Comparative analysis of differential socioemotional variables among those involved in bullying. Study of a bully-victim case

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ABSTRACT

The assessment of bullying must include both actors, the doer of the acts of aggression or bully, and the recipient of such acts, or victim, with all personal, social and environmental elements of the subjects involved being taken into account, but also, we must include socioemotional aspects of the group of peers (Sutton and Smith, 1999). This paper is focused on the assessment of aspects regarding the perception of these situations by members of school groups, especially by the participants involved, as well as on the analysis of the socioemotional differences between these behaviours, establishing comparisons between those who are not involved and each of the subgroups affected: bully, victim and bully-victim, through the Bull-S test (Cerezo, 2000). The sample consists of five Primary Education classroom groups, aged between 7 and 13 years; 52.3% of the subjects are boys and 47.7% girls.

The results revealed that 34.6% of students were directly involved in bullying situations (43% of the boys and 25.5% of the girls), as well as significant differences between non-involved students, bullies, victims and bully-victim (B-V) – those who participate as bullies and also as victims – in social evaluation in the classroom group, the B-Vs being the worst regarded of the entire student body. In general, they stand out for being the most rejected and disliked, followed by victim students. In the perception of social evaluation, only the B-Vs are aware of the social rejection they provoke, which does not occur among victims or bullies. As regards the perception of dangerousness and security in the Centre, there are no differences in general, and the whole sample regards these situations as not very dangerous. This way of perceiving the maltreatment problem along with the helplessness of the bullied subjects may be interpreted as elements conducive to bullying within a school context. The paper includes an approach to the assessment and intervention in a B-V case.

Key words: Bullying, Socialization, Social Perception. *Palabras Clave*: Bullying, Socialización, Percepción social.

INTRODUCTION

Within a school context, aggressiveness is punctuated by of episodes that occur almost every day in more than 50 per cent of Centres and, nearly half the students are involved in situations of abuse, according to the Ombudsman's Report (AA.VV. 2000), being this a generalized phenomenon in industrialized countries (Clémence, 2001).

Situations of violence among school-children go beyond the specific episodes of aggression and victimization, since whenever a subject suffers someone else's acts of aggression on a systematic basis, he/she generalizes the hostile perception to the whole school group, which results in severe states of anxiety, isolation and loss of interest in learning (Cerezo, 2002; Rigby, 2000). On the other hand, the aggressor gradually consolidates his/her anti-social behaviour, whose consequences usually provoke social exclusion and pre-criminality. Besides, the emotional atmosphere of the group of

peers experiences a significant loss of pro-social attitudes, which is conducive to the lack of consideration for the others (Cerezo, Calvo and Sánchez 2004; Roland and Galloway, 2002).

We define bullying (Olweus, 1998) as a way of maltreatment, typically deliberate and harmful, inflicted by one student on another classmate who is generally weaker and whom the bully turns into his usual and permanent victim. Bullies or aggressors act that way, abusing their power, and moved by the desire of intimidating and dominating, while the victim student is helpless. Bullying does not necessarily express itself as physical aggression, but can manifest itself as verbal aggression (in fact, the most frequent type), and as exclusion, being this the way most used by girls and in general by students in higher forms (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez and Martín, 2004).

A first explanatory approach must assume that, though the existence of certain personality components is undeniable, the great transcendence of social and environmental components in the acquisition of aggressive behaviour patterns is

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evident. The most prominent of these components is the social model provided by the family, experiences of maltreatment and family (Barudy, 1998) and school violence, the subject's perception of support or rejection in the reference groups and the position he/she occupies in the network of interpersonal relations (Bemak and Keys, 1999). On the other hand, we have been witnessing for the last few years a phenomenon arising out of behaviour and which derives from models explicitly suggested by the media, especially videogames and other passive entertainment systems. Therefore, an explanatory approach to violence among peers involves understanding that we are in the presence of a set of "causes" conducive to its development, and we will have to present it as the result of social learning mediated by temperament (Leary, Kowalski, Smith and Phillis, 2003).

Although research has already provided a basic scientific corpus (Smith, 2004), still, there are scarce publications focused on analysis and treatment of the subjects directly involved: the aggressor (bully) and the victim. The immediate explanation to this lack of special attention to the issue is, undoubtedly, that we are in the presence of a phenomenon of disguised activity that does not usually becomes manifest in front of adults, and only becomes known when the situation reaches huge proportions for both persons involved. The aggressor or bully, the victim and the observers keep silence because there is the belief that whoever talks about it will be considered an informer, and besides, the fear of being the next person attacked inhibits either of them from speaking; in addition to this, the victim subject feels so embarrassed and degraded that he/she will not admit to his/her situation before the group. However, maybe the most obvious reason is that adults are not very aware of the real problem; we believe that children must learn to solve their own conflicts without the need to resort to adults, and we do not give them the chance to pose the social interaction issues that are present in the classroom.

We understand bullying as group behaviour, i.e., it emerges from the conflict generated within the classroom group (Salmivalli, 1999; Sutton and Smith, 1999), thus, it is essential to include in its analysis the study of socioemotional relations, environmental conditions and the individual perception of severity attributed to situations. The analysis of the classroom group as a social system places each student between two poles: the well-adjusted and the maladjusted. The behaviour that well-adjusted children have towards their schoolmates is characterized by a high level of participation in the group and the frequency with which they treat their classmates in a friendly way, pay attention to, and support them. On the contrary, the behaviour of rejected children is characterized by a much higher frequency of aggressive contact, their demands for attention, by receiving a high number of disagreement expressions, and by the absence of positive reinforcement towards the others.

The bullying phenomenon requires two clearly differentiated subjects that constitute "two sides of the same coin": the aggressor and the victim. Bullies, in general, are children physically strong and somewhat older than their classmates. They frequently display aggressive behaviour and are generally violent towards those they consider weak and cowardly. They rate themselves leaders, honest, as having a considerable degree of self-esteem, and they exercise low self-control in their social relationships. They show a medium-high level of psychoticism, neuroticism and extraversion. They perceive their family environment with a certain degree of conflict. Their attitude towards school is negative, therefore, they often exhibit challenging behaviour, and their school performance is low (Cerezo, 2001b).

Victim subjects, in general, are children somewhat younger than bullies; they are physically weak and are usually the target of bullies' acts of aggression. Their schoolmates perceive them as weak and cowardly. They regard themselves as shy, withdrawn, having very low social evaluation and a tendency towards diffidence. They exhibit low self-control in their social relationships. They get medium-high scores for neuroticism, introversion and anxiety. They perceive their family environment as extremely protective and their attitude towards school is passive (Cerezo, 2001b; Ortega, 1994). Besides, occasionally, we find subjects having both profiles, they are called bully-victims (Salmivalli and Nieminen, 2002).

The assessment of bullying behaviour must cover both actors, the doer of the acts of aggression, or bully, and the recipient of such acts, or victim, but also, we must include socioemotional aspects of the group of peers. The assessment must be aimed at getting information about the personal aspects of the subject, academic aspects, level of helplessness, and behavioural assessment, aspects concerning his/her group relationships, about the family and school environments (Stevens, De Bourdeaudhuij and Van Oost, 2002).

Based on observation, we can introduce more specific assessment tolls. We propose the use of the Bull-S test (Cerezo, 2000) for the measurement of aggressiveness among peers within school premises. This questionnaire was conceived so that we can have a specific assessment tool of social aggressiveness among schoolchildren. Since our first pieces of research (Cerezo, 1997) we have been searching for techniques for the early detection of bullying, and which, in turn, may serve as a basis to develop intervention programs focused on the subjects involved. We designed the questionnaire as an instrument that reports on the social and emotional reality of the classroom group and the involvement of its members in bullying, as well as on the students' personal, social and school interaction characteristics (Gifford-Smith y Brownell, 2003).

The instrument, following the methodological line of Sociometry, and through the direct domination technique, analyzes the internal structure of the classroom, which is defined under the following criteria: acceptance-rejection, aggressive-ness-victimization and the assessment of certain characteristics in the students directly involved. The test pursues three main objectives: contributing elements for the analysis of the socioemotional characteristics of the group of peers, facilitating the detection of situations of abuse among schoolchildren and contributing information relevant to the

intervention. It is presented in two forms: Form P for teachers and Form A for students. The publication comes with a CD-ROM for computerized handling of data.

Form A (Students) consists of 15 grouped items and is arranged into three categories. The first, with four items, informs about the socioemotional structure of the group, which includes the analysis of the cohesion level; the second, with six items, informs about the bullying dynamics, specifying the level of incidence and characteristics of students involved, and, lastly, the third category with five items, gathers descriptive elements such as form of aggression, frequency, place where it occurs, and the degree of severity that students attach to it. Form P (Teachers), is made up of ten items, similar to the first ten items for students, and it is aimed at obtaining information about the degree of coincidence between the group of teachers and the group of students.

The analysis of the Bull-S questionnaire enables not only the detection of situations of maltreatment among schoolchildren, but also provides further insight into the characteristics associated with the bully's, the victim's and the bully-victim's profile, as well as into the social representation of the subjects involved in the bullying dynamics that the group of peers have, assessing how much they justify and/or approve their acts, and, finally, it facilitates knowledge of situational and formal aspects of this dynamics. Recent research endorses the usefulness of the Bull-S Test as an instrument for the measurement of the bullying dynamics in a group, even for comparative purposes (Cerezo and Ato, 2005). The reliability of the test has been substantiated by the test-retest technique. So that, from the pilot group, values were obtained for the variables involved, and later for the control group. These values remain within an acceptable range, i.e., with an associated probability greater than 95 per cent.

The present study forms part of a more extensive piece of research, intended to analyze the incidence of bullying in a school centre so that specific action plans can be formulated. This paper is aimed at deepening our knowledge of two main goals: inquiring into the social and emotional structure of the group of schoolchildren, highlighting how the subjects perceived as bullies, victims and bully-victims are positioned, as well as certain characteristics of social evaluation, in addition to establishing the possible differences between these subgroups and the well-adjusted or neutral subjects. In addition, it will seek to analyze the attitudes towards the bullying situations of the group of students. Finally, based on this knowledge of the group, it will draw the possible lines for the case study of the subjects involved.

Taking the aforementioned studies as reference, this research puts forward a general hypothesis: We understand that bullying is the manifestation of strained socioemotional relations among the members of a group of peers, which is generalized in all classrooms and, therefore, will appear in all the groups of the sample. This first statement is specified as follows:

• In the network of interpersonal relationships, subjects involved in bullying are worse positioned than non-involved subjects, and among the former, especially the victimized subjects.
• As regards perception of social reality, since bullies are in general more realistic than victim subjects, they will get better results regarding the prospect of being chosen and rejected among the subjects involved.
• We explained that the classroom group would regard these aggression-victimization relationships as having a significant degree of dangerousness or severity.
• Lastly, we understand that the detailed analysis of the subjects involved will help us develop the specific intervention programs, where social support will act as a decisive factor.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of Primary Education students from five classroom groups (2º, 3º, 4º, 5º, and 6º forms) in the same school centre (N=107), whose ages ranged from 7 to 13 years (56 boys and 51 girls).

Procedure

The application of the Bull-S test was made after family consent was obtained and the teaching staff informed. Two persons, with a Degree in Psychology, and having been specifically trained, cooperated in this task, while form teachers were absent from the classroom.

Before conducting the test, each subject was assigned to the different subgroups: Student not involved in bullying (Other), Aggressor (Bully), Victim (Victim), and Bully-Victim (B-V). For that, we followed the indications of the Bull-S test, which considers that a student forms part of any of the two Bullying categories (Aggressive or Victim) if he/she receives at least 25% of peer nominations, and the subject who receives at least 25% of the nominations in both two categories simultaneously will be regarded as a Bully-Victim. Furthermore, dimensions were analyzed: Sociometric Situation, Situational Variables and Degree of School Satisfaction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Following the formulation of the objectives, results are established in three aspects: description of the sample and characteristics associated with the subjects involved; in the second place, establishing the differences in the perception of personal, social and situational variables associated with the subjects involved in bullying, and finally, obtaining information for the psycho-social assessment of a bully-victim case.

A study of frequency was conducted in each classroom-group and in the whole sample in order to know the incidence of the bullying dynamics. For the study of differences between subgroups, we conducted the T-Test for the significance of the difference between the means of two independent samples, establishing "two-to-two" comparisons (Others/Bullies; Others/Victims; Bullies/Victims;

Others/BV). On the basis of the specific analysis of the features associated with subjects involved, the study of one case was determined.

1. Frecuency Study

The sample was analyzed according to the age and gender groups for each of the subgroups into

which it was divided, i.e., for Other, Bully, Victim and B-V. The results are displayed in Tables I and II.

Situations of interpersonal violence were detected in all classrooms. In forms 2º, 4º and 5º, students in the four categories were detected, and in forms 3° and 5° no B-V case was present.

	CLASS-ROOM 2	CLASS-ROOM 3	CLASS-ROOM 4	CLASS-ROOM 5	CLASS-ROOM 6
OTHER	13	14	14	12	17
BULLY	2	2	5	4	2
VÍCTIM	3	4	2	5	2
V-P	2	-	2	-	2
TOTALS	20	20	23	21	23

Table1. Incidente by classroom

From the analysis of frecuency, it can be seen that:
- The greatest percentage of students is well adjusted to the school Centre.
- In the five classroom groups we have found students involved in the bullying dynamics as bullies and as victims, and bully-victims appear in only three of them (which confirms our general hypothesis). They represent more than 34% of the sample. 14% are Bullies, 15% Victims, and 5.6% Bully-victim.

- The greatest incidence among forms is seen in forms 4° and 5°, both with 9 cases, followed by 2° form with 7 cases and by forms 3° and 6° with six cases.
- The age group having the greatest incidence in absolute values is between 9-10 y ears with 21cases (51. 3%), of whi ch 9 are b ullies, 10 are victims and 2 are bully- victims.
- The only subject of 13 years of age (a girl) appears as a bully-victim.

	ADGE			SEX	
	7-8	9-10	11-13	M	F
OTHER	71.9 (23)	48.8 (20)	76.6 (23)	57.1 (32)	74.5 (38)
BULLY	9.4 (3)	21.9 (9)	10 (3)	26.8 (15)	-
VÍCTIM	12.5 (4)	24.4 (10)	6.6 (2)	8.9 (5)	21.5 (11)
V-P	6.2 (2)	4.9 (2)	6.6 (2)	7.2 (4)	4 (2)
Total *Bullying*	**28.1 (9)**	**51.3 (21)**	**23.3 (7)**	**43 (24)**	**25.5 (13)**
TOTAL	32	41	30	56	51

Table 2. Incidence by Age and Gender. Absolute percentages and values

- As regards gender, it is surprising that all subjects involved as bullies are boys. While as regards victims, in absolute values, girls double boys, and as a percentage they represent almost 22% against 9% of boys.
- Subjects considered bully-victims represent 7.2% of the boys and 4% of the girls.
- All the girls acting as aggressors (bullies) are victims at the same time; therefore, we can gather that they use aggressiveness as a way to respond to the aggression they receive.

2. Differences between the means of subgroups

In the second place, differences in the perception of personal, social and situational variables associated with bullying were analyzed. For that, "two-to-two" comparisons were established between subgroups and for each of the variables analyzed, so that differences between the means of the scores obtained by the subjects not involved (Other), aggressors (Bully), victims and bully-victims

(B-Vs) could be obtained. The following tables display the significant results of the different T-Tests through the SPSS program, for comparative studies of means.

From the analysis of differences between means, we find that:
- Between the Others and the Bullies, there are significant differences as regards gender, since all the aggressors in the sample are boys (p < 0.001). As regards the Rejection variable, a certain tendency towards Bullies can be observed (p = 0.06).
- Between Others and Victims there are differences in the gender variable, since most of the victims are girls.
- Between Bullies and Victims statistically significant differences are observed in Physical Strength and Aggressor; the values obtained for the bullies being the highest (p < 0.001). In the variables Cowardice and Dislike (p < 0.001) it is the victims who show the highest values.

Variables	Other/*Bully*			Other/Víctim			Bully/Víctim		
	t	g.l	Differ. between Means	t	g.l	Differ. between Means	t	g.l	Differ. between Means
Gender	9.05***	83	.54	-			5.74***	29	.69
Rejection	-			-2.99**	14	-5.76	-		
Strength	-3.34***	83	23.05	2.87*	14	9.17	3.61***	29	32.22
Cowardice				-4.39***	14	-15.98	-2.22**	29	-13.18
Aggressor	-12.23***	83	-30.10	-4.02***	14	-8.70	4.77***	29	21.41
Dislike	-1.99*	83	-4.77	-5.11***	14	-13.63	-1.9(.06)	29	-8.86

*Associated Probability (P value): * = 0.05 > α < 0.03; ** = 0.03 > α < 0.01; *** = α <= 0.01*

Table 3. T-Test Differences in Bull-S between Other/Bully/Victim

- As regards the Rejection variable, there is a marked difference between Victims and Others, the values obtained for the victims being higher (p < 0.001).

This group of variables confirms that aggressor students have higher social evaluation and, therefore, are better regarded by at least a considerable part of their schoolmates, while certain aspects are attributed to victim subjects, as well as bully-victims, which to a certain extent make them more liable to find themselves in situations of helplessness, since they are considered cowardly and are isolated from play, games and activities.

The comparative analysis between the Bully-Victim subjects and the rest of the subgroups produced the following results:

Variables	Other/V-Aggressor			*Bully*/ V-Aggressor			Víctima/ V-Aggressor		
	t	g.l.	Dif .M	t	g.l.	Dif .M	t	g.l	Dif. M
Gender	-			-2.60**	19	.33	-		
Aceptance	3.49**	74	4.17	-			-		
Rejection	-6.94***	74	-21.53	-3.53**	19	-20.23	-2.72**	20	-15.77
Prospect of being chosen	2.01*	74	2.61	-			-		
Prospect of geing rejected	-2.98**	74	-5.88	-2.06*	19	2.70	-		
Physical Strength	3.37***	74	9.65	3.59***	19	32.70	-		
Cowardice	-3.93***	74	-19.67	-2.52**	19	-16.87	-		
Aggressor	-7.54***	74	-36.74	-			-2.93***	20	-28.04
Dislike	-6.20***	74	-25.50	-2.92***	19	-20.73	-		
Form	-2.61**	72	-1.00	-2.50**	19	-1.00	-1.98 (.06)	18	-.93

*Associated Probability (P value): * = 0.05 > α < 0.03; ** = 0.03 > α < 0.01; *** = α <= 0.0*1.

Table 4. T-Test Differences in Bull-S between Other/Bully/Victim and Bully-Victim

- Between Others and B-Vs, differences can be observed in the variables "acceptance" and "prospect of being chosen", the values obtained for "Others" being the highest; in the variables "rejection" and "prospect of being rejected", values are considerable higher in B-VS;
- As compared with the Bullies, they are characterized by being considered more cowardly and by being disliked, and there are no differences in the "bully" ide between both subgroups.
- As compared with Others and Bullies, they are physically weaker.
- As compared with the Victims, the B-Vs are more rejected and considered more aggressive (p < 0.001), and they are usually more disliked (p = 0.06).

These analyses clearly show that between the three subgroups there are significant differences in sociometric values and in the assessment of characteristics associated with the aggressor and the victim.

The comparative study of situational variables reveals that only the B-Vs find that the forms of aggression are specifically different. For these subjects, rejection is the main way of being attacked while for bullies and victims, acts of aggression are usually insults and physical violence.

As regards the severity attached to the acts of aggression and the feelings of security in the Centre, it was surprising that in no case these situations were considered sufficiently serious, maybe because aggressiveness became part of the usual treatment among peers.

3. Identification of subjects involved.

This issue focuses on the study of the case of one of the Bully-Victim students of fourth form. In this group of 23 students, 5 bullies, 2 victims and 2 bully-victims were detected.

Presentation of a clinical case

Tomás G. C. is a boy of 9 years of age, foreign, and has been enrolled in this centre for two years so far. His academic record, in general, shows learning difficulties and adaptation issues. He has been reprimanded on several occasions because of his lack of interest, and lately he has exhibited challenging behaviour towards teachers.

History of the problem

The victimization problem suffered by Tomás comes in part from the negative he receives from a considerable number of schoolmates and partly from his provoking attitude, in addition to the lack of academic interest. This situation gets complicated due to the absence of support in the group; it is meaningful that he chose three girls as schoolmates and no boy. Although last year he was involved in victimization situations, especially with insults and contemptuous treatment by some of the boys of the group, maltreatment has been systematic for six months, and has been worse for three months now, and he says now that he is going through such maltreatment every day, and its effects go beyond the merely academic framework. His state of tension and helplessness has been generalized to many areas of behaviour, times of the day and places, and he has developed aggressive attitudes by way of compensation.

Topographic and functional analysis

The Bull-S test analysis has detected the following particular characteristics in Tomás:

- Sociability: Very low, although he chooses three girl classmates, nobody chooses him. Besides, his prospect of being chosen does not match reality. While he stands out as a rejected student (weighed score 40), and with a high probability of being rejected, his perception in this aspect is quite well-adjusted to reality.
- Variables of the bullying dynamics: Perception of Tomás by the group positions him within the following parameters: Cowardice (31%), Aggressiveness (35%), Victimization (40%), Bully (18%), and Dislike (61%). He is a child with a strong tendency towards being a victim and a bully at the same time, i.e., he suffers the aggression of some of his schoolmates and at the same time displays aggression against others. Besides, he has a quite realistic self-perception of the situation, since he recognizes himself as a subject of both victimization and rejection by his schoolmates.
- Situational values: Among the forms of aggression he usually receives, insults and threats are the most prominent, followed by physical aggression and rejection. The classroom, followed by the schoolyard, are the places where the acts of aggression usually occur, they take place almost every day; he finds that these situations are serious and does not feel very secure in the school centre.

Interviews have revealed that Tomás is in a helplessness and exclusion situation among his schoolmates and has no coping strategies to ask for help, express annoyance in a positive way or make friends. From a different perspective, we find that his shy and somewhat childish temperament makes him a good target for attacks, and that he lacks effective coping strategies.

To complete the information, an assessment of the following areas was made: personal and social relationship, family environment and school environment. Results showed that Tomás was in a clear situation of helplessness and social exclusion, and he was also victimized by three schoolmates who used to insult him and even attacked him physically by kicking and pushing him. His response was ineffective and occasionally aggressive. His level of helplessness was high.

As regards social skills, values were low in: Social Withdrawal (Isolation), Asking for favours, Requesting change in behaviour and Assertive Behaviour.

By means of the EPQ-J (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1989), high levels of psychoticism and neuroticism and medium levels of extraversion and honesty were detected.

The BAS-3 socialization battery (Silva and Martorell, 2001) provided some elements to be taken into account, thus, values were very low in social sensitivity and self-confidence, against very high values in social seclusion and isolation, and also in anxiety and shyness.

The study of the family environment confirmed the necessity of the social inclusion of the family group, made up of the father, a casual worker, the mother, and three children, all of them of school age, Tomás being the second child. The social and family environment as measured by the FES (Family Environment Scale) (Moos, Moos and Tricket, 1995) shows difficulty as regards Expressiveness and a high level of Conflict. The questionnaire about educational and socialization styles "ESPA" (Musitu and García, 2004) revealed a significant divergence between the paternal and the material styles, the mother being the one who tried to overprotect the child, while the father exerted greater control in addition to his low acceptance of, and his low involvement in, the child's problems.

The school environment, as assessed by the classroom environment scale (CES) (Moos, Moos and Tricket, 1995) and the form teacher's opinion, confirmed very low levels in interpersonal relations, both in Involvement, Affiliation and Help. As regards the areas of school self-realization, the little importance he attached to the completion of work and the scant organization of work by the teacher were noticeable; finally, it should be pointed out that students participated very little in the planning of school activities and that students' creativity was hardly stimulated.

From the point of view of the form teacher, the kid had school adjustment issues, and had very few friends; he used to get angry very easily when he did not get what he wanted, and was always complaining about teachers and schoolmates. Concerning his school performance, the form teacher found that he did not work hard enough and that his basic learning level was deficient, that is why he received tuition twice a week.

Treatment techniques

Intervention was established at three levels: the classroom, the subject and his aggressors. The therapeutic goals proposed were focused on providing self-protection strategies, improving self-esteem and self-confidence, developing deficient social skills and assertive behaviour.

From the classroom, after informing the form teacher, we introduced a weekly session in order to improve empathy and the knowledge of the social and emotional reality of the group members, as well as to develop more socializing behaviour.

Nine sessions were scheduled for Tomás, organized into three phases: assessment, treatment and examination, and follow-up. A mixed program was chosen; first we worked on self-esteem and self-confidence along with the training in social skills, introducing at the same time and gradually a program for anger management. Relaxation and self-records for home were used to consolidate the therapeutic tasks. In parallel with that, interviews with the parents were held.

The work strategy for aggressors (bullies) was based on making them conscious of the problem and on the recognition of its severity, the analysis of bullying situations lived, and the aggressors' level of involvement in such situations, and on the development of anger management programs.

After eight weeks of implementation of the program, a significant change was observed in the classroom atmosphere (environment). Tomás interacted more easily with his schoolmates and did more successfully his school activities. In addition, the conflictual atmosphere of the classroom was attenuated considerably.

Later contact with the mother and the form teacher confirmed that the child kept making progress. One fact corroborated the appreciable improvement: Tomás was pleased to go to school and he increasingly integrated into the group of peers. His final academic results improved appreciably, although he required academic reinforcement.

CONCLUSIONS

Results are established at two levels: Interpersonal relations among peers and the perception of aspects concerning the social atmosphere of the classroom and the differences between the students involved. As regards the first issue, a clear effect of the sociometric position on the perception of violence among peers is observed (Gallardo and Jiménez, 1997), favoring aggressors (bullies) whom, in addition to having some personal peer support, physical strength and leadership qualities are attributed to. On the other hand, victims are isolated or rejected and are considered cowardly by a considerable percentage of their classmates. In this respect, bully-victims get the highest sociometric values. As regards the social atmosphere, two dimensions stand out: the perception of the degree of security in the school centre, where most of the members of the sample feel quite or very secure in the centre, and the level of severity attributed to violence situations is insignificant. Therefore, sociometric aspects, in addition to socialization and

social school atmosphere (environment), appear as elements conducive to bullying.

Furthermore, these results confirm not only that bullying is present in the Educational Centres, but also that the incidence rates are increasing with respect to previous studies (AA.VV. 2000; Cerezo, 1997; 2001a; Ortega, 1994). One aspect may contribute to that, and it is that in general cohesion rates in groups are low. Another remarkable aspect is the clear difference in certain aspects of group life between each subject involved (Bullies, Victims and Bully-Victim), especially in the perception of their own social status and adjustment to the group. Among bullies, it is observed that they are shown certain consideration by the group and that they adjust better to social reality as compared with victims who are unable to see peer support, and therefore it is difficult for them to find it, because they do not have a real perception of their situation of isolation (Salmivalli and Nieminen, 2002). Finally, the bully-victims are those with higher rates in perception of rejection by their schoolmates, and therefore, they better adjust to and perceive their social reality.

According to our data, aggressors have a specific profile as compared with victims in general, their physical strength, aggression and certain leadership characteristics standing out against the cowardice and anxiety of victims, and the feelings of antipathy that victims arouse.

Regarding the perception of the social atmosphere of the classroom, in terms of security and severity attributed to aggressions, there are very few differences between the well-adjusted, the aggressors and the victims, which indicates the minor importance that subjects as a whole attach to violence in classrooms. If we add to this the clear situation of isolation and helplessness of victim subjects and the manifest indifference of the rest of the group to maltreatment situations, we can understand that the relational structure in classrooms operates as an element that is conducive to the bullying dynamics.

The case presented as an example of a victim student who also exhibits aggressive features confirms that we are faced with a problem with clear symptoms of depression and social rejection (Rigby, 2000), where the prevalence factor makes us confuse the victim with the aggressor (Cerezo, Calvo and Sánchez, 2004). Treatment, based on training in systematic desensitization and on training in conflict resolution and assertiveness development strategies, in conjunction with the school sensitization work in the classroom group and the presence of external support, provided a substantial improvement in the short term and in the maintenance of the advances achieved by treatment over time.

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