

# School and Motor Activity Against Bullying

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## Abstract

*The purpose of this research work is to highlight the contribution that sport and school can offer for a sustainable educational and training development for young people.*

*There are, of course, some basic social and cultural criticalities to be overcome in order to assert the values of school, sport, and therefore of all educational contexts, so it is necessary to counter the growing phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying.*

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**Keywords:** Sport; bullying, cyberbullying; School; Motor Activity.

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of bullying in recent years is expanding more and more, manifesting itself with episodes of violence affecting social contexts such as schools or sports centers, showing a critical social and educational framework.

In this contribution we intend to offer a brief general overview of the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying, and carefully analyze the values that school and sport offer to counteract this growing phenomenon.

## 2. Il fenomeno del bullismo

In today's society the phenomenon of bullying is spreading more and more, to such an extent that such manifestations are manifesting themselves with a daily frequency involving both children and teenagers (Sharp & Smith, 1994).

This phenomenon is very complex and multicausal, and it is precisely for this reason that it is difficult to eliminate it completely, as it is necessary to analyze individually the peculiarities of the subject and the surrounding environment (Fonzi, 1997).

The term bullying derives from the English "bullying", it is used in the international literature to introduce the phenomenon of bullying between two or more people of the peer group.

It is Olweus in 1973 to generate a definition of this event: "a student is subject to bullying, or is bullied and victimized, when he is exposed, repeatedly over time, to offensive actions carried out by one or more classmates" (Olweus, 1996).

This definition was later improved by emphasizing the social nature of bullying (Björkqvist et al, 1982), the duration of aggressive action and intentionality in harming the victim (Besag, 1989), and the premeditated abuse of power towards one or more people (Sullivan, 2000).

Although bullying can be present throughout life (Pepler et al., 2004), it is possible to identify some characteristics of this phenomenon:

1. Intentionality, which wants to indicate the intentionality on the part of the bully in

- creating damage to the victim with his behavior;
2. Persistence, the meaning of which is to indicate that the bully's actions towards the victim are not sporadic but continuous over time;
  3. The imbalance of power, which wants to indicate the different social, physical, intellectual, family strength of those directly concerned (Fonzi, 1997).

When we talk about aggressive behavior present in the phenomenon of bullying, it is necessary to point out the existence of three types of the same:

1. Physical, are those behaviors that manifest themselves in an evident way with kicks, punches, and usually it is the most encountered mode.
2. Verbal, like previous behaviors, are also frequently evident.
3. Relational, are hidden and subtle forms of behavior that are implemented by bullies especially by exploiting the psychological component of the victim, with the aim of isolating the latter from the group (Menesini, 2000).

These three behavioral variables also change according to age and sex, in fact girls who play the role of bully usually use exclusionary behaviors, while victims of this same sex usually react by denouncing bullying or with depression; Instead, male bullies prefer aggressive physical behavior, while victims of the same sex use a type of complicit and conspiratorial behavior.

The phenomenon of bullying can be defined as an aggressive behavior, specifically as a new form of increasing deviance among adolescents (Petroni & Troiano, 2008), it is possible to place it within the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) in the middle between a conduct disorder and the oppositional-provocative one.

Conduct Disorder is characterized by a repetitive and persistent mode of behavior, which can generate a clinically significant impairment of social, school or family functioning, thus harming the fundamental rights of others or the rules that regulate society.

Children and adolescents who are part of the phenomenon of bullying have a compromised affective sphere, in fact they manifest an overbearing, threatening or intimidating behavior, they can also be physically aggressive both with people and animals, without the presence of remorse or empathy towards the victim.

Instead, Oppositional Defiant Disorder manifests itself with a provocative, disobedient and hostile attitude towards adults or those who represent authority. It has characteristics such as hostility, provocation, stubbornness, resistance to directives, little willingness to compromise, surrender or negotiation, it is less serious than the Conduct Disorder but can become so.

There are various theories that have tried to explain the phenomenon of bullying, including:

- A purely environmentalist approach that establishes that the cause of deviant behavior is due to socio-family factors;
- A genetic-biological approach that attributes risk factors to the constituent components of the individual (Rutter et al., 1998).

Both these two theories and others assert that the child's personality is initially generated with the relationship with the parents, who, in this context, have the important role of facilitators of conventional values and consequently of the acquisition of control functions. This is also validated by Bowlby's attachment theory, which establishes that if the child/parent relationship is not healthy, it can generate difficulties in the growth process. This leads us to think that it is family discomfort that generates vexatious behavior for learning reasons and revenge against the family itself (Oliverio Ferraris, 2008). Some research has highlighted different types of aggression based on severity and, above all, according to age, showing that the highest levels of severity occur during the adolescent phase (Loeber & Hay, 1997).

The manifestations of aggression of adolescents have the aim of giving a role and a position, even if limited in time, within the group (Vitaro, Tremblay & Bukowski, 2001)

So bullying is also and above all a group phenomenon, within which bullies, victims and all those subjects who are supporters of one or the other, or who do not seem to be involved, play an important role (Salmivalli et al., 1996).

It is for this reason that the group, especially in adolescents, assumes a fundamental role, as it becomes a unitary place that feeds on the need of its members to support and share the anxieties of all. This sharing becomes the primary condition of the group, thus generating a constant relationship between the members in order to generate threatening actions towards the surrounding environment, in order to remove and download internal frustration on other subjects: the victim (Ingrascì & Picozzi, 2002).

### 2.1 Bullies

Bullies are impulsive people, not very empathetic and very aggressive both with their peers and with adults, and it is precisely for these characteristics that they have a good opinion of themselves, and thanks to these attitudes they enhance their self-esteem (Olweus, 1993). They are attracted to violence, as they believe that thanks to it they can get what they want, and they justify it with indifference towards others and lack of sensitivity towards the victims (Menesini et al., 1999).

Some research has shown that the aggressive behavior of bullies is not due to any cognitive or social deficiencies, but on the contrary, to a high knowledge of the social context, as it is thanks to it that it is possible to attack the victim and/or manipulate and subjugate others who have to play the role of bully (Sutton et al., 1999).

Other research has shown that bullies are not all the same and therefore are not generated only in disadvantaged social conditions (Lawson, 2001). Four types can be identified:

1. Aggressive or dominant bully, who plays the role of negative leader of the group, he is very popular in the context in which he operates, he is very strong from a physical and psychological point of view, in fact he is a skilled manipulator but at the same time he is also very aggressive and regardless of the consequences.
2. Anxious bully - victim, presenting as unpopular and unfriendly among peers, with an insecure personality, low self-esteem, anxiety and emotional instability. Despite this, he is a very provocative and aggressive subject precisely to try to focus attention on himself.
3. Passive or gregarious bully, who affiliates with the leader and does not act on his own initiative, but what he does is only to feel part of the group, eliminating the risk of becoming a victim.
4. Temporary bully, who plays this role only for a certain period and due to an emotionally traumatic event.

### 2.2 Victims

There are two types of victims:

1. Passive victims, who appear weak both physically and psychologically, do not have a good social life, are unable to respond to the offenses they receive and, consequently, if attacked, they react by crying and withdrawing into themselves, resulting in the eyes of others even weaker.

2. Provocative victims are usually hyperactive subjects, annoying towards others (Genta, 2002), and it is for this reason that social relations with the peer group are scarce. They tend to provoke to seek attention, and at the same time fail to control their emotions, in fact they

are impulsive, and, as mentioned, tend to react to the attacks of bullies, even if in an ineffective way (Schwartz et al., 1983).

### 2.3 Group

Among the various actors present in the bullying phenomenon is the group. It reduces the responsibility and the seriousness of the bully's actions on the victim, as a gesture, if performed by several people, tends to generate feelings of guilt in the victim and not those of others. The bully/leader is admired by the group, and the group usually tends to support and reinforce the bully's behavior. Within the group it is possible to find different actors responsible for the phenomenon of bullying, both in a negative and a positive sense:

- Helper of the bully;
- Supporter of the bully;
- Mediator;
- Advocate for the victim;
- Spectator;
- Comforter.

### 3. Cyberbullying

Bullying phenomenon of bullying with technological progress has evolved into cyberbullying, which uses new technology to spread and it is difficult for others to get away. The term cyberbullying has been recognized internationally, and has had various definitions:

- A repeated and long-lasting aggressive act using electronic, group and individual means of communication (Smith et al., 2008);
- Intentional and non-episodic damage implemented with the use of electronic means of communication.

As in bullying, various types of behavior can be found in cyberbullying:

- Cyberstalking: continuous and repetitive threats such as to pursue the victim;
- Trickery: deception or fraud against the victim;
- Flaming: sending, via messages, emails or online groups, aggressive and vulgar messages:
  - Exclusion: exclusion of the victim from online groups;
  - Denigration: publication of any rumors concerning the victim, in order to ruin the reputation of the same and consequently isolate him from the group;
  - Masquerade: use and therefore appropriation of the victim's digital identity in order to ruin the latter's reputation;
  - Online harassment: sending offensive messages in a continuous and repetitive way with only the use of messages.

Furthermore, since cyberbullying is a young phenomenon and therefore under study, four main categories of behavior have been established (Nocentini et al., 2010):

1. Visual: use of mobile phones or personal computers, the internet, in order to send or disseminate photos or videos that may damage the dignity of the person;
2. Written-verbal: use of mobile phones (messages, chat), personal computers, internet (mail, websites), with the aim of compromising the dignity of the person;
3. Impersonation: use of an account in order to capture and disseminate personal and confidential information;
4. Exclusion: voluntarily exclude the person from an online group.

Although cyberbullying, compared to traditional bullying, is a phenomenon that has been

spreading in recent years, it has some distinctive features:

- Anonymity: the bully feels even more protected because he acts using a computer or a mobile phone and therefore not exposing himself;
- Unavailability: acting using the internet, it is difficult for the bully to be discovered by the victim;
- Bravado: feeling safe thanks to anonymity and being difficult to find, the bully completely eliminates any moral reservations he may have towards the victim;
- Spatio-temporal expansion: when any action or wording is disseminated on the web or with mobile phones, it will spread rapidly, amplifying the damage to the victim.

In addition to these characteristics of cyberbullying, in this phenomenon it is possible to find some peculiarities of bullying, albeit with different methods and values:

- Intentionality: the bully is not fully aware of the value of his attack on the victim and of his reaction, because there is no physical and verbal contact between the subjects involved (Nicoletti & Galligani, 2009);
- Repeatability: in reality in this case the action can also be performed only once, but what makes the difference is the internet's ability to reiterate (Kowalski et al., 2008);
- Asymmetry of power: it is evident in the phenomenon of cyberbullying, and can be defined as the ability to master a computer medium (Shariff & Gouin, 2006).

As in the phenomenon of bullying, also in cyberbullying the group assumes a fundamental role but with different responsibilities, because the seriousness of the bully's action depends on the relevance of the "views" of the group itself (Brighi, 2009).

Ultimately it is possible to say that the virtual world is attractive for bullies (Kowalski & Limber, 2007), because they can express themselves by inhibiting their emotions and use aggressive behavior more easily (Ybarra & Mitchell, 2004).

### **3. School against bullying**

Bullying can be considered a social phenomenon so much that it also involves the school community (Lagerspetz et al., 1982), understood also and above all as a group, which as a whole or even in part, can support the dynamics and rules to be used so that a persecutory type of behavior is used towards the victim and towards the remaining part of the group that acts as spectators (Menesini, 2008).

Specifically, when there is the presence of a bully and a victim, the atmosphere of the class is such that perverse mechanisms are implemented, such as:

- social contagion;
- weakening of control or inhibitions towards aggressive tendencies;
- diffusion of responsibility;
- gradual cognitive changes in the perception of the victim, who appears increasingly deserving of harassment (Fonzi, 1995).

Some studies have shown that approximately 15% of a sample of 130,000 children aged between 8 and 16 are involved in bullying (either as a bully or as a victim) at school (Olweus, 1983). Subsequently these studies were updated, and in Italy, it was found that, out of 1,379 pupils aged between 8 and 14, approximately 42% in primary schools and 28% in lower secondary schools declared to have been bullied (Menesini, 2003).

These researches have shown that the educational institution can be considered as a place of violence and persecutory actions against children (Petrone & Troiano, 2008), highlighting the importance of the school in intervening to contrast and reduce this phenomenon constantly growth.

Some scholars believe that it is necessary to establish well-defined guidelines and

objectives to be included in teachers' programming in order to increase awareness of this phenomenon in the children themselves. In order for all this to be possible, it is necessary to involve pupils, parents, teachers and non-teaching staff, then publicize and communicate the project to those directly concerned. Specifically, during class lessons, it may be useful to discuss some concepts related to the phenomenon of bullying, for example, in literature, the pupils' cultural knowledge could be used as a stimulus to arouse reflections on this phenomenon, in history one could exploit the various abuses of power that have taken place over time (Nazism, the Balkan wars) to have initial discussion points and subsequently expand them.

Teachers must discuss the topic, as it is of common interest to all school disciplines and must be proposed continuously. The contents that are proposed during the lessons must be targeted and proposed with interactive methods and with a final participatory evaluation such as to actively involve the students. These interventions aim to make people understand the importance of grasping any ideas coming from any discipline, as they all have a single purpose: the training of learners as citizens. What has been said turns out to be of fundamental importance because these activities are able to develop the emotional awareness of the children, both at a cognitive level (understanding of emotions) and affective (emotional response to the other). The education and strengthening of feelings and therefore of emotional awareness is significant for understanding oneself and others, generating positive effects on both bullies and victims:

- promote integration and psychological well-being;
- use prosocial behaviors and help from the group towards weaker companions.

Some studies have shown that bullies are less inclined to participate in group activities, because they appear to be less empathetic and hostile towards others, showing poor social acceptance. In this regard, the role of the teacher is of fundamental importance, who must be able to create the right conditions for the pupils to cooperate with the whole class group for the achievement of the final objective, which, in this case, assumes a double value: it must help reduce the learning and integration difficulties of problematic children, but above all change the climate and quality of relationships in the classroom.

#### **4. Motor activity against bullying**

The practice of sport offers numerous opportunities for socialization, thus becoming a real social network which, depending on the context, assumes various roles: confrontation, support or competition, which are fundamental for the creation of the subject's identity.

The phenomenon of bullying can be present in all social gathering environments such as schools or sports realities. Sport can be defined as an educational agency whose task is to show values such as respect for the rules, spirit of sacrifice, tenacity, sportsmanship, humility, characteristics that tend to educate and coexist peacefully with others. It is clear that sport has intrinsic values that can be summed up in a single term: fair play, it can be defined as one of the main pivots of the "sport structure" and in addition to being a value, it can also be defined as a mental attitude from which the way of playing sports derives.

So practicing sport seems to constitute a sort of representation of society, as it has clear rules with social roles and statuses to be respected, in order to simplify the social relationship between individuals, generating recognition and appreciation by society itself, even who was recognized and played exclusively the role of the bully.

Often in sports venues the competition between athletes becomes "sick", in the sense that each sportsman wants to demonstrate his abilities convinced that he is the best, and consequently, thinking that he has a sort of right over the others. Frequently the cause of all

this lies in bad coaches, who despite having the skills of the discipline, do not possess the skills useful for dealing with children and adolescents.

Sport, in general, and the sports association with its coaches, in particular, have the important role of building a sporting ethic against bullying, and young people must understand and internalize these values. The presence of a person who uses bullying attitudes such as to lead them back to the phenomenon of bullying must be stopped and made aware that what they have done goes against the cardinal values and moral principles of sport.

This approach is based on morality and reflection as an opportunity to internalize the rules, but unfortunately it is not always useful to dissuade the bully from acting aggressively again. For this reason it is necessary for the bully to become aware of and understand a series of rules in order to send clear signals to the athletes with the aim of defining acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and in the latter case defining and applying the penalty that it can be mild, medium or severe based on the seriousness of the action, always considering that its effectiveness depends on the perception that the bullies have of it.

A further type of approach to this phenomenon depends on the willingness and ability to listen, and therefore to establish a communication that is valid, on the part of the coach towards the bully. This empathetic relationship is intended to bring about changes not only in the behavior, but also and above all in the feelings and way of thinking of the bully. In addition to the individual talks between the bully, the instructor and the victim, there is also the involvement of the group in order to stop the bullying and help the victim. Logically, the success of this type of approach depends a lot on the quality of the relationship of the people involved, in fact if the instructor manages to establish good communication with the bully, this in itself favors collaboration and the achievement of positive results.

## **Conclusion**

The previous paragraphs dealt with the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying, describing and analyzing the causes, characteristics, dynamics, critical issues and outcomes. It is a phenomenon that manifests itself mostly in an age group between 8 and 16 years, its dynamics have been analyzed in particular educational contexts, i.e. schools and sports centres, therefore it was not possible to ignore the also analyze factors such as the role of the teacher or coach in counteracting this phenomenon.

This explains the importance of the educational institution, which by improving the plurality of knowledge, and supporting a flexible investigative process open to the analysis of any problematic situation, is able to favor the understanding, in the student or in the athlete, of the scarce ethical value of the phenomenon of bullying or cyberbullying, in favor of physical activity based on moral values, the spirit of competition, one's physical abilities, commitment and willpower. So sport has a vast potential from the point of view of social, educational and cultural development, therefore its educational value has been re-evaluated also thanks to the advances in scientific research in recent decades, considering the field of action of bodily experience and highlighting the its close relationship with the emotional dimension and cognitive processes.

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