

PEER VIOLENCE IN ADOLESCENTS AND ITS PREVENTION FROM THE SCHOOL

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This article analyses, from an ecological perspective, the main results obtained in research on violence among adolescents: prevalence, characteristics of aggressors and victims, and age and gender-related differences, with special emphasis on the series of studies¹ carried out by the present author with 826 adolescents on conditions of risk and protection with respect to the violence they suffer, employ or observe, both in school and outside school. Based on the results of these studies, the development of prevention is proposed, integrating the characteristics of specific anti-bullying programmes within a broader perspective that overcomes the usual contradictions and rejects all forms of violence, along with the dominance-submission model on which it is based. Emphasis is placed on the following key components for prevention: the development of multiple-level cooperation and a no-violence curriculum. The results obtained from a programme assessed with 783 adolescents confirm the effectiveness and viability of these components.

En este artículo se analizan, desde una perspectiva ecológica, los principales resultados obtenidos en las investigaciones sobre violencia entre adolescentes: incidencia, características de agresores y víctimas, diferencias en función de la edad y el género, prestando una especial atención a la serie de estudios que su autora ha dirigido con 826 adolescentes sobre las condiciones de riesgo y protección de la violencia que sufren, ejercen u observan, en la escuela y en el ocio. A partir de los cuales se propone desarrollar la prevención integrando características de los programas específicos contra el acoso desde una perspectiva más amplia, que permita superar las contradicciones más habituales y rechazar todo tipo de violencia así como el modelo de dominio-sumisión en el que se basa. Y se destacan, como componentes clave para la prevención: el desarrollo de la cooperación a múltiples niveles y el currículum de la no-violencia. Los resultados obtenidos en un programa evaluado con 783 adolescentes confirman la eficacia y viabilidad de dichos componentes.

PREVALENCE AND SCENARIOS OF PEER VIOLENCE

The majority of studies carried out over the last two decades on peer violence in adolescence have focused on the violence found in schools, and on one of its principal forms, commonly termed “bullying”, highlighting that: 1) it includes a range of behaviours (making fun of others, threats, intimidation, physical abuse, systematic isolation, insults); 2) it tends to cause problems that are repeated and prolonged over time; 3) it involves an abuse of power, with one pupil, who has the general support of a group, bullying another who is defenceless and cannot escape from the situation alone; 4) and it is maintained due to the ignorance or passivity of those around both bully and victim, who do not involve themselves directly.

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Most research on school bullying has been carried out from a descriptive perspective, trying to discover the prevalence of the problem and the characteristics of those involved, both bullies and victims. In the pioneering study on a national scale, Olweus (1983) concluded that in Norway about 15% of the primary and high-school population was affected by bullying. Contrary to popular belief, bullying takes place far more frequently inside the school environment than on the way to and from home. No differences were observed in relation to size of school or number of pupils per class (Olweus, 1993).

The series of studies carried out by Smith in the United Kingdom shows that between 20% and 10% of pupils see themselves as victims (Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor & Chauhan, 2004), while those considering themselves as bullies account for between 4% and 10% (Smith & Sharp, 1994). The frequency of bullying on the way to and from school was found to be about half that of bullying in schools themselves.

In the study carried out in Spanish high schools for the People’s Ombudsman (*Defensor del Pueblo*) (2000), 33.8% of pupils claimed to be the victims of insults,

4.1% of physical aggression and 0.7% of armed threats. As regards aggressors, 40.9% of pupils claimed to use insults; 6.6% physical violence and 0.3% armed threats. The playground is the most frequent location for physical violence and direct exclusion, while insults, nicknames and damage to belongings were more frequent in the classroom. There appear to be no significant differences between state-funded and private schools with regard to this problem.

One of the aims of our own work (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Seoane, 2004) was to compare peer violence in the two most relevant contexts: inside and outside school. The study was carried out in 12 high schools in the Autonomous Region of Madrid, and involved 826 adolescents between 13 and 20 years of age, with an average age of 15.44. Among the main results, we should highlight the fact that teenagers in general claim to suffer less bullying outside than inside school, with the exception of intimidation with threats or weapons, where the opposite is true. The frequent situations of exclusion and humiliation at school seem to be behind the tendency towards violence of those acting as bullies in both contexts. When attempting to differentiate types of adolescents with respect to their participation in violence, cluster analyses reveal three situations:

- 1) That of the majority of cases (80.5%), in which there is no significant threat of violence in either context.
- 2) That of the most common problem (16.1%), in which pupils are excluded and bullied inside as well as outside school (in leisure time).
- 3) That of the worst problem, covering 3.4% of those assessed, who suffer a little more than the rest from victimization at school, use all forms of aggression much more frequently in both contexts, and are victims outside school (in leisure time) of much more violence, and in its most serious forms; this situation probably coincides with that of adolescents who identify themselves with violence and tend to spend their time with other adolescents of similar characteristics.

From these and other studies designed to reveal the prevalence of bullying it can be deduced that:

- 1) We are dealing with a phenomenon which is a normal part of traditional school culture, given that throughout their school lives, all children seem to come into contact with it, as victims, aggressors or spectators (the most common role).
- 2) Communicating the facts about the prevalence of violence among schoolchildren to society at large is

an essential step on the way to breaking the traditional “conspiracy of silence” that has existed in relation to this problem, and overcoming the common tendency to minimize its importance. At the same time, however, one must be wary of the opposite trend, exaggerating its prevalence and thereby transmitting a distorted view of today’s schools as the scenes of constant violence.

THE PROFILE OF AGGRESSORS AND THE DOMINANCE-SUBMISSION MODEL

Characteristics of aggressors

The following characteristics are among those most frequently observed in aggressors (Olweus, 1993; Pellegrini, Bartini and Brooks, 1999; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit and Bates, 1997): a negative social situation, even though they have some friends who follow them or support them in their violent behaviour; a strong tendency to abuse their strength (they are usually stronger physically than their peers); impulsiveness, combined with a low level of social skills, a low frustration threshold, problems obeying rules, negative relationships with adults and low levels of achievement, these being problems which are exacerbated with age; they find it difficult to be self-critical –and in relation to this it is interesting to note that in various studies that have tried to measure the self-esteem of aggressors, normal or high levels have been found. Among the main features of their families the following usually stand out: the absence of warm and loving affective relationships with parents, especially on the side of the mother, who displays negative attitudes or has little time for the child; difficulties in teaching their children to respect limits, combining permissiveness in relation to anti-social behaviour with frequent authoritarian, coercive measures, and often resorting to physical punishment.

Our study carried out with teenagers (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias and Martín Seoane, 2004) also reflects the fact that aggressors have fewer non-violent conflict resolution strategies available, as well as detecting the following shortcomings around which the prevention of this problem could be suitably oriented:

- 1) They agree more with beliefs that justify violence and intolerance in different kinds of relationships, including peer relationships, showing themselves as more racist, xenophobic and sexist. In short, they tend to identify with a model of relationships based on domination and submission.
- 2) They have difficulties putting themselves in some-

one else's position. Their moral reasoning is more primitive than that of their classmates, identifying justice more frequently with "doing to others what they do to you or what you think they do to you", a belief that may explain their tendency for taking revenge for real or imaginary offences. Also, they identify with a series of concepts closely related to bullying, such as "sneak" and "coward", terms they use to justify bullying and maintain the conspiracy of silence that perpetuates it.

- 3) They are less satisfied than others with their learning at school and the relationships they establish with teachers.
- 4) They are perceived by their schoolmates as being intolerant and arrogant, and at the same time they feel like failures. The set of characteristics in which they stand out suggest that they have peers who follow them or support them in their acts of aggression, forming groups with a tendency towards violence which would be joined by other individuals who have had few previous opportunities for playing a positive role in the school context.

The prevention and treatment of aggression

These results show the importance of eliminating situations of exclusion from the academic sphere at the earliest possible stages of education, and of favouring the identification of teenagers with the values of mutual respect, empathy and non-violence, with a view to the prevention of bullying. To eliminate these, it is not enough simply to teach conflict resolution (one of the most frequent approaches); rather, it is necessary to integrate prevention into a more global approach, in which it is possible to:

- 1) *Teach the condemnation all forms of violence by favouring a representation that helps to combat it.* Our research shows (Díaz-Aguado, dir., 1996, 2001, 2004) that the rejection of violence should be favoured from a perspective that includes not only its rejection in general, independently of who is the victim and who is the aggressor, but also specific treatment of its most frequent manifestations: gender violence, and peer violence inside and outside school (in leisure time). Disciplinary measures must contribute to this objective by helping to generate cognitive, emotional and behavioural changes that enable the aggressor to put him/herself in the victim's position, to regret having used violence and to try to make up for the damage done. The effective-

ness of these three components improves when they are integrated in a single process.

- 2) *Favour the identification with the respect for human rights*, stimulating development of the ability to put oneself in the other's place, the basic force behind all socio-emotional development, and which in its most evolved levels is common to all human beings; and to favour also an understanding of the universal rights and the capacity to use that understanding when making one's own moral decisions, linking those rights to the obligation to respect them. Including the rejection of violence in this perspective, conceptualizing it as a dangerous threat to human rights, favours its understanding as a problem that can affect all individuals, given that it endangers the level of justice necessary for their own rights to be respected.
- 3) *Develop alternatives to violence*: establishing alternative contexts and procedures within schools, through which, in a normalized way (without anyone feeling threatened by them), tensions and discrepancies can be expressed and conflicts resolved without turning to violence (through communication, negotiation, mediation, etc.) and promoting skills in all individuals (students, teachers, etc.) that enable tension to be confronted and conflicts resolved in a context of non-violence.

VICTIMIZATION AND TREATMENT OF DIVERSITY IN THE SCHOOL

The situation of victims

Among the pupils who are victims of bullying it is common to distinguish two situations (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Seoane, 2004; Olweus, 1993; Pellegrini, Bartini & Brooks, 1999; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Schwartz, Dodge, Pettit & Bates, 1997; Smith et al., 2004):

- 1) *The typical victim, or passive victim*, characterized by: a social situation of isolation, linked to low levels of assertiveness and difficulties in communication; highly passive behaviour, fear of violence and displayed vulnerability (inability to defend oneself when intimidated), high levels of anxiety, insecurity and low self esteem; characteristics which can be related to the tendency observed in several studies of passive victims to blame themselves for their situation and to be in denial, probably because they consider their own situation to be more embarrassing than the aggressors consider theirs (they sometimes appear to be proud of being aggressors).

2) *The active victim*, characterized by a social situation of isolation and a strong lack of popularity, being among the pupils most rejected by their classmates (more so than aggressors and passive victims). This situation could be the root cause of their selection as victims, although this, as in the previous case, could be compounded by victimization; an excessive and impulsive tendency to act, to act without choosing the most appropriate behaviour for each situation, with concentration problems (in some cases to the extent of hyperactivity) and a certain disposition to react with aggressive or irritating behaviours. These characteristics have led to type of victim being called “provocative victims”, a term which should be avoided to prevent the common tendency to blame the victim, which can be found with respect to any type of violence, including that which occurs in schools. The situation of active victims is that which appears to have the worst long-term prognosis.

The results obtained in some studies (little mentioned in the literature) have special significance with respect to the prevention of victimization. According to these, the risk of becoming a victim of bullying increases if one belongs to an ethnic minority in a disadvantaged situation (Díaz-Aguado, 1992; Troyna & Hatcher, 1992); has *learning difficulties* in the normal classroom (Nabuzoka & Smith, 1993); shows difficulties with verbal expression (Hugh-Jones & Smith, 1999); or is among the boys who challenge the traditional sexist stereotype (Rivers, 1999; Young & Sweeting, 2004).

How should the results about the victims’ characteristics be interpreted? Can they be considered as merely individual problems, and therefore basically treatable by training the victims in skills to escape such situations? Or must they be also be recognized as problems of a school system in which the different types of exclusion and abuse (racist, sexist, and so on) found in society as a whole are allowed to be reproduced? The response to these questions from psychology is extremely important, since it affects not only the efficacy of interventions, but also the possibility of contributing to counteracting the frequent tendency in all types of violence, including school bullying, to justify bullying by blaming the victim, a tendency to which not only aggressors, but also the victims themselves and those in their social environment often fall prey. This tendency is closely linked to the need to believe that *the world is fair* (Lerner, 1980), and that the dire events we see happening around us will

not happen to us. In order to avoid contributing to such a tendency, and indeed, to help to overcome it, we need to take special care with the psychological descriptions of the victim’s situation, emphasizing the changes necessary in schools for preventing problems, and avoiding the description of individual characteristics that increase the risk with terms that activate the tendency to blame the victim.

The role of classmates in relation to exclusion and bullying

The study of the role played by classmates who are not directly involved in the bullying has been growing rapidly over the last few years (Cowie, 2000; Pellegrini, Bartini & Brooks, 1999; Salmivalli et al., 1996; 1998), given the finding that they are present in the majority of situations involving bullying. To illustrate the importance of the role they play, we need only consider one of the results that emerges systematically in studies of the profile of victims and aggressors: the marked isolation of the victim, with no friends, rather unpopular, and experiencing both of these problems to a greater degree than the bullies, especially in the case of active victims. Analysis of this situation should consider that a lack of friends can trigger the onset of victimization, and that this may cause even greater unpopularity of those suffering it, and consequently further isolation (Baker, 1998; Cowie, 2000; Pellegrini et al., 1999; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Smith et al., 2004). It has also been observed that having friends and being popular protects against victimization. However, the protective character of friends is virtually zero if these belong to the group of victims, probably due to their being too weak to intervene. This leads us to the conclusion that in order to prevent violence it is important to work with the class as a whole, encouraging the type of relationships among classmates that inhibit its emergence (Salmivalli, 1999).

In the study we carried out with adolescents it also became clear that there was a need to improve the situation among classmates to prevent bullying, given the type of responses when asked what they did in such situations. In their own words, these are the most frequent behaviours: 1) “try to stop the situation if the victim is a friend” (70.6%); 2) “try to stop it even if the victim is not a friend” (45.6%); 3) “ask someone other than a teacher for help” (37.5%), especially friends. Despite its lower frequency, it is surprising to find that a substantial percentage of schoolchildren, when witnessing the bullying of a classmate “don’t do anything even though I

think I should" (17% if we take the responses for *often*, and 56% if we add those for *sometimes*), "don't do anything because it's his/her problem" (15% and 47%, respectively), and "confront the victim as well as the group" (11% and 31%). This suggests that the roles of active and passive *accomplice* are relatively frequently played out in school contexts, and that without this *complicity* violence could not occur with the frequency and intensity that it does at present.

Prevention of victimization

From the results obtained in studies of the victims' situation it emerges that in order to prevent violence among adolescents it is necessary to:

- 1) *Encourage cohesion among classmates and eliminate situations of exclusion* which, if not prevented, tend to arise in the first years of school and throughout subsequent ones. In order to achieve this, it would be helpful to increase opportunities for facilitating this in classroom activities, such as cooperative learning, as well as developing the skills necessary to enable such cooperation, individually and in groups. These conditions not only aid the integration of all pupils, but also permit early detection (and solution) of interaction problems.
- 2) *Include activities specifically aimed at preventing victimization* within violence prevention programmes, teaching students to: say no in situations that could lead to bullying; ask for help when it becomes necessary; be emotionally prepared so as not to feel guilty if one is a victim.
- 3) *Teach how to detect and overcome the different types of prejudice existing in society with respect to certain groups*, because in order to overcome this it is not enough for the school not to be racist or sexist, but it must work actively and explicitly on the elimination of these problems, creating space for this on the curriculum within global programmes that provide experiences of equality, and help to eliminate all kinds of exclusion (Cowie and Sharp, 1994; Gillborn, 1992; Horton, 1991; Troyna and Hatcher, 1992).

VIOLENCE, GENDER AND SEXISM

One of the most frequently repeated results in the studies on violence is that men use it more often and in a more serious way than women (Rutter et al., 1998; Scrandroglio et al., 2002), a difference clearly manifested from childhood onwards in all contexts, including school (People's Ombudsman [*Defensor del Pueblo*],

2000; Olafsen & Viemero, 2000; Olweus, 1993; Whitney & Smith, 1993). As is the case with other contexts and age groups, bullying is related to traditional male stereotypes in which masculinity is associated with domination, absolute control and violence (Cowie, 2000; Díaz-Aguado & Martínez Arias, 2001). Studies on the frequency with which victimization situations occur in schools according to victims' gender have delivered less consistent results (Olafsen & Viemero, 2000; Smith & Sharp, 1994).

To explain the relationship between aggression and gender, it should be borne in mind that the main risk condition for violence is not gender as a biological condition, but rather the identification with dominance over others, associated with the traditional male stereotype. This type of identification increases the risk of generating aggressive behaviour towards classmates, more frequently among boys, but also in girls (Young & Sweeting, 2004).

Furthermore, various studies have shown the need to consider qualitative differences, given that the use of violence by women tends to be much more indirect (Österman, 1998) and is more influenced by situational pressures. Salmivalli et al. (1998) carried out a longitudinal study along these lines in sixth to eighth-year pupils (aged 12-15) in which they observed that the role of aggressor is much more stable among boys, and that although in both groups the role is influenced by peer pressure, such pressure is more influential among girls.

Our study (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Seoane, 2004) also shows that across almost all indicators boys display a higher risk of violent behaviour and intolerance than girls. The absence of gender differences outside school can be interpreted as an indicator of the strong group pressure that tends to exist in this context, and which could hinder violence-inhibiting mechanisms among adolescents. This reflects the need to focus work aimed at breaking down sexism in such a way that it favours an identification with the complete set of values traditionally associated with femininity (empathy, tenderness, etc.) and masculinity (strength, power, etc.), without the need for anyone to identify with the problems to which these stereotypes lead (such as violence).

CHANGES WITH AGE, CRITICAL PERIODS AND THE NEED TO ADOPT A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE

Retrospective studies of what adults remember show that the frequency of violent episodes suffered at school reaches its highest levels in early adolescence, between 11 and

13 years of age, both among samples taken from the population as a whole (Eslea & Rees, 2001) and with samples from groups with characteristics typical of higher risks of victimization. Hugh-Jones and Smith (1999), for example, noted that 83% of the adults interviewed who stutter said that they had at some time been victims of bullying at school, while 33% claimed this to have been particularly intense between 11 and 13 years of age, 21% between 8 and 10 years, 20% during adolescence and 5% between ages 6 and 7. Also, Rivers (1999), in a study of 190 adult homosexuals, almost all of whom suffered bullying at school, located the onset of the problem around the age of 10, and found that it continues for the next 5 years.

In our own research (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Seoane, 2004) we also find that there is a greater risk of peer aggression in early adolescence, compared to later stages, peaking in the second and third years of compulsory secondary education (13-15 years of age). These are also the school years which are most difficult for teachers, and in which the need to implement programmes for the prevention of violence is most frequently proposed. This may be explained by the fact that violence can be used in relation to a number of key aspects at this age, such as the reduction of uncertainty about one's own identity, integration into the reference group, and channelling the hostility produced by frustration and tension, as well as constituting a response to the discrepancy between adolescents' developmental needs and their situation at home and school. Eccles, Lord and Roeser (1996) found empirical evidence on five changes between primary and high school that can explain this increase in destructive behaviours: 1) greater emphasis on control and discipline; 2) deterioration in the relationship with teachers; 3) fewer opportunities to participate in class; 4) the fall in school marks; 5) lower levels, compared to those of primary teachers, of self-efficacy among high school teachers, whose role is reduced to simply teaching a particular subject. As a preventive measure, these authors propose changing the way school activities are structured so that they become more task and project-based, giving pupils a greater sense of personal involvement.

THE NEED TO ACKNOWLEDGE INTERACTION WITH THE SOCIAL SYSTEM AT MULTIPLE LEVELS. THE ECOLOGICAL-DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

As the above-mentioned studies show, and as is widely accepted among researchers today, (Baker, 1998; Cowie, 2000; Hernández, Sarabia & Casares, 2002; Ortega,

2003; Pellegrini & Brooks, 1999; Reinke & Herman, 2002; Salmivalli et al., 1996; Torrego & Moreno, 2003; Trianes, 2000), in order to prevent violence at school there is a need to adopt an ecological approach that allows a conceptualisation of conditions of risk and protection according to the interaction between the individual and the environment at different levels. Special attention must be paid to the way school activities are structured, as well as to the cooperation between schools, parents and society as a whole.

Features of the traditional school that increase the risks: incoherence and hidden curriculum with regard to violence

From the above it becomes clear that certain characteristics of the traditional school contribute to the appearance of peer aggression and hinder its elimination. These include:

- *The tendency to minimize the importance of peer aggression*, saying that it is inevitable, especially among boys, or that it is a problem children and adolescents need to resolve by themselves, without the interference of adults, in order to make them stronger, to "toughen them up." The widespread tendency of this belief is clearly reflected in the findings of our own research (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Seoane, 2004), showing that 37.6% of schoolchildren agree with the belief that "if you don't hit back, the others will think you are a coward," which closely reflects the advice adults commonly pass on to children "If they hit you, hit them back." This suggests that the incoherence in schools with regard to this problem is merely a reflection of the wider incoherence prevalent in society.
- *The traditional treatment of diversity as though it didn't exist*. This is the reason why belonging to a minority, being seen as different, having a problem or standing out because of an enviable quality increases the likelihood of being picked on as a victim for bullying (through nicknames, isolation, etc.).
- *The typically insufficient response from the traditional school to peer violence among students*, which leaves victims without the help they need to find a way out of the situation, and tends to be perceived by the aggressors as implicit support. This lack of a suitable response is linked to the traditional definition of the teacher's role, especially in high school, with its near-exclusive focus on teaching the subject matter.

It is in relation to the lack of appropriate response in the traditional school that we can interpret the result obtained in our own study (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Seoane, 2004), showing that 34.6% of schoolchildren claimed they would never ask for the help of a teacher if they were being bullied, justifying this with the statement that “teachers are there to teach you, not to solve your problems,” though they admit that they would ask a teacher “whom they felt they could trust.” These reactions reflect the need to adapt the role of the teacher to the new situation in order to increase their educational efficacy, as well as the help they can provide in the prevention of violence. Although teachers are more and more prepared to put a stop to the problems described above, and to contribute to the eradication of school violence, it is not always easy to do so given the difficulty of changing deeply rooted patterns in schools, and they need all the help they can get through the provision of suitable educational resources.

Social changes and the risk of school violence. Maltreatment in the teacher-pupil relationship

From what is observed in the classrooms and perceived by the teachers themselves, there has clearly been an increase in recent years in difficulties of interaction between pupils and teachers, especially at high-school level. These tend to be described as disruptive behaviour, indiscipline and even harassment, as confirmed in the few studies focusing on teacher-pupil problems (Mendoza, 2005; Terry, 1998), which suggest that such aspects should be included systematically in both assessments and intervention, and should be considered in both directions, which would also allow the detection of pupil-to-teacher maltreatment.

In order to understand the possible influence of the macrosocial changes of the so-called *technological revolution* on this situation, it is important to remember that they reduce the effectiveness of certain conditions which until recently protected childhood from adult violence. Some of the cases of violence involving children and adolescents, widely covered by the media, have featured *scripts* impossible to invent at those ages, and information about the use violence that until now has never been accessible to one’s so young. And these changes affect in a very special way the two basic, traditional contexts of education and upbringing, as they have been structured since the industrial revolution:

- *The nuclear family*, which isolated itself from the extended family and specialized in the raising of

children around the figure of the mother, herself isolated from what went on beyond her own restricted, private world.

- *The traditional school*, which became extended to ever broader sectors of the population. Structured on the basis of homogeneity and strongly hierarchical, centred around the unconditional authority of the teacher. Here, all those who did not match up to what was expected of the average pupil were excluded before reaching adolescence.

To prevent violence at school, it is necessary to bring the two main contexts of education and upbringing, school and family, in line with current social changes, structuring the relationships and activities that take place there so that they are more coherent relative to the democratic values our society is trying to transmit. There is an increasingly widespread consensus about the role that cooperation can play in achieving this, as well as the need for cooperation at various levels (Ahmed and Braithwaite, 2004; Conoley and Goldstein, 2004; Gini, 2004; Johnson and Johnson, 1999; Reinke and Herman, 2002).

THE EVALUATION OF PROGRAMMES FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AT SCHOOL

Evaluation in relation to programmes for the prevention of violence at school falls into two categories: 1) that which focuses specifically on violence between peers, generally following the methodology established by Olweus; 2) that with a more general perspective, covering, for example, school-based anti-violence programmes or programmes for the prevention of violence in general, and usually based on the development of social skills.

Specific programmes against bullying at school

In the pioneering programme implemented in 42 schools in Norway by Olweus (1991) with 2,500 pupils aged between 10 and 15, schools were informed of the results obtained in the assessment of peer violence, as well about the response from the context, in an effort to sensitize teachers, parents and classmates about the need to show no tolerance towards it and to develop vigilance, rules and clear sanctions against it. Assessment of the results of the programme shows a significant reduction of bullying (of over 50%) in the reports of both aggressors and victims, without the aggressiveness being displaced to other contexts. In addition, an improvement was noted in the social cli-

mate and pupil's satisfaction with the school, as well as a general reduction in antisocial behaviour. These results are related at least in part to the sensitivity towards the problem existing in Norway in the wake of the suicides of three pupils aged 10 to 14 as a result of having been bullied by their classmates (Stevens, De Bourdeauhuij & Van Oost, 2000).

Subsequent attempts to repeat the excellent results obtained in this first study have not been so positive. An example of this is the programme developed in Belgium (Flanders) by Stevens, De Bourdeauhuij and Van Oost (2000), with three of the basic components for intervention on bullying: 1) a school policy with clear rules and sanctions against bullying and abuse; 2) four classroom sessions on strategies and skills for conflict resolution arising out of abuse and in support of victims; and 3) specific treatment with aggressors and victims. Comparison of the results obtained in the experimental primary schools with those of the control schools show significant effectiveness according to aggressors, but not from the point of view of the victims, while in high schools the programme is not effective from either perspective. This difficulty had previously been observed in other studies (Smith & Sharp, 1994), and can be attributed to the inadequacy of trying to influence adolescents through norms established by adults, and this is why such programmes need to be addressed from a developmental perspective (Stevens et al., 2000). Subsequent studies lead us to the conclusion that the efficacy of anti-bullying programmes improves when these are developed continuously over time, with a long-term view, rather than implemented at a particular moment (Carney and Merrell, 2001); that efficacy is frequently only perceived from one of the two sides assessed: that of victims (Menesini & Smorti, 1997) or that of aggressors (Stevens et al., 2000); or that the preparedness of peers to act as mediators in conflict resolution and victim support is significantly lower among boys (Nailor & Cowie, 1999).

The most recent analyses of anti-bullying programme evaluations reflect a growing consensus on the need to broaden their objectives and activities beyond the specific focus on bullying, and to attempt to improve quality of life at school by promoting cooperation at different levels (Gini, 2004; Ortega, 2003).

School programmes for the prevention of violence

A review of school programmes designed to prevent violence in general shows that although a large number outline guidelines for action, only a few provide empirical

evidence of their efficacy, and fewer still compare changes achieved through a given programme with a control group. The few programmes analyzing the effectiveness of prevention programmes frequently report results of only limited relevance (Webster, 1993; Wilson-Brewer et al., 1991). Thus, for example, Fields and McNamara (2003), in their review, observe that the experimental evidence available up to that time on programmes for the primary prevention of violence in schools carried out among adolescents, including comparisons with control groups, is very limited. An additional and serious problem is the lack of a coherent theoretical framework to underpin the intervention and help to explain the results. In relation to this is the further consideration of the need to design programmes in such a way as to include the moral dimension necessary in education against violence, boosting democratic values and the sense of community (Edwards, 2001), given that it is the connection with these moral values (Ortega, Sánchez & Menesini, 2002) that guides the decisions which will permit the use of the skills around which most programmes are organized. For example, we can highlight the proven efficacy in primary schools of the *Programmes for the Construction of Peace* implemented in a general and continuous manner. Alongside training in conflict resolution, these provide education in democratic values, tolerance and intercultural respect (Aber & Jones, 2003).

When the evaluation of prevention programmes is carried out by the school management itself, the following stand out for their effectiveness: first, those programmes which try to change the school in order to better adapt it to the needs of the pupils; secondly, those which promote changes and skills among teachers to prevent violence; thirdly, those which simply attempt to change the individual behaviour of violent pupils (Heerboth, 2000).

Attempts to draw up a *research agenda* for the prevention of school violence highlight the need to define the basic conditions that contribute to promoting a quality school environment in which there can be no place for violence, and which implies cooperation between teachers, pupils and parents. For this is it necessary to establish "intervention protocols that help to achieve it by simplifying the identification of the basic components" (Reinke & Herman, 2002, p. 796).

COOPERATION AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NON-VIOLENCE AS BASIC COMPONENTS IN PREVENTION

The anti-violence programmes we assessed in our last study (Díaz-Aguado, 2004) revolve around two basic

components: 1) the structuring of educational activities through cooperation in heterogeneous teams, which can take place in the context of any subject on the normal curriculum; 2) the application of a 16-activity protocol in which cooperation is applied to content related to the non-violence curriculum, including specifically, but not exclusively, problems of peer bullying.

Cooperative learning in heterogeneous teams

The social-historical approach of the psychology of activity (Bruner, 1999; Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978) provides the basic framework within which to explain the nature of the innovations included in our programme, as well as its effectiveness for adapting schools to the demands of today's society and the characteristics of adolescence. These activities involve two fundamental innovations with respect to traditional procedures:

- 1) *Organising pupils in heterogeneous teams* (in terms of achievement, level of integration in the class as a whole, ethnic group, sex, risk of violence, etc.). This grouping helps to overcome the segregation and exclusion that can otherwise occur at school and can lead to the perpetuation of that which exists in society in general, and to the deprivation of opportunities for those at risk to learn how to prevent violence. This feature, then, contributes to *the struggle against exclusion and to overcoming the uneven distribution of participation* which tends to arise in the classroom and cause the alienation that develops in some students as well as many of the violent behaviours.
- 2) *A significant increase in the power and responsibility given to pupils* in relation to their own learning, especially in those activities where they are asked to play adult roles, such as being experts in various fields (*media, prevention, politics, etc.*). For example: drawing up a Declaration of Human Rights, a list of golden rules for eliminating violence at school, or campaigns to prevent gender violence aimed at adolescents. The results obtained prove that helping students to play expert roles is highly effective. When, for example, they pretend to be experts against violence, they acquire the formal skills needed for the activity while at the same time taking on board its objectives, i.e., justice, tolerance and mutual respect.

These activities favour meaningful learning, given that they provide a social context which is much more rele-

vant than that of traditional classroom activities, and involve the completion of whole tasks with a finished product (Bruner, 1999). In this way, by treating students as though they were capable of preventing violence, and by providing them with the necessary support and motivation, they are more likely to discover the meaning such tasks have for the experts who normally carry them out, and to learn to identify with this meaning much more effectively than if we were to ask them to work step by step on each component separately in the manner of traditional textbooks: studying concepts and definitions in relation to violence, understanding the steps a media professional takes, applying them to a hypothetical situation, individually carrying out the exercises in the manual according to different criteria ... The effectiveness of doing shared complete tasks has been explained from the psychology of activity in terms of their relevance for activating the zone of the construction of knowledge, and thus promoting learning (Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989).

The non-violence curriculum

Throughout previous research (Díaz-Aguado, dir., 1996; 2003; Díaz-Aguado & Martínez Arias, 2001) we have been developing a series of activities for teaching how to construct values of equality, respect for human rights, tolerance and the rejection of sexism and violence, which is completed in the last programme (Díaz-Aguado, dir., 2004) with a series of specific activities aimed at combating peer violence inside and outside school (in leisure time), through a protocol of 16 basic activities:

- A) Democracy is equality.
 - Activation of previous schemata and basic communication skills through a public information campaign on TV.
 - Discussion about various types of discrimination, underlining their connection with everyday life and discrimination at school.
- B) The construction of human rights as the basis for harmonious life in the community.
 - Drawing up a declaration of human rights.
 - Comparing this to the 1948 declaration.
 - Discussion about the violation of human rights in everyday life.
- C) Encouraging a general representation of violence that will help to combat it.
 - Discussion about the nature of violence, based on the video *Hate and destruction*.

- Discussion about bullying and victimization.
- D) Racism and xenophobia, as an extension of A)
 - Learning to detect racism.
 - What a bad memory we have!
- E) Sexism and gender violence
 - Detection of sexism and the creation of alternatives
 - Discussion about gender violence, based on the video *Home, sad home*.
 - Creating a message to prevent or stop gender violence.
- F) Peer violence inside and outside school (in leisure time)
 - Detection of distortions that contribute to violence in general.
 - Detection of distortions that contribute to violence among adolescents.
 - Discussion about strategies to prevent or stop violence outside school.
 - Creating a set of golden rules for eliminating violence from the relationships in school.
- G) Final discussion session on how to integrate the above themes in one's own identity.

Assessment of the effectiveness of the programme

The above programme was assessed with 783 children from schools within the Autonomous Region of Madrid (Spain), comparing the changes that took place in the experimental group with those of the control group. To this end, the following instruments were applied before and after the intervention: 1) the *Questionnaire for the evaluation of peer violence inside and outside school (in leisure time)*; 2) the *Questionnaire on attitudes towards diversity and violence*; and 3) the *Questionnaire on strategies for the prevention of violence outside school (in leisure time)*. These provided significant evidence of the programme's effectiveness in terms of:

- 1) Reducing situations of violence at school, especially the more serious types, as perceived by both victims and aggressors.
- 2) Preventing serious violence outside school (in leisure time), as perceived by both victims and aggressors. This result helps to modify the pessimistic expectations that teachers sometimes have regarding the impossibility of preventing, from the school, forms of violence that occur outside school, and whose principal causes are usually situated outside the school system.

- 3) Reducing situations of exclusion at school, as perceived by the victims, situations that tend to grow if nothing is done to address them.
- 4) Developing a representation of violence that helps to fight it and to promote tolerance, helping to overcome beliefs that lead to: peer violence; sexism; racism and xenophobia.
- 5) Increasing the availability of more positive and well developed strategies for the prevention of violence outside school (in leisure time), rejecting violence as a form of resolving conflicts.
- 6) Improving the quality of the relationship with learning and with teachers, as assessed by participating pupils and by their teachers. Also noted is a tendency towards the improvement of other relationships and contexts covered by the programme's activities: the classroom, friends, classmates, school, outside school (leisure time).

CONCLUSION

These results support the viability and effectiveness of the proposals made in this article for preventing violence among adolescents, integrating their treatment into a more global one, that of the rejection of all forms of violence. Furthermore, the results highlight cooperation as the fundamental principle for structuring school activity that can permit the adaptation of schools to a new situation, at different levels: between pupils, between pupils and teachers, between teachers, between the school and other social agents such as the family, municipal groups and associative movements. The results reflect that the practice of cooperation in all school subjects, together with the non-violence curriculum, should be highlighted as basic components of school anti-violence programmes (Díaz-Aguado, dir., 2004).

¹AUTHORS' NOTE

The programmes deriving from the mentioned studies have been published by the *Instituto de la Juventud* in three books and a video entitled *Prevención de la violencia y luch contra la exclusion desde la adolescencia* (The prevention of violence and the struggle against exclusion during adolescence), which are distributed free of charge by the organization to institutions working in this field. They can be requested by outlining the aim of the project to publicaciones@mtas.es. They are available via the Internet through: <http://mariajosediazaguado.tk>.

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