

# TRIGGERING FACTORS FOR BULLYING IN THE SCHOOL CONTEXT

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**Abstract:** Bullying is a type of violence that can occur in different places and in different ways, with schools being one of the possible environments for this violence to occur. Because some of the main objectives for its event are the desire to harm or humiliate the target, bullying leads to numerous psychological consequences for those involved, such as a greater propensity to develop depression, low self-esteem and antisocial behavior. It is also worth highlighting that violence suffered in family and school contexts can influence the practice of bullying, as well as discriminatory acts related to skin color, sexual orientation and physical appearance. With these factors in mind, the objective of this research was to identify the phenomena that contribute to the development of bullying among students. To this end, an integrative literature review of articles available on the online platforms Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO Brasil) and ``*Periódicos Eletrônicos em Psicologia*`` (PePSIC) was carried out. As inclusion criteria, the following stood out: articles published between 2017 and 2022 and articles published in Portuguese. Regarding the exclusion criteria, these included articles published in foreign languages, which were unrelated to the objective of the research, where access to the full article was not available and which were duplicates in the databases searched. As a result, nine articles were found that covered the theme of triggering factors for bullying, which were subdivided into three categories, namely, sociodemographic aspects, school characteristics and family relationships. It was possible to observe a relationship between the practice of bullying and characteristics associated with the male sex, the age group of 13 to 15 years, dissatisfaction with body image, the treatment received in the school context and violence experienced or witnessed in the family environment. It is concluded that this article

contributed to the elucidation of relevant issues about the practice of bullying, helping to raise new discussions with the aim of understanding viable forms of interventions for this context.

## INTRODUCTION

School is one of the first environments for social interaction, and it will be essential to the child's development, through the social interactions that occur in that environment. It is through these interactions that children transform their way of perceiving, feeling, memorizing, imagining, and giving meaning to the emotions perceived in situations, such as in moments of joy and fear (VYGOTSKY, 1994). According to Olweus (1993), bullying is characterized by being a type of violence that has its greatest occurrence in the school context and that can involve some behaviors that involve physical and/or verbal and/or psychological violence, in addition to threats, robberies and defamation. Such attitudes, for the most part, can be carried out by more than one person against another and aim to hurt or harm the target in some way (OLWEUS, 1993).

Bullying brings several consequences to the lives of those involved, which vary depending on the frequency and intensity of the harassment and impact different areas of their lives (ALBUQUERQUE; D'AFFONSECA; MAZO, 2013). Neto (2005) points out that targets of bullying are more likely to develop depression, low self-esteem and antisocial behavior. Silva and Borges (2018) recognize that bullying can trigger negative feelings in targets, inspiring aggression and revenge, which can lead them to suicide and homicide.

Oliveira-Menegotto, Pasini and Levandowski (2013) define this phenomenon by the frequency of three factors: repetition, in which attacks are repeated frequently; the intention of causing physical, material or psychological harm to the victim; and the

imbalance of power, which consists of an unequal relationship, in which the author's ability to attack exceeds the target's means of defending himself, as in situations in which the author is physically stronger or has greater support and protection for his actions, while the target can hardly avoid attacks or resolve the damage caused.

According to Oliveira, Campos, Andrezza and Malta (2017), in a survey that was carried out with adolescents aged 13 to 17 and published by the Brazilian Institute of Research and Statistics (IBGE), more than 20% of students indicated that they had been victims of bullying in the last 30 days prior to the survey. According to the study participants, the reasons for this were varied, but mainly due to physical appearance, including color or race. Regarding the mental health of these people, it was possible to observe reports of concern about everyday situations, as well as that their lives were not important. Furthermore, the adolescents reported having suffered, at some point in their lives, situations of harassment or exposure, especially in the case of girls.

The research also indicated the involvement of some adolescents in physical aggression and possession of firearms, in addition to having experienced circumstances of aggression suffered by their parents or guardians (OLIVEIRA; CAMPOS; ANDREAZZI; MALTA, 2017).

There is still confusion on the part of teaching staff and students about the concept of bullying, confusing any and all cases of violence in schools as bullying and generalizing other forms of violence, such as racism, homophobia and misogyny (FRANCISCO; LIBÓRIO, 2013). As stated by Oliveira-Menegotto, Pasini and Levandowski (2013), a case is characterized as bullying when intentional persecution occurs with the aim of causing physical or psychological harm, repetition of the practice and unequal power relationship.

The research by Mezzalira, Fernandes and Santos (2021), which proposed an interactive dialogue with eight teachers, collected shared stories that reveal some disregard for violence, often understood as a harmless and natural joke between students, such as the culture of pejorative nicknames that "doesn't traumatize anyone." The researchers state that:

[...] although there was awareness of the need for debate around the issue involving violence, especially bullying, it was still common to come across the unworthiness and invisibility of the phenomenon when cases were identified at school as commonplace or age-old jokes (MEZZALIRA; FERNANDES; SANTOS, 2021, p.

However, two types of attitudes from educators were observed: sometimes permissive, sometimes strict, with threats made in an attempt to control students. Both stances reveal a lack of awareness of the problem, which makes the school an environment vulnerable to the appearance and maintenance of bullying (MEZZALIRA; FERNANDES; SANTOS, 2021).

Sometimes, bullying has an impact on school engagement. The research by Valle and Williams (2021) observed interesting correlations between bullying and feelings, as well as commitment to school activity. While students not involved in bullying are those who are most committed to their studies and cultivate an affection for school, the targets do not like being there and the perpetrators have difficulty following rules and being interested in learning the content taught, which affects your engagement. These results correspond to those found in the investigation carried out by the same research on the perception of bullying, which proved to be inversely proportional to academic commitment.

With these findings, it is clear that bullying creates a negative feeling in relation to school and studies, evidenced by the fear and

discomfort that targets feel in being in this environment, which leads to academic failure and undermines the conditions of safety and motivation necessary to a positive academic performance. For the authors, it reveals a lack of discipline and lack of interest in education (VALLE; WILLIAMS, 2021).

Silva, Lima, Acioli and Barreira (2021) highlighted that violence suffered in family and school contexts encourages aggressiveness in adolescents, which leads to bullying. The study profiled the majority of authors and identified characteristics, such as being male, considered older, doing more physical exercise and sexual relations, tending to be absent from classes, using alcohol and other drugs, as well as presenting reports of loneliness and insomnia. Furthermore, it may be common to be leaders in groups that generally have attitudes of power over others, who commonly submit out of fear (SILVA; LIMA; ACIOLI; BARREIRA, 2021). It is clear, therefore, that there is an influence of family violence on the practice of bullying, especially physical violence committed by mothers and between siblings, which many authors claim to suffer.

In this sense, family violence, although it seeks an educational character through punishments, ends up encouraging aggressive behavior, as a solution to everyday, social problems or the imposition of power. In addition to the practice of violence, parental negligence is also relevant, as little monitoring is permissive of aggression, as there are no limits or guidelines to avoid it. Discriminatory acts related to skin color, sexual orientation and physical appearance were also associated with a greater chance of bullying (SILVA; LIMA; ACIOLI; BARREIRA, 2021). Thinking about these factors, it is important to have a better understanding of possible factors that can contribute to the practice of bullying, in order to promote debate on the topic, raise awareness and combat it. In this sense, the

objective of this research was to identify the phenomena that contribute to the development of bullying among students.

## **METHOD**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

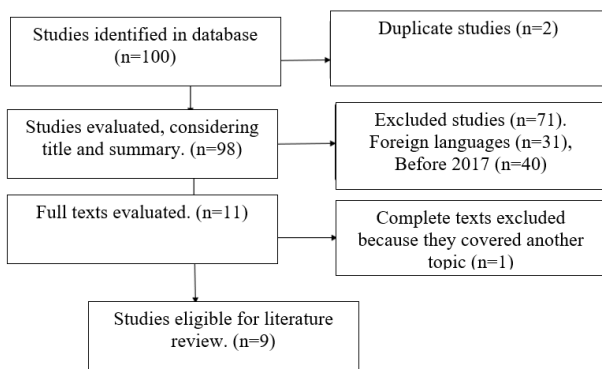
This research was characterized by being an integrative literature review, which, according to Gil (2002), is conceived by reading, analyzing and interpreting printed material, such as books, mimeographed or photocopied documents, periodicals, images, manuscripts, maps, publicity works, among others. This type of review's main objective is to provide scientific and/or technical knowledge on the topic under study.

The procedures proposed by the PRISMA model (LIBERATI et al., 2009) were adopted: (1) identification of the theme and delimitation of the guiding question; (2) choice of databases; (3) definition of descriptors for the search; (4) free search for articles in databases; (5) establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria; (6) selection of articles according to established criteria; (7) collection of information to be extracted from selected articles; (8) categorization of studies; (9) evaluation and interpretation of results; and (10) knowledge synthesis.

### **PROCEDURES**

To achieve the outlined objectives, a search was carried out, between February and March 2023, in the Electronic Journals in Psychology (PePSIC) and in the Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO Brasil), using the descriptors "bullying" and "schools". These descriptors were chosen after consulting the terminology dictionary of the Virtual Health Library – Psychology Brazil (VHL-Psi Brasil). As a result, 100 articles were found, of which two were duplicates.

In the selection through reading the titles and abstracts, it was decided to exclude articles published in foreign languages and dated before 2017, considering the research proposal to understand what has been discussed in the area in the last five years. Furthermore, articles that did not indicate topics related to the research objectives and those that were duplicates in the databases were excluded. Of the 98 articles, 78 were excluded, 31 for being in foreign languages and 47 for being published in years prior to 2017. After reading the 20 articles in full, it was found that 11 did not present a topic related to the research objectives. Finally, nine articles were selected for analysis in this literature review. The step-by-step selection of articles was described in the flowchart shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Flowchart of the search and selection of articles.

Source: Prepared by the author herself (2023).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The descriptive results of the nine articles found on triggering factors for bullying in the school context were presented in Table 1, summarizing data on authorship, objectives and main findings of each of these articles.

According to Table 1, it can be seen that the greatest concentration of research related to the theme of this research was concentrated in 2018, with studies that portray the triggering factors of bullying in schools in the last year being absent. Furthermore, it

is possible to see, from the objectives of the articles found, that discussions on this topic revolved around the presence of bullying triggering factors focused on three categories, namely, sociodemographic aspects, school characteristics and family relationships.

With regard to the category of sociodemographic aspects as triggering factors for bullying in schools, there is research by Monteiro, Medeiros, Pimentel, Soares, Medeiros and Gouveia (2017) in which these authors sought to understand how age and sex could interfere or determine the practice of bullying. In this study, 300 students participated, aged between 8 and 17 years old, from the city of Parnaíba (PI). Students responded to the Bullying Behavior Scale and the Children's Basic Values Questionnaire to determine the prevalence of forms of expression of bullying, whether physical, verbal, relational or cyberbullying. According to the results, it was observed that people in need of support, which can motivate behaviors to obtain the approval of a group, as well as the search for personal success, can influence the practice of bullying. Furthermore, the variables of sex and age proved to be irrelevant in moderating bullying relationships.

Marcolino, Cavalcanti, Padilha, Miranda and Clementino (2018) aimed in their research to analyze the prevalence of aggression and victimization and the sociodemographic variables related to them as risk behaviors. To this end, 678 students from the 6th to the 9th school year participated, the results of which determined the predominance of psychological bullying among the public investigated, in addition to the greater involvement of male students. But in the research carried out by Santos and Faro (2018), we sought to determine the social distribution of bullying in the state of Sergipe, using a sample of 555 adolescents between 14 and 18 years old.

Authors/Year	Goal	Principais Resultados
Monteiro, Medeiros, Pimentel, Soares, Medeiros e Gouveia (2017)	To understand the extent to which human values predict bullying, testing the moderating role of the variables gender and age.	Bullying can be motivated by values of power and inclusion in a group. Sex and age are irrelevant in moderating these functions, however, such values exert influence on relationships between peers, such as in manifestations of violence.
Aguiar e Barreira (2017)	Explore the occurrence of bullying in two school contexts – public and private –, comparing them in terms of frequency and patterns of occurrence of the phenomenon.	When comparing the results of both schools, there is a 24% rate of targets, recesses and classrooms as main scenarios, and a permissive passivity on the part of the witnesses. As for the gender of the authors, only in public schools was there a predominance of male authors, while this disparity is not evident in private institutions.
Marcolino, Cavalcanti, Padilha, Mirandae Clementino (2018)	To analyze the prevalence of bullying victimization and aggression and typologies associated with sociodemographic factors and risk behaviors in students.	The prevalence of targets is 29.5%, with psychological abuse being more common, and the majority of perpetrators being male. 8.4% of participants declare themselves perpetrators of bullying.
Santos e Faro(2018)	To understand the social distribution of bullying in a sample of adolescents in the State of Sergipe.	A total of 19.1% (n = 106) of participants were identified as targets of bullying. It is noteworthy that factors such as school, municipality and age can contribute to such violence.
Oliveira, Silva, Santos, Hayashida, Caravita e Silva (2018)	Analyze the quality of adolescents' family interactions and their involvement in school bullying situations.	Students without involvement in cases of bullying have quality family relationships, which appear to be related to the presence of rules, supervision and guidance from their guardians. On the other hand, punitive and negative practices seem to trigger bullying, both actively and passively.
Humpel, Bento e Mabada (2019)	Highlight the role of schools in combating and overcoming the problem of bullying.	The school has responsibilities with regard to promoting education and harmonious socialization to build an environment of inclusion.
Veloso, Costa, Marques, Andrade, Mirandae Araújo (2020)	To analyze school, sociodemographic, nutritional and body and behavioral perception factors associated with bullying victimization among Brazilian students aged 13 to 17 years.	Bullying victimization was inversely proportional to advancing age, in addition to being more common among students who consider themselves fat or excluded.
Silva, Lima, Acioli e Barreira(2021)	Estimate the prevalence of bullying aggressors and identify factors related to this behavior.	The prevalence of 21.26% of perpetrators of bullying allows us to verify the relationship between the phenomenon and violence suffered at home, mainly from mothers and siblings.
Falcão, Stelko-Pereira e Alves (2021)	Identificar a participação em bullying de estudantes com TEA, de acordo com eles mesmos, seus pais e seus professores de educação física (EF), bem como analisar o quanto conhecem a respeito do fenômeno.	Os resultados apontam para uma disparidade entre as percepções de alunos, pais e professores quanto ao envolvimento em bullying e os papéis interpretados, que sugere a ocorrência de ideias errôneas sobre o fenômeno e aponta a necessidade de melhor explicá-lo.

**Table 1:** Brazilian articles about bullying in schools

Source: Prepared by the author herself (2023).

In this study, the California Bullying Victimization Scale was administered, adapted to the Brazilian context, in which participants must answer some questions evaluating the forms of bullying, their involvement with the phenomenon and power relations between peers. The results found a prevalence of almost 20% for bullying victimization and a higher probability for students aged 16 and 17.

In the study by Veloso, Costa, Marques, Andrade, Miranda and Araújo (2020), the authors turned their attention to the relationship between bullying and school, sociodemographic, nutritional and body perception aspects. The research sample was made up of 10,699 Brazilian adolescents and the results showed that there is a more frequent occurrence of victimization among students who do not have good treatment in the school environment, who consider themselves fat and among those who are in early adolescence (around 13 years old), declining over the years.

Turning to issues of inclusion at school, Falcão, Stelko-Pereira and Alves (2021) promoted a survey with the aim of obtaining information about the participation of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in bullying, in addition to investigating knowledge of students, parents and teachers on the topic. To this end, they carried out a cross-sectional study with an analytical approach, which involved the participation of 133 people, including parents, teachers and students from Fortaleza, Ceará. After analyzing the results, there was greater knowledge on the part of teachers, while more than 40% of parents did not provide information about bullying situations and the rest identified, in the majority (more than 40%), their children as targets. However, for teachers, only 47% of students were targeted. Among students, 63% declared themselves targets of bullying. Such data indicate

contradictions between the perceptions of the different audiences investigated and point to the need to disseminate the definition of bullying so that cases are correctly and more frequently identified, in addition to more prevention campaigns.

Based on the data provided in the research reported above, the studies seem to point to some characteristics considered relevant when it comes to understanding factors related to the practice of bullying, such as age, sex and physical characteristics. In line with the findings in these studies, Malta et al. (2014) also highlighted the influence of age and gender among those who bully. In their work, the authors pointed to a tendency towards bullying by older boys, black and yellow and from private schools. In a complementary way, Recha, Halpernb, Tedesco and Santos (2013) indicated a prevalence of bullying by boys to the detriment of girls. Furthermore, the authors also mentioned the association between dissatisfaction with body image and the practice of this violence.

The research by Silva et al. (2019) corroborates the data presented here and complements it by highlighting that there is a tendency for adolescents between the ages of 13 and 15 to practice bullying, decreasing over the years. The authors hypothesize that these characteristics may be related to the fact that, culturally, boys seem to cultivate a more aggressive style of relating to other people, even to the detriment of cultural demands related to the image of masculinity, which permeate issues related to domination and power.

Regarding the category of school characteristics, the research by Aguiar and Barreira (2017) set out to investigate how bullying manifests itself in two school contexts, namely, public and private, to then make comparisons regarding frequency and patterns. that they assume. The study

involved 76 students aged between 10 and 15 years old and predominantly female, where a questionnaire was administered to collect data regarding the occurrence of bullying and the role assumed by students in these events. As a result, we have detected 24% of students targeted in frequent situations of violence, which can lead to bullying, the identification of the majority of perpetrators as male in public schools, while the distribution by gender is balanced in private schools, the high incidence of violent episodes, more frequent in playgrounds and classrooms, and the preference by observers to adopt a passive stance.

In the study by Humpel, Bento and Mabada (2019), the authors sought to understand the role of schools in combating bullying. The research was a literature review, in which they sought to understand the concept of bullying, the different forms of its occurrence and the factors that determine it. As a result, they found that the school environment becomes favorable for the spread of bullying, where educators often do not notice it, as they have not been properly instructed to look carefully at these issues. Despite this, the authors pay attention to the fact that it is viable for the school to assume responsibilities with regard to building a harmonious environment, through quality education, moral training and well-oriented socialization.

The research by Malta et al. (2014) is in line with the findings in this work, as it points to both the type of treatment that students receive in the school environment, and the mother's level of education, as factors that can contribute to the practice of bullying. People who do not feel welcomed at school, who have resources limited financial resources and who are little encouraged in the family context are more prone to bullying.

Finally, with regard to the category of family relationships, the research by Oliveira, Silva, Santos, Hayashida, Caravita and Silva (2018) stands out, which aimed to analyze the quality of family interactions and their relationship with involvement in bullying. This study involved the participation of 2,354 elementary and high school students, enrolled in 11 public schools in Minas Gerais. The results revealed that the good quality of family interaction, added to the imposition of rules and monitoring, represents a protective factor against bullying, whether as perpetrator or target, while physical punishment and negative communication are aspects that contribute to the opposite effect.

The research by Silva, Lima, Acioli and Barreira (2021) aimed to verify the prevalence of perpetrators of bullying and their motivations and influences for such an act. Students in the 2nd year of high school, aged 15 to 19, from public and private schools participated in the research. The results pointed to the prevalence of 21.26% of perpetrators of bullying related to episodes of violence at school, among peers and in the family. Furthermore, there is the association between bullying and suffering family violence and the influence of discriminatory behavior regarding sexual orientation, physical appearance and skin color on this behavior.

Understanding the data found in this research related to the association between the type of family relationships and the practice of bullying, other studies corroborate the fact that reports about children and adolescents suffering physical and/or psychological violence at home, in addition to witnessing aggression between parents or guardians contribute to the occurrence of violent practices directed at other students in the school context (TORTORELLI; CARREIRO; ARAÚJO, 2010; MELLO et al., 2017). In this sense, it is



The perception that, in the same way that family violence seems to be related to a higher incidence of bullying in the school context, a welcoming and friendly family environment contributes to the better development of social skills in children and adolescents in general, is relevant. Furthermore, it is reiterated that understanding the role of parents or guardians must be valued in interventions on the development, maintenance and prevention of bullying (MALTA et al., 2014).

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The present research aimed to identify the phenomena that contribute to the development of bullying among students. Considering the literature review carried out, nine articles were found, which were subdivided into three categories that dealt with the theme of triggering factors for the practice of bullying, namely, sociodemographic aspects, school characteristics and family relationships. In general, the articles showed that there seems to be a consensus in the literature regarding

the tendency of bullying by males, between the ages of 13 to 15 years, with a decrease throughout development. Furthermore, research has pointed to an association between dissatisfaction with body image and the practice of bullying, as well as the type of treatment that the student receives in the school context and the probability of this type of violence occurring.

The studies also portrayed the relationship between violence suffered in the family environment and the tendency to engage in bullying practices, with emphasis mainly on physical and/or psychological violence, as well as witnessing aggression between parents or guardians. In this sense, it is valid to understand that bullying occurs within a broad social context, and the motivations for this type of violence are diverse. It is necessary to pay attention to components at both the individual and social and cultural levels, so that this practice is understood in its complexity and targeted and more effective interventions are developed to combat this violence.

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## ANNEXES

### ANNEX A – DECLARATION OF PORTUGUESE REVISION

#### DECLARATION

I, Maria Meiriane Freire Aguiar, identity card: 2000098101316, graduated in Languages with a qualification in Portuguese from the “*Universidade Estadual Vale do Acaraú*” (U.V.A.), declare to the faculty Luciano Feijão (FLF), that I have carried out the textual analysis, spelling and linguistic correction, following the parameters of ABNT and Brazilian standards and grammatical nomenclature of the course completion work, ARTICLE, entitled: **TRIGGERING FACTORS FOR BULLYING IN THE SCHOOL AREA** of the student, **VITÓRIA MARIA VASCONCELOS GUIMARÃES**, student of the Bachelor's degree in Psychology, promoted by Faculdade Luciano Feijão (FLF).

Because it is true, I signed this document.

Meruoca, CE, May 8, 2023.

  
Maria Meiriane Freire Aguiar