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## **Bullying and social exclusion in Spanish secondary schools: National trends from 1999 to 2006<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT.** Despite the interest in determining the severity of peer victimization in schools, resulting in many survey studies, few have explored the issue through representative samples in a country, and even fewer longitudinal studies have been carried out. In 1999, the first survey at a national-scale on school bullying was developed in Spain. The results provided detailed data of the forms of victimization experienced, done or witnessed by students, and their different incidence among boys and girls; along the different grade-years and the type of school (state/private). A second study was carried out in 2006 in order to explore the possible changes in the incidence of bullying. The results presented here point to a decrease in the percentage of self-recognised victims and aggressors of certain types of bullying, while others remain in similar percentages after seven years. Immigrant students identify themselves more as victims compared to their autochthon schoolmates. Results are discussed in relation to the efforts to improve relationships in educational settings.

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on the Second Ombudsman's-UNICEF Report on School Violence, co-funded by the Spanish *Defensor del Pueblo* [Ombudsman's Office] and the *Comité Español del UNICEF* [Spanish Commission for UNICEF] through the UAM-UNICEF Institute for Children's and Adolescents' Needs and Rights (IUNDIA). This report was elaborated by the authors together with E. Ochaíta and M.E. Espinosa. The authors want to thank P.K. Smith and K. van der Meulen for comments on an earlier draft.

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**KEY WORDS.** School bullying incidence. Longitudinal survey. Age and gender differences. National trends. Secondary school climate. *Ex post facto* study.

**RESUMEN.** Si bien es innegable el interés de los numerosos estudios que intentan determinar mediante encuestas el grado de severidad del acoso escolar y la victimización entre iguales en las escuelas, pocos de los estudios publicados se han llevado a cabo mediante selección de muestras representativas de ámbito nacional que permita generalizar las características de este fenómeno. Más excepcional todavía es que dichos estudios hayan tenido carácter longitudinal. En el año 1999 se realizó el primer estudio nacional sobre el acoso y la exclusión social en el ámbito de la enseñanza secundaria española (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2000). Los resultados aportaron un retrato preciso de las diferentes formas de victimización padecidas, presenciadas o realizadas por los estudiantes, informando de su incidencia relativa entre chicos y chicas, a lo largo de los diferentes cursos y en función de la titularidad de los centros (públicos/privados). Siete años más tarde se ha llevado a cabo un segundo estudio con el mismo diseño e instrumentos a fin de determinar posibles cambios en la incidencia del acoso y la exclusión social en la enseñanza secundaria. Los resultados de la comparación apuntan a un decremento en el porcentaje de estudiantes que se reconocen víctimas o agresores de algunos tipos de acoso, mientras que permanecen inalterados los relativos a la exclusión social y a la difusión de rumores a espaldas de un tercero. Estos resultados se discuten en relación con los esfuerzos de mejora de las relaciones llevados a cabo por los centros educativos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE.** Abusos de poder en escolares. Investigación longitudinal. Diferencias de edad y género. Tendencias nacionales de incidencia. Clima en educación secundaria. Estudio *ex post facto*.

Peer maltreatment categorised as abuse-of-power relationships, *i.e.* bullying behaviours and social exclusion, particularly when taking place in schools, has become a subject of concern in a large number of countries (Smith *et al.*, 1999). Since the decade of the 70s when the first empirical studies were carried out by Dan Olweus in Scandinavia, much attention has been addressed to this phenomenon first in Europe, soon afterwards in Japan, Australia and Northern America, but only recently in Latin America. This general interest is not only shown by scientists and the schools themselves, but also by the mass media and, at various levels of involvement depending on the particular country, at a local community level, especially in institutions that are also responsible for school policies (Debarbieux, 2001). Very often the interest and concern are a result of the existence of severe incidents with a clear impact on the media, as for example suicides of adolescents, either declaring or not their inability to get away from the nightmare that his/her life at school had become. But research is also conducted as a consequence of the difficulties experienced by teachers in their daily school life. The need for improving the moral and emotional atmosphere leads to the acknowledgement of the relevance of considering peer bullying and social exclusion as obstacles for an efficient and inclusive school.

Along three decades of study on the phenomenon, the scope of behaviours considered to be bullying or power-abuse has increased. In the questionnaires used in early studies the emphasis was on direct physical bullying and verbal taunting, mainly performed by a group of bullies on the victim (Olweus, 1978); later on, mostly due to the contribution of Björkqvist and colleagues in Finland (Björkqvist, Lagerspetz, and Kaukiainen, 1992) indirect forms of bullying were also considered, either as physical aggression (aimed at one's belongings) or as verbal aggression (gossiping and spreading rumours) (Smith, 2001; Smith *et al.*, 2002). Additionally, social exclusion was introduced in most studies, very often described as relational aggression (Crick, Casas, and Mosher 1997), or social or psychological aggression (Galen and Underwood, 1997). However, accepting that each type of bullying is essentially psychological, and relational, it is more discriminative to use social exclusion to refer to the following: a) direct exclusion: deliberate actions preventing someone to be part of a group (for example saying no to his/her intentions to enter the group); and b) indirect exclusion: the systematic ignoring of an individual (*e.g.* not talking or looking at him/her). Olweus (1999b) states that in bullying the "negative actions can be carried out by physical contact, by words, or in other ways, such as making faces or mean gestures, and intentional exclusion from a group" (p.10). He characterizes bullying by the following three criteria: "a) it is aggressive behavior or intentional "harmdoing" b) it is typically carried out repeatedly and over time c) it is an interpersonal relationship characterised by an imbalance of power" (p.11). Moreover, the nature of bullying has been progressively underlined as a group phenomenon (Pellegrini, 2002; Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Björkqvist, Österman, and Kaukianen, 1996).

One element contributing to the difficulties of comparing studies between countries is the difficulty of using one global term in the various languages for all the forms of the phenomenon. Even more difficulties become apparent when trying to find equivalent terms in different languages, as was found in a cross-linguistic international study in which children's and adolescents' use of terms for describing cartoons depicting various modes of bullying and other aggressive or neutral interactions was studied (Smith *et al.*, 2002). The same set of cartoons was presented to participants from fourteen countries. It was found that even the term bullying was mainly used for direct physical interactions in which a power imbalance between characters is evident. Among Spanish participants the most used term was *meterse con alguien* (picking on someone), for both physical and verbal aggressions, either direct or indirect, followed by *maltrato* (maltreatment) and *abuso* (abuse), the latter being used more for those cartoons in which an explicit power difference was observed. In comparing terms and cartoons linked to them, *maltrato* was found to correspond most to "bullying". Scientific terms turned out not to fit the terms used by adolescents, and especially children.

In many countries studies on incidence are usually the first action to measure the severity of the situation in schools. The research carried out by Olweus (1978, 1993, 1999a, 1999b) were very influential, especially among European researchers. There are not many published national or longitudinal studies, with few exceptions (Byrne, 1999; Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2000, 2007; Olweus 1999a, 1999b). Olweus carried out national studies in Norway and Sweden, and also longitudinal studies, but not combined. Most studies have been based on data from schools located in a particular town

(O'Moore and Hillery, 1989; Ortega, 1994; Vieira, Fernández, and Quevedo, 1989) or a particular geographical area (Almeida, 1999; Ortega and Mora-Merchán, 1999; Whitney and Smith, 1993). Some of them consisted of comparisons between towns located in different regions of a country (Fonzi, 1997; Fonzi *et al.*, 1999; Genta, Menesini, Fonzi, Costabile, and Smith, 1996; Lösel and Bliesener, 1999). The review coordinated by Smith in 1999, despite differences in the instruments applied -most of them however translations of Olweus' (1996) original questionnaire with small adaptations-, and ages/school levels studied (primary or secondary), provided a fairly comprehensive overview of the incidence of abuse of power relationships in schools taking in consideration various pupil related variables as age and gender, and other school variables (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2000; Olweus, 2007; Smith *et al.*, 1999).

The findings revealed a hard reality very often not communicated by those who suffered it, existing at every place with formal or informal educational systems, with similar features in every country and different percentages for particular types of bullying documented from country to country. It seems to start during the preschool years, to increase during primary school with a peak from 9 to 14 years of age, and decrease during later adolescent years. The relative importance of the various types of bullying varies according to age and gender of those involved, with more boys involved as victims or aggressors, except for spreading negative rumours, for which more girls are involved.

#### *Incidence of bullying in Spain*

Spain is not an exception to this, as shown by the work on school bullying produced during nearly two decades. The very first study resulted from the need to confirm informal observations during authors' teaching experiences (Vieira *et al.*, 1989). Later on, Ortega threw light on the phenomenon through her studies performed in Andalusia (Ortega, 1998; Ortega and Mora-Merchán, 1999). A decade after the first study, the feeling of a progressive degradation of the school climate led public authorities to promote the elaboration of an Ombudsman's Report on School Violence, with the participation of UNICEF. As a basis for it, research on incidence of peer bullying in secondary schools was carried out (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2000; Del Barrio, Martín, Montero, Fernández, and Gutiérrez, 2001a, 2001b)<sup>3</sup>.

The incidence of bullying was estimated through a nationwide survey by giving a questionnaire to a representative sample of 3000 male and female students aged 12-16 (from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> years in secondary school). The questionnaire required each student to answer as a possible victim, aggressor or bystander of what is going on. A second questionnaire was filled in by the 300 head-teachers of the corresponding schools participating in the survey.

<sup>3</sup> The complete Ombudsman's Report consisted of the following: a) a review of research studies and educational interventions in Europe; the judicial framework on violence against and by minors in Spain and neighbouring countries; and policies on bullying across Spain; b) a national study on the incidence of bullying at secondary schools; and c) recommendations to the educational institutions.

From the data of the students who identified themselves as victims “since the academic year started”, *i.e.* during the last four months, a higher incidence was found for the different forms of verbal victimization: insulting, offending/humiliating name-calling and spreading rumours (ranging from 35 to 39%), followed by social exclusion, either direct or indirect (10-15%). The incidence of physical modes of bullying was very heterogeneous: relatively high for hiding the pupil’s belongings (22%), much lower for stealing and breaking things (4-7%), and for direct physical bullying (4%). Incidence of threats and sexual harassment (.70-2%) was lower. Differences by gender and level-year appeared for several behaviours and roles. A general trend pointed the boys as more involved in bullying, either as victims or especially as aggressors, with two exceptions: a) indirect verbal bullying (spreading rumours), in which more girls appeared as victims, aggressors and bystanders, and b) indirect exclusion, where no gender-linked differences were found. The data also showed a trend for school year-linked incidence where 1st and 2nd years had higher percentages of victims. Additionally, a higher percentage of aggressors was found in the second school year. New analysis on the same data pointed to gender-year interaction effects in a number of cases (Del Barrio, Martín, Montero, Gutiérrez, and Fernández, 2003).

The circumstances in which bullying occurred were identified on the basis of victims’ descriptions. The aggressor came from his/her same class group. Classroom was found as the most risky place, instead of the playground, more mentioned in other studies including primary school participants. Often, victims did not communicate their bullying experience to others. Only a few friends helped the victim. Help from teachers and family was seldom asked for, neither was it provided to the victim. The various views of the problems held by pupils and teachers confirmed the nature of school bullying as a secret and horizontal phenomenon not sufficiently acknowledged by schools.

One of the aims of the national study was the comparison of the Spanish data with those from other studies. This is never an easy task even when sharing the same instrument. In fact, some of the different percentages between countries (e.g. UK and Italy) had been attributed to the difficulties for finding an exact translation for the term “bullying”, and to the different questions used in the various questionnaires (Genta *et al.*, 1996; Smith *et al.*, 2002). In the Spanish instrument, the lack of a general question asking the participant if they have been bullied, taken as a basis for further questions, had the advantage of avoiding individual interpretations of the term bullying, but made very hard the comparison of Spanish data with data from other studies. Nevertheless, a similar trend to findings from other countries was evident, with verbal abuse as the main form of victimization. While usually this is followed by physical abuse and verbal threats, the latter two types switching positions depending on the study (Smith *et al.*, 1999), in the Spanish sample there were more cases of social exclusion, but fewer of physical aggression (beating up), compared to other European studies and to Ortega’s (1998) study in Andalusia. Beyond the differences by type of behaviour, the results pointed to a higher percentage of students admitting being aggressors in the less severe types of bullying than students identifying themselves as victims. Even more students reported observing bullying around them.

New research on bullying incidence blossomed during later years, especially after a 15 year-old boy's suicide took place in September 2004, with a strong impact on society. These studies are widely different in the scope of samples and procedures used (for a review and methodological discussion see Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2007).

The need to establish the state of the art seven years after the first national study, led to a new study using the same instrument and design to allow an exact comparison with the previous survey conducted in 1999. Consequently the present article aims at describing the methodological decisions taken in both studies (1999 and 2006) on the one hand, and on the other, showing part of the results on bullying incidence among students obtained in the 2006 investigation (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2007) and comparing them with the data of 1999 (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2000). In particular, among the many issues dealt with in both studies, those selected for comparison in this article are: the percentages of students self-identified as victims, aggressors and bystanders of the various types of peer bullying; to whom the victims communicate what it is going on, and who help them; the difference in the percentages of victims, aggressors and observers by school year, gender, size of habitat, regional community and state/private funded school.

## Method

### *Participants*

Two national representative samples of 3000 students (half boys, half girls), each coming from 300 secondary schools were selected in the study, in two time points, 1999 and 2006. In both cases, samples were proportionally stratified taking into account the number of state and private schools, size of school location, and the specific Spanish autonomous community. For both samples, 10 students from each school were randomly selected according to the following distribution: a girl and a boy from each of the four years of compulsory secondary school (*Educación Secundaria Obligatoria*, ESO), and two more students, rotating their specific school year in each school. So the 3000 students were uniformly distributed over the four academic levels.

In 1999 a total of 553 sample schools were selected, of which 300 provided the final sample and 253 were used for substitution when necessary; in the 2006 sample, a first selection of 600 schools resulted in a final sample of 300. For both samples, taking a confidence level of 95.5%, the error of estimation was  $\pm 2.2\%$  for the students data.

Only for 2006, the national origin of the participants was identified: 92.5% were autochthon; 7.1% were immigrants (mostly first generation), and .40% did not declare their national origin.

### *Materials*

The questionnaire used for the students' data collection in 1999 as well as 2006, started with a definition of school bullying and social exclusion and was translated into Catalan, Galician, and Basque languages so students in Catalonia, Galicia and Basque Country could choose their own language version of the questionnaire (see Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2007; Del Barrio *et al.*, 2001a, 2001b, for more details of the questionnaires).



A feature of this study was that questions dealing with the different aspects were always asked in relation to every specific type of peer abuse. This allowed us to establish more precisely the incidence and circumstances of each type of bullying. Questions were formulated from three different points of view corresponding to the possible status of the interviewee as a victim, a bully or a witness. So in the case of the pupil being a victim, she/he was asked about each type of behaviour for: a) severity of bullying behaviours experienced; b) profile of aggressor (gender, year form, *etc.*); c) setting of the behaviour; d) people with whom she/he communicates; e) people intervening to help; f) how she/he is treated by teachers. In the case of the student as a bully, she/he was asked again about each type of bullying for: a) the severity of aggressions carried out; b) reactions of the observers; c) whether she/he joined the group in the bullying. In the case of the student as an observer, she/he was asked again about each type of bullying for: a) the severity of behaviours observed; b) her/his role when observing others being bullied; c) teachers' role. Participants were also asked about their peer relationships. In 2006 questions on the use of new technologies (Internet, cellular phone, *etc.*) for peer victimization were added.

#### *Design and procedure*

The study is considered an *ex post facto* longitudinal survey with successive independent samples (Montero and León, 2007) and follows the editing norms established by Ramos-Alvarez, Valdés-Conroy and Catena (2006). Data collection was carried out exactly in the same way for both samples (1999 and 2006): it took place during the winter quarter by interviewers from a surveys agency properly trained by the authors following a pilot study. In each school, questionnaires were administered by interviewers to the 10 selected student-participants in a quiet room and in the absence of any teacher, so that questions or doubts from the participants could be answered (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2000, 2007; Del Barrio *et al.*, 2001a, 2001b).

### **Results**

Data found in 2006 are presented first, and then a comparison with the 1999 results. In order to control validity of the answers, some questions were used as filters, so the number of valid responses can vary among questions.

#### *The estimation of bullying from the victims', aggressors' and bystanders' answers*

In order to get a clearer contrast of the intensity of aggression experienced, done or observed by participants, the "often" and "always" categories for intensity of victimization, as they appeared in the questionnaire, were unified into a single category ("many times") for analysis (as in Solberg and Olweus, 2003).

As shown by the victims' answers (see Table 1), verbal aggressions are the most common way to be bullied. More than a quarter of participants (26.7%) were called offending or humiliating names; 21.4% say it happens sometimes and 5.2% many times. A similar percentage suffers insults (27.1%), sometimes (23.2%), or many times (3.9%). Even more students are the target of negative talking behind his/her back (31.6%), sometimes (27.3%), many times (4.2%).



**TABLE 1.** Students who report being victimized, victimizing others or observing victimization in various ways since beginning of this school term (%). (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2007).

		<i>Victim</i>	<i>Aggressor</i>	<i>Bystander</i>
Social exclusion	Ignoring ( <i>n</i> = 2788)	10.5	32.7	82.9
	Not letting participate ( <i>n</i> = 2824)	8.6	10.6	69.7
Verbal aggression	Insulting ( <i>n</i> = 2716)	27.1	32.4	89.8
	Calling offending names ( <i>n</i> = 2760)	26.7	29.2	88.9
	Spreading negative rumors ( <i>n</i> = 2684)	31.6	35.6	89.7
Indirect phy. aggression	Hiding peer's belongings ( <i>n</i> = 2792)	16	10.9	73.3
	Damaging peer's belongings ( <i>n</i> = 2897)	3.5	1.3	40.5
	Stealing peer's belongings ( <i>n</i> = 2900)	6.3	1.6	45.2
Direct phy. aggression	Hitting ( <i>n</i> = 2909)	3.9	5.3	59.3
Threat/blackmail	Threatening only for scaring ( <i>n</i> = 2870)	6.4	4.3	64.1
	Blackmail ( <i>n</i> = 2973)	.6	.6	12.2
	Threatening with weapons ( <i>n</i> = 2974)	.5	.3	6
Sexual harassment	Verbal/not v. sexual harassment ( <i>n</i> = 2974)	.9	.4	6.6

The type of victimization most suffered by students is a specific type of indirect physical aggression, others hide my belongings. This is mentioned by 16% of the secondary school students (14.2% sometimes, 1.80% many times). Lower percentages are obtained for victims of other two indirect physical aggressions, stealing others' belongings (6.3%, sometimes; 1.2%, many times) or damaging others' belongings (3.5%, most of these, sometimes). Direct physical aggression (hitting) is experienced by 3.9% of participants, usually sometimes (3.3%). Regarding threats, 6.4% are threatened to get scared, but less than 1% admit to being blackmailed or threatened using weapons. Sexual harassment is mentioned by .90%.

Data provided by students who say they bully others (see Table 1), point to a similar order of incidence to that found for victims. Three behaviour categories change their position: those who ignore, hit or sexually harass others are more frequent than those victimized in these ways.

Less aggressors than victims for seemingly "less severe" behaviours have been found: verbal aggressions and both modes of social exclusion<sup>4</sup>. For instance, while insulting is mentioned by around 27% of the participants as victims, it is mentioned by

<sup>4</sup> It is necessary to take cautions in attributing a certain severity to the quality of different behaviours. According to retrospective studies, those behaviours considered less severe (social exclusion) as compared to others e.g. with a more apparent result of physical injury, seem to be linked to negative and long-lasting psychological consequences (Van der Meulen *et al.*, 2003).

32% of them as aggressors. This trend is also found for direct physical aggression (hitting). For the rest of the behaviours, the opposite is true: more students admit being victims of the various aggressions through their belongings, sexual harassment and threats, except for the specific threat consisting of blackmail, which shows the same percentage of students for both perpetrators and victims.

As shown in Table 1, the percentages of participants observing the bullying and social exclusion behaviours show the same order as those on the victims' and aggressors' lists. Nevertheless, the percentages of observers are higher than those of victims and aggressors. Looking at the example of insulting, almost 90% of participants have observed this type of peer maltreatment, while percentages of victims and aggressors are around 30%. This is of course not strange, as many pupils can observe what is being done for instance to one of their classmates.

Few Spanish secondary students seem to be involved in cyberbullying, *i.e.* cellular telephone, Internet, or other communication techniques either as a way to suffer from or to exert peer-abuse-of-power: only 5% of them were victims, and the same percentage of students admit to use them against their peers.

#### *Differences in incidence results linked to participants' and school characteristics*

No statistically significant differences on bullying incidence were found when comparing Autonomous Communities in Spain; nor did town size result as an influential variable<sup>5</sup>. However, the funding condition of the school was linked to differences in students involved in bullying and social exclusion. Differences were found between students from the state- and private-funded schools for social exclusion and gossiping/spreading rumours. More students from private schools received and carried out these types of peer maltreatment, for those not allowed to participate ( $\chi^2_{(4)} = 22.43, p < .001$ ); and behind whom others talk/spread rumours ( $\chi^2_{(2)} = 21.66, p < .001$ ); and for those who ignore ( $\chi^2_{(2)} = 20.42, p < .001$ ) and talk behind someone's back/spread rumours ( $\chi^2_{(2)} = 34.85, p < .001$ ).

When gender and school year of students were taken into account, far more differences in victimization incidence become apparent. Higher percentages of boys than girls were found as perpetrators of not letting others participate ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 27.56, p < .001$ ), call offending/humiliating names ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 29.60, p < .001$ ), insulting ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 26.39, p < .001$ ), hiding peers' belongings ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 51.40, p < .001$ ), damaging peers' belongings ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 12.18, p < .001$ ), hitting ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 35.91, p < .001$ ), threatening for the sake of scaring ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 24.40, p < .001$ ) and sexual harassment ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 11.04, p < .001$ ). More boys than girls are victims of hitting ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 31.53, p < .001$ ) and offending/humiliating name calling ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 19.43, p < .001$ ). However, gossiping/spreading rumour is mentioned

<sup>5</sup> Due to the responsibilities of the two institutions promoting the study, a conservative level of confidence ( $p < .001$ ) was used. Moreover, in looking for statistically significant differences linked to the participants' characteristics -if not mentioned otherwise-, non occurrence vs. occurrence are the two comparison terms. Occurrence embeds "sometimes", and "many cases" intensity levels.

by more girls than boys, either as victims, ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 47.26, p < .001$ ), aggressors ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 60.43, p < .001$ ) or observers ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 14.14, p < .001$ ).

For the variable school year a consistent pattern is apparent. More students of first and second school year are victims of insults ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 41.33, p < .001$ ); being called offending/humiliating names ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 26.67, p < .001$ ), not being allowed to participate ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 17.14, p < .001$ ), hitting ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 25.21, p < .001$ ), and threats for scare ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 19.79, p < .001$ ) and forced to do things by means of threats ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 20.72, p < .001$ ), especially when compared to the fourth-year group. For aggressors, this decreasing pattern is only found for hitting ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 17.92, p < .001$ ). The other differences found involve ignoring ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 23.43, p < .001$ ) and gossiping/spreading rumours ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 30.09, p < .001$ ), both of which show aggressors increasing from the first to the fourth school year. There is an increasing pattern in observing peer victimization from year 1 to 4 for several behaviours, with significantly less first year students who observe peers being ignored ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 17.74, p < .001$ ), receiving insults ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 17.49, p < .001$ ), name calling ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 40.07, p < .001$ ), gossiping/spreading rumours ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 40.24, p < .001$ ), and having their belongings stolen ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 33.92, p < .001$ ) and damaged ( $\chi^2_{(3)} = 17.61, p < .001$ ).

With respect to the national origin of students (first and second generation immigrant versus autochthon), two differences were found. Immigrant students were ignored twice as much as their autochthon peers ( $\chi^2_{(2)} = 20.45, p < .001$ ); and threatened with weapons was also higher (1.90%, vs. .40%;  $\chi^2_{(2)} = 14.49, p < .001$ ).

#### *Changes in the incidence of school bullying and social exclusion from 1999 to 2006*

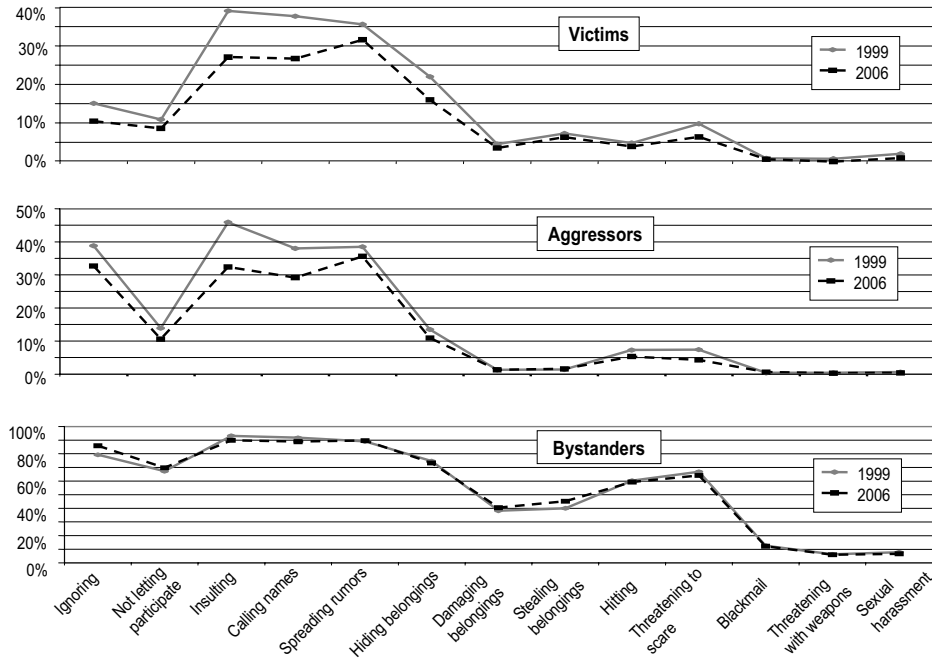
Comparing the studies carried out in 1999 and 2006, the statistically significant differences found point to a decrease in certain types of bullying and social exclusion both as victims and aggressors. In particular, the percentages of victims in 2006 (see Figure 1) are lower than those in 1999 for being called names ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 75.49, p < .001$ ), being insulted ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 85.96, p < .001$ ), ignored ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 24.57, p < .001$ ), having his/her belongings hidden ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 32.80, p < .001$ ), being threatened for scaring ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 20.97, p < .001$ ) and being sexually harassed ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 13.85, p < .001$ ).

The data for aggressors (see Figure 1) also show a decrease, in ignoring ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 21.73, p < .001$ ), not letting participate ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 13.54, p < .001$ ), insulting ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 100.20, p < .001$ ), calling names ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 46.95, p < .001$ ), hitting ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 10.17, p < .001$ ) and threatening to cause fear ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 24.37, p < .001$ ). Moreover, a decrease in direct physical aggression results from the comparison of 1999 and 2006 aggressors' percentages for hitting.

This pattern of changes between 1999 and 2006 does not appear so clearly when focusing on observers' data. As shown in Figure 1, while lower percentages were found for insulting ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 17.84, p < .001$ ) and name calling ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 12.68, p < .001$ ), in 2006 higher percentages were found for ignoring others ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 11.01, p < .001$ ) and stealing others' belongings ( $\chi^2_{(1)} = 16.09, p < .001$ ).

Differences in incidence linked to the participants' characteristics are not equally present in the data of 1999 and 2006. First, a gender-year interaction in the percentages of victims is found in the behaviour of being called names ( $Z = -3.31, p < .001$ ). As shown in Figure 2, the number of girl victims decreased significantly in 2006 in comparison to

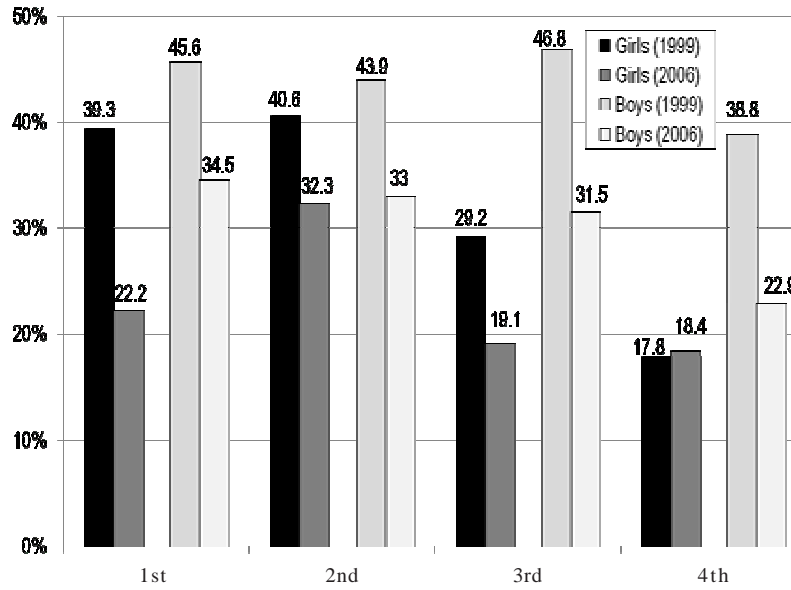
**FIGURE 1.** Comparison of students who report being victimized, victimizing others or observing victimization (by type of behaviour) in 1999 and 2006. (Defensor del Pueblo – UNICEF, 2007).



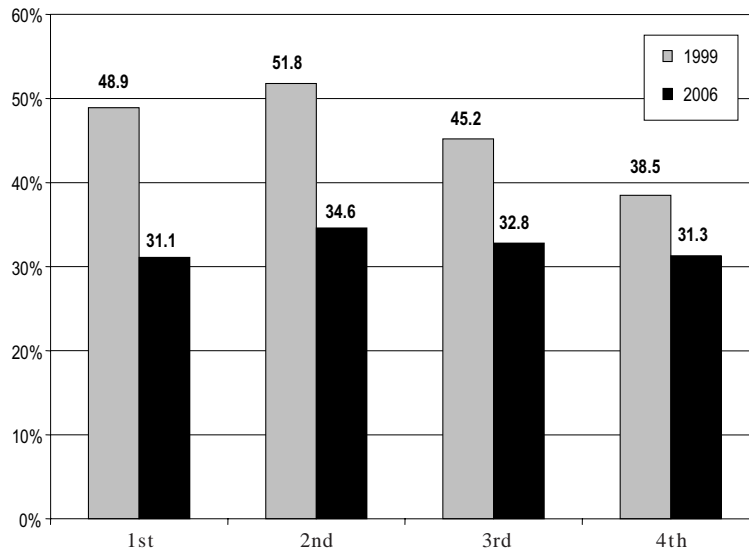
1999 in the first year of secondary school. On the other hand, this reduction of victims from 1999 to 2006 is true for boys in each school year.

The second difference concerns students who insult others ( $Z = -3.47, p < .001$ ): in 1999 lower percentages were found in the oldest students' group (4<sup>th</sup> year), but in 2006 a similar distribution along the four years is found. So, it is during the first three years when *insulting* decreases in the clearest way (see Figure 3).

**FIGURE 2.** Girls and boys in each secondary school year who report being called names since the beginning of this school term in 1999 and 2006. (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2007).



**FIGURE 3.** Students in each secondary school year who report insulting others since the beginning of this school term in 1999 and 2006. (Defensor del Pueblo – UNICEF, 2007).



For the observers, differences are only found in the case of hitting ( $Z = -3.63$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with a significant decrease among the youngest group of students (1st year).

#### *Aggressor/s' characteristics as described by their victims*

Students were asked about the school year and gender of their bullies. Confirming results of other studies, mostly classmates were identified as the authors of each type of aggression. Aggressors are mainly boys acting either alone or in groups. This goes for each type of aggression with one exception. Girls are more identified as aggressors with respect to gossiping/spreading rumours.

**TABLE 2.** Who does the victimization? Percentages for each type of bullying behavior (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2007).

	<i>A boy</i>	<i>Some boys</i>	<i>A girl</i>	<i>Some girls</i>	<i>Boys and girls</i>	<i>Everybody</i>
Ignore me	14.2	32.5	7.6	17	26.6	2.1
Not let me participate	18.7	42.6	6.4	11.1	19.1	2.1
Insult me	27.8	41.9	5.5	8.1	15.5	1.2
Call me offending names	27.1	47.1	4	4.2	15.2	2.3
Spread negative rumors about me	13.4	20.3	14.3	27.1	23.9	1
Hide my belongings	34.8	39.1	6.1	6.6	12.7	.7
Damage my belongings	33.3	48	3.9	2	11.8	1
Steal my belongings	35.1	31	10.7	3.6	17.3	2.4
Hit me	40.4	43.3	5.8	2.9	5.8	1.9
Threaten me just to scare me	36.7	32.8	13	8.5	7.9	1.1
Force me to do things I don't want by ways of threats	31.6	42.1	15.8	5.3	5.3	0
Threaten me with weapons	50	31.3	6.3	0	6.3	6.3
Harass me sexually	24	48	4	24	0	0

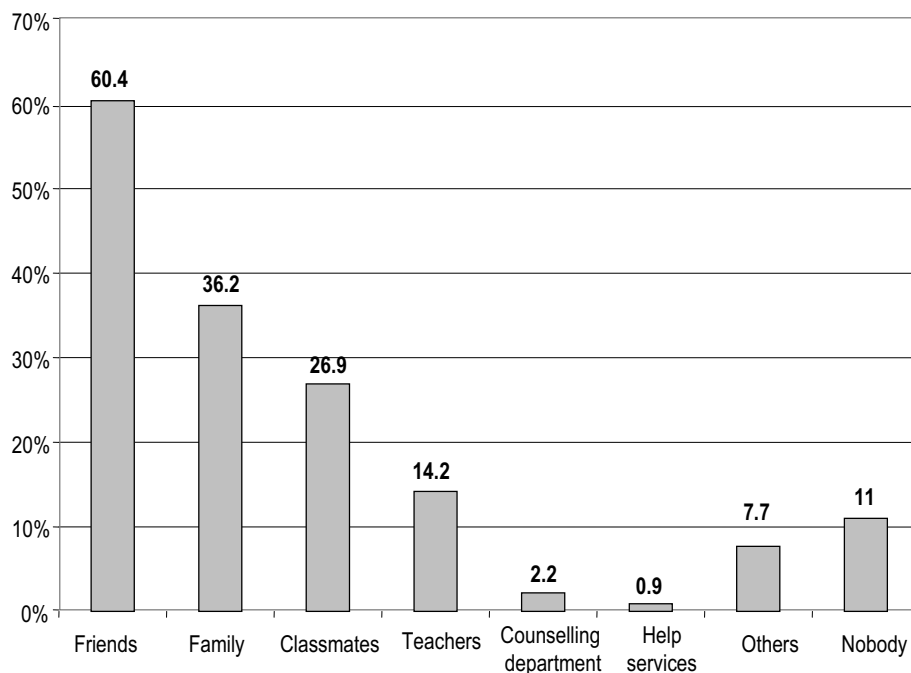
\* Cells in grey show statistically significant differences ( $p < .001$ ).

Asked explicitly about the existence of gangs in schools, more than half of students say schoolmates' gangs act aggressively against individual students, sometimes (43.1%) or often (11.2%). Lower percentages of students (41.2%) say that schoolmates' gangs act against groups of pupils. To a lesser extent gangs acting against gangs are seen: 28% of students have observed this, 5.2% frequently. Nearly half say that these gangs are from outside the school.

#### *Responding to the bullying*

As can be seen in Figure 4, victims mainly tell friends what is going on (60.4%), followed by family (36.2%), and classmates (26.9%). Teachers are told to a much lesser extent (14.2%), and only 2.2% tell the counselling service. More than one tenth of students considering themselves as victims, tell nobody.

**FIGURE 4.** Who does the victim tell to about being bullied  
(Defensor del Pueblo – UNICEF, 2007).



Do others intervene to help? Victims most commonly mention their friends (68.5%). Much lower are other students (18.9%), teachers (15.3%); and family (13%). No one intervenes, according to almost 13% of victims.

The information obtained from the aggressors about the reaction of their peers points to the passivity of other students, as mentioned by 68% of aggressors. More than a quarter says that other students “support or help them”. Only 5.5% of aggressors admit that other peers reject their actions.

Correspondingly, almost half of the students, when asked about their reaction to observing peer maltreatment in school, say that they stop what is going on if the victim is a friend; 30.8% do so even when the victim is not a friend and 12.5% report to an adult; 5.5% consider themselves as passive bystanders; and 14.1% do nothing but admit that they should do something.

Students were also asked about teachers’ response to bullying episodes. Some type of teachers’ intervention to stop the bullying was the most usual answer (31.3%), followed by punishing the aggressors (29.8%), and not knowing what the teachers do (23%), and that they do nothing because they are not aware of the problem (19.8%) or do nothing despite their knowledge of the problem (6.6%).



No differences concerning the aggressors' characteristics or victimization circumstances between 1999 and 2006 were found, except that a higher percentage of students never observed gang to gang aggression in 2006 (67.1% in 1999; 72.3% in 2006), together with a lower percentage of those who observe this many times (7.8% in 1999; 5.2% in 2006).

### Discussion

One of the recommendations in the first Spanish Ombudsman's Report on School Violence in secondary schools had been the replication of the nation-wide survey of the incidence of peer bullying as a means to determine the phenomenon's evolution in Spain. In the present article the results from this new survey are shown and a comparison with results from the previous one. The most important finding of the resulting longitudinal study is the evidence of a decrease in incidence of several forms of bullying in secondary schools all over Spain along the last seven years. A second conclusion is that there is still an unacceptable amount of students experiencing such victimization by their peers.

The data provided by the six thousand students participating in the study, point to the existence of all types of peer abuse-of-power in Spanish schools, with a different level of incidence between the various types. According to the information given by the students who considered themselves victims of different forms of peer maltreatment, in 1999 and 2006, there is a decrease of students declaring to be verbally bullied (by means of insults and offending/humiliating names), to be ignored, to have his/her belongings hidden, to be intimidated by means of threats and sexually harassed. These results do not allow concluding that there is a general decrease of all types of verbal bullying or social exclusion as no changes are observed from 1999 to 2006 in the number of students who are the target of rumours nor in the amount of pupils who are denied participation by their peers. Neither for direct physical aggression, indirect physical bullying via personal belongings *i.e.* stealing and damaging, and the most severe forms of threats (blackmail and using weapons to threaten) changes have been found.

At the same time, the percentages of those identifying themselves as aggressors of certain types of bullying is also lower in 2006 than in 1999. This goes for example for both types of social exclusion (ignoring and not letting participate). Following the trend found for victims, in 2006 there are also less students who are authors of the two types of direct verbal bullying, *i.e.* insulting and calling names, and of threatening to intimidate. Moreover, a decrease of number of students hitting their peers has also been found. But again, no change in incidence of rumour spreading was identified, being this the most common way of victimizing other students in 2006. This latter result, together with a similar finding for the victims, points at the stability of this indirect style of hurting others. Correspondingly, the data from the students as observers complement what has been pointed at: the steadiness of spreading rumours, and the decrease of the other two types of verbal bullying. In any case, from 1999 to 2006 secondary school students observed more often two types of indirect bullying: ignoring and stealing others' belongings. However, this latter less frequent type of bullying had not been

pointed at as being different from the 1999 data from the victims' and aggressors' viewpoint. And the incidence of ignoring, a more frequent type of bullying (especially in 1999), had decreased in 2006 according to both victims and aggressors. This seemingly contradicting result can be interpreted as a more recent acknowledgment of this behaviour as a type of bullying. The indirect nature of the two types could support the idea that being more invisible they were in the past years more hardly recognized as bullying than more prototypical forms (Del Barrio, Gutiérrez, Barrios, van der Meulen, and Granizo, 2005),

The fact that in many schools cellular telephones are forbidden could partially explain the relatively small percentage of victims or aggressors mentioning internet or cellular phones as a tool for school bullying. Moreover, the expensive nature of both communication tools in Spain probably contributes to its not generalized use among secondary school students. A further analysis looking for differences between school grades or state/public-funded schools could throw light on this subject.

As mentioned above, the variables of school grade and school funding type, are relevant, jointly with gender for the differences found in the incidence of bullying. Among private schools, a higher frequency of gossiping/spreading rumours and social exclusion has been observed, pointing at relational bullying as the main way of hurting peers within this setting. The gender-linked nature of bullying established in the literature is confirmed in both -1999 and 2006- samples especially when considering authorship of bullying for what more boys are found in a majority of behaviours. Again the exception is spreading rumours for what more girls are found as victims, authors and observers.

The differences in the percentages of victims and aggressors by school year point to the existence of a more direct bullying at the beginning of adolescence, *i.e.* the first and the second year of secondary school compared to the fourth year, and an increase of indirect forms of bullying (ignoring, spreading rumours) among those aged 16-17 years old, *i.e.* in their fourth year of secondary school. The lower percentages of observers found in first year could point to a lower ability to detect or acknowledge the phenomenon among the youngest students.

A relevant finding deals with the immigrant students. What does it mean that the only differences found deal with their higher percentages as victims of two particular and very different types of bullying such as being ignored and being threatened with arms? The latter type, being simultaneously a very violent type of behavior and the least frequent among the whole sample, points to an overt rejection of immigrant peers. The twofold percentage of them being ignored (a behavior that on the whole has decreased from 1999 but is still frequent) point to the lack of contact with peers experienced by many immigrant students. This exclusion prevents from experiencing any other form of bullying. This peculiarity of the victimization experienced by a specific group of students was also found in a Chilean multicultural school with Mapuche students, more likely ignored or insulted than their non-Mapuche peers, although it would need some confirmation with a wider sample (Alonqueo and Del Barrio, 2003).

The mass-media opinions about an increase of gangs activity is neither supported by the data from 1999 to 2006: a decrease is obtained although this activity of gangs seems real from the data, especially in the form of students' gangs bullying their mates.

The aftermath of bullying episodes is not very different from 1999 to 2006. Concerning the ways in which victims cope with bullying, friends continue as the best target for sharing what is going on, followed by family. The number of students telling nobody or declaring that no one intervenes, jointly with the number of aggressors declaring to be supported by peers or admitting to do nothing when they observe these episodes is a challenge for educational intervention in the classroom. Given that, very often, victims have few friends if any, or feel insecure in front of their schoolmates there is a need of a change in the class group dynamics for supporting individuation (Blasi and Glodis, 1995) among students who do not agree with what is going on, *i.e.* a change in the moral climate of the classroom.

A methodological conclusion of the whole study concerns the efficiency of both the instrument and the procedure that was followed, which gave precise information on the incidence and nature of peer abuse of power in schools. As Smith *et al.* (2002) underline, to ask for each specific type of behaviour and not for a general term (victimization, maltreated, bullied, or other) as a basis to estimate victimization incidence prevents possible idiosyncratic interpretations of the global term. That is, if a pupil is asked whether she/he is maltreated she/he could deny just because her/his idea of maltreatment (bullying) is limited to other aggressions than those experienced by him/herself. The use of specific behaviours when finding out what is being suffered, done or observed, allows us to go beyond this interpretation. And subsequent analysis can establish which behaviours are suffered by the same participants (Gutiérrez, Barrios, de Dios, Montero, and Del Barrio, 2008). On the other hand, this procedure showed difficulties for the purpose of comparison with the incidence found in other studies, in which general terms have been used. In these studies, only when a general question (posed in terms of the participant identifying her/himself as a victim or not) is answered affirmatively, is the participant asked afterwards about having experienced victimization in a variety of bullying behaviours. However, the particular categories used are often at a basic level, *e.g.* verbal aggression (which includes insulting, name calling, rumours spreading); or being target of attacks to one's belongings (being robbed, having one's belongings hidden, having one's belongings damaged). It is possible that the higher frequency of threats than of physical aggression in Spain is due to the fact that the questionnaire distinguishes between three types of threat (threatening to cause fear, threatening as a means for obliging someone to do unwanted things, and threats using weapons). In fact, the highest frequency refers to threatening to cause fear; the last two types (which are considered much more serious) show lower percentages. In other studies students found all these behaviours in one block under the same heading of threats leaving the student to decide whether different actions could be considered as such. As it is hard for an adolescent to accept him/herself being a victim of others in the group probably a minimizing answer is usual, explaining why the percentage of this behaviour as a whole in those studies dropped below the percentage of physical aggression.

These data can not explain the causes of the improvement that has been identified. Nevertheless, the information obtained by the teachers could contribute to put forward some hypothesis (Defensor del Pueblo-UNICEF, 2007). Teachers' answers show the

implementation of different procedures in schools along this time period, among others conflict-solving units, peer mediation and other more preventive programmes, which surely have contributed to coping better with bullying. This is also consistent with the reported view of 2006 students, who are more (though not in a statistically significant degree) confident in reporting to their teachers what is going on, compared to students in 1999. The high frequency of teacher-training courses, parents' schools, together with the many scientific meetings and research or intervention networks, and the increase of attention from the mass-media, illustrate this perceived higher consciousness of the problem in various educational and research contexts.

This improved situation does not mean the bullying problem is over in Spanish secondary schools. Even with only a single student bullied, the problem would still exist. Moreover, some other results contribute to a negative portrait of the interpersonal relations in schools. Among others, two kinds of relational bullying stay unchanged from 1999 to 2006, *i.e.*, rumour spreading (still one of the most frequent modes of hurting others), and overt type of exclusion. These data point to the fact that social-moral development of adolescents needs to be addressed as an educational aim in schools in order to improve the quality of relationships. Moreover, the higher percentages of immigrant students as victims of particular ways of victimization, and the increasing number of this potentially vulnerable population every year in Spanish schools, confirm the need of continuing efforts. First, it is still necessary to discover more of the nature of this phenomenon, *e.g.* using different methods to approach the various aspects of the phenomenon, and looking for the modes in which it takes place depending on the particular characteristics of participants linked to a potentially higher vulnerability. Some previous findings point in this direction (Eguren, Gutiérrez, Herrero, and López, 2007; Granizo, Naylor, and Del Barrio, 2006; Hugh-Jones and Smith, 1999; van der Meulen, Gutiérrez, Del Barrio, Hernández, and Eguren, 2006). Second, the design and evaluation of preventive programmes are needed once a school has decided to admit the phenomenon and confront it (Martín, Fernández, Andrés, Del Barrio, and Echeita, 2003; Smith, 2003; Smith, Pepler and Rigby, 2004; Sullivan, Cleary, and Sullivan, 2004). Third, there is a need to carry out new studies on parents and teachers' representation of bullying as a basis for developing actions addressed to them in order to counteract misinterpretations or myths about school bullying (Gázquez, Cangas, Pérez-Fuentes, Padilla, and Cano, 2007). The results obtained in the present study point to the possibility of coping with the phenomenon of bullying and social exclusion with successful expectancies.

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