



Research Article

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Bullying and School Coexistence in the Return to Class of Primary School Students after the COVID-19 Pandemic: Evidence Collected in Peru

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Abstract

Bullying is a public health problem widely discussed by both academics and education professionals. It is a permanent behaviour of violence that could be physical, verbal, psychological and even sexual, which discredits the victim and places him/her in a situation of fragility in his/her environment. The objectives of this research were to determine the levels of bullying (and its dimensions); to determine the levels of school coexistence (and its dimensions); and finally to analyse the relationship between bullying and school coexistence (and its dimensions) in an educational institution located in Cajamarca, Peru in the first year back to school after the pandemic caused by COVID-19. The study presented a quantitative approach, with a descriptive and correlational level, and a non-experimental design. According to the literature explored, bullying has 4 dimensions (physical bullying, verbal bullying, sexual bullying and psychological bullying), while school coexistence has 3 dimensions (inclusive coexistence, democratic coexistence and peaceful coexistence). The population consisted of 120 students in the sixth grade of primary education, of both sexes, from a school located in Cajamarca, in northern Peru. Two instruments were used: the school bullying questionnaire (with 56 items) and the school coexistence questionnaire (with 37 items). Both instruments showed validity and reliability after being tested. Among the results, it was observed that most of the schoolchildren presented bullying at low level (57.5%), followed by medium level (22.5%) and high level (20.0%); on the other hand, regarding the school coexistence variable, the low level was 36.0%, the medium level 53.0% and the high level 11.0%. Finally, it was determined that bullying is significantly related to school coexistence ($p < 0.001$); as for the intensity of the correlation, it is negative and moderate ($r = -0.551$), the greater the bullying in school contexts, the lower the school coexistence in this space.

Keywords: bullying; school coexistence; violence; COVID-19; Peru

1. Introduction

Historically, Olweus (since 1973), states that bullying is a permanent behaviour of physical, verbal, psychological and sexual violence, which discredits the victim and places him/her in a situation of

fragility in relation to the environment (Aidomojie et al., 2022; Bauer et al., 2007; Beckman & Svensson, 2015; Luis M. Dos Santos, 2022; Limber et al., 2018; Yaakub et al., 2010). This problem has increased in recent years, becoming a public health problem with risks that could lead to loss of life (Francis et al., 2022; Gong et al., 2022; Hertz et al., 2013; Luo et al., 2022). The person who suffers from bullying has the condition of dominance and submission, where humiliation is leaving serious consequences over time that are lacerating the self-esteem of the aggrieved person (Lugones Botell & Ramirez Bermudez, 2017). Therefore, for the case of schools, in this public health problem, the participation of authorities, teachers, families and students is urgent to promote preventive actions against violence (García Martorell, 2018).

The United Nations Organization (UNESCO) indicates that students remain silent when they suffer from bullying at school and the violence generated by the abuser, has an aggressive and premeditated nuance, who reacts or acts with impetus when he feels insecure and vulnerable, in front of other subjects with greater power. The incidence of bullying in schools usually occurs in both men and women, due to issues related to the child's physiognomy, such as skin colour, weight, hair shape, sexual orientation, etc. (Davis et al., 2018; Duarte et al., 2017; Islam et al., 2022; Luis Miguel Dos Santos, 2021). Sometimes, those who originate bullying in the school environment are children with dysfunctional families, have economic or social problems, among other conditions (UNESCO, 2021).

Likewise, bullying has become a huge concern because it alters the emotional and psychological state of students, having high implication worldwide for its negative consequences on victims and victimizers. Therefore, it implants in educational centres a harmful environment, which undermines institutional freedom and meaningful learning in schoolchildren (Arroyave Sierra, 2012; Cano Echeverri & Vargas-González, 2018; Kallciu et al., 2020). On the other hand, schoolchildren are between 6 to 7 hours at school, 5 days a week, which is enough time to create with peers integral interpersonal relationships, to form adequate coexistence environments at school and to consolidate significant knowledge during their permanence (Cerdeña et al., 2018). However, training does not only concern teachers, it is a task that is expressly circumscribed with parents, who are responsible and the first educators of their children, and should not be absent or delegate such obligation to teachers (Lugones Botell & Ramírez Bermúdez, 2017).

International organizations report the increase in bullying statistics in male and female students, who are victims of aggression, humiliation and intimidation by their peers, in addition to theft, psychological, verbal, physical and sexual violence, who do not report their situation for fear of reprisals (United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation, 2019), (UNESCO, 2021). In Latin America, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Panama, Mexico, Ecuador, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Chile, Nicaragua and Puerto Rico are those with high rate of bullying (Garaigordobil et al., 2019).

In Latin America, a study reported that 30% of schoolchildren claim to have been victims of school violence in some of the dimensions raised; however, the aggressors operate in a group or herd to achieve subjugation of the victim through physical force or psychological coercion, to force them to say things or commit acts against their own will. Scenarios where it is notorious the lack of prevention and the poor preparation of teachers, managers and administrators, who do not act adequately or intervene in advance, in situations of violence at school (Andrades-Moya, 2020).

In this sense, the development of educational policies with the objective of diagnosing and preventing violence among schoolchildren in time is unavoidable. Despite the evident results of many inquiries and evaluations on the subject, which do not crystallize responsibly in school institutions, coupled with the passivity of governments that do not establish suitable public policies to address this social problem (Cardozo, 2021; Diaz Crespo, 2019). The pandemic motivated several countries to implement policies to ensure teaching in virtual environments for digital natives (Suyo-Vega, Meneses-La-Riva, Fernández-Bedoya, Alarcón-Martínez, et al., 2022; Vitvitskaya et al., 2022), but neglected those required to address cases of bullying in the return to face-to-face classes.

It should be noted that the momentum generated in schoolchildren by the practice of bullying subsides over the years and among its most frequent manifestations perceived in the victims we have,

blackmail, offense, theft of passwords, false messages, sharing personal information through apps, insulting videos, etc. (Arias-Sandoval, 2018). Circumstances that emphasize the urgent need for further research on this collective problem, whose main purpose should be to propose preventive actions and educational interventions, which help students to overcome bullying from the first years of school, until its end in high school (Garaigordobil et al., 2019), (Aristimuño & Noya, 2015).

In the Peruvian setting, the Ministry of Education (MINEDU) describes that it is common for schoolchildren to want to leave school, after finishing secondary school, compared to those schoolchildren who were never bullied; high statistics on violence were recorded in national schools (84%), and in a lower proportion in private schools (16%); where 9,686 complaints were considered coming only from public institutions in metropolitan Lima (55%), which reach a total of 36.69% at the national level and which are distributed with 74.71% for state schools and 25.29% for private schools (MINEDU, 2018). There is evidence to support that during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people saw their mental health affected by the new conditions of performing daily activities and the need to adapt to change (Becerra-Medina et al., 2022), so the state sees the need to implement projects to care for the mental health of students and teachers (Esteves Pairazamán et al., 2020; Suyog-Vega, Meneses-La-Riva, Fernández-Bedoya, Polonia, et al., 2022).

Therefore, bullying undermines the victim students' sense of belonging in the school and their future aspirations (Bitsika et al., 2022; Yu et al., 2022). During the formative process, students experience certain shortcomings that do not allow them to achieve meaningful learning, inducing them to have risky and pernicious ideas in the dimensions raised, with characteristics referring to indiscipline, victimization and aggression (Cerdeira et al., 2018). They become individuals with some defined characteristics such as, unfriendly, lonely, un-empathetic, little personal treatment, antisocial behaviour, little talk among equals and no respect for the rules of coexistence, nor did behavioural establish in the classroom (Toballino-López et al., 2017).

It should be pointed out that the practice of daily coexistence at school requires values that help students to overcome difficulties and restore harmony, which enrich the learning received in the classroom. However, bullying has a significant outcome on the psychological aspect and quality of life of schoolchildren, because those who have experienced bullying are twice as likely to isolate themselves, have insomnia problems and express the occasions of having thought of suicide. In addition, conflict resolution models show favourable results in the use of different strategies such as, communication, discipline, mediation and teacher control, collaborative and cooperative work that help the care of emotions and the promotion of discipline; where the school as a whole has an active participation, from the management in the construction of adequate coexistence environments (Peña Figueroa et al., 2017).

Finally, it is the teachers who reveal behaviours of physical, verbal and psychological aggression in students, because they evidence them inside the classroom and outside school, where in most cases the victims opt for silence and keep quiet for fear of further attacks. However, they are manifest situations and parents hold the educational institution responsible for the acts and cases that have occurred, demanding immediate actions and more psychological support for victims and perpetrators; but the truth is that despite such measures the problems still continue (García Martorell, 2018), (González & Baca, 2018). Finally, we must analyse and understand the problem, but we must deepen the awareness of the members and actors of the educational entity as a whole, with the aim of redesigning bullying prevention and attention programs with appropriate institutional policies (Galán & Robles, 2018; Hidalgo-Rasmussen & Hidalgo-San Martín, 2015).

This study has the following objectives:

Objective 1: To determine the levels of bullying (and its dimensions) in an educational institution located in Cajamarca, Peru in the first year back to school after the pandemic originated by COVID-19.

Objective 2: To determine the levels of school coexistence (and its dimensions) in an educational institution located in Cajamarca, Peru in the first year back to school after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Objective 3: To analyse the relationship between bullying and school coexistence (and its dimensions) in an educational institution located in Cajamarca, Peru in the first year back to school

after the pandemic caused by COVID-19.

2. Methodology

The study was of quantitative approach, descriptive and correlational design, non-experimental design (Hernández-Sampieri & Mendoza Torres, 2018). The population consisted of 120 students in the sixth grade of primary education, of both sexes, from a school located in Cajamarca, in the northern part of Peru.

A questionnaire for school bullying was used whose author is Atala Ticeran (2018), which has 56 questions with Likert-type answers and 4 dimensions (physical bullying, verbal bullying, sexual bullying and psychological bullying). In addition, another questionnaire was used to measure school coexistence, whose author is Echeverría Echeverría et al., (2021), which has 37 questions with Likert-type resolution and 3 dimensions (inclusive coexistence, democratic coexistence and peaceful coexistence). Both instruments were evaluated by expert judgment and a pilot test was carried out, obtaining a Cronbach's Alpha reliability of 0.945 and 0.972 respectively.

Likewise, parents were asked for informed consent and assent for data collection, indicating during the process that the information was anonymous and would only be used for the study.

Subsequently, the data were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics version 24, to create the statistical tables that finally calculated the relationship of the variables, which facilitated the numerical analysis and the interpretation of the processed data, from the detailed representation of each variable, by means of the Spearman rho test.

3. Results

3.1 Objective 1: To determine the levels of bullying (and its dimensions) in an educational institution located in Cajamarca, Peru in the first year of return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic

The results are presented in Table 1. It was observed that most of the schoolchildren presented bullying at low level (57.5%), followed by medium level (22.5%) and high level (20.0%).

In terms of its dimensions, verbal bullying achieved a low level (48.0%), medium level (43.0%) and high level (9.0%). psychological bullying was found at a low level (37.5%), medium level (32.5%) and high level (30.0%). On the other hand, physical bullying was identified at a low level (60.8%), medium level (21.6%) and high level (18.0%). Finally, sexual bullying was identified at a low level (65.0%), medium level (12.0%) and high level (25.0%).

Table 1: Levels of bullying (and its dimensions)

Variable and its dimensions	Low level		Medium level		High level	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
Bullying	69	57,5%	27	22,5%	24	20.0%
Verbal bullying	58	48.0%	51	43.0%	11	9.0%
Psychological bullying	45	37.5%	39	32,5%	36	30.0%
Physical bullying	73	60,8%	26	21,6%	21	18.0%
Sexual bullying	78	65.0%	12	10.0%	30	25.0%

3.2 Objective 2: To determine the levels of school coexistence (and its dimensions) in an educational institution located in Cajamarca, Peru in the first year of return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic

According to Table 2, the findings obtained on school coexistence and its dimensions showed average levels for the most part. Regarding the school coexistence variable, the low level was 36.0%, the

medium level 53.0% and the high level 11.0%. The dimension inclusive coexistence obtained a low level of 31.0%, medium level of 56.0% and low level of 13.0%. As for democratic coexistence, the low level was 35.0%, the medium level 49.0% and the high level 16.0%. Finally, peaceful coexistence had a low level of 29.0%, a medium level of 59%, and a high level of 12.0%.

Table 2: Levels of school coexistence (and its dimensions)

Variable and its dimensions	Low level		Medium level		High level	
	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage	Count	Percentage
School coexistence	43	36.0%	64	53.0%	13	11.0%
Inclusive coexistence	37	31.0%	67	56.0%	16	13.0%
Democratic coexistence	42	35.0%	59	49.0%	19	16.0%
Peaceful coexistence	35	29.0%	71	59.0%	14	12.0%

3.3 *Objective 3: To analyze the relationship between bullying and school coexistence (and its dimensions) in an educational institution located in Cajamarca, Peru in the first year of return to school after the COVID-19 pandemic*

Spearman's rho statistical test (Spearman, 1904) was conducted. In each of the results, a bilateral asymptotic significance coefficient of less than 0.05 (margin of error 5%) was obtained, so it is possible to affirm that the calculated results are significant within this margin of error.

It was possible to determine that bullying is significantly related to school coexistence ($p < 0.001$); as for the intensity of the correlation, it is negative and moderate ($r = -0.551$).

It was also possible to determine that bullying is significantly related to inclusive coexistence ($p = 0.002$), the intensity of the correlation measured was negative and slight ($r = -0.398$).

Continuing with the analysis, it could be determined that bullying is significantly related to democratic coexistence ($p < 0.001$), the intensity of the correlation measured was negative and close to moderate ($r = -0.450$).

Finally, there is sufficient evidence to establish that bullying is significantly related to peaceful coexistence ($p < 0.001$), the intensity of the measured correlation was negative and mild ($r = -0.324$).

The findings, in general, showed a significant negative and inverse relationship in the analysis of the variables and dimensions of school coexistence, which is interpreted as an indirect correlation. The greater the bullying in school contexts, the lower the school coexistence in that space.

Table 3: Correlations between the bullying variable and school coexistence (and its dimensions)

Correlations	Spearman's rho	p. value
Bullying * School coexistence	-0.551*	<0.001
Bullying * Inclusive coexistence	-0.398*	0.002
Bullying * Democratic coexistence	-0.450*	<0.001
Bullying * Peaceful coexistence	-0.324*	<0.001

4. Discussion

Currently, bullying is an undeniable problem in educational institutions, which weakens and puts school coexistence at risk, due to the permanence of different situations of intimidation that occur inside and outside the classroom at an alarming rate worldwide. As raised by (Reyes-Angona et al., 2018), violence that originates in the school environment is a type of violence that is not made visible. It should be noted that, from their daily perspective, students do not need clarity in the construction of the concept of bullying, since in practice they do not distinguish the difference between violence and play, confusing both terms that are part of their life stage (Resett, 2020).

Likewise, Cano Echeverri & Vargas-González (2018), supported that the relevant prevention measures are an essential element to anticipate the risks of verbal bullying, psychological bullying, physical bullying and sexual bullying. Bullying is a problem that has detrimental effects on the victim's self-esteem, so it should be avoided that a schoolchild becomes a future aggressor (Paredes-Zavaleta, 2021). Also, there is in the educational context high social vulnerability, since bullying is more common in younger schoolchildren and decreases during adolescence; so it follows that bullying affects the emotional health of students, deteriorates self-esteem, and affects their academic development and personal growth (Cerdeira et al., 2018).

According to the analysis of the variable school coexistence and the dimensions inclusive coexistence, democratic coexistence and peaceful coexistence, results with high and medium level were obtained. Derivations that coincide with (González & Baca, 2018), who verified 43% of students dissatisfied with coexistence at school. In addition, Sáez et al., (2018), stated that the perception of schoolchildren is positive, however, there is indecision about the promotion of a culture or pedagogy of peace within the classroom. Therefore, school harmony is an essential component in the school, where directors, students, teachers, administrators and society are the active actors of the process and who should plan a fraternal environment with effective interpersonal relationships, coexistence rules and timely communication between peers (Carbajal & Fierro, 2019; Larios Gómez, 2021).

In the assessment of the variable bullying and school coexistence, according to the results, they are moderately related, finding a negative correlation coefficient ($r = -0.551$). The results coincide with those found by (Maquera Maquera & Apaza Gomez, 2022), who found a value of $r = -.736$, establishing a negative relationship. It should be noted that both studies were similar in the sample and the type of statistical analysis used.

In this regard, Avilés Martínez & Petta Daud (2018), expressed the need to optimize coexistence in schoolchildren, with the implementation of educational anti-bullying projects that allow the permanent intervention of the members of the educational community, whose purpose is to eradicate all types of violence inside and outside the classroom. Inclusively, Hidalgo-Rasmussen & Hidalgo-San Martín (2015), stated that bullying preventive action must be in harmony with teamwork, role change, problem solving, student body distribution, decision making and new forms of support and integration established in the institution.

Thus, González & Baca, (2018), pointed out that parents demand from the institution, timely information and/or learn various practical methods that help them to restore harmony and agreements at home. As pointed out by, Valdés, López, Chaparro (2018), who exposed that the development of educational standards and the practice of adequate coexistence, seek to ensure proper harmony in the classroom, which guarantee in the student the achievement of the objectives set and timely pedagogical training.

Likewise, an inverse negative correlation ($r = -0.398$) was found in the study in relation to bullying and inclusive coexistence in sixth grade schoolchildren. Results that can be compared with those found by (Herrera-López et al., 2017), who showed in their research inconsistent bonds of friendship among students, sympathy for various harmful group models and little learning of the negative meaning of violence.

In this regard, the practice of democratic school coexistence, develops a valuable work in the transmission of information among students, since it strengthens communication between peers, encourages school affection and collaborative teamwork, expanding other events that will consolidate teaching and appropriate scenarios for school performance. Likewise, in the school where this study was carried out, it was evidenced that the strategies proposed in the classroom favored interpersonal communication with favorable results among students, given that from an integrating aspect they created a more democratic, plural and positive environment.

In reference to bullying and democratic coexistence in sixth grade students. The results showed the presence of an inverse and negative correlation ($r = -0.450$). In this sense, school coexistence between students and teachers generates ideal relationships, which should be understood within the scope of interculturality and social multiculturalism, and should be considered in schools for

students to reach and live social, civic and democratic values, which will allow them to strengthen their academic work in a responsible manner (Andrades-Moya, 2020; Larios Gómez, 2021). Likewise, the identification of the different factors that limit and hinder coexistence at school, should provide the appropriate skills to establish interventions aimed at the prevention and risk factors of bullying (Cardozo, 2021).

In evocation to bullying and peaceful coexistence in schoolchildren, the results found showed the existence of a negative inverse correlation ($r = -0.324$); which coincide with the derivations evidenced by (Echeverría Echeverría et al., 2021; Saez et al., 2018), as both studies ensure that educational actors during the training process seek to eradicate all types of violence, as well as to maintain a peaceful, democratic school environment and a healthy citizen harmony, founded on the good treatment of the person and respect for human dignity, with moral and ethical principles.

Finally, the threat of bullying is a global and social problem, which demands the shared responsibility of society, parents, students and the educational community, who must work together and unified to seek common alliances, in order to achieve a healthy coexistence in school, for the integral formation of schoolchildren. Likewise, we must point out that, if the dynamics of bullying are not corrected, the utopia of a more just, non-violent, moral, human rights and peaceful society will be more difficult to achieve as the inappropriate use of TICs tools spreads like an epidemic throughout the world.

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