

Group aggressions have increased by 65% among schoolchildren during the pandemic and cyberbullying is on the rise.

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While the pandemic brought an unprecedented halt to school activity for millions of children, the return to school attendance and the lifting of restrictions means that many pupils are once again facing one of their worst nightmares: bullying.

That happens although this type of 'bullying' fell during the pandemic because of the state of alarm, tele-education and greater control of teachers for health issues - has gone from 50.1% of cases of bullying in 2016 to 15.2% this year - group aggressions have grown, with an incipient increase in bullying by social networks.

These are the conclusions drawn by the annual report on school bullying of ANAR Foundation and Mutua Madrileña Foundation, presented this Wednesday, and in which 18,510 students and almost 500 teachers have participated. The data, in this sense, are devastating: students admit that group aggressions have increased, going from 43.7% in 2018-19 to 72.4% in 2020-21, an increase of 65%.

Cyberbullying, the most frequent form of bullying

The report notes that the overall reduction in bullying is a positive development, especially given the awareness campaigns of recent years. However, the exceptionality of the pandemic may have influenced the statistics, also considering that bullying has undergone a metamorphosis. Much of the violence has moved from fists to mobiles.

According to data from both foundations, cyberbullying is the form of bullying that has been most present since the pandemic began, as a quarter of students say they know classmates who could have suffered it.

In addition, the social networks in which these abuses take place have also changed. While WhatsApp is still the dominant tool (with 53.9% of cases), Instagram (44.4%), TikTok (38.5%) and even some online video games (37.7%) should also be counted.

The report also breaks down the types of aggression suffered by bullied students, increasing insults, name-calling and teasing (86.3% of cases), spreading rumors (46.9%), and pushing and shoving (45.3%). Along with that, among the main reasons for this bullying are physical appearance (52.5%), being different (46.4%) or the things they say or do (39.1%).

More cases are reported because there is more awareness

One of the main points around which the research revolves is that these facts would not necessarily represent only an increase in violence, but that students, through information campaigns in schools, are now more aware of bullying. Hence, they show up more in the statistics.

In this sense, the report reflects that 21.8% of the students surveyed acknowledged having been able to participate in a case of bullying without being aware of it, although 96.4% said they would not do so if they realized it. In any case, 88.1% admitted that the union of classmates in a bullying situation makes the affected person feel better.

Thus, the study highlights that students are more aware of the damage that bullying causes, both to victims and their families, to observers, teachers, the whole class, and even the aggressor himself. However, there is still work to be done, students understand, because their answers highlight that only 52.2% of the cases were resolved, and they consider that it was largely at the initiative of the school.

More than half would ban mobile phones in class to prevent bullying

Along with these data, an important point revolves around prevention. And in view of the role played by social networks in school violence, most students have given the go-ahead for schools to be tougher on the use of mobile phones in the classroom.

52.4% of those surveyed would prohibit mobile phones in schools, because this practice would prevent cyberbullying (through teasing, dissemination of images and videos), avoid distractions and improve attention in class. Among those who disagree, they state that it is necessary for emergency calls and that it should be allowed at recess or as a school tool.

Even so, for students, the most effective way to resolve bullying is to tell the teacher. As for teachers, more than half (51%) recognize the lack of resources and training among teaching staff as a barrier to intervening in bullying situations.

In this way, teachers conclude that it makes more sense to work with students on respect for differences and dialogue than punitive actions, such as expulsion from school, and suggest parents to educate in values and pay attention to their children as measures to prevent bullying.

