



ciência plural

BULLYING AND ITS CORRELATION WITH THE QUALITY OF LIFE OF ADOLESCENTS

*Bullying e sua correlação com a qualidade de vida de
adolescentes*

*El acoso escolar y su correlación con la calidad de vida de los
adolescentes*

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The high incidence of school violence in the school environment is a worldwide problem at all levels, which is of concern as well as highly relevant to public health, as its impact on the development of children and adolescents can have serious physical, psychological and social consequences, significantly affecting their lives. One form of violence that has been emphasized through academic studies is bullying, which means cruelty, intimidation and / or aggression. **Objective:** Aimed at verify the occurrence and correlation of bullying with the quality of life among adolescents. **Methodology:** The study followed the current ethical dictates. This is a cross-sectional, observational and analytical study. All elementary school institutions (n = 22) of a municipality of São Paulo, Brazil were visited. All students (n = 1,068) were invited to participate, but, only 382 consented. **Results:** Of the total, 3.7% said they always committed bullying; 21.2% reported being victims of peer intimidation; 11.3% said they had a quality of life neither good nor bad; 2.4% said their lives make no sense. According to the correlation tests between the VPAS and the WHOQOL-Bref., there was a significant correlation at the intersection of the direct aggression and relational aggression domains with the physical, psychological, social relationships and environment domains of the WHOQOL-Bref. **Conclusion:** It is concluded that as bullying increases, the quality of life decreases.

Keywords: Bullying; Adolescent behavior; Quality of life

RESUMO

Introdução: A alta incidência de violência escolar é um problema mundial em todos os níveis, o que é preocupante, bem como altamente relevante para a saúde pública, pois seu impacto no desenvolvimento de crianças e adolescentes pode causar sérias consequências físicas, psicológicas e sociais, afetando significativamente suas vidas. Uma forma de violência que tem sido enfatizada por meio de estudos acadêmicos é o bullying, que significa crueldade, intimidação e/ou agressividade. **Objetivo:** Verificar a ocorrência e a correlação do bullying com a qualidade de vida de adolescentes. **Metodologia:** O estudo seguiu os ditames éticos atuais. Trata-se de um estudo transversal, observacional e analítico. Foram visitadas todas as instituições de ensino fundamental (n = 22) de um município do noroeste do estado de São Paulo, Brasil. Todos os alunos (n = 1.068) foram convidados a participar, mas, apenas 382 consentiram. **Resultados:** Do total, 3,7% disseram que sempre cometeram bullying; 21,2% afirmaram serem vítimas de intimidação de pares; 11,3% disseram ter uma qualidade de vida nem boa, nem má; 2,4% disseram que suas vidas não fazem sentido. De acordo com os testes de correlação entre o VPAS e o WHOQOL-Bref, houve correlação significativa na interseção dos domínios agressividade direta e agressividade relacional com os domínios físico,

psicológico, relações sociais e meio ambiente do WHOQOL-Bref. **Conclusão:** Conclui-se que a medida que o bullying aumenta, a qualidade de vida diminui.

Palavras-chave: Bullying; Comportamento do adolescente; Qualidade de vida.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La alta incidencia de violencia escolar es un problema mundial en todos los niveles, lo cual es preocupante y muy relevante para la salud pública, ya que su impacto en el desarrollo de niños y adolescentes puede tener graves consecuencias físicas, psicológicas y sociales, afectando significativamente sus vidas. Una forma de violencia que se ha enfatizado a través de los estudios académicos es el acoso escolar, lo que significa crueldad, intimidación y agresión. **Objetivo:** El objetivo de este estudio fue comprobar la incidencia y la correlación entre el acoso escolar y la calidad de vida de los adolescentes. **Metodología:** Este estudio siguió los códigos de ética actuales. Se trata de un estudio transversal, observacional y analítico para el cual se realizó una visita a todas las instituciones de educación básica (n = 22) de un municipio del noroeste del estado de São Paulo, Brasil. Se invitó a todos los alumnos (n = 1.068) a participar, pero solo 382 aceptaron. **Resultados:** Del total, el 3.7 % dijo siempre haber perpetrado acoso escolar; el 21.2 % afirmó ser víctima de intimidación por parte de sus compañeros; el 11.3 % dijo que su calidad de vida no era ni buena ni mala, y el 2.4 % dijo sentir que su vida no tiene sentido. De acuerdo con los resultados de la VPAS y la WHOQOL-Bref, hubo una correlación significativa en la intersección de los ámbitos de agresividad directa y relacional y los ámbitos físicos, psicológicos, de relaciones sociales y del entorno de la WHOQOL-Bref. **Conclusión:** Se concluyó que, a medida que el acoso escolar aumenta, la calidad de vida disminuye.

Palabras clave: acoso escolar, comportamiento de los adolescentes, calidad de vida.

Introduction

The high incidence of school violence is a worldwide problem in all school levels, which makes the matter a concern. It is highly relevant for public health since its impact on the development of children and adolescents can cause serious physical, psychological and social consequences, significantly affecting their lives^{1,2}.

A form of violence that has been emphasized through academic studies is bullying, an English source word whose root term is the *Bull*, "a term for a cruel, intimidating and/or aggressive person"³. In addition, it is a multifaceted form of abuse mostly seen in schools and workplaces. Characterized by repeated exposure of a person through physical and / or emotional aggression including teasing, insults, mockery, threats, harassment, social exclusion, among others^{2,4}.

Bullying is classified in three major forms. The first involves "direct and physical" behavior including acts like assaulting physically, stealing or damaging other people's objects, extorting money, forcing sexual behavior, forcing performing menial activities, or the threat of such things. The second form includes "direct and verbal" behaviors such as insulting, nicknaming, making fun of, making racist or homophobic comments, or relating to any difference in the other. Finally, there are "indirect" behaviors of bullying such as to systematically exclude a person, gossiping or spreading rumors, threatening to exclude someone from a group to get some favor or, in general, manipulating the social life of another^{5,6}.

This kind of behavior is a combination of factors such as aggression by parents, family dysfunction, lack of boundaries, hyperactivity, impulsiveness, behavioral problems, attention difficulties, low intelligence and poor academic performance. In general, aggression is associated with poor school performance and inappropriate behavior⁷.

Victims of school bullying are more likely to suffer from psychological distress, depressive symptoms, self-harm and even suicide, besides being a precursor of criminal behavior^{7,8,9}. There is evidence that *bullying* in adolescence can affect the quality of life, causing physical and emotional difficulties not only for the victims but also for the aggressors¹⁰.

Quality of life is a multidimensional builder surrounded by distinct domains such as physical, psychological, social and environmental. It is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "an individual's perception of their position in life in the context of culture and value systems in which they live in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns" ¹¹.

In view of the consequences of bullying and its impact on adolescent health, the adoption of measures to fight is necessary or at least minimize the problem. For it is at this stage that experiences are provided to assist them in choices about life, to guide them on how to protect themselves and others, encouraging them to build their autonomy and their otherness ¹².

Thus, it is appropriate to carry out the present study on the subject in question because of the high prevalence of bullying in schools and also verify the consequences it causes to the quality of life of adolescents.

Methodology

This is a cross-sectional, observational and analytical study. All the Elementary Education State Public Schools (n = 22) of a medium-sized municipality in the interior of São Paulo, Brazil were visited. The study participants were composed of 382 sixth year students of the total of 1,068 students enrolled in schools.

As exclusion criterion was some students at the time of data collection did not have the authorization signed by their parents or guardians.

Two instruments were used. The Victimization and Peer Aggression Scale (VPAS) was used to verify the occurrence of bullying in schools, which is a self-report instrument developed to investigate aggression among peers in schools¹³. The main features of the VPAS are the following: the use of statements describing specific aggressive behaviors that can occur in the school context, delimiting the last six months as a trial period; the scale contains eighteen questions distributed in four dimensions:

Direct Aggression: includes form of physical and verbal abuse;

Relational Aggression: includes behaviors that harm the victim's relationship with other peers;

Attacks on property: includes negative and aggressive behavior directed at objects belonging to another peer;

Victimization: includes all aggressive behaviors of which the participant has been targeted. [13]

To evaluate the quality of life of adolescents, the WHOQOL-Bref instrument was used. It was prepared by the World Health Organization, translated and validated in Brazil [14]. It consists of 26 questions and four domains:

Physical: related to pain, discomfort, energy and sleep; **Psychological:** related to positive and negative feelings, self-esteem, appearance and concentration; **Social relationships:** personal relations and support; **Environment:** physical security, home environment, financial resources, health care, leisure, physical environment and transportation. The application of instruments was carried out collectively in the classroom, on days and times pre-arranged with teachers in order not to change the school routine.

The VPAS analysis was made through four domains: direct aggression (questions 1-4 and 6), relational aggression (questions 7-10), attacks on property (question 5) and victimization (questions 11-18). The scale items are evaluated on a Likert 5-point scale measuring the frequency of the studied behaviors (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = always, 5 = almost always).

The WHOQOL-Bref. has 24 facets which are comprised of four domains: physical (questions 3, 4, 10,15 -18), psychological (questions 5-7, 11, 19, 26), social relations (questions 20-22) and environment (questions 8, 9, 12-14, 23-25). The responses follow a Likert scale (from 1 to 5, the higher the score, the better the quality of life).

For the correlation between the VPAS and the WHOQOL-Bref., the Spearman correlation was used because they are not distributed according to the Normal Curve.

The study was approved by the Regional Education Board. The visits were carried out after the authorization of the directors responsible for the institutions,

as well as the signing of the Informed Consent by parents who consented to student participation and the assent of the same, previously obtained at the beginning of the study. The project was approved in the Brazil Platform following the ethical norms of Resolution 466/12 enacted by the National Health Council of the Ministry of Health - Brazil, according to the declaration of Helsinki.

Results

Of the total 1,080 students, 382 participated in the study. Regarding gender, 62% were female and 38% were male. Regarding age, 80.1% were 11 years old, 16.5% 12 years old, 1.6% 13 years old, 0.8% 10 years old, 0.5% 14 years old, 0.3% 15 years old and 0.3% were 16 years old. According to race / color, 47.6% reported being white, 38% brown, 9.9% black, 2.9% yellow and 1.6% reported being indigenous according to Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of students according to gender, age and race / color, Araçatuba-SP, Brazil, 2018.

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Feminine	237	62.0
Masculine	145	38.0
Total	382	100.0
Age		
10	3	0.8
11	306	80.1
12	63	16.5
13	6	1.6
14	2	0.5
15	1	0.3
16	1	0.3
Total	382	100.0
Race/Color		
Yellow	11	2.9
White	182	47.6
Indigenous	6	1.6
Black	38	9.9
Brown	145	38.0
Total	382	100.0

When asked if they had already committed bullying against their peers, 46.3% said they had never committed, 21.5% almost never committed, 25.4%

reported that they sometimes provoked their peers, 3.1% almost always committed this act and 3.7% said they always committed bullying.

With regard to being victims of bullying, 28.3% reported that they were never provoked by their peers, 9.4% said they often suffer provocation, 27.5% said they were sometimes annoyed by them, 13.6% almost never suffered provocations and 21.2% said they always suffer from bullying.

Whether they have already been insulted by their peers, the majority (41.9%) states they never went through this situation, 13.9% of students said they hardly ever experienced insults, 22.8% claimed that they were sometimes cursed at, 8.6% said they were often insulted by classmates, and 12.8% reported always suffering offenses.

As the victim of physical abuse, 67% reported that they were never victims, 13.6% said they almost never suffered this aggression, 12.6% claimed that sometimes they were struck by peers, 2.6% reported almost always suffering from this act, and 4.2% said they always suffer this type of bullying.

When asked about the location where most of these bullying situations occurred, 54.5% claimed the classroom, followed by recreational area, representing 21.7% of the participating students. Regarding the consequences of intimidation, the majority (73.3%) said it had no consequence and 6.3% claimed that there were some bad consequences. Regarding derivations that remained, 5% reported psychological consequences and 1.6% reported physical consequences according to Table 2.

Table 2. Percentage distribution and numerical characteristics of violence, according to the location, if they had consequences and what were the consequences. Araçatuba-SP, Brazil, 2018.

Characteristic	n	%
Location		
Class room	208	54.5
Playground	83	21.7
Corridors and stairs	5	1.3
Lunch room	9	2.4
Physical education space	8	2.1
Did not respond	6	1.6
Total	319	83.5
Consequences		
Had no consequences	280	73.3
Some bad consequences	24	6.3
Terrible consequences	1	0.3
Made to change schools	7	1.8
Did not respond	7	1.8
Total	319	83.5
Which		
Psychological	19	5.0
Physical	6	1.6
Total	25	6.5

The average of each domain for the VPAS questionnaire is described in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the variables studied, Araçatuba-SP, Brazil, 2018.

Characteristic	Average	Standard deviation
Direct aggression	1.65	0.67
Relational aggression	1.48	0.68
Attacks on property	1.15	0.51
Victimization	2.8	0.96

The studied variables of the WHOQOL-Bref questionnaire are listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the studied variables, Araçatuba-SP, Brazil, 2018.

Characteristic	Average	Standard deviation
Physical	79.99	12.18
Psychological	74.63	14.80
Social relations	78.18	18.88
Environment	68.65	13.87

Analyzing the results of the WHOQOL-Bref., 52.1% said they have a very good quality of life, 35.9% claimed to have a good life, 11.3% said they have a quality of life nor bad nor good, 0.5 % reported having a bad life and 0.3% reported a very poor quality of life.

With regard to how life makes sense, 43.5% claimed that their lives make a lot of sense, 36.4% said that life makes great sense to them, 13.6% reported that their lives more or less makes sense to them, 4.2% said their lives makes very little sense and 2.4% declared that their life does not make any sense at all.

According to the correlation between the VPAS and WHOQOL- Bref questionnaires, it is observed that all significant intersections are negative, that is, as bullying increases, the quality of life decreases. According to the classification proposed, one can also say that the correlation coefficients are low, according to Table 5.

Table 5. The correlation results between the VPAS x WHOQOL, Araçatuba-SP, Brazil, 2018.

VARIABLES	DIRECT AGGRESSION		RELATIONAL AGGRESSION		ATTACKS ON PROPERTY		VICTIMIZATION	
	Coefficient correlation	p-value	Coefficient Correlation	p-value	Coefficient correlation	p-value	Coefficient correlation	p-value
WHOQOL								
Physical	-0.284*	<0.001	-0.246*	0.000	-0.153*	0.003	-0.263*	0.000
Psychological	-0.295*	<0.001	-0.287*	0.000	-0.147*	0.004	-0.372*	0.000
Social Relations	-0.183*	<0.001	-0.145*	0.005	-0.058	0.261	-0.191*	0.000
Environment	-0.179*	<0.001	-0.139*	0.006	-0.063	0.222	-0.164*	0.001

* Statistically significant correlation coefficient

Discussion

The presence of bullying can lead to physical, psychological and social damage, both to the recipient and to those who commit. These losses can be observed soon after their commission or in the course of child development and may last into adulthood ¹. But adolescents do not realize the seriousness of this problem therefore, the consequences also go unnoticed by them.

The processes and the time related to bullying are characterized by constant, recurrent and increasingly complex episodes, which start with small taunts and intimidation and arrive in many cases to acts of actual violence ¹⁵. In the present study, a prevailed victimization of adolescents can be observed between the aggressors and victims. This rate is similar to that reported in studies conducted by Atik & Güneri, 2013¹⁶.

The most prevalent type of bullying in this study was the verbal form of aggression among adolescents such as insulting and name calling. This result is consistent with studies conducted in other countries in which insults prevail over physical aggression that includes kicking, punching and threatening to injure a peer¹⁶.

According to Santos & Kiene ¹⁷, the location where most bullying occurred was the playground (patio), followed by the classroom, which can also be observed in the present study, and yet, it is noted that in the playgrounds and in the classroom, while there are staff and teachers, bullying occurs in disguised form in various situations, making interventions difficult, especially when the professional in question naturalizes such situations.

Adolescents who suffer bullying, depending on their individual characteristics and their relationships with the means in which they live, especially the family environment, cannot overcome some or all of the traumas suffered at school. They may grow with a negative self-image, low self-esteem and depression, and develop serious relationship problems marked by mistrust and insecurity with respect to bonds. They may also assume an aggressive behavior and can suffer from or commit bullying in their future workplace. In extreme cases, some of them may

try or come to commit suicide^{8,15}. This was noticed at work where the psychological consequences prevailed.

In the correlation between bullying and the quality of life, it is observed that the student victims of bullying generally have their quality of life decreased. This data is consistent with other studies¹⁸.

The adolescent phase is characterized by several changes in the body, including the way of being, thinking and acting as adolescents. It is marked by biological, social and behavioral changes which significantly affect eating habits, social, family, cultural and spiritual relations, and in a sense, the (dis) agreement with themselves¹⁹.

Adolescence is a stage of acquiring healthy lifestyle behaviors and also exposure to various risk situations which can become serious consequences in the future. This can also have a negative effect on the quality of life^{19,20}.

The quality of life in adolescents is closely related to their mental health and subjective well-being. There can be different proposed strategies to promote the quality of life in adolescents. The school is a crucial social structure for education and preparation for life, however, it should have a broader educational approach that promotes a healthier social and emotional development of students²⁰.

Conclusion

Therefore, bullying is a serious social problem that goes beyond the academic and personal level, negatively influencing the adolescent quality of life, causing in most cases, irreversible damage. With prevention in school, the quality of life of adolescents will be better and this will reflect in their future, becoming more friendly young people.

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