# **UNIVERSIDAD SAN FRANCISCO DE QUITO**

The prevalence of bully teachers and the identification of risk factors in the development of these attitudes, from January to December 2007

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# ABSTRACT

### Objective

Determine the prevalence of teachers who are bullying their students at school and, the correlations with their perceptions of bullying in their school lives.

### Design

Cross sectional survey.

# Participants

One hundred and twenty Ecuadorian teachers of different subjects from primary to high school between the 21 to 55 years of age, from "high" and "medium-high" socio-economic status and with heterogeneous ethnic levels.

# Main outcome measures

A questionnaire from "Teachers who Bully Students: A Hidden Trauma", Compilation of wrongful activities to determine the prevalence of bullying in teachers; and, Identification of risk factors in the development of these attitudes.

### **Methods and Results**

Sample size (n=120) who filled out a questionnaire that collected information from their personal experiences with bullying during their high school years, their experience with the current perception of their co-workers about bullying toward students and their knowledge of anti-bullying rules in the institution. Teachers, who suffered bullying when they were young, are more sensitive to identify acts of bullying, to participate in them, and to be more vulnerable to acts of bullying in the classrooms or beyond. The level of knowledge about anti-bullying rules among teachers is very low.

#### Conclusions

The bullying from teachers plays a vital role in the psychological development of the student, further more it might affect their behavior, while teachers are not correctly applying the anti-bullying standards because their lack of experience in this topic.

Key Words: prevalence, teachers, bullying, anti-bullying.

#### INTRODUCTION

Bullying is understood as any kind of aggression that affects an individual physically or psychologically, which in turn creates an atmosphere of violence, with a negative behavior, that can lead to injury or illness in the victims.<sup>1</sup> The prevalence of bullying at schools in many countries is high; for example: Australia (17%), England (19%), Japan (15%), Norway (14%), Spain (17%) and the United States (16%), <sup>2</sup> these numbers demonstrate how big the problem of bullying among students is. Bullying among boys is different from bullying among girls, the first group use mainly physical strength (strokes), while girls use indirect ways such as exclusion from groups, in fact; actually there are reports that it is done with the use of electronic communication (instant messaging, chat rooms, e-mails, etc). <sup>3-28</sup> Bullying involves three types of subjects: the bully, the victim and the bystanders. There is a difference of power between bully and victim, this factor decides who will be the victim and who will be the perpetrator.<sup>1-2-3</sup>

Bullies are aggressive people, with self-confidence (problems); sometimes they had witnessed violence at home. The way their parents raise and educate them is also a factor. Together patterns of upbringing at home and violent behavior within are the principal reasons for bullying, so if a child has a violent father, it is possible that in the future this kid will become a bully.<sup>5</sup>

While the victims are quiet, passive people, usually with few friends, their actions against the attacks are not effective because of their lack of self-confidence; meanwhile a person who is not seen as a bully or as a victim but rather witnesses the action of bullying is considered a bystander.<sup>6</sup> However nowadays is necessary to considerate the cases of bully teachers with children. With regard of the bullying from teachers toward their students, the pattern of behavior could be different, based on the difference of power, which enables the teacher to threat, harm and induce fear on the students, which in turn creates emotional damage in the student, and traumas that might remain for their whole lives <sup>7-24.</sup>

There may be some important relation between the prevalence of bully teachers and their personal experiences on bullying when they were students, it can have a strong influence in their current perception of bullying and their behavior toward students with attitudes of abuse of power or strength, because this may reflect their own experiences. In addition, teachers who experienced bullying when they were students may be able to identify more easily when their students are victims of bullies at school. Furthermore, this association can make a pattern of bullying with consequences in the mental health and the effectiveness of teaching, with the traumatic effects that the presence of bullying may provoke in the development of the student,<sup>8</sup> among the forms of intimidation witnessed by teachers, the most common are the physical and verbal intimidation, which include social exclusion. <sup>22</sup>

The influence of bullying in children may have many consequences in their adult lives, with different changes in their behavior; so the risk of developing psychiatric disorders, as antisocial personality, substance abuse, depressive and anxiety disorders; frequent victimization-only status, predicted anxiety disorder, and a suicide induction 10 to 15 years later is near to 28%.<sup>18-25-29</sup>

Moreover, teachers who get a higher suspension rate at school reportedly had bullied a higher number of pupils, and they also had more experience about bullying when they were students, there is a correlation in these findings with the relation between experiences of bullying in their school years and been a bully now.<sup>8-9</sup>

In order to control intimidation several programs have been developed and applied in various countries; using virtual educative programs, videos, work groups inside and outside the classrooms, to create an environment of empathy among the participants, to decrease the incidence of bullying. <sup>26-30</sup> These implemented programs, require multidisciplinary collaboration by the victims, perpetrators, peer groups, classmates, teachers, school staff, the families of the victims and aggressors and families in general; plus, other programs such as tutoring or mentoring <sup>10-</sup> <sup>12.</sup> On the other hand; it is important to consider the role of the spectator to decrease the frequency of abuse, but all these programs need to be applied together to decrease the incidence of bullying at schools. <sup>11</sup>

The issue of bullying was previously considered normal, however, it took due importance in the 70s when D. Olweus, conducted the initial investigations into this matter and further stalled it with the use of the first anti-bullying measures. Despite the interest showed in these measures, they were not enough to avoid this type of behavior and shortly after their implementation there were fatal consequences for pupils involved in this practice, when, in 1999, twelve students and one teacher were killed at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. <sup>11</sup>

The year before Columbine other five people were killed at Westside Middle School in Jonesboro, Arkansas, postevent analysis produced evidence that the shooters, four boys ranging between 11- and 18-years old, were victims of bullying in their schools. <sup>11</sup> Therefore this type of behavior certainly has been an important part in the increased interest in the research and study on the prevalence, effects and ways to control bullying. Among the adverse affects of bullying, we can include physical injury, difficult in concentration, physical symptoms (ex, nausea, and anorexia), anxiety or depression symptoms, poor self-esteem, and high rates of school absence. Most of the bullying acts are perpetrated by classmates and, without intervention bullying can lead to serious academic, social, emotional and legal difficulties.<sup>12</sup>

Being relatively a new topic, which has recently regained attention, there is an important amount of data to investigate, while in countries such as Norway the study of this issue has been deepened, in countries such as Ecuador, this issue has been acknowledged in a limited way by both health professionals, and people involved with it. The level of experience in the management and impact of bullying on individuals is very poor, for this reason and because this issue has currently created great interest in the area of psychological health, we have conducted this study; focused mainly on the prevalence of the teachers' personal experiences with bullying, and the influence of their work on the perception that we all have about it. This study done at a private school in a suburban area of Quito-Ecuador will try to determine the teachers' perceptions about the use of intimidation by other teachers; and, the frequency that those bully teachers were bullied by schoolmates, we will identify the main causes of bullying from teachers, and finally we will analyze the teacher's perceptions about the use of anti-bullying programs in school.

### OBJECTIVE

Determine the prevalence of teachers who are bullying their students at school and the correlations with the perceptions of bullying on them in their school lives.

#### **METHODS**

#### **Research Design**

This is a cross sectional study where teachers who work at an institution in the sub urban area of Quito- Ecuador, teaching different classes from primary to High school, completed an anonymous questionnaire about bullying prevalence an anti-bullying rules.

### **Setting and Participants**

We counted with the participation of 120 teachers, who completed an anonymous questionnaire, their range of age was from 21 to 55 years old (M=33.52 SD=7.44), while their years of experience were from one to 30 years

(M=8.17, SD=5.77), most of them have worked in more than one school, with a total range of 13 schools (M=2.63, SD=2.076), an average of 18 students per class with a standard deviation of 3.19. The 9.4% were men, while the 90.6% were women, of which 60% were married, 31% single and 9% divorced. Most of the teachers (88.6%) said that they were highly satisfied or satisfied with their work, 5.3% said that they were "highly unsatisfied or unsatisfied with their work, 5.3% said that they were "highly unsatisfied or unsatisfied with their work, 5.3% said that they were "highly unsatisfied or unsatisfied with their work.

### **Research Instruments**

Three different questionnaires were applied for this study; first, a portion of the survey *Compilation of wrongful activities* <sup>14</sup> was added, to gain a better perception in terms of the experience from teachers on bullying when they were high school students and in this way be able to relate it to the prevalence of bully teachers. The second part was taken based on a study "*Teachers who Bully Students: A Hidden Trauma*"<sup>8</sup>, and comprises 5 sections, section A compile general information on the respondent, Section B registered the experience with bullying, Section C, the interpersonal dynamics of bully teachers, section D lists possible causes of bully teachers and finally section E compile the personal experiences with bullying, all this information based on the previously appointed study. In addition, the third part *Bullying program self-assessment:* measures the degree of knowledge, implementation and effectiveness of the anti-bullying program within the institution. <sup>15</sup>

The survey was carried out in an institution of a medium-high socio-economic stratum, with an influx of families with traditional structures, most of the teachers are ethnically mixed, and in addition, they provide education to most levels within the school. The data from each teacher were obtained with the highest confidentiality and to ensure it, the surveys were anonymous, and each of the teachers responded to the questionnaire all at once.

Within the inclusion and exclusion criteria, respondents were all teachers of the school without any special consideration. In the first part of the questionnaire we took into account the teachers' personal experience with bullying when they were students, whether they were bullied by other schoolmates and how often they suffered it, the way how and the places where it was done. This information was later correlated with teachers who are prone to practice bullying and to establish if they are more susceptible to distinguish its presence in a determined attitude.

In the second questionnaire, we obtained the necessary information about the actual conditions of each teacher, thus the first section took their general data (name withheld) such as years of experience, and satisfaction within

their current job. The next section was used to establish the prevalence of bullying among teachers, the kind of data obtained was, how many teachers have seen bullying and if whether they have worked with teachers who practice bullying.

In the third part of the survey there were two options for each question to observe how they could possibly respond under certain circumstances and, to establish if they were bully teachers or not. The section C of this part was carried out by factor analysis with emphasis in the analysis of the principal component, getting six major components for "bully teachers" and nine for "non-bully teachers", this allowed us to observe the relationship between the two groups. Subsequently we proceeded to conduct an analysis of correspondence with the questions that gave the major input in this section and, to observe the behavior pattern of teachers through each of these questions.

Section D of this part of the questionnaire refers to the possible causes of bullying by teachers, such as psychiatric illnesses, near retirement, among others. The last section instead focused on the current experience of teachers bullied by students. The final part of the survey refers to the presence of internal control measures for bullying within the institution, that is, the internal rules for prevention of bullying and how the teachers implement them. We asked the subjects to complete the questionnaire with the following parameters: yes, most of the time, sometimes, no, don't know; in this way we could determinate the proper use and efficacy of these rules, then there was a correlation analysis system that used a non-parametric Spearman (r<sub>s</sub>), to facilitate the analysis and interpretation of data.

#### **Outcome Measure**

The experience of teachers with bullying in their school years and the current perception of bullying to students by other teachers.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The data analysis was conducted using the SPSS 13.0 software for Windows. Descriptive statistics were calculated as percentages and means; we also implemented a correlation analysis system that used a non-parametric Spearman (r<sub>S</sub>), to facilitate the analysis and interpretation of data, P value was obtained when needed, and the analysis of the principal component was used in the section C of the second questionnaire.

#### RESULTS

With regard to the first part of the questionnaire, *Compilation of wrongful Activities* the most outstanding results on the experience of teachers with the bullying when they were students are shown in Table 1. Besides; the cases in which they were most exposed to some type of bullying behavior, was once a month between classes (49,5%),once a week during classes (11,8%) once a day, during lunch and between classes (3,9%), these cases have the same frequency while the less bullying behavior was presented before school (86,7%).

About the places were more vigilance must be applied, the frequency of the responses was as follows: hallways (92,6%), lunchroom (88,5%), bathrooms (87,6%), the gym lockers (87,5%), outside school (72%). As for the attitude toward this type of behavior we have the following: when watching someone bullying, most tried to stop this kind of behavior (51,8%), a good number did nothing (35,1%), a small fraction reported this behavior to a teacher (11,4%), and a small number (1,8%) joined this activity. Furthermore, when bullying attitudes affected them directly, most told them to stop (44,6%), others ignored (28,6%), while others acted the same way (15,2%), and finally, a small group (11,6%) reported it with their teachers.

The questions in the second part of the questionnaire that have bigger impact referring to the perception of teachers, with respect to other colleagues bullying their students are summarized in Table 2, where the frequencies and percentages obtained in each of them can be observed and analyzed.

On the other hand, in the analysis of the "*A survey on bullying teachers and teachers bullying*", after we carried out correlations between variables, interesting results from past experience with bullying and harassment on the basis of teachers to pupils were obtained, and we establish that the teachers who bully students with more frequency are the ones who see more bullying from other teachers to students ( $r_s 0,257$ , p<0,001 n=90). In terms of performance and bullying through the obtained data we noticed that bullying in classes and bullying in other places are correlated ( $r_s 0,415$ , p 0,003 n=90). Other correlation values that stand out are the following: Teachers who suffered more bullying during their school years have seen more bullying from teachers to students during their careers ( $r_s 0,14 \ p<0,001 \ n=76$ ), the experience with actions related to bullying was correlated. Teachers who witnessed bullying but do not think that administrators would be open to be told about bully teachers ( $r_s 0,251$ , p<0,001 ,n=101). Teachers who observe more bullying think that the bully teachers have psychiatric problems ( $r_s -0,071$ ,p <0,001, n=91). Teachers who saw more bullying behavior think that in the case of their profession the more burned

out they feel in their work the more they bully ( $r_s$  -0,074, p <0,001, n=91). Teachers who observed more bullying were more likely to think that bully teachers were not trained sufficiently in appropriate disciplinary methods or psychology ( $r_s$  0,029, p<0,001 n=92). The correlation between teachers who observed more bullying with "bully teachers" that are envious of students who are smarter than they are ( $r_s$  -0,041, p<0,001 n=92).

While, the analysis of the main components, brought together the two options of the questions of the remaining section, about the "bully teachers", we got a total of six main components with a contribution of 68.95 % of information, and nine major components for "non-bully teachers", giving 73.45 of information input into the analysis.

The questions that have the greater input for the distribution of the principal component analysis in the "bully" and "non bully" are presented in Table 3. The values shown in this table were used to find the questions that have major function into the section of *Interpersonal Dynamics of Bully Teachers*; therefore, this values show the frequency and the impact of these questions in this part. The major components inside the section of "bully teachers" were six: superiority complex or abuse behavior, teachers' emotional instability, teachers' discomfort, teachers' way of punishment, teacher absenteeism, or student absenteeism. While in the "non-bully teachers" we got nine axes, these are psychological abuse of teachers, superiority complex, initiative of students, defensive position, discipline control problems, teachers' instability, to overpower students, disruption of work or acceptance of bullying.

Subsequently when the principal component analysis took into account the answers that were provided more frequently and calculated them, taking the correspondence analysis of the correlation between these questions by the chi-square statistic, gave us the following results, the questions "Allows disruption in classroom without intervention" and "Makes fun of special education students" have similar behavior with regard to the determination of "bully" and "non-bully" teachers and are related (Inertia 0,11; Significance 0,32). The same "constantly punished the same child" and "Makes fun of special education students" are also related among the two groups (Inertia 0,052; significance 0,84). The questions "Uses rejection as a form of discipline" and "Seems to take pleasure in hurting students feelings" are also correlated (Inertia 0.17; significance of 0,997). Moreover, "Suspends the same student over and over without success" and "Allows students to bully him or her" are correlated too (Inertia 0,22; significance 0,993). These questions are correlated to the greatest proportion within the "Interpersonal Dynamics of Bully Teachers" because its value is less than the inertia of significance.

#### DISCUSSION

The results of the statistical analysis, allowing the estimation of the general perception from teachers on other fellow teachers bullying their students, showed that most of them think that there is a bullying behavior from teachers toward students (over 90%), Proving that this is a present problem within the teacher-student relationship; and is correlated with others studies about bullying by teachers.<sup>7-9-20-21</sup>

On their personal experience in high school, (44%) admitted to have been victims of bullying behavior by other people during their high school years, most of them mentioned verbal bullying, and that the moments when it was more frequently done was between classes, in turn, the hallways are the places where more bullying is perceived, this is because those are the places where the contact between students is closer and without supervision, which is linked to previous reports.<sup>16</sup>

Despite being a sample where the largest number of respondents was of female gender, the perception regarding past experiences of bullying, was similar in both genders. The perception of the experiences, relates to the identification of bully teachers and, makes easier to recognize attitudes of bullying on teachers toward students. An important number of teachers attributed the bullying attitude of their colleagues to problems such as large classes, feeling tired, not being properly trained on methods of discipline or psychology, plus some degree of envy toward the students and lack of actions taken by the school authorities, because many of them knew what to do during a bullying act, but there was not administrative support.<sup>27</sup>

This study is in agreement with other studies about bullying; the prevalence of this behavior in teachers could be related with their experience about bullying when they were students and their work with more bully teachers in the last three years. <sup>4-8-9</sup> On the other hand, there is an association between the teacher and somebody that intimidates someone who the teacher does not like, or fear because is a brilliant student (32%), with a pattern of a lack of empathy for the victim. <sup>20-21-22</sup>

A grouping of the major components in the groups mentioned before, allowed the use of the questions that have the biggest input in section the Interpersonal dynamics of bully teachers, which in turn demonstrates the pattern of behavior from "bully" and "non-bully" teachers. In the correspondence analysis of the "Interpersonal Dynamics of Bully Teachers" there is a correlation between "bullying" and "non-bully" teachers; this correlation is observed by the similarity in the responses between these two groups, demonstrating that the "bully" and "non-bully" teachers have similar attitudes when they face some special circumstances such as those named in the results.

Thus, in the study it is shown that a large percentage of teachers (56%) are not aware of anti-bullying rules established in the school, that those rules are not well taken or regulated by teachers. That, the rules applied in school could not be evaluated, so no one can argue that these regulations accomplish with the established standards to reduce bullying. However, within the group of teachers who know the anti-bullying rules, it appears that the majority (60%) knows that these rules are enforced and the vast majority of the same group (80%) thinks that these rules help to maintain order and good conduct. In addition, there is a mismatch between teachers and administrative staff, which confirms that there is an inadequate communication between the two groups, bringing both a disregard for anti bullying rules by teachers.<sup>27</sup>

#### LIMITATIONS

The limitations presented in this study were, that teachers in certain sections did not answer some questions. Because of a printing mistake in the material of the survey, a question in the second questionnaire in the section "Personal Experience of Bullying" was omitted; and, it was not possible to gather this question later as an anonymous survey, the question was, "Can you think of any times when you have bullied a student yourself?" If answered, it would provide a boon for the analysis of the personal experience of teachers, without a doubt this question could have contributed to establish the frequency of bullying by teachers, which in turn could correlate with various factors, but it was not implemented for the reasons stated before.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The observed values in this study about bully teachers, in a small sample of the population of Ecuador, bear relation to the studies conducted in other countries. It was established that the presence of bullying to a person throughout his life, generates such a sensitive individual who knows bullying acts, recognizing the behavior more easily and participate in its practice. Which, significantly disrupt the relationship between teachers and students, creating a hostile environment full of uncertainty that does not benefit the teaching-learning process.

There are many causes for this type of behavior, but the past experiences have the biggest role in the development of these attitudes, while the anti-bullying rules are apparently enforced, very few teachers are aware of their existence. Finally, this whole environment generates discomfort in the students, making them more susceptible to behavioral problems in the future.

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# Table 1: Experience of teachers with bullying in their school years

		Frequency	%
Did you get along with your classmates?	Yes	108	92,3
	No	9	7,7
	Total	117	100
How often were you been bullied at school?	Never	60	56,1
	Once a month	29	27,1
	Once a week	13	12,1
	Once a day	3	2,8
	Few times less than five	1	0,9
	Once a semester	1	0,9
	Total	107	100
Saying mean things, calling me names , making mean faces or signals	Never	63	54,8
	Once a month	39	33,9
	Once a week	8	7,0
	Once a day	3	2,6
	Once a life	2	1,7
	Total	115	100
Making fun of me because people thought that I was different	Never	66	57,4
	Once a month	37	32,2
	Once a week	9	7,8
	Once a day	3	2,6
	Total	115	100
Gossiping (saying bad things) about me	Never	58	51,3
	Once a month	43	38,1
	Once a week	10	8,8
	Once a day	2	1,8
	Total	113	100

# Table 2 : Teachers' perceptions of bully teachers

		Frequency	%
When you were still in school as student, had you	Never	26	28,3
ever been bullied?	Sometimes	59	64,1
	Often	7	7,6
	Total	92	100
In your classroom, how many students have tried to	No student have tried to bully me	41	44,6
bully you as teacher?	One student	30	32,6
	A few students	21	22,8
	Total	92	100
Do you think that fellow teachers bully students?	Never	10	8,9
	Isolated Cases only	73	65,2
	Frequently	28	25
	Widespread problem involving many teachers	1	0,9
	Total	112	100
How many teachers that bully students have you	0	52	59,8
known in the past school year?	1	18	20,7
	2	9	10,4
	3	6	6,9
	4	1	1,1
	10	1	1,1
	Total	87	100
Does your school have a written procedure for	Yes	15	15
handling "problem teachers"?	No	29	29
	Don't know	56	56
	Total	100	100

# Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix ; ore relevant questions in the section of Interpersonal

# Dynamics of Bully Teachers

Question	Bullying	Non
		bullying
Allows disruption in classroom without intervention	0,825	
Constantly punishes the same child	0,765	
Uses rejection as a form of discipline	0,812	
Suspends the same student over and over without success	0,680	
Is absent from school more frequently than other teachers	0,757	
Humiliates students as a way of stopping disruption S	0,642	
Is easily disorganized when there are school emergencies S	0,703	
Fails to set limits with students S	0,664	
Is quick to put bright students who are showing off in their place S	0,622	
Seems to have a lot of children on a black list N	0,736	
Sits back when there is trouble and lets others handle the problems	0,635	
Complains a lot about working conditions	0,678	
Watches as students bully other students		0,880
Denies that he or she has problems with students being bullied		0,794
Has problems keeping discipline with behaviorally disturbed students		0,800
Seems to take pleasure in hurting students feelings S		0,793
Makes fun of special education students		0,809
Allows students to bully him or her S		0,795
Resents any demands from the principal or school administration		0,849