Bullying and diversity. The relationship between bullying and the perception of normalcy in victims and aggressors

Acoso escolar y diversidad. Relación del acoso escolar con la percepción de normalidad en víctimas y agresores

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Abstract

School bullying has been related to numerous variables, including diversity (Garaigordobil, 2014) and others implying victim abnormality (Suárez-García, Álvarez-García & Rodríguez, 2020). However, it is difficult to find a unique meaning of normality, since the definition itself suggests that it depends on the authority, context, and moment when it is defined. This work had two fundamental objectives: to determine whether or not victims of school bullying perceive themselves as having any characteristics that may deviate from the ordinary; and to find out if aggressors perceive themselves as having any specific characteristic that deviates from the norm. A cross-sectional, descriptive, and quantitative study was designed using a representative sample of high school students from the community of Madrid. This sample was created using a stratified, proportional, and random sampling technique involving 1211 participants. To acquire the information, a questionnaire was compiled consisting of an initial section relating to sociodemographic data and information about normality; and a second section containing the *School bullying questionnaire from the UNICEF Ombudsman* (Ombudsman, 2006). The questionnaire's reliability and internal consistency were found to be acceptable (Cronbach's alpha.90). A Student's t-test was applied to compare the means between groups. Our results suggest that individuals perceiving as possessing characteristics that deviate from the norm

scored significantly higher on the victim variable. No significant differences were found regarding the aggressor variable. This suggests that involvement as a victim in school bullying situations is a risk that may be predicted. On the other hand, these results offer valuable information that could potentially assist in the development of school bullying prevention and intervention programs.

Keywords: Bullying, aggressor, victim, normality, diversity, role, violence, school life, discrimination

Resumen

El acoso escolar está relacionado con diversas variables entre las que aparecen la diversidad (Garaigordobil, 2014) y variables que sitúan a la víctima fuera de la normalidad (Suárez-García, Álvarez-García y Rodríguez, 2020), sin embargo no es sencillo encontrar un único significado sobre normalidad, puesto que la propia definición indica que ésta depende de la autoridad, el contexto y el momento en el que se define. El presente trabajo tiene dos objetivos fundamentales: conocer si las víctimas de acoso escolar perciben tener alguna característica que los sitúe fuera de lo normal; y conocer si los agresores perciben tener alguna característica que los aleje de la norma. Se ha diseñado un estudio transversal, de tipo descriptivo y cuantitativo, en el que han participado una muestra representativa de alumnos de ESO de la Comunidad de Madrid conformada por 1211 participantes y construida mediante una técnica de muestreo estratificado, proporcional y aleatorio. Para la recogida de la información se ha construido un cuestionario que incluye una primera sección donde se recoge la información sociodemográfica y sobre normalidad; y una segunda sección conformada por el *Cuestionario de acoso escolar del defensor del pueblo-Unicef* (defensor del pueblo, 2006). La fiabilidad y consistencia del cuestionario es aceptable (Alfa de Cronbach.90). Para la comparación de medias entre los grupos se ha aplicado la prueba t de Student. Los resultados muestran que las personas que perciben tener alguna característica que las sitúan fuera de la normalidad, puntúan significativamente más alto en la variable víctima. No encontramos diferencias significativas en relación con la variable agresor. Esto implica que el riesgo de participar en situaciones de acoso escolar como víctima se puede predecir. Por otra parte, estos resultados nos proporcionan información valiosa para la elaboración de planes de prevención e intervención en acoso escolar.

Palabras clave: bullying, agresor, víctima, normalidad, diversidad, rol, violencia, ambiente escolar, discriminación

Introduction

Violence between peers in the school setting is not a new occurrence, however, the interest in studying this type of violence is quite novel. The first references to the study of school bullying date back to the 1970s in Scandinavian countries. Olweus (1973) defined school bullying as "a physical, psychological or moral behavior of persecution and physical aggression carried out by a student or group of students, on another, with a power imbalance and in a repeated manner" (Olweus, 2013, p. 762).

According to subsequent studies on school bullying, numerous variables have been found to relate to participating in bullying incidents, either as an aggressor or as a victim of this violence (Garaigordobil, 2014). Lucena (2005) suggested that, in the case of victims, although certain characteristics appear to be linked to this role, in no case should these characteristics be considered necessary or sufficient to explain the aggression. As for the bullies, when asking these individuals about the causes driving them to harass their victims, they tend to refer to the presence of certain variables related to physical aspects of the same, such as wearing glasses, being overweight, skin color, hair color or having a disability (Castedo, Alonso & Roales, 2010; Suárez-García, Álvarez-García & Rodríguez, 2020).

These variables form and relate to the so-called *normality* and the definition of being (or not being) *normal*. Therefore, it may be the case that victims justify the violence that is perpetrated against them, since they possess one of the characteristics mentioned by the aggressors and are not considered to be normal according to their own perception, the perception of the bully or according to the generalized standard perception of normality. In addition, doubts exist as to whether or not bullies may justify the violence by certain characteristics that they possess and whether or not these characteristics are included in the definition of normality.

This work examines the potential relationship between adaptation (or lack of the same) to normality and participation in school bullying, from the perspective of both the victim and the aggressor. It is impossible to promote inclusion and a school environment for all, that is, schools free of bullying, unless we end the pursuit of *normality* and discover the benefits of our differences. Then, school bullying would not result from

individual differences or the inability to fit into this so-called normality (Sánchez Sáinz & García Medina, 2013).

Clearly, everyone is different and these differences do not all have the same value and are not all included within the consideration of normal. But since this definition of normality extends beyond the merely statistical, very infrequent traits are viewed as positive, normal, and desirable, while much more frequent traits tend to be considered negative, abnormal, and undesirable (Platero & Gómez Ceto, 2008). In this work, given the lack of consensus regarding a definition of *normal* and what it means to *be normal*, according to the current cultural framework (Carretero-Bermejo, 2005), we propose a relationship between participation in school bullying as an aggressor or victim and whether or not this participation is related to the perception of having a characteristic suggesting abnormality, with the meaning of normal (and abnormal) being established by the context of reference, in this case, the school and class group.

For this work, the individual's assessment regarding his/her normality (or abnormality) is of interest (intrapsychic or subjective model of normality), as opposed to the specific characteristics upon which this assessment is based. This allows us to determine whether or not there is a relationship between school bullying and the perception of normality or abnormality, as opposed to the relationship between school bullying and any specific characteristics. The results of past studies have suggested a relationship between certain physical, personality, and background characteristics and participation in school bullying (Sánchez Sáinz & García Medina, 2013). If this is in fact the case, school bullying victims may believe that the violence perpetrated against them is caused by their abnormal characteristics. And similarly, aggressors may justify the violent acts that they engage in by certain characteristics of the victim that they consider to be abnormal, in effect blaming the victims for the bullying. On the other hand, if the bully believes that there is nothing abnormal about himself/herself and therefore considers himself/herself to be part of the normal and majority group, this would be a case of the reproduction of mechanisms that have already taken place in other social contexts between majority and minority groups. It should be noted that there is nothing new about dominant groups dictating and imposing their definition of normal and attempting to control other meanings, realities, or contents, often through violence. Why should this be any different in school settings? In this situation, it may even be justified that aggressors,

belonging to the dominant group, believe that they have the right to harass those who do not fit in with what they consider to be normal.

The objectives of this research design are, first, to determine whether victims of school bullying perceive themselves as having any characteristics that are not normal or that might make them less normal; second, to determine if aggressors perceive themselves as having any abnormal characteristics. Therefore, the working hypotheses are: individuals perceiving themselves as having any abnormal characteristics will be more likely to be involved in school bullying situations as victims as compared to those who do not perceive themselves as having any abnormal characteristics; individuals who perceive themselves as having abnormal characteristics will be more likely to participate in school bullying situations as aggressors; the most common role in school bullying situations is that of the observer.

School bullying

Since the initial definition of school bullying was penned, numerous subsequent definitions have been proposed. In all of these, three characteristics repeatedly appear in an attempt to determine and explain the difference between school bullying and other types of violence: school bullying includes distinct types of violence and the intent to harm the victim; it is not an isolated event but rather, repeats in a recurrent manner and it may be caused by a power imbalance existing between the victim and the aggressor, which the latter takes advantage of (Castillo Pulido, 2011; Estrada Gómez, 2015). Likewise, additional studies of school bullying have led to the distinction between different types of violence and ways that this bullying can be perpetrated. Given this perspective and considering how it tends to be carried out, the following types of bullying may be considered: direct, in which there is a direct confrontation between participants, as is the case of physical and/ or verbal aggressions; indirect, in which the aggression is not openly carried out but rather, more subtle forms are used, such as false rumors, exclusion from groups of friends or even *cyberbullying*, among others (Valdés Cuervo, Carlos Martínez & Torres Acuña, 2012, p.619).

When making the classification according to the type of violence (Martínez, 2002; Valdés et al., 2012) the following are found for school

bullying: physical, including pushes, punches, kicks, strikes, burns, etc.; verbal, mainly in the form of nicknames and insults, although public humiliation of the victim is also common, highlighting their physical defects or actions; psychological, affecting the victim emotionally by damaging their self-esteem and creating a sensation of insecurity and fear. It tends to include verbal and non-verbal intimidation and threats. The psychological component may be seen in any of the harassment forms; social, in which an attempt is made to isolate the victim, with aggressors trying to eliminate any prestige that the victim might have in the group, thereby ensuring his/her social exclusion and even, at times, encouraging others to participate in the bullying behavior. This may include the use of nicknames, ridiculing and spreading negative rumors; and sexual forms, which include sexual behavior that denigrates the victim.

Advancing technology has also been influential, leading to the creation of new forms of school bullying (Hernández & Saravia, 2016) in addition to those mentioned above; dating violence: bullying between adolescent couples, in which emotional blackmail is common. It is considered a prelude to gender-based violence; cyberbullying: an intentional aggressive act carried out repetitively and consistently over time, via electronic contact by a group or individual, against a victim that is unable to easily defend him/herself (Hernández Vázquez & Saravia, 2016; Castro Santander, 2017).

There are three main roles in school bullying situations arising between peers: aggressor, victim, and observer (Martínez Rodríguez, 2017). As a result of further study on school bullying between peers, distinct types or subtypes of these three main roles have been recognized and identified (Carretero-Bermejo, 2011).

- **Aggressor**: they typically come from families facing difficulties in teaching their children to respect boundaries and rules. Normally, these families demonstrate excessive permissibility with their children in response to inappropriate or antisocial behavior and use authoritarian and coercive methods that often include physical punishment (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Seoane, 2004; Díaz-Aguado, 2005). There are three potential aggressor types: *aggressor leader*: student that initiates the aggression in school bullying situations with peers; *aggressor follower*: student that does not initiate the aggressive act but that joins in on the behavior with the aggression leader; *reinforcing aggressor*: student that

participates in the situation by encouraging the aggressor and ridiculing the victim.

■ **Victim**: there are two potential types: passive and active victims (Martínez Rodríguez, 2017). *Passive victim*: this type of victim does not tend to receive support from other group members, suffers from social isolation, and demonstrates considerable social skill and basic communication deficits. They tend to be less assertive and behave, as the name would indicate, in a passive and even submissive manner. They often become nervous in violent situations and may be quite vulnerable, anxious, and insecure, having very low levels of self-esteem. They often feel guilty in violent situations in which they are the victims and they tend to hide these situations. It is possible that passive victims are more ashamed than the aggressors in these bullying situations (Díaz-Aguado, 2005). *Active victim*: this victim lacks support from the group, suffering from a certain degree of social isolation. In addition, he/she tends to be unpopular amongst classmates, being discriminated against or excluded from the class group. Unlike passive victims, the active victim tends to behave aggressively and impulsively, reacting in response to the bullying, and in the face of other stimuli. They are unable to offer an appropriate response to conflict resolution. At times, they are labeled as the "provoking victim" (Díaz-Aguado, 2005).

■ **Observer**: there are two basic types of observers (Martínez Rodríguez, 2017): *defender observer*: students that assist or attempt to assist the victim; *passive observer*: students that do not get involved in the situation. A distinction may be made between those that are aware of the bullying situation but do not intervene and those that are unaware of the situation.

Normality

When seeking a definition of 'normal' in the Real Academia Española's dictionary (RAE), we come across the following: "that serving as a rule or standard and which adjusts to certain previously established rules". The definition of 'standard' is "a rule or group of behaviors that are dictated by an authority; a rule that should be followed or to which behaviors, tasks, and activities should be adjusted". When attempting

to define 'normalization' we find the following: "an action and effect of normalizing" and, finally, the definition of 'normality' is "a quality or condition of normal" (Sánchez Sáinz & García Medina, 2013).

Thus, the meaning of normal remains unclear, since it is conditioned by the authority declaring the same. Depending on the specific authority or context, the meaning of *normal* may change. It is therefore unlikely that a consensual meaning of normality will be available for all contexts, times, and/or groups (Carretero-Bermejo, 2005).

There are distinct perspectives or models of the study of normality, which reflect the diverse realities, depending on where the emphasis is placed in these models. The first model, the statistical one, considers that normal and normality are defined by statistical criteria, establishing concepts such as mean value, frequency, and continuity. Thus, the normality dimension is the most frequent one found in the cultural framework of reference. Thus, normal is defined as the most frequent and the most likely to occur, with normality being defined as what happens on a repeated basis, more frequently and in a more likely manner. In contrast to the definition of normal, terms such as deviation are used to refer to that which does not fall in line with this statistical normality. On the other hand, the normality defined for each group and in each context is presented as a unique case. Therefore, in order to be part of this normality, compliance with certain defining characteristics is required. Clearly, this is not always possible, since attitudes and behaviors can be changed but physical traits are often more difficult to alter when attempting to adjust to this so-called normality of the group or context.

Discrimination against those who are different is a common part of life in groups, since within groups, there are often processes of exogroup discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Being identified as a member of the majority and the normal group may result in discrimination against those who are not members of the so-called *normal* group.

The second model, the legal one, considers the law, with normal being considered to be that which abides by the rules declared for each specific context. Once again, the need to link normality with the social context of reference is evident. The third model, the medical model, links the term normality with health, and it considers the normal state to be the one in which optimal health is found, or the one that abides by the distinct criteria used to assess normality (with statistical frequency). Finally, the subjective or intrapsychic model suggests that every individual

defines and assesses their normality or abnormality (Pineda Rodríguez & Betancur, 2015). Having assumed these difficulties, in the closest context possible, we can propose what will be considered normal and therefore, what will be accepted. According to Sánchez Sáinz and García Medina (2013), if we refer to physical characteristics, we should also consider those that are not commonly referred to in media, stories, or text books, such as weight, skin color, height or hair color or texture. Everyone has distinct characteristics that make us diverse. But only some of these are considered legitimate and positive in today's society, such as being Caucasian and thin. Others, such as being short, fat, having a different skin color, or being cross-eyed, are not. And as mentioned in the introduction, this is not only related to statistics, but also to the decisions made by the dominant group and followed by others.

Normality is a social construct. It is a social representation or a way of thinking and acting that is used in academic and scientific contexts and in the everyday world, allowing us to understand the social context. Therefore, the definition of normality cannot be inferred from a specific area or discipline. Furthermore, the definition of normality is not exclusively a scientific concept, given that any proposed definition of the same tends to be based on common sense. Despite being used commonly, it cannot be defined unambiguously (Bertolote, 2008).

Methods

A descriptive and comparative study was designed. It is cross-sectional and quantitative, with a representative sample of high school students from the Madrid community.

Sample

In the 2018-2019 school year, the community of Madrid had 280,356 high school students enrolled in its public (n=145,891), charter (n= 105,601) and private schools (n= 28,864). To ensure its representativeness, the sample was selected using a stratified, proportional, and randomized sampling technique, taking into account the proportionality of the school type and the distribution of students across the different districts of the

Madrid community. In all, 1428 students participated, of which 1211 correctly completed the questionnaire. Therefore, this is the definitive sample in this design. Participant ages ranged from 13 to 16, with the mean age being 14.4 (standard deviation= 0.91). As for sex, 42.2% are female and 57.8% are male. The selected sample permits a confidence interval of 95% (assuming a significance level of.05) and a margin of error of 2.81.

This design examines the relationship between the independent variable, the personal characteristic that is perceived as being abnormal, and the dependent variable, school bullying. The variables of age, grade, sex, school type, and district were controlled for.

Instrument

For this study, a two-part questionnaire was created. In the first part, sociodemographic information was collected, along with the independent variable and the control variables of the research design. The second part collected information on the dependent variable, school bullying. For this study, we used the questionnaire from the UNICEF Ombudsman (Ombudsman, 2006). The data collection instrument was configured as follows:

Block 1: sociodemographic variables
- Independent variable: personal characteristic perceived as being abnormal
- Controlled variables:
  – Age
  – Grade
  – Sex
  – School type
  – District

Block 2: Questionnaire from the UNICEF Ombudsman (Ombudsman, 2006)
This includes a Likert-like scale for 39 items, having a response option between 1 (never) and 4 (always). Items from 1 to 13 measure involvement as a victim of school bullying; items 14 to 26 measure

participation in school bullying as an aggressor; and items 27 to 39 measure participation in school bullying as an observer. For each of these roles, the questionnaire collected information on 6 dimensions of school bullying: verbal aggression, indirect physical aggression, direct physical aggression¸ exclusion, sexual harassment, and threats.

Procedure

Having selected the high schools and participants, a meeting was held with the management team of each school to explain the content of the project and to confirm their participation. Then, having confirmed their participation, the participating grades, date, and time for information collection were randomly selected. An authorization form was provided for the legal guardians of the minors, authorizing their participation. Once in the class, the researcher explained the content of the questionnaire to each group and they were assigned 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Of all of the questionnaires that were administered, 217 were eliminated because they were complete incorrectly. A database was created in the SPSSv25 statistics program, introducing the collected data. A statistical and descriptive analysis was conducted of the sample, creating the necessary variables to carry out the work and verifying the reliability and consistency of the questionnaire that was used. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each of the sections and for the questionnaire in its entirety. In order to compare the results and to determine the statistical significance of the differences found between the mean scores of the independent variable groups for the dependent variable, the Student's t test for independent samples was used.

Results

Reliability and consistency: Cronbach's alpha was calculated to determine the reliability and internal consistency of the questionnaire. It was found to have adequate internal consistency and reliability (Cronbach's alpha.91).

To facilitate the understanding of the results, data were grouped together according to the working hypothesis.

Individuals perceiving themselves as having abnormal characteristics were more frequently involved as victims of school bullying, as compared to those who did not perceive themselves as having any abnormal characteristics.

TABLE I. Mean and significance (bilateral) of victims and perception of abnormal characteristics

		Victim	Verbal aggres-sion	Indirect physical aggres-sion	Direct physical aggres-sion	Social exclu-sion	Sexual harass-ment	Threat
Perception of abnormal character-istics	Yes	18.33	5.42	4.25	1.08	3.25	1.00	3.33
	No	14.98	3.91	3.55	1.04	2.35	2.35	3.11
Sig. (bilateral)		**.000**	**.032**	**.029**	.527	**.000**	.319	.061

Source: author's own creation

It can be observed that individuals perceiving themselves as having an abnormal characteristic scored significantly higher in victims of verbal aggression, indirect physical aggression, social exclusion, and victim as a total category of all of the victim dimensions. Furthermore, individuals perceiving themselves to have certain characteristics that distinguish them from others obtained higher mean scores on direct physical aggression and threats. It was not possible to confirm the working hypothesis since no statistically significant differences were found in all of the victim categories studied.

Individuals perceiving themselves as having an abnormal characteristic participated more frequently as aggressors in situations of school bullying.

TABLE II. Mean and significance (bilateral) aggressors and perception of abnormal characteristics

		Ag-gressor	Verbal aggres-sion	Indirect physical aggres-sion	Direct physical aggres-sion	Social exclu-sion	Sexual harass-ment	Threat
Perception of abnormal character-istics	Yes	15.52	4.25	3.08	1.25	2.67	1.00	3.17
	No	14.83	3.95	3.20	1.12	2.43	1.02	3.11
Sig. (bilateral)		.461	.515	0.279	.348	.385	.207	.761

Source: author's own creation

Statistically significant differences were not found in any of the aggressor categories studied between the means of students perceiving themselves as having abnormal characteristics differentiating them from others, and those that do not perceive themselves as having these characteristics. Therefore, our working hypothesis is rejected.

The most frequent role in school bullying situations is that of observer.

TABLE III. Mean and significance (bilateral) participation in school bullying situations

	Victim	Observer	Aggressor	Observer
Mean	14.87	23.47	15.21	23.47
Sig. (Bilateral)	**.000**		**.000**	

Source: author's own creation

Statistically significant differences were found between the roles of victim and observer and aggressor and observer, with the mean for the observer being the highest. Therefore, our working hypothesis is maintained.

Discussion of results

According to the information found, individuals who perceive themselves as having an abnormal characteristic that differentiates or separates them from the normal group were more frequently involved in school bullying situations as victims, as compared to those perceiving themselves to belong to the normal group. Although it is impossible to confirm the hypothesis since no statistically significant differences were found, in all of the victim categories studied, these results suggest the possibility that school bullying may be justified by the abnormal, by individuals deviating from normality (Sánchez Sáinz & García Medina, 2013). Historically, the dominant group, the "normal" one, uses all of the tools at its disposal, including violence, to maintain and impose this view of normality. The school environment may be a reproduction of the social context in which it is immersed (Carretero-Bermejo, 2011).

Distinct studies (Suárez-García, Álvarez-García & Rodríguez, 2020; Garaigordobil, 2014; Martínez, 2002) have suggested that any element that potentially singles out a student, differentiating him/her from the rest of the group, may lead to their being ridiculed and becoming a victim of an aggressor. Further studies may attempt to determine the specific variables that may potentially be related to being a victim. It appears, however, that the precise characteristic is not overly important, but rather, the assessment made by the victim and aggressor of this characteristic is the important factor, since the definition of normal is shared, and this assessment of normality, not solely based on statistical criteria (Carretero-Bermejo, 2005) is what actually appears to cause the bullying (Platero & Gómez Ceto, 2008).

In a study presented by the Universidad Internacional de Valencia (2014), it was affirmed that certain factors multiply the probability of being a victim of bullying, such as: belonging to a religious, ethnic or cultural group, or having a minority sexual orientation, having any type of learning disability, especially those related to oral language, since these are more evident, or having any type of disability, but not for the specific fact of having this characteristic, but due to the negative assessment of the same by the dominant group. In this study, participants were asked to identify the characteristics that, in their opinion, differentiate them from the group, with the following responses: "*I can't read well*", "*wearing glasses*", "*my nationality*", "*being Russian*", "*my intellect*", "*my ears*", "*my*

physique", "*my weight*", "*being less feminine than the other girls*", "*for my personality and my clothes, myself in general*", "*bigger than normal eyes*", among others. These responses were not considered in the results since this was not one of the specific objectives proposed for this work.

Lucena (2005) suggested that a defining trait of students who are victims of school bullying is their physical appearance and the differences that may characterize them. The results of this work also appear to suggest this.

We should also note that *social exclusion* is the dimension of the victim variable having the most statistically significant differences. These results are seemingly in line with those of Sánchez Zafra, Zagalaz-Sánchez and Cachón-Zagalaz (2018), which suggest that, even today, despite the many socio-educational interventions being implemented in schools, individuals viewed as different tend to be excluded in school settings. In this study, the context is limited to high school students from the Madrid community. However, it is necessary to consider whether or not this is the case for other ages and education levels, and in other regions.

The results suggest the need to reject the hypothesis with regard to the aggressor's role, given that no significant differences were found between those declaring to have an abnormal characteristic and those that did not. These results appear to present aggressors as being part of normality.

In this work, as anticipated in the hypothesis and as suggested by past studies (Trautmann, 2008), the observer is the most frequent figure in school bullying situations. The observer role depends, in part, on the aggressors finding the support needed to carry out his/her bullying behavior or on the victims finding allies to confront the aggression that they suffer and/or to avoid these situations from occurring (Martínez Rodríguez, 2017). Therefore, work with the observer group, which surrounds the victims, is fundamental in the implementation of prevention and intervention programs, to ensure that these school bullying incidents do not take place. These prevention and intervention programs should not overlook this majority of students who, according to this and other studies on school bullying, are observers, with their distinct types.

Conclusions

This study does not directly ask victims and aggressors whether or not the characteristic that makes them different or not normal explains or justifies the school bullying that takes place. However, it does request that they describe a situation in which having (or not having) a characteristic that they consider to be abnormal increases the possibilities, in a statistically significant manner, of being a victim. However, we propose what would happen if we asked aggressors, once they believe that they are normal, whether or not they believe that the victims suffer from school bullying due to any of these abnormal characteristics. We also wonder what would happen if this same question was asked to the victims. The aggressors' and victims' responses to these questions may offer valuable information for the creation of training, prevention, and intervention programs to combat school bullying.

The fact that aggressors do not believe that they are different from the normal group may suggest their perception of belonging to the dominant and majority group, and thus having its support. We should not forget that, in large part, school bullying situations are possible due to the support and direct or indirect reinforcement offered to the bully in his/her reference group, by aggressor profiles that lack the ability to lead and to begin the aggression (Martínez Rodríguez, 2017) or by passive observers. Therefore, school bullying intervention and prevention programs should consider the observer figure as an agent of change and fundamental protection, since without the support of this majority, many forms of school bullying would not be possible.

We consider that, in light of the results of this study, the goal of constructing an inclusive and diverse school system, in which differences are not perceived as being negative, would also have positive repercussions on the decrease of school bullying. This would be the case, if, as the results indicate, these variables related to differences and normality, are related to the involvement as victims in school bullying situations.

Research limitations

This research design describes a very specific situation: the perception of having a characteristic that is assessed as being abnormal, increases

the risk of being involved, as a victim, in a school bullying situation. This, however, is not the case with aggressors, given that no significant differences are found between those having a characteristic considered abnormal and those that are considered "normal". Distinct hypotheses result from these results, regarding what this may or may not mean, but they continue to be hypotheses that have yet to be contrasted and are therefore, potential future lines of research.

This work has been carried out using tests, specifically, via self-reporting, which generates at least two research limitations: the first relates to the influence of social desirability on the questionnaire completion process; the second relates to the influence of the use of one test or another, on the results, although the two attempt to measure the same thing, in this case, school bullying.

Our sample represents high school students from the community of Madrid and the results cannot be generalized to other high school students from other parts of the country, based on this single study.

Future lines of research

Four research lines have been proposed, based on the results of this study:

First, as mentioned in the limitations section, we propose a replication of this study in different communities, in order to contrast the results.

Second, certain additional issues may be considered: Do victims and aggressors justify the violence based on the characteristics that are not perceived and assessed as being normal? If so, how do they create the justification discourse? What variables define normality in our school context? Of these, which are related to involvement in school bullying situations as a victim?

Third, the importance of including teachers in future designs should be assessed, since clearly, they are essential in the identification and intervention of school bullying situations.

As for interventions, we believe that it is necessary to include information obtained from this and other works, regarding the variables underlying school bullying, such as gender variables and sexism.

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