SECCIÓN ESPECIAL:
Bullying y Cyberbullying

Bullying and cyberbullying: Research and intervention at school and social contexts

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School is the main scenario of social actions where the foundations of interpersonal relations other than those of the family are laid down; it has therefore become one of the main settings for psychoeducational research. In recent years, the phenomena of poor interpersonal relations, gratuitous and cruel aggression, the resulting victimization, and the construction of a psychopathic and inmoral personality have been the object of intense research. The monographic section presented herein aims to provide the readers of Psicothema with a series of investigations that trace the most important research lines developed in the international community on bullying and cyberbullying.

Bullying y cyberbullying: investigación e intervención en contextos escolares y sociales. La escuela es el escenario por excelencia de práctica social donde se sientan las bases de las relaciones interpersonales más allá de las que provienen de la familia, por ello se ha convertido en uno de los principales contextos de investigación psicoeducativa. Últimamente, ha sido objeto de intensa investigación el fenómeno de las malas relaciones interpersonales, la agresión gratuita y cruel, la victimización consecuente y la construcción de una personalidad psicopática y escasamente moral. La sección monográfica que aquí se presenta pretende ofrecer a los lectores de *Psicothema* un conjunto de investigaciones que dibujan las líneas más importantes de trabajo que la comunidad internacional está desarrollando sobre bullying y cyberbullying.

If the basic advancement of knowledge is one of the goals of science, then one of the primordial motivations of progress is for scientific knowledge to serve for the benefit of society. This, which seems obvious in sciences that involve the improvement of physical and biological conditions, is sometimes forgotten in the social sciences that involve psychological and social well-being, such as developmental and educational psychology. This does occur in various spheres of psycho-developmental and educational science, but it is particularly relevant in the area that targets the improvement of psychological co-existence and well-being produced by good social relations.

Research in the sphere of interpersonal relations and their improvement has an important impact on all the scenarios where human beings communicate, love, or hate while they are living and doing things together. We need scientific knowledge to cast some light on the social practices that are undergoing increasingly important and rapid transformations, due, to a great measure, to the impact of the populations' incorporation of information and communication technologies, especially the new systems and social networks established by means of digital devices (Ortega, Del Rey, & Sánchez, 2012).

School is the main scenario of social practice where the foundations of interpersonal relations, other than those of the family, are laid down; it has therefore become one of the main settings for psychoeducational research. This means that educational systems in general, and the quality of each one in particular, have been significantly favored by the study of a phenomenon that is as primitive as humanity and that, up to the 1970s, had not been addressed, studied, or analyzed rigorously. Once it began to receive attention, it has ceaselessly contributed instruments and theoretical clarity to community life at school for the improvement of school education. We are referring to the so-called peer harassment, or bullying. We cannot ignore the fact that the study of these problems is a consequence of social development and of welfare society's demands aimed at the educational system. In social science

research, a true demand of knowledge and competence about complex social actions like those that take place at school may not emerge unless the community becomes aware of the need for it. In the countries with a good level of social well-being, the public opinion demands benefits that are not demanded in poor countries or countries with worse levels of governance. In this sense, we have noted the extent to which poorer societies and countries that have not yet reached this level of demand (Romera, Del Rey, & Ortega, 2011) are significantly and unfortunately delaying the prevention of problems of school violence. In developed countries, without the public demand for the improvement of educational quality, it would not have been possible to cope with the complexity of peer co-existence at school and to observe and investigate how love, friendship, and mutual help play a positive role in development and learning. In contrast, disaffection, unjustified aggression, and moral irresponsibility evolve as feelings and bonds that bias and disturb students' interpersonal relations, with a negative impact on their learning and development.

The psycho-developmental paradigm established since the 1970s, especially as a result of the works of Bronfenbrenner (1979) on the ecology of development, and the contributions of Harturp (1984) on the relevance of phratry, have allowed us (Ortega & Mora-Merchán, 1996) to consider the extent to which the peer system is a very positive context for learning and social competence, but also to observe the extent to which it is a risk scenario. When rivalry is rampant where friendship should prevail, and there is aggression instead of cooperation, and hatred and disaffection in the place of positive affect, then the peer system can be said to include elements of risk that must be known and forestalled. The peer system allows and stimulates children and youngsters to find a learning sphere beyond their vertical relations (adults-youngsters) that gains capital importance in the domain of social competence. If the peer system is affected by problems of unjustified aggressiveness and violence, co-existence and mastering the rules of moral standards deteriorate, and what should lead to positive development, learning, and progress turns instead into a hell of disaffection and violence.

The phenomenon of poor interpersonal relations, gratuitous aggression, and the resulting victimization, and the construction of a psychopathic and immoral personality have been studied over the past 40 years from the perspective of developmental and educational psychology, which is becoming a science that, from the rigor of its investigative proposals, still remembers that its results should be echoed in schools and serve to improve educational practice (Álvarez et al., 2011; Ortega, 2010; Orue & Calvete, 2012). Research of bullying has contributed significantly to the progress of an education with positive proposals (Álvarez, Álvarez, González, Núñez, & González-Pienda, 2006). One of its goals is to support those who have difficulties gaining others' respect, so that social rules will palliate and prevent unjustified—and sometimes cruel—aggressiveness exerted by some students on others.

The scientific study of bullying has allowed us to stretch our limits when we joined this line of work (Lucas, Pulido, & Solbes, 2011; Ortega & Mora-Merchán, 1996; Romera, Del Rey, & Ortega, 2011). Applied psycho-developmental research and the analysis of the psychoeducational dimension of this matter have made us realize that being a good person, socially competent, and well aware of what is and what is not correct, and, especially knowing how to set limits to abuse, to the threat of social exclusion and maltreatment—all of this must be learnt at school in all possible scenarios, both real and virtual. Psychoeducational research of the diverse types and severity levels of bullying at school has showed us that, in everyday school community life, children learn to be good citizens by exercising values, attitudes, and behaviors of mutual respect and by controlling the risk of harassment and unjustified aggression within the contextual framework of interpersonal peer relationships (Ortega, 2010).

Research of bullying can be described in three big temporal phases (Sánchez & Ortega, 2010), each of which has focused on what the scientific community and the school communities have considered the most relevant. In a first—always international— phase, on the one hand, it focused on the study of prevalence and on rating the importance of this phenomenon as a disruptor of co-existence and school climate (Del Rey & Córdoba, 2010; Lucas, Pulido, & Solbes, 2011; Ortega & Del Rey, 2001). On the other hand, it focused on how bullying affected the protagonists, basically the victims, aggressors, and spectators (we include in this simplified category practically all the students, because this is and always has been a phenomenon that was known to the classmates even if they did not take part in it). A second phase is where, in addition to psycho-developmental and educational investigators, researchers from the sphere of basic psychology, social psychology, psychopathology, and even methodology join the scientific work. This second phase is characterized by a large production of scientific works on the identification of risk and protector factors of this phenomenon, at an individual and contextual level (Del Rey & Ortega, 2008; Díaz-Aguado & Martín, 2011; Romera, Del Rey, & Ortega, 2011; Ttofi, Farrington, Lósel, & Loeber, 2011). From this perspective, the impact of diverse cognitive and affective variables, and the consequences of being involved in this problem have been analyzed. Among these variables, we underline the analysis of the perception of threat and control, the coping strategies used by the victims, the perception of social support, comprehension, and emotion regulation, as well as personality traits (Elipe, Ortega, Hunter, & Del Rey, 2012; Garner & Lemerise, 2007; Hunter, Boyle, & Warden, 2004; Ortega, Elipe, & Calmaestra, 2009). This was a very interesting period that has furthered our comprehension of the phenomenon and its connotations, and has provided invaluable information to improve school climate and co-existence and, thereby, the quality of education.

The third period began in the first decade of the 21st century, when it became patent that the use of information and communication technologies was an activity that progressively and massively involved young people (Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Wolak, 2000). At this time, the international scientific community, which was concerned about bullying, began to show interest in phenomena, behaviors, and attitudes that are very similar to indirect bullying (Ortega, Elipe, & Monks, 2012; Ortega, Elipe, Mora-Merchán, Calmaestra, & Vega, 2009), which very soon began to be known as cyberbullying (Álvarez et al., 2011; Belsey, 2005; Cambell, 2005; Li, 2006; Smith, Mahdavi et al., 2008). Somewhat precipitately, the first studies of cyberbullying reproduced the schema followed by the studies of traditional bullying, in the sense that cyberbullying was considered a concrete form of indirect bullying, and its study was very focused on the impact provided by the technological instruments. However, cyberbullying is a social problem of harassment, intimidation, bullying, and unjustified aggressiveness, using digital devices, which one person or group inflicts upon another person (the victim), either protracted over time or short-term, but whose harassment effects remain and

are diffused exponentially, and the victim cannot defend him- or herself alone quickly and effectively (Buelga, Cava, & Musitu, 2010; Calmaestra, Ortega, & Mora-Merchán, 2008; Campbell, 2005; Smith et al., 2008; Smith, Smith, Osborn, & Samara, 2008; Tokunaga, 2010; Ttofi, Farrington, Lösel, & Loeber, 2011).

The victimization produced by cyberbullying can be of varying degrees of severity but it is never innocent. When the victims react and defend themselves and ask for help, the attack quickly ceases, and its effects are not necessarily devastating because, as in some experiences of traditional bullying, the victims can learn to cope with the problem and shake off the harasser. Another aspect are the short-, medium-, and long-term effects, which, as in traditional bullying, are varied and of differing levels of severity for the victim and the aggressor. We note that the aggressors, whose behavior is morally objectionable and sometimes legally punishable, should be the target of educational attention because their behavior is a break in their ethical development, if not a spiral in their psychopathic behavior. The victims, both in bullying and in cyberbullying, should be the first to receive help, but the aggressors should also arouse scientific and professional attention because their behavior should be stopped and corrected, as a function of the severity of the harm caused.

For the investigators like us, who have been concerned with traditional bullying (and in recent years, with cyberbullying), this problem is similar to that of bullying but with some important nuances that must be defined and explored. This does not imply a lack of scientific controversy, because, whereas some authors think that we should not refer to cyberbullying, but simply to cyberaggression, some of us think that this is basically a phenomenon of poor interpersonal relations, harassment and, in general, unjustified and immoral aggression that occurs in the networks of interpersonal relations, which have turned into social networking. Although this is one of the most relevant debates currently within this community, this monographic volume does not focus on it particularly, although some authors do mention it. The intention of this special issue is to reveal the state of the art, in all its complexity of dimensions and parameters, of the phenomenon of peer harassment, both in its face-to-face manifestations and in its manifestation mediated by the use of digital devices in a new context, which we have called cyber-co-existence (Ortega et al., 2012).

For this purpose, a call for papers was made among the diverse scientific societies, and very particularly, among the two large networks of investigators who work on bullying and cyberbullying: *The Bullying Research Network* (http://brnet.unl.edu) and the European Project entitled *Cyberbullying: Coping with negative and enhancing positive uses of new technologies, in relationships in educational settings* (http://www.cost.eu/domains_actions/isch/Actions/IS0801); both of them have gathered a large group of experts on the topic. From the proposals received, we selected the works that could best represent the scenario described in this introductory article, and which we present below.

In the first article, *Bullying and Cyberbullying: Overlapping and predictive value of the co-occurrence*, Del Rey, Elipe, and Ortega (2012) assume that the phenomenon now known as cyberbullying is similar to the more frequently studied phenomenon of bullying, and that it meets some of the criteria that characterize bullying and others to a lesser extent or incompletely. These authors attempt to determine the extent to which involvement in bullying, defined by its protagonists' behaviors (victimization and aggression), predicts involvement in cyberbullying. This is a short-term longitudinal study that is interesting because it deals with the same subjects at two moments in which both problems are examined. The study confirms continuity in the roles of involvement, at least at short-term, and the prediction that can be made from one problem to the other in some cases, but not in others.

In the study, *Predicting adolescent perpetration in cyberbullying: An application of the Theory of Planned Behavior,* Wannes and Walrave (2012), using a broad sample of 1045 twelve-to eighteen-year old pupils from 30 Belgian secondary schools, aim to contribute to the research field on cyberbullying by offering a comprehensive theoretical framework that helps to predict adolescents' perpetration of cyberbullying. Specifically, they analyze the role of students' attitudes towards cyberbullying, peer pressure, and perceived behavioral control over the intention or motivation to carry out this behavior, and subsequent involvement in cyberbullying. Thus, the authors attempt to solve a relatively frequent problem in studies of this phenomenon: the lack of a theoretical framework that allows coherent integration of the results. In this study, the authors found that attitude explained the greatest portion of variance in intention of cyberbullying, whereas subjective norm and perceived behavioral control contributed significantly less to the explained variance. Wannes and Walrave indicate that interventions aimed at tackling cyberbullying among school students should primarily focus on turning neutral or positive attitudes towards cyberbullying into negative attitudes.

In the third article, *Cognitive appraisals, emotional reactions, and their associations with three forms of peer-victimization*, Anderson and Hunter (2012) study the relationships between three types of victimization (verbal, physical, and relational) and the emotions experienced during victimization in students aged 10-13 years. The authors also evaluate whether cognitive appraisals mediate the effects of peer-victimization on emotional reactions. The results indicate that peer-victimization is associated with the emotions of anger, sadness, and fear, and all three forms of victimization (physical, verbal, and relational) are positively associated with all three emotions. However, there were no significant indirect effects of victimization on emotions either through control or threat appraisals.

In the fourth article, *Cybergrooming: Risk factors, coping strategies and associations with cyberbullying*, Wachs, Wolf, and Pan (2012) investigate the factors that shape the risk of becoming a victim of cybergrooming, analyzing diverse coping strategies, and examining he overlap between being cyberbullied and cybergroomed. The results of this investigation indicate that the associations between being a cybergroomed victim and a cyberbullied victim seem to be strong, whereas there is a weaker association between being a victim of cybergrooming and traditional bullying. However, certain strategies seem to make a significant difference: adolescents who cope cognitively-technically seem to be more likely to be cybergroomed than students who cope aggressively.

The article of Palladino, Nocentini, and Menesini (2012), entitled *Online and offline peer-led models against bullying and cyberbullying,* describes and evaluates an ongoing peer-led model called *Noncadiamointrappola!* [Let's not fall into the trap!], 2nd edition, carried out with 375 adolescents enrolled in 9th to 13th grades of four high schools in Tuscany (231 in the experimental group and 144 in the control group). This intervention consists of both online and face-to-face activities to prevent and contrast bullying and cyberbullying. In order to understand possible mechanisms,

it analyzes the role of diverse coping strategies that can mediate the effects of the project on bullying and cyberbullying behaviors. The results clearly support the efficacy of this intervention: they show a significant pattern of decrease in bullying, victimization, and cyber-victimization in the experimental group in comparison with the control group (albeit the effect size is not very strong).

In the sixth manuscript, entitled *Investigating legal aspects of cyberbullying* (Paul, Smith, & Blumberg, 2012), cyberbullying in secondary education is explored from the students' perspective using a qualitative method of enquiry. The reported level of awareness and understanding of the legal aspects of cyberbullying are investigated; consideration is also given to the views expressed by young people on children's rights, school sanctions, and safeguarding responsibilities. The results indicate that students do not really accept the sanctions in place to prevent cyberbullying, but when asked to consider alternatives, they provide similar suggestions to the already existing ones. Students are aware of their rights, yet they take responsibility for the occurrence of cyberbullying, considering their role in prevention to be more prominent than that of adults. Whilst acknowledging that they themselves are best placed to safeguard against cyberbullying, students do not present a sufficient level of understanding how to act appropriately within the constraints of the law. In conclusion, the study provides insight into the everyday aspects of implementing legislation and practical application in British schools. As indicated the authors, the extent of the contribution of this work to the growing body of knowledge about cyberbullying is limited in scope but noteworthy during the initial stages of research into cyberbullying.

Finally, Vandebosch, Beirens, D'haese, Wegge, and Pabian (2012) present an article that describes the activities of the Belgian police with regard to cyberbullying. In cooperation with other actors, the police can help to prevent cyberbullying by informing students, parents, and schools about the issue; they play a role in the detection of cyberbullying, for instance, by creating online reporting systems (aside from the offline channels); and they assist in handling the existing cyberbullying cases, by identifying the perpetrators and helping the victims.

The monographic section presented herein aims to offer the readers of *Psicothema* a series of investigations that represent the most important research trends that the international community is developing on bullying and cyberbullying. As mentioned, we selected from the responses received to our call for papers the works that best represented the key issues of bullying and cyberbullying, from their co-occurrence to the role played by legality and police action in their prevention and control. We hope we chose well.

Acknowledgements

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