

Bullying and cyberbullying: victimisation, harassment, and harm. The need to intervene in the educational centre

Bullying y ciberbullying: victimización, acoso y daño. Necesidad de intervenir en el entorno escolar

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Abstract:

This work focusses on cyberbullying, analysing the results of a survey administered to a representative sample of Spanish internet users aged between 9 and 16. The data show that harassment on digital devices is part of the climate of violence among pre-teenagers and teenagers, where face-to-face bullying is much higher than online bullying. Although bullying occurs in different ways, and these tend to overlap, the most frequent form is offline bullying. The prevalence of cyberbullying varies considerably by age, tending to increase as the subjects' age increases, whereas offline bullying decreases among 15-16-year-olds. The boundary between victims and perpetrators

is difficult to sketch in cyberbullying as three out of four children who admit having treated others in a hurtful or nasty way on the Internet or with mobile phones have themselves been treated in this way by others. The evidence regarding 13-14-year-olds is especially worrying as they are more involved in cyberbullying and a great many of them say they have felt very upset when victimized. The results display a need to prevent and deal with cyberbullying at school, as this is the most effective and equitable site for intervention.

Keywords: bullying, teenagers, cyberbullying, school life, Internet, mobile devices, risks.

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Resumen:

El presente trabajo analiza el *ciberbullying* a través de los resultados de una encuesta realizada a una muestra representativa de los y las menores españolas usuarias de Internet de entre 9 y 16 años. Los datos revelan que el acoso a través de las tecnologías digitales forma parte de un clima de violencia entre los preadolescente y adolescentes, entre los cuales el acoso cara a cara prevalece claramente sobre el que tiene lugar a través de medios tecnológicos. Si bien las diversas modalidades de acoso se superponen entre sí, la más frecuente es la que tiene lugar en entornos *offline*. La incidencia del *ciberbullying* está fuertemente estructurada por la edad y aumenta en función de esta. Se aprecia un intercambio de roles entre los y las menores

implicados en los episodios violentos *online*, dado que tres de cada cuatro acosadores han sido también víctimas de acoso. Resultan particularmente llamativos los datos del grupo de 13-14 años, en el que la prevalencia de la participación en el *ciberbullying* es relativamente elevada y además los y las menores reconocen haberse sentido muy disgustados por su victimización. Los resultados avalan la necesidad de intervenir desde el entorno escolar para minimizar la incidencia del acoso, ya que es el principal ámbito en el que tiene lugar, y además este es el ámbito más igualitario y efectivo.

Palabras clave: acoso, adolescentes, ciberracismo, convivencia escolar, Internet, dispositivos móviles, riesgos.

1. Introduction and state of the question

Social and institutional interest and concern about violent behaviour among school pupils has increased in recent years, as has its presence in the media (Sahuquillo, 2017). Both face-to-face bullying and the form which involves the use of ICT are subjects of analysis and concern at different levels, something which has led to a range of working definitions to describe these two phenomena.

While cyberbullying should be understood as an extension of the traditional form of bullying on virtual social networks and the Internet, some of the features of bullying —repetition, imbal-

ance of power, intent, and lack of justification— have to be redefined in the case of cyberbullying or online bullying. Repetition, for example, has been flagged as a problematic criterion, given that on occasions a single aggression using technological means can endure and perpetuate itself on the Internet, even though there was only a single action by the aggressor (Levy et al., 2012; Menesini et al., 2012; Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). Similarly, factors such as the anonymity in which the bully can hide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2008), the difficulty for the victim of stopping bullying on the Internet (Ovejero, Smith, & Yubero, 2013), and the ease with which the audience can increase in the case of cyberbullying contribute to

the victim's defencelessness and to harm being greater than in cases of traditional bullying (Estévez, Villardón, Calvete, Padilla, & Orue, 2010).

Although bullying can occur in situations outside school—in public spaces such as parks or sports centres—and the online setting transcends schools, school is the location where most of children's social relationships occur, and so it is where bullying—traditional and online—is most common and most visible.

Among the elements relating to bullying—the family setting, the cognitive characteristics of bullies and victims, and social factors—it is important to mention ones that relate to the school setting, such as academic performance, peer pressure, lack of safety and supervision in schools, lack of measures to respond to diversity, the absence of a positive school climate, and lack of knowledge and limited control of the relationships students maintain on social networks, which, as Cook, Williams, Guerra, Kim, & Sadek note (2010), are risk factors for cyberbullying.

There is no consensus when quantifying the prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying among school pupils in Spain. The data can, and indeed do, vary according to which tools are used to measure them, how the phenomenon is defined, and the age range considered, as Smith notes (2016). At a global level, in 2010 the WHO reported a prevalence of bullying at school which varied by country from 13% to 27% in Europe, with similar figures for 2016 (Currie et al., 2012; Inchley et al., 2016).

Regarding cyberbullying, Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, and Del Rey (2015) deduced from a review of over 60 studies that at least one in every five to seven minors are involved. At the European level, Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson (2011) found that on average 6% of the population aged between 9 and 16 believed they had been victims of cyberbullying and 3% said they had been a bully on the Internet. In the case of Spain, Garmendia, Jiménez, Casado y Mascheroni (2016) established that among Internet users aged between 9 and 16 the prevalence of online victimisation was 12% and the prevalence of bullying was 8%. Likewise, the survey carried out in 2016 by Save the Children is noteworthy thanks to the size of its sample, which included over 21,000 children and adolescents aged from 12 to 16 from Spanish public schools. This gave the result that 9.3% of those surveyed considered that they had suffered traditional bullying in the last two months, and 6.9% considered they had been victims of cyberbullying, with insults being the most frequent form of aggression (Save the Children, 2016).

Various channels are used for carrying out online aggression: harassment by telephone, recordings of physical attacks circulated by instant messaging or on sharing platforms, emails, spreading rumours and threats on social media, exclusion, etc. In this way, as the online habits of the school population and its access to different technological elements have increased and diversified, so too have forms of cyberbullying. It is worth noting that Internet use has now spread to virtually

all of the school-age population; in Spain, on average, 95% of children and adolescents aged 10 to 15 use the Internet. The use of mobile phones, in turn, is strongly shaped by age: 25% of children have a mobile phone at the age of 10; practically half do at 11, and from 14 years of age, over 90% have a device for their own use (Spanish National Statistics Institute (INE), 2017). In Europe, 97% of the population aged between 15 and 24 has virtually daily access to the Internet, with 85% doing so from a smartphone (European Commission, 2015).

School is the key area for action on bullying among children and adolescents and the need for schools to intervene in the face of this phenomenon is upheld. However, school intervention on bullying currently faces complex challenges. For example, there are situations in which more than one school is involved in a single case of cyberbullying or, as it is deemed to have happened outside of school, responsibilities are watered down and nobody acts. Nonetheless, bullying causes harm to whole communities, and so it is necessary for all parties—family and society as well as the school—to be involved (Cohen-Almagor, 2018). Work to prevent different forms of violence among the student body as a whole is fundamental to prevent any form of bullying (Save the Children, 2016).

The field of psychology has suggested that the role of schools is as a force for cooperation between different parties such as the school and family as well as society and the community. Interventions

must focus on both the aggressor and the victim and on the two of them jointly. Different types of intervention are recommended, both for conflict prevention and to improve coexistence in schools. These include primary intervention, to detect initial situations of mistreatment, and secondary intervention in the face of consolidated situations to provide therapeutic support or protection for victims, and monitor aggressors (Garaigordobil, 2011). Nonetheless, the best form of intervention proposed is to encourage harmonious coexistence in schools, stimulating social and emotional skills, cooperation, and conflict solving (Garaigordobil, 2015).

Del Rey, Estévez, and Ojeda (2018) refer to a variety of school programmes focussed on prevention or intervention in the case of cyberbullying. These programs focus on raising awareness in society and making students reflect, strengthening a critical attitude to the phenomenon and making them aware of security and the protection they should have on the Internet, and fostering good use of social media and the Internet (Del Rey, Estévez, & Ojeda, 2018).

Evidence shows that, to varying degrees, cyberbullying complements bullying at school (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Smith, Kwak, & Toda, 2016). The aim of this work is to analyse the relationship between bullying and cyberbullying in Spain, starting from the basis that the two phenomena overlap, to describe the frequency with which they occur in different age ranges and with different levels of

harm for their victims, and to explore the association between the roles of victim and aggressor in bullying processes, taking the school setting as the context.

1.1. Material and methods

This article analyses data obtained through a survey funded by the Spanish Ministry of the Economy and Companies, reference number CSO 2013-47304-R, which was carried out from April to June 2015. With regards to the population and sample, according to data from the Spanish National Statistics Institute, the reference population —children and adolescents aged between 9 and 16— was estimated to be 3,758,400. Similarly, the Spanish National Statistics Institute, in the press release about ICT equipment and usage at home, estimated that among children and adolescents aged between 10 and 15, use of the Internet is universal. Consequently, with a margin of error of 4.45 % and a confidence level of 95.5 %, it was decided to use a sample of 500 children and adolescents. The fieldwork involved surveying children and adolescents aged between 9 and 16, all of whom were Internet users, and their parents. In each family home, the parent most involved with the online activity of the child or adolescent was interviewed. In order to maximise the quality of the responses, the questionnaires were completed in the homes of the families and self-administered questionnaires were also used for the more sensitive questions asked to the children and adolescents.

The sample was stratified by region and level of urbanisation and sampling points were selected using the census

sections. After this, the addresses of the homes were selected at random using the random route process. The survey analysed Internet access and usage, the online activities of the children and adolescents, the incidence of the risks and the subjective perception of the harm caused by them, as well as communicative practices, digital skills, aspects relating to excessive use, and parental mediation.

In this article we analyse the results relating to bullying between peers considering the medium through which it occurs —online and/or offline— and the roles of the children and adolescents involved in the incidents of violence. The statistical analysis will fundamentally be descriptive as the relatively small number of children and adolescents who are victims and/or aggressors does not allow for more elaborate statistical analyses. The frequency analyses will be structured by the age of the children and adolescents as this has a direct influence on the development of digital skills, personality maturation, and possessing mobile phones. The prevalence of bullying will be analysed according to its different forms, the frequency of the roles involved for bullying and cyberbullying, the association between the two roles, and the relationship between harm and age according to type of bullying.

2. Analysis and results

2.1. Context and forms of cyberbullying

Table 1 shows how the incidence of face-to-face bullying is much higher than that for cyberbullying in any of its various forms.

TABLE 1. Percentages for forms in which children and adolescents have suffered bullying in the last 12 months by age (absolute frequencies in parentheses).

%	Age				Total
	9-10	11-12	13-14	15-16	
In person, face-to-face	27 (36)	27 (34)	27 (34)	20 (23)	25 (127)
Mobile phone calls	0	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	1 (6)
Through messages on my phone (SMS or MMS)	0	1 (1)	2 (3)	3 (3)	1 (7)
On a social network (Tuenti, Facebook, etc.)	1 (1)	4 (5)	6 (7)	8 (9)	4 (22)
On a platform (YouTube, Instagram, Flickr)	2 (3)	3 (4)	6 (7)	2 (2)	3 (16)
By instant messaging (MSN, WhatsApp, Skype)	2 (2)	4 (5)	7 (9)	9 (10)	5 (26)
In a chatroom	3 (4)	6 (7)	4 (5)	2 (2)	4 (18)
Any form of bullying through the Internet or mobile devices	8 (10)	13 (16)	14 (17)	15 (17)	12 (60)
TOTAL victims	33 (43)	32 (40)	33 (40)	28 (31)	32 (154)
Non-victims	67 (91)	68 (87)	67 (91)	72 (84)	68 (346)

Q33: If someone treated you like this, how did it happen? (Please mark as many boxes as necessary.)

Sample: all children and adolescents who use the Internet (N= 500).

Source: Own elaboration.

Twelve per cent of the children and adolescents reported having been victims of cyberbullying, although the percentage of victims of face-to-face bullying (25 %) is over twice the rate for victims involving telephones or the Internet. The data corresponding to the prevalence of each type show that the various types overlap. So, the sum of the relative weight of the victims of the various online forms is higher than the total percentage of online victims (12%). Likewise, the percentage for face-to-face victims (25 %) plus the percentage for online victims (12 %) is higher than the total percentage for victims of bullying (32%). This shows that the types of bullying overlap. For example, a particular child might be bullied face-to-face and by instant messaging and/

or in a chatroom simultaneously. In any case, the data show that cyberbullying is not the dominant model of aggression between peers. Instead, the data seem to show the contrary; face-to-face bullying is predominant with other forms added to it.

The most frequent channels through which cyberbullying occurs are instant messaging (WhatsApp, 5%), social networks (4%), and chatrooms (4%). This last category is mainly used by preadolescents. In contrast, among those aged over 13-14, online bullying mainly occurs through instant messaging (7-9%) and on social media (6-8%), while in the 13-14 age group, victimisation on sharing platforms is most noticeable (6%).

2.2. Victims and aggressors by age and type of bullying

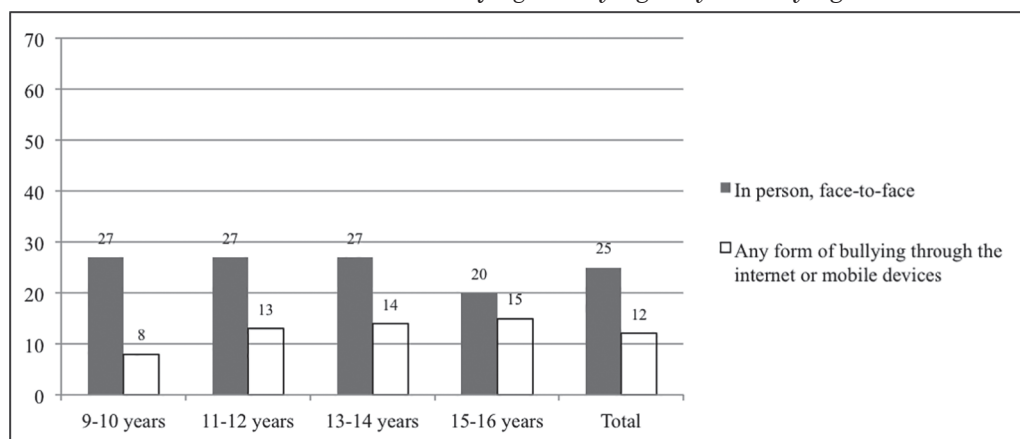
When the term bullying is used, it generally refers to the victimisation to which children and adolescents are subjected. Nonetheless, in this work we will analyse both types of violent behaviour, differentiating the two main roles of the people involved—victim and bully—depending on the two principal types of bullying.

The difference between the various age groups is striking: for those aged under 15, offline bullying clearly predominates, with around 27% in the 9 to 14 band compared with 20% in the 15 to 16 band. In contrast, the prevalence of victimisation through cyberbullying tends to increase with age, in particular from the age of 11, reaching 15% in the 15 to 16 age group. In this age group, the difference between the two types of bullying is 5%, while in

the younger age groups, it is much higher: between the ages of 11 and 14 the relative frequency of offline victimisation is double that of online victimisation and in the youngest age group it is three times higher.

In general, the prevalence of bullying—offline and online—is slightly lower than that of victimisation; however, the difference between the frequencies of the two roles is smaller in the case of cyberbullying. So much so that among young people aged 13 and 14, both frequencies are exactly the same; in this age range there are as many victims as bullies involved in cyberbullying incidents. The evidence shows that technology facilitates insults, revenge, and switching of roles between the agents involved, as was also established in the interviews and discussion groups held in previous pieces of research.

GRAPH 1. Victimization by age: *bullying v. cyberbullying*.



Q33: If someone treated you like this, how did it happen? (Please mark as many boxes as necessary.)

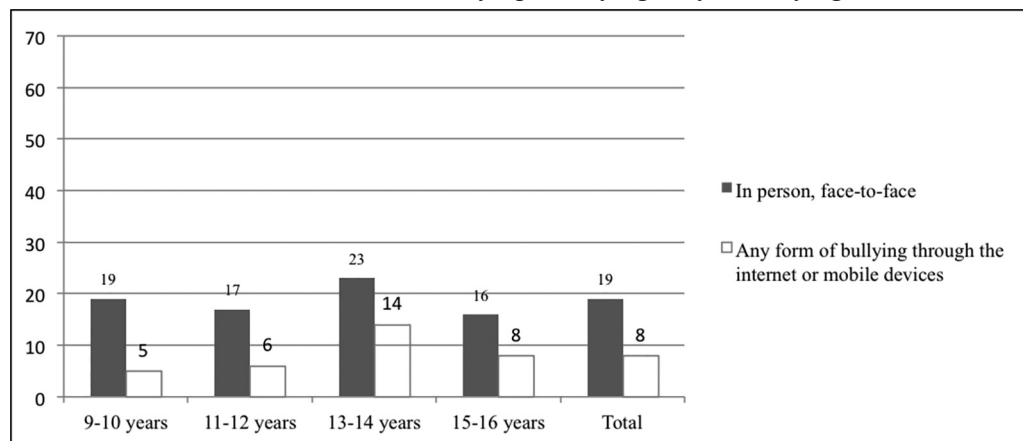
Sample: all children and adolescents who use the Internet (n = 500).

Source: Own elaboration.

In general, the percentage of bullies tends to increase with age up to 13-14 where it reaches 23% in the offline form and 14% online, while in the 15-16 age

band it falls to 16% and 8% respectively. Both types of bullying —online and offline— are most prevalent in the 13-14 age group.

GRAPH 2. Victimization by age: *bullying v. cyberbullying*.



Q34: In the last 12 months, have you treated somebody else like this? If so, how did you do it? (Please mark as many boxes as necessary.)

Sample: all children and adolescents who use the Internet (N = 500).

Source: Own elaboration.

2.3. Relationship between aggressor and victim in the online setting

Table 2 shows that there is a significant association (Chi squared = 138.5, significance = 0.000) between the roles of bully and victim in the online setting. In the total percentages the relatively low incidence of children and adolescents involved in incidents of cyberbullying tends to blur the trends. Nonetheless, participation in episodes of cyberbullying has an enormous impact on the likelihood of becoming a victim of bullying. If, on average, 12% of minors have been victimised, this datum varies considerably depending on whether they have been involved in incidents of cyberbullying as the bully. So, among those who have not bullied other children and adolescents online, the per-

centage who say they have been victims of bullying is relatively low (7%), while among the children and adolescents who have bullied people, three out of every four have also been victims of online bullying.

TABLE 2. Association between the roles of bully and victim in *cyberbullying*.

% Victims <i>online</i>	% Aggressors		Total
	No	Sí	
Not victims	86 (428)	2 (12)	88 (440)
Victim	6 (32)	6 (28)	12 (60)
Total	92 (460)	8 (40)	100 (500)

Q34: In the last 12 months, have you treated somebody else like this? If so, how did you do it? Online.

Q33: If someone treated you like this, how did it happen? Online.

Sample: all children and adolescents who use the Internet (n = 500).

Source: Own elaboration.

2.4. Association between harm and age by type of bullying

Another aspect to take into account when analysing bullying and cyberbullying is the harm they cause to the victims. Previous research has found that bullying —online and offline— is in general the most damaging experience of risk (Livingstone et al., 2011; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014) compared with other potential risks such as accessing unsuitable content or contact with strangers.

Among children and adolescents who have been victims of face-to-face bullying, on average 40 % said they felt very upset, a slightly lower percentage said they felt a bit upset (38.6 %), and 21 % said they did not feel upset. The results show that the experience of harm is strongly shaped by age. Accordingly, the proportion who felt very upset increases to 47 % in the 11-12 age group. In the 13-14 age group it falls to 41 %, and in the 15-16 age group it drops notably to 22 %. The proportion of those who said they had felt a bit upset is slightly lower than those who felt very upset between the ages of 9 and 14 and in the 15-16 age group it increases because the relative weight of those who felt very upset reduces drastically. Finally, the proportion of people who were not upset is around 14 % between the ages of 9 and 12. It increases by almost 10 percentage points in the 13-14 age group, and is 39 % in the 15-16 age group. The data show that from the age of 13, the development of resilience and digital skills as well as personality maturation can contribute to young people managing situations of

conflict more effectively and being less vulnerable to the harm caused by face-to-face bullying.

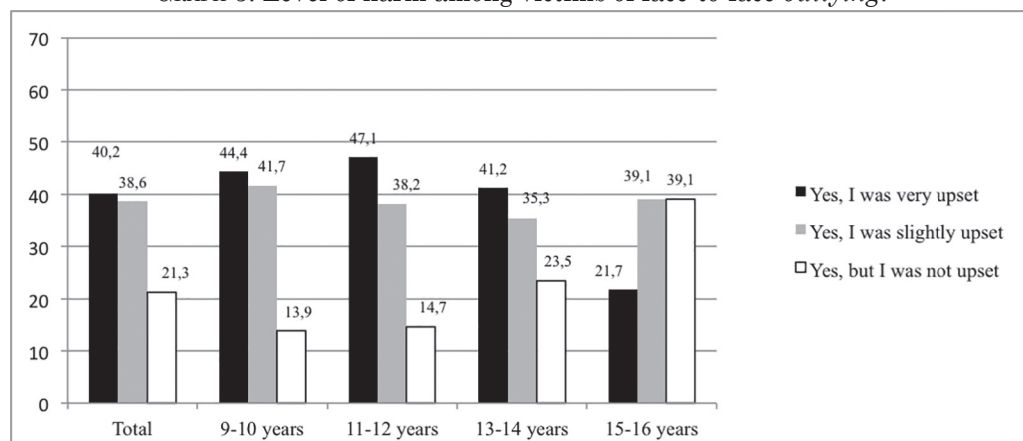
The results show that on average the proportion of children and adolescents who said they had felt very upset because of an episode of cyberbullying (45 %) is greater than the percentage who said they felt that way because of an episode of face-to-face bullying (40 %). In contrast, the percentage of children and adolescents who said they had felt a bit upset is lower in the case of cyberbullying (28 % compared with 39 %). The data show that the subjective perception of harm caused by cyberbullying is more polarised: people who report feeling very upset are relatively more numerous, but the ones who report not feeling upset are also more numerous.

Regarding age, it is worth noting that among under 12s, the percentage who felt very upset is between 40 % and 44 % compared with 30 % who say cyberbullying did not affect them. This last datum could indicate that at this early age, somewhat under one in three children is already developing resilience. Nonetheless, the data for the 13-14 age group entirely contradict this. This group's vulnerability to online victimisation is very notable: 65 % state that they felt very upset, 24 % a bit upset, and just 12 % were not upset. This age group's very high vulnerability to cyberbullying could possibly be associated with the importance these young people place on their online reputation, which would be seriously affected by incidents of online violence. In contrast, among

those aged 15 and 16, the percentage who felt very upset falls notably (29%), as also happens in the case of bullying, while the

same percentage felt a bit upset and not upset (35%).

GRAPH 3. Level of harm among victims of face-to-face *bullying*.

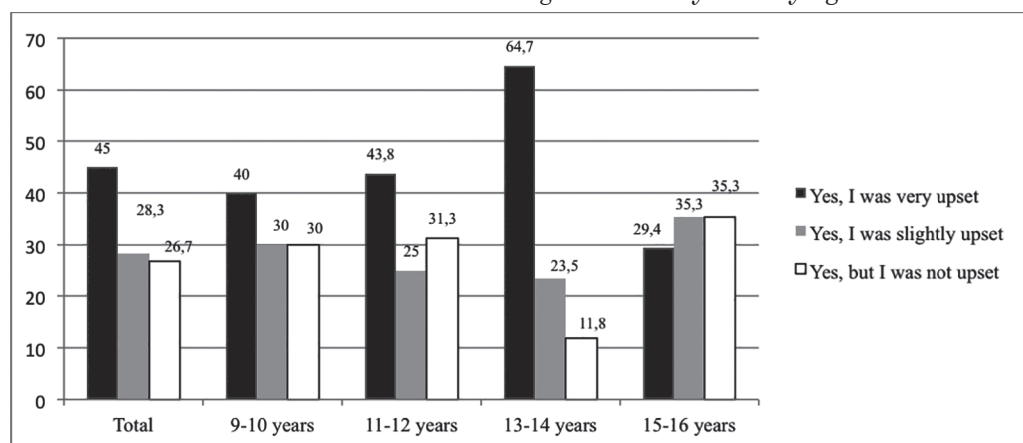


Q32: Has anyone treated you like this in the last 12 months? If so, how upset were you?

Sample: all children and adolescents who use the Internet and have been victims of face-to-face bullying (n = 127).

Source: Own elaboration.

GRAPH 4. Level of harm among victims of *cyberbullying*.



Q32: Has anyone treated you like this in the last 12 months? If so, how upset were you?

Sample: all children and adolescents who use the Internet and have been victims of cyberbullying (n = 60).

Source: Own elaboration.

3. Discussion

The evidence shows that situations of online bullying take place in a setting, in which there are many more cases of face-to-face bullying. Online bullying, or *cyberbullying* is a form of bullying, which is superimposed on other already-existing types, something which agrees with what previous research and reviews have shown (Ybarra, Boyd, Korchmaros, & Oppenheim, 2012; Zych et al., 2015; Garmendia et al., 2016). Both types of bullying display an increasing trend, and so the prevalence of bullying in general—online and offline—has doubled compared to the year 2010: 15% of children and adolescents aged between 9 and 16 (Garmendia, Garitaonandia, Martínez, & Casado, 2011) compared with 32% in 2015. This notable increase in the incidence of bullying could relate to a greater ability to identify situations of abuse and bullying by people who suffer from it and to greater social awareness of it (Garmendia et al., 2018).

Regarding the relationship between the prevalence of cyberbullying and age, while Del Rey et al. (2018) found mixed results, in our work, the differences by age group show a progression of violent online behaviour between peers: the frequency of cyberbullying increases with age unlike with face-to-face bullying (Garmendia, Garitaonandia, Martínez, & Casado-Calatayud, 2018; Barboza, 2015; Cappadocia, Craig, & Pepler, 2013; Kowalski & Limber, 2007). The number of people who suffer from cyberbullying increases as their age increases, although this bullying behaviour is carried out by fewer people. Therefore, a smaller number of aggressors

bully and victimise a larger number of students in the later years of compulsory secondary education. However, in offline bullying, the frequency increases with age but from the age of 15 there is a change in trend, with face-to-face bullying falling.

The high prevalence of bullying behaviour in the 13-14 age group is striking. This coincides with the first stage of secondary education, where supervision of pupils in schools is relatively limited while at the same time the possession of mobile phones also increases notably (INE, 2017), something often regarded as a rite of passage as young people often receive a smartphone as a present to mark their move to secondary education (Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014). In contrast, from the age of 15-16, the prevalence of face-to-face bullying falls notably, something that can be interpreted as part of the process of maturing and learning about managing emotions and the consequences of actions.

In this sense, it is important to consider that anonymity and ease of use and immediacy contribute to online insults being seen easy and free from consequences. This evidence can therefore be interpreted as a trivialisation of online violence. On many occasions, the context of the aggression is connected to young couples where, in an immature handling of a break-up, one of them distributes messages or images of the former-partner as blackmail or revenge to damage their reputation (Roca, 2015). This is consistent with the association Görzig proposes (2011) between cyberbullying, sensation seeking, and the difficulties associated with maturation. As

a conclusion in this regard, and in view of the development of cyberbullying by age group, it can be deduced that paying special attention to the first stage of secondary education, where the near-universal penetration of smartphones coincides with a lack of skill in managing social relationships, is vital for preventing and tackling situations of online bullying. On these lines, Garaigordobil claims that “if there is no preventive intervention, cyberbullying can not only not be expected to fall but instead can be expected to increase in the 12 to 18 age group” (2015, p. 1074), noting that good habits and prevention plans for cyberbullying are fundamental for learning to relate online.

There is a significant association online between the roles of bully and victim. The data do not allow us to clarify what the sequence is in the interplay between the two roles, if victimisation promotes bullying behaviour or if bullying behaviour leads to subsequent victimisation of the bullies. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence from previous research to support this connection, such as the work by Görzig (2011), which showed that around 60% of bullies had also been bullied, and the work by Lampert and Donoso, who also stated that “being a cyberbully is the best predictor of being a victim of cyberbullying” and noted that the boundaries between roles are harder to trace in cyberbullying than in face-to-face bullying (2012, p. 146).

Regarding the incidence of harm, understood as a subjective experience which can vary with each experience of bullying, the data show that the subjective percep-

tion of the harm caused by cyberbullying is more polarised than in the case of face-to-face bullying: people who report being very upset are relatively more numerous, but people who say they were not affected by it are also more numerous. Strong shaping by age is also observed: as the age of the victims increases, the proportion of severe harm falls, but this differs somewhat between face-to-face and online bullying. From the age of 13, the development of resilience and maturation can contribute to young people managing conflicts more effectively and being less vulnerable to the harm caused by conventional bullying. And yet vulnerability to cyberbullying is extraordinary in the 13-14 age range: 65% of those affected said they felt very upset, 24% somewhat upset, and just 12% did not feel upset. As noted above, this very high level of vulnerability is probably connected to the importance of the online reputation in this age group, and with the perception that aggression might have a universal reach (Ruiz, Martín, López, & Hernán, 2016), which has an impact on the particular interest in conflict prevention and management tasks among these children and adolescents.

4. Conclusions

The close association identified in our work between the roles of bully and victim indicate that the school climate is affected by situations of violence, which arise in turn are fed by episodes of aggression, and in which those children who observe, suffer and/or reproduce it also participate. All of this means that school intervention is necessary to protect victims and re-educate

cate aggressors (Save the Children, 2016), and it is also an important unifying element which is independent of each family's starting regarding, for example, digital skills (Garmendia et al., 2016). Acting in schools involves difficulties such as the school *law of silence* which leads to teachers being unable to help victims because they are not always aware of what is happening (Del Rey et al., 2018), or lack of specific training to handle this sort of situation. In this sense, it is important to detect situations of bullying, and also to have action protocols and prevention plans, taking as reference points elements that have been proven to be effective against traditional bullying (Ttofi & Farrington, 2011), as well as other specific ones given the differences detected between the two types of aggression.

The ombudsman has recommended that educational centres have increasing intervention on bullying, working with families and counsellors, and providing students with interpersonal relationship skills and communication strategies. In other words, solving issues with coexistence in a given school, without relying so much on external interventions, social services, the police, and courts (Defensor del Pueblo, 2007). In this respect, there is evidence for a reduction in the number of problems between students in schools with a plan for education in problem solving (Caballero, 2010).

But reality differs greatly from what was suggested. The cuts resulting from the financial crisis have meant that many schools can no longer have a PTSC (Spe-

cialist Community Service Teacher), a figure supporting harmonious coexistence who in theory would be the person responsible for implementing protocols or plans against bullying in schools, something which, in light of the evidence shown here, is a grave error. Consequently, it is noteworthy that "in the Spanish Law to Improve the Quality of Education's mentions of teacher training and granting resources to schools, educational quality is constantly linked to curriculum subjects, and prevention of violence is not regarded as an essential part of the desired educational quality" (Del Rey et al., 2018, p. 86). At the same time, there is still little regulatory support for tackling violence in schools and what there is only partially matches the suggestions by the ombudsman and by leading researchers on the topic in our setting, and the creation of specific legislation relating to school violence continues to be vital (Cerezo & Rubio, 2017). Overall, the contrast between the growing social interest in mistreatment between peers and the lack of political commitment to preventing it is worrying.

In this sense, the report "Los derechos de los niños y niñas en el sistema educativo en España" ("The rights of children in the Spanish educational system", Larrañaga, 2016) underlines the social acceptability of violence in some school settings, where aggressors tend to replicate patterns of violence in relationships with their peers without being aware of the harm caused to the victim. It is apparent that the school setting is very prone to permeation by violence from other settings in current society, which is characterised by individual-

ism, competitiveness, and a fast pace of life where interpersonal relationships are becoming increasingly conflictive. Recreating harmonious coexistence in schools is a challenge which should involve all agents—teachers, students, and parents—to transform the culture of mistreatment into a culture of good treatment.

It has also been shown that a friendly and supportive climate in schools has positive effects on students and reduces the likelihood of bullying, both online and face-to-face. Research shows that when young people feel connected to their schools, in an impartial, pleasant, and positive climate of trust, acknowledged involvement in all types of bullying—physical, verbal, or online—is lower (Cohen-Almagor, 2018; Cohen, Twemlow, Berkowitz, & Comer, 2015; Williams & Guerra, 2007).

Therefore, schools have a responsibility to act in the face of bullying, whether it be online or face-to-face, explaining and discussing the problem in the school and trying to explain the effects of bullying on victims. But the work of schools must take place alongside the parents to raise awareness and control the problem. Prevention programmes in schools, which offer support for students, are necessary, but parental intervention is also required (Cohen-Almagor, 2018).

And schools cannot tackle this social problem alone. The latest research into the topic suggests it is necessary to implement measures in the face of the social ills created by the Internet, and it calls for responsible cooperation between parents,

schools, governments and institutions, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the people in charge of social networks. Intimidation is a problem which affects and concerns us all, and so it must be approached in an interdisciplinary manner. Responsibility and accountability must be shared by all parties: parents, teachers, schools, NGOs and businesses, and must encompass different countries and the international community (Cohen-Almagor, 2018).

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