statistical analysis*

A descriptive statistical analysis was carried out, centred mainly on comparing frequencies and percentages. Nonetheless, the use of a criterion of association such as the gender variable permits an analysis of correlations between the independent variables determined in the study (prevalence, context where the aggression takes place, etc.) and the criterion of association (the victim's gender). The tests of statistical significance used were chi-squared and the contingency coefficient. The significance level used was .05.

##### *4.2 Specific data*

We considered that bullying exists in any one of its forms when the situation that is described occurs "often" or "always". We understand that not all the forms of behaviour contrary to the basic norms of coexistence imply a situation of bullying with repercussions of physical and/or psychological suffering for the victim. The results will be presented according to the five questionnaire items indicated above.

###### *4.2.1 Prevalence of bullying at school*

The analysis of the data shows that, in general terms, the most continual forms of bullying experienced by the pupils surveyed were: insults (26.8%), the use of offensive



nicknames (25.4%), speaking badly of them when they are not present (23.9%), the disappearance or concealment of personal or school things (18.7%), feeling ignored by the others (11.7%), feeling excluded because the others do not let them participate in the group's activities, discussions, meetings, etc. (11.4%), and, to a lesser extent, stealing personal things (7.7%). Other forms of bullying presented to the pupils were recorded with an incidence of less than 6%, being less than 2.5% in those forms which could be considered the most serious such as sexual harassment, threats to force another person to do things that he or she does not want to do, and threats with weapons (Table 3).

With respect to the intensity with which the pupils experienced these types of bullying, the frequency with the greatest percentage was 'sometimes'. I.e., the student who is insulted, for example, is the target of those insults continually, but not on every occasion that he or she is addressed, only some of them. It remains to be determined whether these are the occasions when the student need to feel more respected, and therefore when the insult is more damaging.

Table 3. Prevalence (%) of school bullying in Extremadura.

Types of bullying	Never			Sometimes			Often			Always		
	H	M	Total	H	M	Total	H	M	Total	H	M	Total
Ignoring me	88,1	88,4	88,2	11,6	10,7	11,2	0,3	0,5	0,4	0	0,4	0,2
Not letting me participate	86,7	90,4	88,6	9,2	5,5	7,3	1,3	1,3	1,3	2,8	2,8	2,8
Insulting me	67,7	78,6	73,2	26,1	19,2	22,6	4,6	1,5	3,0	1,6	0,7	1,2
Making fun of me or name-calling	69,6	79,5	74,6	22,9	16,1	19,5	4,6	3,2	3,9	2,9	1,2	2,0
Speaking bad about me	78,7	73,5	76,1	18,1	23,8	21,0	2,5	1,8	2,2	0,6	0,9	0,7
Hiding my things	78,1	84,5	81,3	19,7	14,4	17,0	1,8	0,7	1,2	0,5	0,4	0,4
Breaking my things	94,4	99,5	94,9	4,9	4	4,4	0,5	0,5	0,5	0,3	0,1	0,2
Stealing from me	92,9	91,8	92,3	5,7	7,3	6,5	0,9	0,9	0,9	0,6	0,1	0,3
Hitting me	93,5	96,7	95,1	5,7	3,0	4,3	0,6	0,1	0,3	0,3	0,2	0,2
Threatening me to scare me	93,9	95,2	94,6	5,1	4,3	4,7	0,8	0,4	0,6	0,2	0,1	0,1
Making me do things by threats	98,6	98,8	98,7	0,9	1,1	1,0	0,3	0,0	0,2	0,2	0,1	0,1
Threatening me with weapons	98,6	99,3	98,9	1,0	0,6	0,8	0,2	0,0	0,1	0,2	0,1	0,2
Harassing me sexually	97,7	97,4	97,6	1,5	1,9	1,7	0,3	0,2	0,2	0,5	0,5	0,5

\* Statistically significant differences (p < .05)

\*\* Statistically significant differences (p < .001)

With respect to the association variable 'gender', the contingency coefficients indicated that there existed significant differences between boys and girls in being subjected to the following forms of bullying: 'not letting me participate' ( $p < .05$ ), 'insulting me' ( $p < .001$ ), 'using offensive nicknames or ridiculing me' ( $p < .001$ ), 'speaking badly of me' ( $p < .01$ ), 'hiding things from me' ( $p < .001$ ), and 'hitting me' ( $p < .01$ ). The girls were subjected more than the boys to those forms of bullying related to social exclusion and verbal aggression ('not letting me participate' and 'speaking badly of me'). The boys suffered more physical aggression, both indirect ('hiding things from me') and direct ('hitting me'), as well as other forms of verbal aggression such as insults and the use of offensive nicknames to ridicule them in front of their companions (see Table 3).

#### *4.2.2 Context in which bullying takes place*

The scenarios that the aggressors use to bully their victims are fundamentally the classroom itself and the playground. Nonetheless, victims believe, and state as much in the questionnaire, that some forms of bullying to which they are subjected by their companions do not take place exclusively in a particular scenario, but are repeated in any place, inside or outside the school limits.

The results show that the forms of aggression related to social isolation ('ignoring me', 'not letting me participate') take place in the classroom and the playground, scenarios where more group activities take place. On most occasions, verbal aggression (insults, nicknames, and speaking badly of somebody) take place in class, although a high percentage also corresponded to the option 'any place'. This is in part because not only classmates are the aggressors, but also students from other classes of the same or a different educational level who coincide with the victims in scenarios other than the classroom.

The victims state that indirect physical aggression (hiding, breaking, and stealing things) generally takes place in the classroom, which indicates that they are perpetrated by companions in the same class. This result is evident since those who have access to the victim's school material or personal possessions are students sharing the space in which these materials are used and kept, i.e., the classroom. Finally, it is observed that direct physical aggression is not restricted to a certain place, with there being high percentages in more than one scenario. As this form of bullying is easily identifiable by teachers and classmates, one would suppose that it is more likely to be carried out where teachers are not present or, in the classroom, at those moments when the teacher is absent or can not notice.

With respect to the possible differences derived from the variable 'gender', the association analysis indicated that there were no significant differences between boys and girls save in the 'speaking badly of me' form of bullying, i.e., the boys are no more likely to suffer some form of bullying in a specific scenario different from the girls and vice versa. In the case of the variable 'speak badly about me', the girls are subjected to these aggressions usually in the classroom or 'any place', whereas for the boys this behaviour can occur in any of the places provided as response options.

Table 4. Scenarios (%) in which the different types of bullying occur.

<b>Types of bullying</b>	Classroom	Corridor	Playground	Any place	Outside school	Outside person	Others
Ignoring me	32,9	7,9	20,4	14,0	9,2	6,2	9,4
Not letting me participate	43,4	0,0	32,0	7,0	2,6	5,2	9,8
Insulting me	33,3	7,0	11,9	18,0	6,7	5,5	17,6
Making fun of me or name-calling	40,8	5,0	10,9	19,9	6,7	4,0	12,7
Speaking bad about me	25,4	4,4	13,0	29,6	10,1	6,6	10,9
Hiding my things	85,0	0,4	4,4	4,4	1,7	0,8	3,3
Breaking my things	83,7	0,0	2,3	4,7	0,0	2,3	7,0
Stealing from me	79,9	2,5	2,5	6,5	1,6	3,3	3,7
Hitting me	24,9	4,9	16,2	17,4	5,1	7,7	23,8

\* Statistically significant differences (p<.05)

Table 4 presents the responses of the students who feel themselves to be continually harassed by their peers at a greater or lower intensity. The table does not

include results related to threats and sexual harassment given the small percentage of students who felt themselves to be victims of this type of behaviour. Nonetheless, the results showed these forms of aggression to take place mainly within the classroom, followed by 'any place'.

#### 4.2.3 Individual or social nature of the bullying

The students who stated that they felt bullied said that those who attack them generally act in groups. Also, they indicated that in approximately 50% of the cases this group consists of boys only, and of both boys and girls in 15-20%. When, instead of acting in a group, the aggressor acts individually, the victims indicated that this was usually a boy. Nonetheless, significant differences in the responses were found in analyzing the association criterion 'gender'. In the case of the boys, it is very probable that they are attacked by another group of boys or by one of those boys individually, and not by a girl or a group of girls. In the case of the girls, there was a greater tendency than in the boys to identify their aggressors within a group consisting only of girls. Nevertheless, their responses indicated that their main aggressors were groups of students, fundamentally boys. This pattern was not the case in two particular manifestations of bullying – 'ignoring me' and 'speaking badly of me'. In these cases, the girls are far more likely to be victims of a group of girls or of a mixed group of girls and boys (Table 5).

Table 5. Individual or social nature of the bullying (%).

Types of bullying	Boys		Boys		Girls		Girl		Boys and girls		Everybody		
	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	H	M	
Ignoring me	51,2	15,9	13,4	11,2	4,9	9,3	3,7	24,3	25,6	37,4	1,2	2,8	*
Not letting me participate	55,0	40,7	19,0	13,6	4,0	4,9	7,0	12,3	14,0	27,2	1,0	1,2	
Insulting me	60,4	45,9	18,0	15,3	4,1	7,2	2,5	15,3	13,1	16,2	2,4	0,5	*
Making fun of me or name-calling	66,3	41,9	17,5	18,6	2,8	5,6	1,2	9,8	11,1	22,8	1,6	1,4	*
Speaking bad about me	43,5	11,8	18,6	5,7	6,8	17,5	9,9	38,4	18,6	26,6	2,5	0,4	*
Hiding my things	67,8	43,1	18,0	16,7	1,5	6,9	1,5	6,9	10,5	24,5	0,7	2,9	*
Breaking my things	68,3	44,4	19,5	33,3	7,3	2,8	0,0	2,8	4,9	19,4	0,0	0,0	
Stealing from me	62,3	42,8	20,7	21,4	1,9	5,4	0,0	3,6	11,3	23,2	3,8	5,4	

Hitting me	60,0	52,4	26,7	4,8	4,4	14,3	4,4	4,8	4,4	23,8	0	4,8	**
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\* Statistically significant differences (p<.001)

\*\* Statistically significant differences (p<.05)

The data in the table confirm that school bullying is more a question of group behaviour than individual, and that it is also a question of gender. Both girls and boys principally identified their aggressors as a group of boys. The pupils' responses break the prototype of the boy as a direct physical aggressor, attributing him also with verbal and indirect physical aggression. In the case of the forms of bullying related to social isolation, one observes that boys tended to isolate boys, and girls tended to isolate girls.

A final aspect to emphasize is that practically all the pupils identified their aggressors as specific people who act individually or in groups and not as some indefinite group as would have come under the option 'everybody'.

#### 4.2.4 *The aggressor's educational level*

The victims indicated that more than 50% of their aggressors were classmates. This figure rose to more than 70% for indirect physical bullying, among other reasons because those who have access to the victims' belongings to hide, break, or steal them share the same classroom. With respect to the social exclusion forms of bullying, the victims responses showed that, although the people who continually ignore them or do not let them participate are principally classmates, around 15% are students from a higher year, and in around 10% of the cases the isolation comes from the teachers. The victims who feel attacked verbally or who suffer direct physical bullying situate their aggressors in their classroom in approximately 50% of the cases, in other classes of the same level (~11%), in higher levels (~9%), and not connected with the school (~8%).

The results for the 'threats' and 'sexual harassment' forms of bullying were very disperse, although they indicated that in around 50% of the cases the aggressor was from the same class.

With respect to the possible differences deriving from the variable 'gender', there were significant correlations in the 'not letting me participate', 'insulting me', and 'speaking bad of me' forms of bullying. In the two first, for the boys the aggressors were not only from their own class but also from other classes of the same and higher years, whereas for the girls the aggressors were almost exclusively from the same class. In the case of the variable 'speak badly of me', it is the girls who locate the aggressors in the upper years and other classes of the same year as well as in their own class, whereas the boys practically limit themselves to indicating classmates.

#### *4.2.5 Communication of the problem*

The negation or concealment of bullying at school makes it difficult to establish an aid network that enables the student to face and overcome the problem. Nevertheless, 32% of the students who declared that they felt themselves to be victims of bullying at school confessed that they had told nobody about the aggression to which they were being subjected. In particular, they boys were less likely to make the problem public, not even to their friends ( $p < .001$ ). Another third of the students who felt themselves to be victims (35%) told their friends about what had happened. It remains to be determined whether they were seeking the support necessary to denounce and confront the bullying situation or were looking for consolation and flight strategies. The importance in adolescence of the group of friends explains why the victims resorted to them more frequently than to other groups such as the family, teachers, or some other group of adults. With respect to the variable 'gender', the girls told their friends about the aggression they received from other classmates to a greater extent than the boys. The boys, on the contrary, were more likely than the girls to comment on the problem with their family ( $p < .001$ ). In general terms, 16% of the pupils told their families about their bullying situation at school. Also, teachers were the last group to which the

students resorted to make the aggression public, with only 2% of the pupils informing teachers of the bullying they were victims of even though most of it took place in the classroom. This lack of communication between teacher and student is an obstacle to detection and intervention in this kind of problem within the context of the school itself, and to the adjustment of the programs of prevention that are currently being developed.

Finally, the responses showed that 15% of the students shared their problem with more than one of the aforementioned groups (friends, family, teachers), and that the girls more than the boys tried to establish a more diverse network of aid.

## **5. Discussion**

1. Bullying is to a greater or lesser extent a phenomenon in all secondary schools. Nevertheless, *to speak of bullying in absolute terms and with generic numbers is far from being a reflection of the widely varying reality of individual schools.* To say, for example, that the prevalence of bullying at school is around 20-30% in countries such as Australia or Portugal (Rigby & Slee, 1999; Pereira et al., 2004), or in the case of Extremadura if we were to use a single percentage resulting from averaging the partial numbers that we obtained, the first picture that would come to the mind of many people would be one of highly conflictive centres with a low level of security that need special measures to maintain control and discipline. Nothing could be farther from the truth. This picture would generate social alarm and the consequent demand for governments and other institutions to adopt measures and commit a quantity of resources ill-fitted and scarcely adequate to approaching the real situation in schools. On the contrary, if instead of using generic numbers one presents a detailed analysis of the different types of bullying that occur in each school and of their prevalence,

this would favour the effective adjustment of the design and development of programs of prevention and intervention.

2. The results set out in the present work indicate that the *commonest forms of aggression* among adolescent students are verbal, followed by a form of indirect physical bullying ('hiding things'). The percentages observed in these situations ranged between 19% and 26%, although one must bear in mind that the intensity with which they were found to occur was light ('sometimes') in approximately 75% of the cases. This type of bullying is followed by others relating to social exclusion (prevalence of around 12%), but again with an intensity that can be defined as 'light'. Far behind these figures come other direct and indirect types of physical aggression, and threats and sexual harassment. Also, the small percentages recorded in these last two manifestations were concentrated in the option 'sometimes', so that their presence was not at a high intensity.
3. The results indicated *bullying to be a group phenomenon*, with the aggressors acting individually on very few occasions. In terms of the adjustment of prevention and intervention measures, this indicates that the effort must be preferentially to working with groups and not exclusively to the individual learning of conflict resolution strategies.
4. In agreement with some other studies (Pellegrini et al., 1999; Smith et al., 1999; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Solberg et al., 2007), our results showed that *boys form the greater percentage of victims and of aggressors* in all the manifestations of bullying save in some very specific types such as 'speaking badly of me'. In this sense however, our results differ from studies that have emphasized that boys resort more to physical aggression and girls to aggression of a verbal or social nature (isolation or exclusion) (Baldry & Farrington, 1999;



Boulton et al., 1999; Rigby, 2000). Again, the importance of the present data lies in the information they provide for the orientation of programs being developed for the classroom.

5. The present *results are very similar to those obtained in research carried out in Spain* in 1999 and 2006 (Defensor del Pueblo/UNICEF, 2000, 2007). All three used the same instrument for information collection and the same methods of analysis, so that they are readily comparable. They differ in the size and provenance of the sample. The earlier two studies were of 3000 students covering the whole of Spain, whereas our sample was of 2091 students in a specific region (Extremadura). Some forms of bullying (insults, offensive nicknames, speaking badly of a person when he or she is not present, making threats to produce fear) here showed lower percentage prevalences than had been found at the national level.
6. While the picture painted by the present results is one of a worrisome reality since the psycho-social consequences of any manifestation of bullying can be serious for the victim, it is not one that is in any sense alarming. The light intensity of the bullying and the forms of the most frequent types (those with a moderate prevalence) lead us to think that intervention oriented towards developing prosocial skills and values would contribute to a marked reduction of the situations of bullying in the secondary schools of Extremadura. These programs of intervention will firstly have to focus on establishing links of communication and aid in order to facilitate the victim's denunciation of aggression. One of these links that needs especial reinforcement is the teacher, who the present results show to be excluded by the victim. Secondly, these programs need to be contextualized in the very specific scenario represented by

the classroom, which is where most bullying is recorded, independently of the form it might take. And thirdly, they must be synchronized with specific teacher-oriented programs promoting the acquisition of new mechanisms to detect bullying at school. Bullying mainly takes place in the classroom, and the teacher must learn to detect it so as to be able to intervene.

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