



GENERAL ASPECTS ABOUT BULLYING IN CHILDREN AND WHAT CAN WE DO IN ORDER TO PREVENT ITS OCCURRENCE

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Abstract: Bullying in children represents a serious public health problem, one of three children being bullied worldwide. Bullying is defined as an aggressive behaviour that someone directs against another person, characterized by intentionality, repetitiveness and hurtfulness. There are many types of bullying including direct bullying, indirect bullying, sexual bullying or cyberbullying. According to the etiology of bullying, this is complex and may depend on many factors including social factors, individual factors and also family factors. Bullying has a great impact on children's health, its consequences including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances and nightmares, substance abuse, low school performances and absenteeism, poor relationships with parents and troubles in making or keeping friends. Bullying prevention strategies are designed to help children learn coping skills for emotions' management, empathy development, built self-esteem and improving social abilities. In order to determine changes in children's behaviour, it is important that parents and teachers work together.

INTRODUCTION

The term of bullying refers to an aggressive behaviour that someone directs against another person, who usually has some troubles in protecting herself. The main characteristics of this behaviour are intentionality, repetitiveness and hurtfulness.(1)

Bullying in children represents a serious public health problem. It affects children everywhere across the world and recent data published by UNESCO showed that one of three children is bullied worldwide.(2)

AIM

The purpose of this paper is to present the main characteristics of bullying in children, what are the risk factors which can lead to its occurrence, and also what are the consequences, and what people can do in order to identify bullying and prevented it.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bullying can have many forms, such as traditional bullying, sexual bullying or cyberbullying.(1,3)

Traditional bullying includes direct bullying and indirect bullying. Direct bullying refers to physical bullying, which consists in physical aggression such as hitting, slapping or pushing, or verbal bullying, which includes verbal aggression such as intimidation, teasing, insults or threatening behaviour, targeted to the victim's appearance, name, race and so on.(1,3)

Indirect bullying consists in relational aggression and involves actions intended to damage victim's reputation and relationship with the other persons in the group. This form of bullying can include gossiping, sabotage, embarrassing the victim in public and also exclusion from a group.(1,3,4)

Sexual bullying is more frequent in teens and young

adults, especially girls, and is known as sexual harassment.(3,5)

Cyberbullying, also known as “electronic aggression”, refers to that type of aggression which use digital technology as a way of manipulation. This type of bullying may include phone calls, messages, emails or false posts on social media, designed to provoke shame, fear or anger in people who are targeted.(3,6)

The most common type of bullying in children is direct bullying, especially verbal bullying, while physical bullying and cyberbullying ranks second and third respectively.(7)

Bullying has three main types of participants- the bullies, the victims and the bully-victims, each of them with typical characteristics.(4,7,8)

Bullies are the ones who start bullying, and usually behave aggressively. Their behaviour can occur for several reasons such as: the desire to feel stronger than the victim, the need for attention or popularity, envy towards other children. Another reason why children exhibit this aggressive behaviour may be the fact that they, in turn, are harassed by others or have friends who abuse other children. It should be noted that bullies are unable to take responsibility for their actions and often to accept that the victim's suffering represents a consequence of their behaviour. Bullies also have some difficulties in terms of school performance, making friends and detecting emotions such as fear or sadness.(4,7,8)

Victims are the ones who are aggressed by bullies, and usually are children who are different from the others, being targeted by bullies without provocation. They are weaker than bullies, less popular than the other colleges, they have just a small number of friends and they are usually considered as shy, sensitive and quiet. Victims also have tendency to introversion and they have a high level of anxiety and poor self-esteem.(1,7,8)

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Bully-victims are the ones who are both bullied themselves and also bully others, being known as “reactive bullies”. These children may be impulsive children who respond with aggression when they are bullied or they may be victims who are passing from victimization to bullying behaviour and in this case the bully-victims’ behaviour usually represents a consequence of the fact that they are also aggressed in their families. Bully-victims are considered to have both bullies and victim characteristics. They are both anxious and with low level of self-esteem, as well as aggressive and with some social or educational difficulties.(1,8)

According the etiology of bullying, this is complex and may depend on many factors including social factors, individual factors and also family factors, as shown in table no. 1.(1,7,9,10,11)

Generally, bullying is more frequent in boys than in girls, and usually in boys physical and verbal bullying are more frequent, while in girls verbal bullying is most common. According age, bullying occurs most frequent in middle school children, peaks in early adolescence and then decrease during adolescence.(1,7,9,10,11)

Hyperactivity-impulsivity attention deficit represents the most important individual risk factor that predict an aggressive behaviour. In addition, impulsivity, attention problems and low level of intelligence could all be related with some deficits regarding brain functions, being associated with violence and antisocial behaviour.(1,7,9,10,11)

Regarding family risk factors, social and environmental risk factors, they all have a great influence on bullying occurrence.(1,7,9,10,11)

Table no. 1. Risk factors associated with bullying

Social and environmental factors	Individual factors	Family factors
School environment	Gender, age	Parental conflict
High stress level	Hyperactivity-impulsivity attention deficit	Family aggression
Social media- violent games or movies	Few friends, low popularity	Family social isolation
Low social abilities	Academic difficulties, low IQ	Lack of emotional support
Low education level	Low self-esteem	Poor parent-child communication
Low economic status	Physical aspects	Child’ rejection or overprotection

Regarding consequences, bullying has both short and long-term effects, on both bullies, victims and bully-victims. Bullying consequences are divided in effects on health and mental health, academic effects and social effects. Victims of bullying related immediate effects such as physical injuries and long-term effects on health- headaches, stomach-aches, vomiting- and mental health- anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances and nightmares, substance abuse and also suicidal ideation. Bullies also reported anxiety, depression, substance abuse and higher risk of criminality. Regarding academic and social effects, all participants reported poor school performances and absenteeism, poor relationships with parents and troubles in making or keeping friends.(4,12,13)

Due to the high incidence of bullying and its impact on child’s health, several strategies have been designed in order to prevent its occurrence.

Restorative practices represent a set of measures adopted in schools, as an alternative disciplinary approach to conflict situations. These practices involve participation of the entire school community and also culture change, focused on repairing and building relationships. Restorative practices encourage communication between children, responsibility,

increase empathy and built self-esteem.(12,14)

Socio-emotional learning involves a set of social and emotional skills, designed to improve children’s social skills and response to bullying situations. Socio-emotional learning focuses on teaching children how to identify different types of bullying, coping strategies for emotions’ management (including self-awareness and self-control), empathy development and social skills, in order to take responsible decisions in bullying situations.(12,15)

Parents are the persons who have the most important role against bullying because they are the most important persons in children’s lives and they have a solid influence on their behaviour. In order to prevent bullying, parents should spend more time with their children, speak with them and teach children how to treat others with kindness and respect. Because of the fact that most bullying situations take place at school, teachers also have an important role in bullying prevention. Teacher’s response to bullying situations consists is several strategies focused both on the victim and bullies. These strategies include supportive-cooperative interventions designed to promote cooperation between children, individual assistance to the victims and bullies, offering them emotional support and increase empathy between them and also maintaining discipline strategies. In order to determine changes in children’s behaviour and also to ensure children’s social development, parents and teachers should work together.(16,17)

School-based interventions consist in a group of multidisciplinary strategies (which include learning social and behavioural skills) based on the fact that bullying represents a complex problem which involves both students, teachers and parents and anti-bullying interventions should be targeted to all persons involved. From this point of view, several anti-bullying prevention programmes have been created. One of these programmes is the Olweus Aggression Prevention Programme, designed for children who are 8-15 years of age, which helps children improve their peers’ relationships by using methods that explain certain negative behaviours, thus promoting positive attitudes. Step to respect represents another bullying prevention programme, designed for children who are 8-10 years of age, which teaches children how to deal with bullying, how to recognize bullying and how to react when they observe other children who are bullied. A social skills programme created for children who are 4-14 years of age is Social Step Bullying Prevention Programme, which helps children how to control impulsive behaviour, how to manage anger and how to develop their socio-emotional abilities.(1,3,18)

CONCLUSIONS

As a conclusion, bullying affects many children around the world and has significant consequences on children’s health, mental development and relationships with persons around them.

In order to prevent bullying occurrence, it is important for parents to maintain a strong connection with their children, by communicating with them and offering them emotional support. Moreover, they need to spend as much time as possible with their children and teach them how to treat people around them, including their colleagues, with respect and compassion.

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