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#### ABSTRACT

Phenomena such as social exclusion, situations of vulnerability and marginality along with conditions of cultural impoverishment contribute to increasing the school dropout. The basic task of the school is to offer responses to the main problems that are configured as an obstacle to a person's full development, with regard also to the phenomena of bullying or cyberbullying. The aim of this work is to analyze the possible relationships between deviant behaviors and early school leaving.

Esclusione sociale, vulnerabilità e marginalità insieme a condizioni di impoverimento culturale contribuiscono ad accrescere fenomeni come la dispersione scolastica. Il compito della scuola è quello di offrire risposte alle principali problematiche che fungono da ostacolo al pieno sviluppo dell'individuo, tra cui condotte devianti come bullismo e cyberbullismo. L'obiettivo del presente lavoro è quello di analizzare le possibili relazioni tra condotte devianti e dispersione scolastica.

#### KEYWORDS

Deviance, early school leaving, bullying.  
Devianza, dispersione scolastica, bullismo

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## **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

The problem of bullying and cyberbullying has been discussed in different areas and in different fields.

Aggressive and violent behaviors enacted by children and young people toward their peers have also acquired different characteristics due to the spread of new technologies. Deviant behavior, bullying and cyberbullying most often have their roots in family, social or school distress and are linked to the phenomenon of school dropout. Research aimed at understanding, preventing and solving this problem has been conducted for several years in Italy and around the world. Studies have shown that worldwide 1 in 3 students between 13 and 15 years old have experienced bullying. Cyberbullying is also increasing significantly: most of the available data concern studies conducted in industrialized countries with percentages of minors who have experienced it ranging from 5 % to 20 % of the youth population. Schools, in this regard, represent the first real social institution that has the responsibility to encourage students to report bullying episodes and has the duty, at the same time, to give more attention to the acquisition of social skills and person education that takes on a preventive and formative character for civic coexistence, citizenship and legality. This empirical research aims to analyze the characteristics of the phenomenon in an Italian school before and after the conduct of a project focused on raising student awareness of bullying.

### **1. Bullying: features of the phenomenon**

The expression bullying is used in international literature to describe the phenomenon of peer bullying in a group context, where the "*bully*" is a person who uses his strength and/or power to intimidate and/or harm a weaker person. This phenomenon can be defined behaviorally as a conscious and voluntary act of aggression persistently perpetrated by one or more individuals against one or more persons considered weak and unable to defend themselves. Some authors have further emphasized the relational

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<sup>1</sup> Diletta Chiusaroli: introduzione, paragrafi 1, 3, 4, 5. Leila De Vito: Paragrafo 2 e conclusioni.

dimension of bullying, which is represented as «a premeditated abuse of power directed toward individuals, who because of a difference in status or power, are unable to defend themselves» (Sullivan, 2000). In 2011, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) provided the definition of bullying as follows: «any unwanted aggressive behavior by a youth or group of youth other than siblings or friends that involves a perceived or observed power imbalance and that is repeated over and over again or is likely to be repeated. The act of bullying may cause harm or distress to a subject. The harm may be physical, psychological, social or educational» (Gladden et al., 2014). As Batini (2021) observes, "Bullying encloses under the same term a set of heterogeneous aggressive behaviors. Among the many forms, through which bullying manifests itself, the most common is the use of offensive expressions (verbal type behaviors), however, indirect bullying can also occur: exclusion from the peer group, spreading prejudice, defamation. Another increasingly widespread form of bullying is that which occurs through the use of technology: using text messages, social networks, etc. (Save the Children, 2013). Forms of bullying that involve the use of physical violence are, moreover, not so rare".

The main features that distinguish this phenomenon can be specified:

1. Similar to aggressive acts, it is aimed at causing harm;
2. It is intentional and voluntary;
3. It involves asymmetry of power between bully and victim. Specifically, if the bully is endowed with greater physical strength than the victim, it is called "action-based power"; on the other hand, it is often "status-based power", in other words, the asymmetry is at the level of social context, the bully has many friends who can act as witnesses or accomplices, while the victim is completely isolated; finally, sometimes the bully has greater "verbal power", that is, he has greater language skills that he uses to mock the victim;
4. It consists of organized and systemic acts;
5. It is repetitive and durable over time;
6. It provides for role rigidity in that the bully is always the same person, as is the victim. Such rigidity often leads to failure to develop the boys' identities, as they are forced into a fixed and static category;
7. The bully uses accomplices who, as we shall soon see, may act as witnesses, may directly carry out the acts of violence in substitution

for the bully, who in this case acts as "mandator," or may simply isolate the victim;

8. It causes in the victim the incapacity to defend themselves either directly (responding to the bully) or indirectly (seeking the help of adults), for fear of possible retaliation, or because the bullied boy believes that even though he reports the acts of violence suffered, the situation will not change. In fact, several researches have shown that only 20-25% of bullying incidents are reported, and even more than 50% of complaints are withdrawn. This is why we talk about the "iceberg effect";
9. It also causes fear of speech in viewers who witness acts of violence;
10. The victim is dehumanized and in this way the sense of guilt in the bully, gregarious and viewers is reduced. Acts of violence, in fact, cause a collapse in the self-esteem of the victim, who tends to blame himself; similarly, bystanders also believe that the victim deserves the acts of violence.

These ten features help to distinguish manifestations of bullying from what cannot be called bullying. Bullying, in fact, can be identified as the borderland between bullying and acts of crime. Bullying can occur in different places and contexts, but the location where it occurs most frequently is the school, and no school setting is safe from bullying. Research conducted by two German researchers reported the incidence rate of this phenomenon in different school settings (Rigby, 1996):

- 60% in the recreation ground or school garden;
- 17% in the school-to-home route;
- 10% in the hallways and bathrooms of the school;
- 9% in the classroom.

From the data obtained, it is evident firstly that acts of violence are frequent in places where there is less adult supervision, and secondly, that they may also affect the setting outside the school gate. It is therefore necessary to take this into consideration when planning anti-bullying interventions.

But how does this phenomenon arise? Firstly, it should be emphasized that bullying is not an all-or-nothing problem; rather, it emerges gradually. It is

possible, in fact, to recognize four phases of phenomenon development: observation, test, start, escalation and stabilization.

*Table 1 Phases of Bullying Phenomenon Development*

| <b>Phase</b>                        | <b>Bully</b>  | <b>Victim</b>   | <b>Classmates</b>  | <b>Teacher</b>   |
|-------------------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| <b>Observation</b>                  | He looks around trying to identify the weaker individuals   | Appears undefended and isolated from classmates               | They do not appear easy victims since they are in groups                                 | Does little care for the isolated student by considering him shy                                     |
| <b>Test</b>                         | Commits small provocative acts                              | Show embarrassment  | They do not realize what is happening or observe passively                               | It underestimates these small incidents and does not interfere                                       |
| <b>Start</b>                        | Starting bullying with acts of physical and verbal violence | Suffers in silence hoping the bully will get bored            | They are scared to interfere or become accomplices of the bully                          | Ignore these episodes as they mostly occur in unsupervised settings                                  |
| <b>Escalation and stabilization</b> | Involves other classmates and escalates aggressive behavior | Falls into a state of isolation and his self-esteem collapses | They consider bullying inevitable or are scared of being subjected to the same treatment | Discovers the problem too late, does not know how to interfere, and often blames the bully's family. |

Therefore, reading the aforementioned table, it is understood: that the earlier the interventions, the greater the chance of action; that the teacher should try to promote from the earliest days the integration of the most shy students; and that small incidents that occur in the classroom should in no way be underestimated.

### **1.1 Types of bullying**

There are three main types of bullying:

1. Physical bullying;
2. Verbal bullying;
3. Relational bullying.

Physical bullying is the most prevalent type. It is common among males and arises early (it can be observed as early as primary school). It can be distinguished into three subcategories:

- a) direct physical aggressive acts such as kicking and punching;
- b) damage to other people's property;
- c) theft or misappropriation of objects.

This type in its mildest form is the least worrisome because the signs of physical aggression are easily recognized and early intervention is therefore possible. In addition, the victim may attempt to escape or may defend himself by equally aggressive acts. In this way, although exposed to retaliation by the bully, he or she maintains high self-esteem.

Verbal bullying includes all forms of insults and backbiting. It appears later in development and is equally used by males and females. It can be distinguished into two subcategories:

- a) Manifest, the bully insults the victim by commenting on personal details (e.g., physical characteristics) or aspects related to the victim's family;
- b) Hidden, the victim is the subject of backbiting spread by the bully in his or her absence.

This type of bullying is very dangerous for many reasons. Firstly, being subjected to repeated acts of violence causes the victim's self-esteem to collapse and he has a tendency to isolate increasingly. In addition, since the victim is generally a shy student, is unable to respond to the bully's prevarication.

Relational bullying is the least studied and most dangerous type as it is difficult to detect. It can be distinguished into:

- a) Manipulative, in this case the bully acts directly on the victim's friendships by breaking them;
- b) Social, the bully and wingmen oust the victim who tends to become increasingly isolated.

It can have devastating effects on the victim. In fact, the condition of isolation in which she gradually closes in results in a collapse of her self-esteem; moreover, she can neither escape nor react.

|                | <b>Socio-emotional effects in the short and long term</b>  | <b>Educational effects</b>   |
|----------------|--|--|
| <b>Victim</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear and concern</li> <li>• Low self-esteem</li> <li>• Guilt and shame for not being able to stop bullying</li> <li>• Sense of powerlessness and loss of hope</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Depressive conditions</li> <li>• Sleep and appetite disorders</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worsening school performance</li> <li>• Concentration difficulties</li> <li>• School dropout</li> </ul> |
| <b>Bully</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Substance abuse</li> <li>• Mood disorder</li> <li>• Justice issues</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deficit in reading, writing and computation activities</li> <li>• School failure</li> </ul>             |
| <b>Viewers</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fear and anxiety</li> <li>• Reduced prosocial skills</li> <li>• Adoptions of aggressive behaviors</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School difficulties</li> </ul>  |

*Table 2- Effects of Bullying*

In addition to the three main types of bullying mentioned previously, it is possible to distinguish other more particular types such as, e.g., racially motivated bullying, prevalent mainly in the United States, where it is directed against the population of African Americans (Whitney et al., 1993), while in Italy it is still a marginal phenomenon. We then recognize sexual bullying, including vulgar comments and obscene gestures directed toward a girl; cyberbullying, a form of verbal bullying in which threats are conveyed through computerized means; and finally bullying directed against disabled pupils. The latter targets pupils with disabilities because they are generally poorly integrated into the class group, sometimes exhibit motor behaviors that

cause annoyance in classmates and become objects of derision precisely because of the cognitive and/or physical difficulties they manifest.

## **1.2 The effects of bullying**

The effects of bullying impact not only the bully and the victim, but also the viewers and their families. The extremely dangerous element of this phenomenon is not so much the gesture itself as the repetitiveness of the actions, which often move in the direction of increasing aggression, in relation to age and the possibility of harming the other.

The following table shows the effects of bullying on the main protagonists (Fedeli, 1997):

It is evident from reading these data that bullying causes problems in the cognitive, emotional and behavioral development of all those implicated, and that early intervention is necessary because the state of social isolation in which the victim and sometimes the viewers are enclosed, increasingly exposes the victim to the bully's abuse.

## **1.3 Cyberbullying: a new form of bullying**

In recent years, the now widespread use of the Internet among adolescents has paved the way for an additional type of bullying, Cyberbullying. The phenomenon takes the form of "aggressive and intentional actions, persistently performed through electronic means (texting, mms, photos, video clips, e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, phone calls), by an individual person or a group, with the deliberate aim of hurting or harming a peer who cannot easily defend". Cyberbullying, as with any Internet-related phenomenon, has no limits of space or time. In fact, unlike bullying actions, which are confined to a specific environment (e.g., a school classroom), *cyberbullying* actions can reach any place in the world (Willard, 2007). In addition, the *cyberbully* does not have eye contact with the victim and therefore does not have the exact perception of the consequences of their actions. This results in a reduced sense of guilt. Then in cyberbullying, verbal aggression, such as threatening or harassing communications, and relational aggression, e.g., backbiting spread online, are predominant.

This phenomenon manifests itself in many forms:



- Flaming: this term is used to denote violent and vulgar electronic messages aimed at stirring up verbal "battles" online, between two or more contenders, who face each other on a "level playing field";
- Harassment: it consists of rude, abusive, insulting, disturbing messages that are sent repeatedly over time, through E-mail, SMS, MMS, unwelcome phone calls, or sometimes silent calls. Unlike in flaming, the persistence of aggressive behaviors and power asymmetry between the cyber-bully(s) and the victim are recognizable here;
- Cyberstalking: when harassment becomes particularly persistent and intimidating and the victim begins to fear for his or her physical safety, the abusive behavior takes on the name of cyber harassment;
- Denigration: the goal of the cyberbully is, in this case, to damage the reputation or friendships of a peer by spreading gossip and/or other offensive material online;
- Impersonation: if a student violates someone's account (because he or she has consensually obtained the password or because he or she has managed, with special programs, to locate it) he or she can pass himself or herself off as this person and send messages with the aim of giving a bad image of that person;
- Outing and trickery: the term "outing" is understood to mean a form of cyberbullying through which, the cyberbully, after "saving" a peer's spontaneous confidences (SMS, Chat, etc.), or confidential and intimate images, decides, at a later time, to publish them on a Blog and/or spread them through E-mail. In other cases, the cyberbully may solicit, by deception (trickery), "the friend" to share online secrets or embarrassing information about himself or another person and then disseminate them to other network users, or threaten to do so if he does not make himself available to fulfill his (sometimes sexual) demands;
- Exclusion: the Cyberbully decides to intentionally exclude a peer from an online group, chat, interactive game, or other password-protected environment;
- Cyberbashing o happy slapping: A boy or a group of boys beat up a peer, while others film the assault with their cell phones. The images are, then, posted on the Internet.

## **2. Distress and school dropout**

In recent decades, the concept of school dropout has undergone a rethinking phase, moving from the perspective of risk prevention for certain categories of individuals to that of promoting educational success (Orefice, 2009). The dropout rate<sup>2</sup>, i.e., young people between 18 and 24 years old who have completed at most one round of secondary education and are not currently in education or training, is 13.1 % against a European average of 9.9%, representing a continuous decline over the past 40 years (it was 37, 5 % in 1992, 24.2 % in 2002 and 17.3 % in 2012), with a strong gender disparity (15.6 % for males vs. 10.4 % for females), territorial (progressively increasing between North Central-South-Islands) and between pupils with Italian citizenship and those with non-Italian citizenship. The implicit dropout rate is estimated by Invalsi<sup>3</sup> to be 9.5 % nationwide, reaching double-digit values in some southern regions (Calabria 22.4%, Campania 20.1%, Sicily 16.5%, Puglia 16.2%, Sardinia 15.2%, Basilicata 10.8%, Abruzzo 10.2%). Of great significance is the figure, but it should be read not only in light of pandemic influences, but also taking into account the continuous lowering of the explicit dropout figure: pupils who in previous decades would not have completed their schooling now complete it, although they come to completion with deficiencies and difficulties. School dropout is a widespread problem, determined by multiple variables that, interacting with each other, create unique configurations of opportunities and constraints, affecting individual learning paths. It is a complex phenomenon that must be analyzed taking into account the different dimensions that combine to determine critical and vulnerable conditions, which can progressively lead boys and girls to disinvest in their schooling. To understand why some students fall into dropout, it is important to analyze their experiences, how these are shaped by their everyday life context.

In addition, school distress should not be confused with social, psychological adolescent distress as it is an emotional state, unrelated to psychopathological language disorders or cognitive retardation, is manifested through a complex of dysfunctional behaviors (inattention, rejection and disturbance, poor participation) that do not allow the subject to succeed in living peacefully in the classroom and to learn school subjects positively. It is a multifactorial and

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<sup>2</sup> Eurostat 2020 data, referring to Early Leavers from Education and Training (ELET)

<sup>3</sup> data taken from the interview with Roberto Ricci president of INVALSI.

complex phenomenon that precedes school dropout. As Mancini and Gabrielli (1998) observe, school distress is an emotional state, not significantly related to psychopathological, language or cognitive retardation disorders, which manifests itself through a set of dysfunctional behaviors (poor attendance, inattention, prevailing behaviors of rejection and disruption, bad relationship with classmates, but also absolute lack of critical spirit), which do not allow the subject to adequately experience classroom activities and to learn successfully, using the maximum of his cognitive, affective and relational abilities. The student may exhibit low academic performance, which becomes a possible indicator of school maladjustment, that is, a phenomenon that manifests itself in many facets in any educational system. Students who exhibit this maladjustment struggle to meet the various demands of the school educational context (work, personal study, classroom activities). Maladjustment can have multiple facets not only from the standpoint of failure in terms of performance-learning, it can also be manifested through absences. This phenomenon is identified with a form of school absenteeism can lead to sporadic attendance that can undermine the validity of the school year ending in the most resounding form of school failure such as flunking out and repeating the year. Such a consequence only produces school delay to the point of escaping school, that is, not attending school permanently and then dropping out of school altogether. All this can be succinctly traced back to the so-called school dropout. By the expression school dropout, typical of the sociology of education, we mean that complex of phenomena consisting in the missed or incomplete or irregular use of education services by school-age children and youth (Lo Schiavo, 2006). This definition indicates the pupil-school relational difficulty and goes to include not only dropouts before the conclusion of the educational cycle (drop out), but also repetitions and irregular attendance. In addition to school dropout there are cases called "hidden dropout" where there are no particular behaviors manifested by children who despite being enrolled in school have continuous tardiness and absences. School discomfort and school dropout are often seen as symptoms of being sick in school, and the child is described as listless, with low self-esteem and little ability to concentrate. Among the main factors of school discomfort we can mention:

- socioeconomic and cultural factors where individuals from less affluent classes are at greater risk of educational distress due to their social status;

- factors intrinsic to the educational institution; the school system has difficulties in individualized curricular planning that allows for the appreciation of the differences and entry skill levels of each individual pupil, and there is no respect for the child's mental development;
- factors related to family dynamics; we highlight negative parental attitudes toward both the school and the child with whom they use rigid and punitive educational modes that result in anxiety increasing school difficulties;
- individual factors; school distress and dropout are more frequent in those who from an early age have manifested a specific learning disorder that has caused frustration resulting in demotivation and distrust in their own abilities. The onset of adolescence also leads to school disinterest by reducing the time and energy spent toward learning;
- factors related to class group dynamics; teaching modes centered on individualism go to highlight rivalries and tensions within the class. The fear of being regarded as "class geeks" goes to generate school disinterest in some adolescents.

### **3. Field investigation**

The aim of the research proposal is to further knowledge about bullying and cyberbullying and to raise awareness about this problem, while also reflecting on possible relationships related to conditions of distress and school dropout. The research proposes some strategies to develop in children greater awareness of the other, greater empathy and better perception of actions attributable to bullying. Indeed, as analyzed in the previous paragraphs, bullying represents a multidimensional and complex phenomenon. Additional objectives are to foster a positive and trusting climate in the classroom and to intervene on the problem of school dropout. The activities were conducted at school for the duration of 9 hours during which the phenomenon of bullying was explained, discussed and analyzed; in addition, different didactic strategies such as simulations, practical exercises, cooperative learning and problem solving were used. To test the research assumptions, a questionnaire consisting of 47 closed-ended questions was prepared and divided into two parts:

- the first, consisting of 25 questions, aimed at detecting the degree of perception of various behaviors ("joke"; "quarrel"; "bullying"; "crime");
- the second aimed at investigating the current reality in the educational institution and on perceived moods.

The queries were prepared through an accurate computerized investigation with an attempt to understand the meaning participants attributed to acts of bullying by proposing them to recognize different behaviors and actions.

The sample of 257 students belonging to 2 different schools in Frosinone province between 11 and 13 years of old was divided into an experimental group and control group. The experimental group participated in a specific focus group regarding the topic of bullying. The research, therefore, included the analysis of data from two groups, both groups underwent the same measurements before and after the focus group intervention and the same input and output tests. Therefore:

- the experimental group was subjected to manipulation, and the possible effects of manipulation were detected;
- the control group was not subjected to any manipulation and the same dependent variable as the experimental group was measured.

The experimental group consists of a total of 112 students including 49 males and 63 females. The control group consists of 145 students including 72 females and 73 males. The time to complete the questionnaire proposed was 30 minutes. The working steps and topics discussed in the focus group were as follows:

- 1) Perception and understanding of the phenomena: ask students what they mean by bullying, how they define it, and what their perceptions are about it.
- 2) Causes of bullying: discuss the causes of bullying and explore what motives students have for attacking others.
- 3) Impact of bullying: explore the effect of bullying on victims and aggressors, and discuss the associated emotional and physical harm.
- 4) Prevention and intervention: discuss prevention tools and solutions to counter aggression, including the importance of empathy and respect.

- 5) Personal responsibility: discuss the importance of personal responsibility in bullying prevention, such as the need to observe and report inappropriate behaviors.
- 6) Roles and responsibilities in schools: discuss the role and responsibility of teachers and school personnel in preventing bullying and supporting victims.
- 7) Diversity education: explore the importance of accepting diversity in others and how important it is to understand that being different is positive.
- 8) Family and community involvement: discuss the importance of family and community involvement in preventing and supporting victims of bullying.
- 9) Mental schemas: understand the psychological dynamic behind bullying and what motivates people to commit these acts of bullying, talk about the need to create a culture of kindness and respect for others.

#### 4. Results

Data analysis of the first part of the questionnaire, aimed to detect the degree of perceptions about various behaviors ("joke"; "quarrel"; "bullying"; "crime") revealed an improvement in the perception of behaviors attributable to bullying in the experimental group after participation in the focus group called "Bullying Project". This improvement was also revealed in the second part of the questionnaire, which aimed to detect bullying situations in the two different school settings. Tables 3 and 4 show the most significant data from the perception detection of different behaviors examined before and after focus group participation for the experimental and control group. Graphs 1 and 2 show that the perception of behaviors related to the categories "Bullying" and "Crime" improved by 12 % and 8 % respectively in the experimental group compared to the control group.

*Table 3 - Perceptions of behaviors related to bullying in the experimental group*

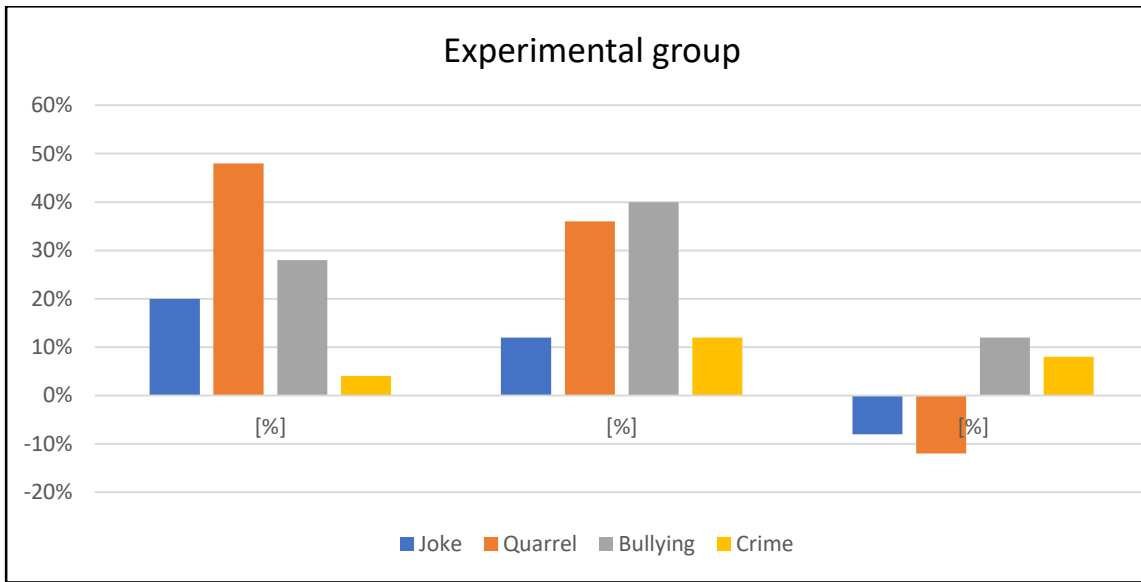
| Experimental group | Ante | Post | Difference |
|--------------------|------|------|------------|
|--------------------|------|------|------------|

|                 |            |            |             |
|-----------------|------------|------------|-------------|
|                 | [%]        | [%]        | [%]         |
| <b>Joke</b>     | <b>20%</b> | <b>12%</b> | <b>-8%</b>  |
| <b>Quarrel</b>  | <b>48%</b> | <b>36%</b> | <b>-12%</b> |
| <b>Bullying</b> | <b>28%</b> | <b>40%</b> | <b>12%</b>  |
| <b>Crime</b>    | <b>4%</b>  | <b>12%</b> | <b>8%</b>   |

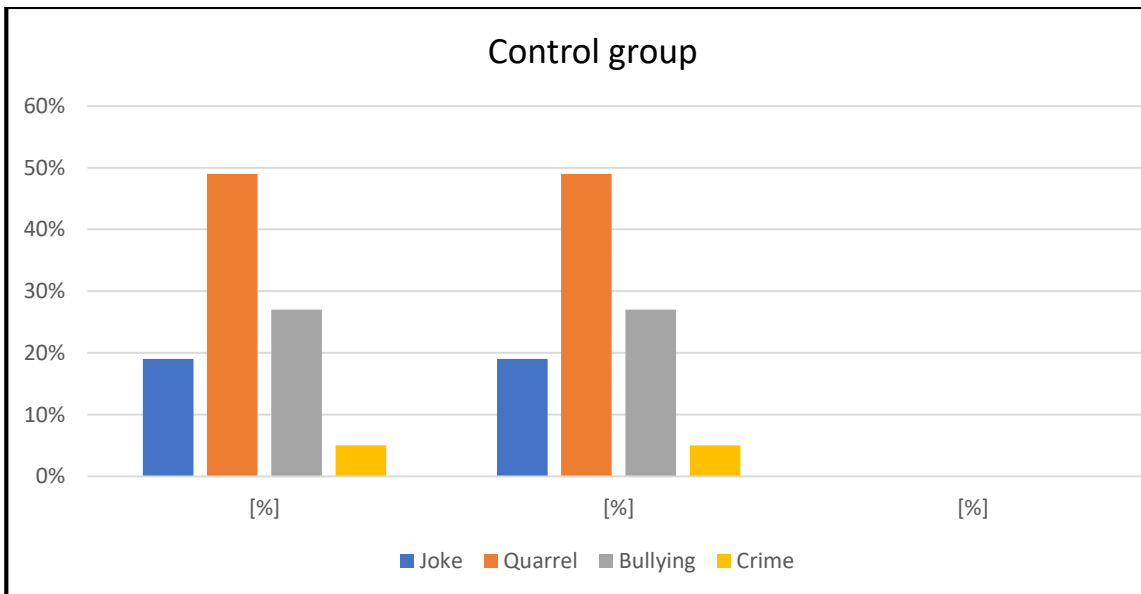
*Table 4- Perception of behaviors related to bullying in the control group*

| <b>Control group</b> |             |             |          |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
|                      | <b>Ante</b> | <b>Post</b> | <b>D</b> |
|                      | [%]         | [%]         |          |
| <b>Joke</b>          | <b>19%</b>  | <b>19%</b>  |          |
| <b>Quarrel</b>       | <b>49%</b>  | <b>49%</b>  |          |
| <b>Bullying</b>      | <b>27%</b>  | <b>27%</b>  |          |
| <b>Crime</b>         | <b>5%</b>   | <b>5%</b>   |          |

*Graph 1- Perception of behaviors related to bullying in the experimental group before and after interventions*



*Graph 2- Perception of behaviors related to bullying in the control group before and after interventions*



**5. School dropout and deviant behavior: what relationships?**



UN Sustainable Development Goal number 4, to ensure quality, inclusive and equal education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, is strongly linked to key issues such as preventing early school leaving and bullying (Downes, 2019). Through specific training concerning the phenomenon of bullying, it is assumed that there is a better perception and discrimination of acts referable to the investigated phenomenon in the schools participating in the research. The aim of the research was to further knowledge about bullying and raise students' awareness. Among the strategies used, group work has enabled individual empowerment and improved self-esteem. The activity presented also aimed to analyze the problem in order to detect relationships with the phenomenon of school dropout. In fact, as highlighted by a study conducted in 2010 on NEETs (young people neither studying nor working) bullying and school dropout would seem to be related. As Cozzolino (2014) notes, statistics point out that NEET youth are those who showed poor attention span in school, low level of motivation, were homeless or had poor family support, had health problems, special educational needs, had a disabled or unemployed member in the family. Many of these had negative school experiences: such as bullying, behavioral difficulties, and exclusion.

Moreover, what is evident from the many studies done on school dropout is its complexity. Anna Paladino (1996), argues that the majority of those interested in school dropout consider it as the result and crossroads of multifactorial causes. She then observes that there has been a shift from an original monocentric approach, to framing the issue in a complex system of interpretation that increasingly has multiple interpretative keys and interdependent and interconnected elements. The author distinguishes the causes of school dropout into two areas: the first concerns the subject's extracurricular history, which relates to his socio-cultural and economic origin, the work done by parents, the socialization process, the functioning of social and territorial services, family interpersonal dynamics and forms of distress; while, among the causes imputable to the school, the author includes pedagogical-didactic discontinuity between different school grades, professional deficiencies of teachers, rigidity of educational curricula, standardized and standardizing teaching, evanescence of interventions to prevent youth distress, and negative biases in teachers' expectations concerning students. What seems to be most worrying in relation to the

phenomenon of school dropout is the fact that the latter is one of the most relevant factors among those that contribute to the process of orientation in a delinquent direction of adolescent conduct. The delinquent career of youth, in fact, is significantly correlated with school dropout, since a cycle is generated that assumes continuity: as children reject school they are in turn rejected by it especially those who enact disturbing behaviors that cause disappointment. The importance that the phenomenon of school dropout takes on with regard to the adolescent phase is evident, especially in relation to the importance of the centrality of this phenomenon in prevention interventions. As Patrizi and Blasi (2017) observe: "in order to prevent the symptoms represented by the typical behaviors of bullying and cyberbullying reported by the most accredited international literature, and making use of an interdisciplinary perspective to the study of educational phenomena, it is decisive to promote pro-social behavior and empathic sensitivity through the enhancement of symbolization processes, which represent precisely one of the main objectives pursued in the long term by educational institutions. Considering due differences related to the educational context [...] and the specific educational goals, the development of symbolic representation skills can be proposed as a teaching modality of fundamental importance for students who easily react with violent behavior. That is, it is a matter of representing through the didactics of play, artistic-expressive education and image education, the various conflict contents involving the learner and then promoting forms of reparative reworking of aggression and pro-social conduct. It is easily recognizable at this point the primary role that schools can play in the prevention of aggressive and antisocial behavior through the implementation of specific educational workshop programs centered on the strengthening of symbolization processes through the didactics of play and artistic-figurative-expressive education".

Below are summarized possible strategies aimed at countering school dropout, deviant conduct, and promoting school inclusion:

1. Tutoring: providing individualized support to students who have difficulty learning or feel isolated through the assignment of tutors to help them cope with school challenges.
2. Group work: promoting group activities so as to foster collaborative learning and a sense of ownership.

3. Extracurricular activities: offer laboratory, sports and art activities for students so as to foster learning through a playful and creative approach.
4. Regular feedback: provide regular and constructive feedback to students so that they understand their strengths and weaknesses and stimulate them to strive for improvement.
5. Individualized curricula: create individualized curricula for students with learning disabilities to address their specific needs and achieve positive results.
6. Collaboration with families: involve students' families in school life and in solving their children's school problems, so as to build strong support at home and at school.

## **Conclusions**

Bullying can have a significant impact on school dropout. Students who are bullied may feel insecure and unsatisfied with their school experience, which can lead to reduced engagement in school activities. In addition, students who are bullied may also have difficulty concentrating in class because of concerns about bullying. Similarly, students who bully often also show a negative attitude toward school and may have behavior problems that lead them to have difficulty complying with school rules and expectations. This can lead to reduced participation in school activities and school dropout. This fundamental concept is fundamental in the psycho-pedagogical field, since it is essential that each individual be assured the natural and appropriate development of their potential in the process of personal and formative growth. The first space of educational and training stimulations is certainly the family, a sphere to which are accompanied and contributed factors determined by the environmental and social context and the combination of many distinct external contributions. Among these, school occupies a significant position, substantially impacting on the individual's development at a formative age from early years onward. It, in fact, differently from the family and society, is the only agency that has the responsibility of predisposing, adopting and controlling the tools necessary for each student to develop their maximum potential. The role of great and substantial responsibility assigned to the school is manifest, but it is a systemic action

that works through an integrated educational project, that is, through the realization of a synergic and networked relationship between:

- child's individual action (taking responsibility, engagement in work, building meaningful interpersonal relationships, autonomy, self-esteem);
- educational alliance with the family (presence, collaboration, comprehension, listening, guidance to empowerment, valorization, support, etc.). The school's meaningful intervention, understood as a training and educating agency, works within a dynamic, open system capable of networking with the community.

To counter bullying, deviant behaviors and school dropout, it is important the schools adopt policies and programs that promote a safe and welcoming school environment. For a good project, which aims to prevent at-risk behaviors, it is necessary to improve the relationship between the student and the school with the collaboration between different professional figures who go to act especially in relation to three areas: affective, cognitive and cultural, this should result in the subsequent decrease of the phenomenon of dropout and deviant behaviors. The present study is intended to be a starting point for the analysis of the existing relationship between deviant behavior and school dropout that deserves future further investigation.

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