

Bullying and coping strategies in 2nd and 3rd year secondary school students

Acoso escolar y estrategias de afrontamiento en estudiantes de 2° y 3° nivel de secundaria

ABSTRACT

Bullying affects students' well-being, making it crucial to develop effective coping strategies to mitigate its negative impacts. The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between bullying and the coping strategies used by second- and third-grade secondary school students at "Ignacio León 2" Educational Unit in the Municipality of Oruro, Bolivia. The study used a quantitative approach, using a non-experimental, cross-sectional, and correlational design. The sample consisted of 210 students. The results highlight that 29.5% of students have experienced bullying; 6.2% of cases require urgent attention. It is concluded that a significant percentage of students have experienced bullying, including serious cases. Documentation of incidents is inadequate, highlighting the need for improved record-keeping. Adolescents frequently use coping strategies, but many are ineffective.

Keywords: Bullying; Educational strategy; High school student; Psychological well-being.

RESUMEN

El acoso escolar afecta el bienestar de los estudiantes, por lo que es crucial desarrollar estrategias de afrontamiento efectivas para mitigar sus impactos negativos. El objetivo del estudio fue determinar la relación entre el acoso escolar y las estrategias de afrontamiento utilizadas por los estudiantes de 2° y 3° nivel de secundaria de la Unidad Educativa "Ignacio León 2" del Municipio de Oruro, Bolivia. Se trabajó con un enfoque cuantitativo, una investigación con un diseño no experimental, de corte transversal y de tipo correlacional. La muestra estuvo conformada por 210 estudiantes. Los resultados destacan que el 29.5% de los estudiantes ha experimentado acoso escolar; el 6.2% de los casos requiere atención urgente. Se concluye que un porcentaje significativo de estudiantes ha experimentado acoso, incluyendo casos graves. La documentación de los incidentes es inadecuada, lo que señala la necesidad de mejorar los registros. Los adolescentes utilizan estrategias de afrontamiento con frecuencia, pero muchas no son efectivas.

Palabras clave: Acoso escolar; Estrategia educativa; Estudiante de secundaria; Bienestar psicológico.

INTRODUCTION

Bullying is a growing problem in secondary education, negatively affecting students' well-being. It occurs in children and adolescents during the school years and is, arguably, a phenomenon that has always been present in our society. To address it, it is important to implement effective coping strategies. This includes awareness programs, social and emotional skills workshops, and clear protocols for reporting and handling incidents. Furthermore, fostering an inclusive environment and providing psychological support for victims is essential. These measures help create a safe school environment and promote students' holistic development (Menesini & Salvimalli, 2017).

In this regard, Zhang et al. (2019) assert that bullying has garnered increasing attention and social alarm in recent years, driven by widespread media coverage, which turns isolated incidents into highly relevant issues. This phenomenon affects children and adolescents throughout their school years and has likely been a constant in our society, although it is now more visible thanks to media coverage. The authors note that its impact extends beyond the school environment, affecting students' mental health and general well-being.

UNICEF (2024) states that bullying is a form of violence that systematically targets a specific victim, subjecting them to various forms of physical, verbal, or psychological aggression. The organization highlights that this phenomenon is a complex social problem that affects a significant percentage of adolescents worldwide. It also indicates that one-third of students have experienced some form of bullying, whether physical, verbal, or cyberbullying. This type of violence profoundly affects students' well-being and education, constituting a violation of their basic rights to health and a safe learning environment.

In this regard, UNESCO (2020) reports that secondary school students, as they transition into adolescence, may experience a more profound impact from bullying, which can lead to serious consequences such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and, in some cases, suicidal thoughts. Furthermore, the organization points out that this phenomenon not only affects academic performance but can also disrupt young people's social and emotional development, limiting their ability to establish healthy relationships and face future challenges.

According to UNICEF (2018), bullying is a growing concern in Bolivia, with a significant percentage of students affected. A local study indicates that 14% of them remain silent concerning attacks, which can lead to devastating consequences such as depression and suicide. In La Paz, 90% of secondary school students experience school violence, while in Santa Cruz; seven out of ten students are exposed to some type of violence. These frequent incidents significantly affect primary and secondary school students, impacting their emotional and academic well-being. Causes include a lack of adult supervision, a lack of clear school policies on the issue, cultural tolerance of aggressive behavior, and the media influence. Additionally, individual factors such as low self-esteem, insecurity, and the need for power can contribute to bullying behavior.

In this sense, Boulon -Jiménez (2022) states that to prevent adverse consequences, it is essential to implement comprehensive strategies that involve the entire educational

community, promoting empathy, tolerance, and peaceful conflict resolution. These actions must be constant and coordinated at all levels. Vargas and Campos (2019) report that efforts have been made through awareness campaigns and intervention programs, such as the "Bullying Prevention Program" which emphasizes the importance of collaborative work between parents, teachers, and educational authorities. The authors emphasize that these initiatives foster an inclusive and safe school environment, thus improving student well-being.

Several studies have explored the coping strategies used by victims of bullying. Nacimiento et al. (2017) found that children and adolescents between 12 and 18 years old use metacognitive skills to cope with bullying, although unproductive strategies can increase the frequency of victimization. Another study by Sittichai and Smith (2018) reported that victims of traditional bullying tend to report it to adults, while those with cyberbullying block messages or change contacts. Girls tend to report it more and recommend ignoring bullying, promoting a more proactive and safer approach in educational settings.

Neaville 's (2017) study on adolescent coping strategies includes informing adults, blocking cyberbullying messages, and promoting a proactive approach. Girls tend to report more, while boys may choose to defend themselves or make new friends. In this context, Uribe et al. (2018) also found that adolescents who use coping strategies aimed at problem - solving and seeking social support exhibit higher levels of psychological well-being. These strategies help manage difficult situations and also foster a healthier and safer school environment for all.

This research background reveals the need to explore bullying and coping strategies in high school students, given its negative impact on emotional and academic well-being. Identifying the levels of bullying and the strategies used is crucial to understanding its influence on students' overall development, which will allow for the design of more effective support programs. The analysis of this relationship will allow for the development of effective interventions that promote a safe school environment and adequate emotional support for high school students.

The present research aims to determine the relationship between bullying and the coping strategies used by students in 2nd and 3rd levels of secondary school at "Ignacio León 2" Educational Unit in the Municipality of Oruro, Bolivia.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a positivist paradigm and a quantitative approach, which allowed it to achieve its primary objective: to measure the correlation between the dimensions and characteristics of bullying and the coping strategies used by students. The research was based on a non-experimental, cross- sectional, and correlational design.

The study population is comprised of 306 male students in "Ignacio León 2" Educational Unit, specifically from the 2nd and 3rd grades of secondary school. This population is unique because it is located in an all-male educational environment, which allows for an analysis of students' experiences and perceptions in this specific context.

The sample consisted of a representative group of 210 students from the second and third grades of secondary school at "Ignacio León 2" Educational Unit. The students were selected to participate in the study using a probability sampling method, with the objective of obtaining accurate and representative data on bullying and the coping strategies they used.

The research was conducted at "Ignacio León 2" Educational Unit in the city of Oruro, an all-boys school. This institution offered a unique opportunity to analyze secondary school students. The research process took place during the 2024 academic year.

Observational data collection was used. Students were subsequently provided with an informed consent form before administering the measurement instruments. Once the students or their parents/guardians gave their consent, the AVE School Bullying and Violence Test and the ACS Adolescent Coping Scale were administered.

The instrument used was a structured questionnaire divided into two distinct parts. The first part consists of 50 items, designed for students to assess the frequency with which they experience bullying behavior. This component is aimed at students aged 7 to 18, takes 25 to 35 minutes to complete, and can be administered either individually or in groups.

The items are organized on a Likert-type scale, which offers three response categories: never, rarely, and often. This scale allows for a precise assessment of the frequency with which bullying behaviors are experienced. The items are grouped into four main dimensions: provocation (12 items), intimidation (13 items), exclusion (17 items), and aggression (8 items). These dimensions cover various forms of mistreatment, such as teasing, threats, social exclusion, and physical aggression. The second part of the instrument is designed to assess clinical symptoms related to bullying, such as anxiety, although it was not considered in this specific study.

The AVE School Bullying and Violence Test demonstrates high internal consistency, as assessed by Cronbach 's alpha coefficient. The overall bullying index achieves an alpha coefficient of 0.95, while the intensity scale achieves an alpha of 0.93. Furthermore, the test's validity is assessed by analyzing its item structure, which allows for verifying how each scale relates to the constructs it aims to measure. This ensures that the test assesses bullying accurately and reliably. SPSS version 23 software was used to process the data.

RESULTS

Bullying and coping strategies among students are fundamental to understanding its impact on emotional, academic, and social well-being. Identifying effective strategies, such as seeking support and problem-solving, allows for the intervention designs that promote safe and inclusive school environments, protecting the students' holistic development in secondary education.

Table 1 shows the overall results of the Bullying and School Violence Test. The results reveal that the majority of students, 70.5%, did not report having experienced bullying in their school environment. Meanwhile, 29.5% reported having experienced bullying, with 22.4% classifying them as having experienced known bullying and 6.2% as having experienced

known bullying. Only 1.0% reported a very high level of bullying. These findings indicate that, although the majority of students do not experience bullying, a significant proportion does and requires attention and appropriate measures to address the problem within the educational community.

Table 1

School bullying and violence test overall result.

Overall Score (n=210)				
Degree	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unverified provocation	148	70.5	70.5	70.5
Provocation confirmed	47	22.4	22.4	92.9
Provocation well-established	13	6.2	6.2	99.0
Provocation is well-documented	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	37	100.0	37	100.0

Regarding provocation, Table 2 reveals that the majority of cases, 73.3%, are classified as "unverified provocation." Additionally, "verified provocation" represents 19.0% of cases. Moreover, cases of "well-verified provocation" and "highly verified provocation" are less frequent, with percentages of 6.7% and 1.0%, respectively. These findings indicate that although a significant percentage of cases (19.0%) were confirmed, the low proportion of "well-verified provocation" and "highly verified provocation" demonstrates significant gaps in the documentation and validation of these incidents. This underscores the urgent need to implement substantial improvements in the processes for recording and responding to provocation cases in order to ensure adequate and fair care for victims.

Table 2

Study on provocation results.

Provocation (n=210)				
Degree	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unverified provocation	154	73.3	73.3	73.3
Provocation confirmed	40	19.0	19.0	92.4
Provocation well established	14	6.7	6.7	99.0
Provocation is well documented	2	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	37	100.0	37	100.0

Regarding the bullying study in Table 3, it can be seen that the majority of cases have not been officially confirmed, with 85.7% classified as "unsubstantiated bullying." Only a smaller percentage (10.5%) of cases were classified as "substantiated bullying," while cases of "well-substantiated bullying" and "highly substantiated bullying" are even less frequent, with percentages of 2.4% and 1.4%, respectively. These findings indicate a notable lack of evidence or official recognition of bullying incidents, highlighting the need to improve documentation processes.

Table 3

Degrees of Intimidation Distribution.

Bullying (n=210)				
Degree	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unverified provocation	180	85.7	85.7	85.7
Provocation confirmed	22	10.5	10.5	96.2
Provocation well-established	5	2.4	2.4	98.6
Provocation is well-documented	3	1.4	1.4	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 shows the results of the exclusion study. It can be observed that the majority of cases have not been officially confirmed, with 63.3% classified as "unverified provocation." A significant 26.2% of cases were classified as "verified provocation," indicating a considerable number of verified situations. Meanwhile, cases of "well-verified provocation" and "highly verified provocation" are less frequent, with percentages of 9.0% and 1.4%, respectively. These findings indicate a lack of official evidence in many exclusion incidents, revealing the need to improve documentation and response processes for these events.

Table 4

Study on exclusion results

Exclusion (n=210)				
Degrees	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unverified provocation	133	63.3	63.3	63.3
Provocation confirmed	55	26.2	26.2	89.5
Provocation well-established	19	9.0	9.0	98.6
Provocation is well-documented	3	1.4	1.4	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Table 5, which addresses aggression, shows that the majority of cases have not been officially confirmed, with 61.0% classified as "unverified provocation." A significant 31.0% of cases were classified as "verified provocation," indicating a considerable number of verified situations. Cases of "well-verified provocation" and "highly verified provocation" are less frequent, with percentages of 7.6% and 0.5%, respectively. These findings indicate a lack of official evidence in many incidents of aggression.

Table 5

Degrees of aggression distribution.

Aggression (n=210)				
Degrees	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Unverified provocation	128	61.0	61.0	61.0
Provocation confirmed	65	31.0	31.0	91.9
Provocation well-established	16	7.6	7.6	99.5
Provocation is well-documented	1	,5	,5	100.0
Total	210	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the adolescent coping scale, it was found that the majority of participants used coping strategies with some frequency. Only 2.4% reported not using them, while 8.6% rarely used them. Meanwhile, 36.2% indicated that they sometimes used them, and 43.3% reported having often used them, indicating that this is the most common strategy among adolescents. Finally, 9.5% of participants used these strategies very frequently. The findings indicate that adolescents regularly tend to use coping strategies, which demonstrates a developed ability to handle challenging situations.

Regarding the nonproductive coping dimension, it was found that most participants used these strategies with some frequency, with 49.0% sometimes using them. While 27.6% often used them, and 5.7% very frequently used them, 3.8% reported not using them, while 13.8% rarely used them. These findings indicate that participants regularly use nonproductive coping strategies, although with variations in frequency. This highlights a need to improve coping strategies to make them more effective and productive in managing challenging situations.

Regarding the correlation results between bullying and coping strategies, a significant, although weak, relationship was observed, with a Spearman coefficient of 0.220. The p-value of 0.001 confirms this direct relationship, indicating that the greater the bullying, the greater the use of coping strategies. However, the correlation strength is weak, revealing the influence of other factors. These findings underscore the importance of considering the bullying impact on the development of coping strategies in adolescents.

DISCUSSION

Bullying and school violence severely affect secondary school students, impacting their mental health and emotional well-being and violating their fundamental rights. In line with this study, Mora-Merchán et al. (2021) conducted research in 28 European countries, where they found that victims of bullying experience physical symptoms such as headaches, stomachaches, backaches, and vertigo. This study also revealed that the more frequently they were bullied, the more symptoms of poor health the children experienced. Furthermore, a significant correlation was found between the frequency of bullying and the use of coping strategies, supporting the idea that bullying has a profound impact on adolescents' well-being.

Calderón's (2020) findings reveal that bullying arises from a complex combination of social, historical, and cultural factors that turn the school environment into a hostile space. This is due, in part, to the emergence of thought patterns that seek to impose themselves both symbolically and physically, which violates the integrity of the most vulnerable. Furthermore, this phenomenon generates a profound sense of powerlessness in victims, leading them to a state of defenselessness that leads to victimization. Therefore, it is crucial to consider these factors to effectively address bullying and promote a more inclusive and safe environment in schools.

Coarite and Carrillo (2014) point out that violence and bullying are phenomena that manifest themselves immediately and overwhelmingly in Bolivian educational institutions. These problems profoundly impact the school environment and student well-being, generating a climate of insecurity and mistrust. The authors emphasize that the lack of effective interventions, along with the naturalization of conflict in schools, contribute to the persistence of these problems, hindering the creation of safe and healthy educational spaces. They also underscore the need to implement comprehensive policies and programs that address these situations, fostering peaceful coexistence and respect among students.

According to Cano and Vargas (2018), bullying is a phenomenon deeply rooted in culture, influenced by social and educational factors that can be transformed. Therefore, it is important to implement both cultural and educational interventions to prevent and address this problem, aimed at creating a more inclusive and respectful school environment. Furthermore, as a cultural phenomenon, its modification requires a comprehensive approach that considers the existing social and educational dynamics in schools. In this way, a positive change in school culture can be promoted, thereby reducing the incidence of bullying.

Regarding bullying, it involves intentional and repetitive behaviors that seek to generate fear or subjugate the victim. Garcia et al. (2017) mention an experience with primary and secondary school students in Chiapas and Veracruz, Mexico. Their findings refer to verbal and physical abuse, with the classroom being the most frequent setting for bullying situations; 30.9% are victimized, and 4.5% suffer persistent aggression; 25% reported having bullied at least once, and 2.7% have done so systematically.

For their part, Ordoñez and Granja (2023) point out that, beyond the internal and external factors that influence school exclusion, and the emphasis on the provocation analysis, intimidation or aggression, it is decisive to identify manifestations of real and symbolic

exclusion due to ethnicity, race, disability, poverty and other causes. They also refer that, despite existing programs, it is important to effectively address them to promote educational inclusion. In this sense, Satici (2020) refers to a study with adolescents in Turkey, in which it was found that mediation analyses revealed that the negative effects of social exclusion on well-being were partially mediated by stress, academic self-efficacy and school satisfaction.

The findings of Páez et al. (2020) reveal a high prevalence of physical and verbal violence and social exclusion in the school environment, with blockages through manipulation, which generates a climate of fear and insecurity. In this context, it was found that 84.2% of school-aged adolescents have witnessed some type of violence, with verbal violence predominating (80.1%), followed by physical violence (47.7%) and psychological violence (36.9%). Furthermore, according to Guzmán et al. (2023), bullying behaviors do not occur in isolation, but are often accompanied by various forms of violence, showing strong and positive associations between psychological, verbal, and physical bullying. This complex interconnection underscores the need to address bullying from a comprehensive perspective.

Pérez (2017) reports that most cases of student aggression have not been officially confirmed, remaining in a state of uncertainty that hinders effective management and the victims protection. The author emphasizes the need for a more transparent and effective reporting system to ensure school safety. He also asserts that it is necessary to build spaces for coexistence, where dialogue prevails, a positive institutional climate, and an excellent family-school relationship, thus promoting an inclusive and safe environment. This requires proactive educational policies.

According to the findings regarding the coping strategies used by students, Uribe et al. (2018) highlight a significant and positive relationship between coping strategies and psychological well-being in adolescents. Strategies aimed at problem-solving, whether through individual actions or seeking support from others are associated with high well-being. On the other hand, strategies belonging to the unproductive style are correlated with low well-being. Furthermore, Espinoza et al. (2018) refer to an experience with adolescents in Ecuador, whose results mention the use of four basic strategies and two coping styles, and it was concluded that those aimed at problem-solving predominate.

For their part, Buitimea et al. (2024) mention an experience in which teachers use both preventive and reactive strategies to address school violence. Preventive strategies focus on developing a comprehensive educational environment that promotes peaceful coexistence, while reactive strategies are implemented to respond immediately to serious conflicts. Both strategies are seen as effective, especially in vulnerable contexts where students are exposed to violent behavior outside the classroom.

Sandoval et al. (2022) describe an experience with 251 students between the ages of 12 and 15, from public and private secondary schools in the Guadalajara Metropolitan Area. Their findings highlight that private schools obtained higher scores in strategies such as gathering evidence and seeking support, suggesting greater access to institutional and family resources. They also emphasize that private institutions foster a more favorable environment for the development of effective coping strategies, such as problem-solving and assertive communication. The authors emphasize the importance of promoting school environments

that facilitate access to tools and support networks for all students, regardless of the type of institution, in order to reduce existing gaps and ensure adequate situations of violence and bullying management.

CONCLUSIONS

The study showed that Bullying and School Violence Test reveals that 29.5% of students have experienced bullying, with 6.2% being serious cases. The majority of incidents (73.3%) are not adequately documented, highlighting the need to improve recording and response processes in educational institutions to ensure the necessary support for victims.

It is confirmed that the majority of bullying (85.7%) and exclusion (63.3%) cases have not been officially confirmed, highlighting a significant gap in the documentation and recognition of these incidents. However, 26.2% of exclusion cases have been verified, indicating that while a considerable proportion of situations are real, many are not adequately recorded. These findings emphasize the need to implement more effective mechanisms to identify, document, and address bullying and exclusion in the school setting, in order to ensure a safe and protective environment for all secondary school students.

Most adolescents frequently use coping strategies (43.3% "often" and 9.5% "very often"), but many are ineffective (49.0% use unproductive strategies). The weak correlation (0.220) between bullying and coping suggests that other factors also play a role. Promoting more effective and productive coping strategies among adolescents is essential.

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