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Bullying in Perú
A Code of Silence?

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Abstract

School violence in Perú consists of acts of confrontation that occur between students, and has been found to have three primary characteristics: (a) it is physical and psychological; (b) it is mostly perpetrated by males; and (c) it is typically committed by adolescent ages 11 to 16 years, not younger children. These three criteria in combination with prevailing Peruvian views of school violence have neglected the identification of hidden forms of school violence such as bullying. Given these conditions, bullying research in Perú is limited. Generally, antibullying prevention and intervention initiatives come from personal initiatives or private institutions without public sector participation. In addition, antibullying programs are located mostly in urban area of Lima. Among the works considered in this chapter are those of the Observatorio sobre la Violencia y Convivencia en la Escuela (OVCE) [Observatory on Violence and Coexistence in Schools] and other formal initiatives in Perú. It has been found that psychological bullying is more frequent than physical bullying in Peruvian schools and that harassment is present in all schools, without exception. Teachers were found to have an attitude of inaction on the issue of bullying, because they consider it normal behavior among students. Among the few interventions being used with bully victims is peer mediation. Thus far, a few private schools have implemented a comprehensive intervention protocol against bullying. It is concluded that the violence in the Peruvian schools is still unacknowledged and is affected by a code of silence.
Overview of the Peruvian Social Context

Cultural Diversity

In Perú there are different ethnic groups that mainly reside in regions outside the capital city and they comprise 17% of the Peruvian population (Mejía & Moncada, 2000). The migration of these rural people to the capital of Perú (Lima) has declined in recent years because of the promotion of decentralized social and economic development in the regions (Manrique, 2004). In rural Andean regions, the magnitude of poverty and inequality is much higher compared with the coastal region (Manrique, 2004), and the government has failed to effectively reduce the social justice needs sustainably. Due to recent economic growth and the increased availability of educational and social service resources in Lima, attention being given to bullying is more likely because of media influence. In this context, information on bullying research is beginning to emerge in Lima. Recently, empirical investigations of bullying in Lima have been published (Landázuri, 2007, Oliveros & Barrientos, 2007; Quintana, Montgomery, & Malaver, 2009). In addition, some data show its prevalence in regions outside Lima (Amemiya, Oliveros, & Barrientos, 2009; Oliveros et al., 2008). It is possible that the bullying prevalence reported in studies of European and American schools is not comparable to the prevalence of bullying in rural areas outside Lima. However, this is an issue not yet widely discussed between researchers and professional psychologists in Perú. Hence, this chapter summarizes initial investigations of the prevalence of bullying in Peruvian communities and factors that influence its occurrence.

Special Conditions in Perú

Since 1995, Perú has experienced the consequences of subversive violence. It has been hypothesized that this political subversive violence has an impact on bullying in school life (Centro de Desarrollo y Asesoría Psicosocial [CEDAPP], 1995), but research has not directly linked to these two phenomena, with the exception of one analysis (Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2009).

Bullying in the Peruvian News

In Perú, the impact of bullying is occasionally reported in the media (e.g., Noriega, 2010). There are also brief international references on the status of bullying in Perú (e.g., in Bolivia; El Diario, 2009), emphasizing information on the prevalence and superficial intervention suggestions. Furthermore, the need to understand how bullying occurs, the characteristics of its participants, and recommendations on how to prevent bullying, has recently attracted the interest of the Peruvian media (El Comercio, 2010). This interest in bullying has risen since the report of homicides and suicides related to bullying (Observatory on Violence and Coexistence in School and the Association Living in Peace, 2010).

Peruvian Bullying Research

Peruvian bullying studies have contributed to international Hispanic research (e.g., García, Paredes, Arenas, & Quintana, 2010), in national research meetings (Carozzo, 2008, 2009, 2010a; Landázuri, 2007, 2008), and in intramural events (e.g., Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2009). Publications about bullying have appeared in medical Peruvian journals (Amemiya et al., 2009; Oliveros & Barrientos, 2007; Oliveros et al., 2008) and in psychology journals.
The primary foci of these presentations and empirical papers were, first, to report the prevalence and correlates of bullying in Lima and in other regions of the country, and to propose criteria for identifying the severity of bullying in a screening assessment in the context of a medical evaluation (e.g., Amemiya et al., 2009). These efforts provided preliminary descriptive and diagnostic information of bullying in Peru, not just centralized in Lima. Second, another contribution of this research has been to convey to the academic and nonacademic community the existence of bullying as a pattern of behavior that deserves serious academic and professional attention because it occurs frequently, and ignoring acts of bullying can lead to an increased frequency of bullying (Oliver & Barrientos, 2007, Oliveros et al., 2008).

Since 2005, professional and academic attention to bullying in Peru has increased, which provides the first quantitative data that can be (a) integrated in international comparative studies and (b) examined for correlates between bullying and other contextual and individual differences. However, the findings of these investigations require replication for generalization, concrete reports of quantitative results, and sensitivity to within-country cultural contexts that influence the strategies used by students to avoid or cope with bullying. Something that stands out in several Peruvian investigations is the term “law of silence” or “code of silence,” which explains the results of prevalence studies in Lima and other Peruvian regions (Oliver & Barrientos, 2007; Oliveros et al., 2008). This code of silence is a way to hide or discount the acts seen or experienced by direct or indirect actors of bullying, and in this situation it involves all school participants, involved students, teachers, and principals.

This law of silence appears when survey participants show reluctance to disclose the true prevalence of bullying and its impacts on victims and bystanders (Landázuri, 2007). Finally, two influences on bullying could be the effects of the Peruvian government’s war against terrorism, especially in families that migrated to Lima, and the effects of natural disasters on the violent behavior of children and adolescents; but it is clear this is a consequence of possible responses of post-traumatic stress.

In general, bullying research conducted to date in Peru has the following characteristics: (a) descriptive and epidemiological, and most of the studies were conducted in Lima; (b) poor conceptualization of the theoretical frameworks needed to generate explanatory hypotheses; (c) methodological approaches frequently use univariate instead of multivariate analyses; (d) construction and adaptation of instruments is questionable and not supported by appropriate practices from measurement theory; (e) no clear difference between frequent and sporadic bullying; and (f) moderating variables are not included in the design of these investigations.

**Intervention Against Bullying**

An evaluation of antibullying intervention efforts in Peru suggest that they are not completely supported by school personnel, even when their schools experience and report harassment. In Peru, bullying has not attracted public concern of teachers, principals, and other school staff, and this lack of concern inhibits the implementation of systematic intervention. This perception that ignores bullying in schools is reflected in the position of the Ministry of Education, which expressed in recent statements by the deputy minister that there are no specific antibullying strategies or programs being implemented in Peru (Noriega, 2010).

A recent approach to the understanding of bullying in Peru has emerged within a broader program to provide comprehensive care to victims of political violence. This approach was prepared by a public university (Oliveros et al., 2008; Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos, 2009) and by a team of doctors and psychologists to research and intervene in communities outside of
Lima, which were affected by political terrorism. With the epidemiological data obtained in the studies, the team tried to link the occurrence of acts of bullying to the effects of terrorism, but they did not show direct evidence of this, and relevant covariate variables were not controlled (e.g., previous parenting practices, communication skills). Although the effects of subversive political violence on children have been confirmed (Rojas & Brondi, 1987), its connection to bullying is unclear. In addition, there were no reports on the specific strategies and outcomes of the psychological interventions attempted.

In summary, we conclude that, in Perú, intervention efforts in schools do not have government support to develop regulations, documents, or policies against bullying. Fieldwork experiences lead us to conclude that it is unlikely that schools have institutional plans on general intervention and prevention of bullying security practices. The bullying interventions being attempted are occasional individual school efforts, focused on solving immediate problems without a long-term plan that integrates all school staff. On the other hand, the apparent priority among bullying prevention professionals in Perú is to have publicly available school prevention plans that address male bullying (Landázuri, 2007; OVCE, 2010).

**Importance of the Bullying Problem**

We propose some essential criteria to characterize the importance of bullying in Perú. These criteria are discussed in the following section.

**Varied Expressions of Bullying**

It is fair to say that the occurrence of bullying is higher in urban areas and less in rural areas outside Lima, although there are no comparative studies in this regard. This observation emerges from reports made at psychology conferences and national academic forums held in 2008, 2009, and 2010. Sources for these observations come from public schools mainly in the cities of Huacho, Chimbote, Lima, and Trujillo (cities in the coastal region of Perú). As in other countries, it is reported that insults and name calling are the most common form of aggression (Benites & Carozzo, 2003). Another tendency is cyberbullying. Although specific research as yet to done on cyberbullying in Perú, it seems to be an increasing practice among high school students with less frequency among students ages 11 to 13 years. However, there is no reliable information about the prevalence of this new problem in Lima, and there are only a few reports on this issue (e.g., Carozzo, 2010c).

In addition, a recent report from public schools outside of Lima identified a bully who collected money from students just to let them enter the school toilet. This is an indication that a wide range of bullying behaviors are emerging in a context that has yet to develop preventive interventions in Peruvian schools.

**Bullying Participation in Perú**

The actors directly involved in bullying and witnesses are between 47% and 67% of the school population in elementary and high school, respectively (Amemiya et al., 2009; Oliveros & Barrientos, 2007; Oliveros et al., 2008), without establishing a distinction between offenders, victims, and witnesses. Some authors (Garcia, 2008) state that between 7% and 10% of students are bullies or victims, while others found a lower frequency rate in high school students (La Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo y Vida sin Drogas [DEVIDA], 2007). In relation to gender, due to the nature and limitations of these studies, it has been only superficially examined, and the information is unclear.
Common Experience with Bullying

Many students have participated as actors or witnesses in bullying; therefore, it seems that bullying is a part of the common experience in most educational institutions in Perú. This observation suggests that bullying could be perceived as “natural” behavior at school and related to the impulsiveness of teenagers. Such an erroneous belief may explain how this problem is falls under the code of silence, which is characteristic of schools in Perú.

Generalized Impact of Bullying

School life is negatively affected by the presence and intensity of bullying at least in two aspects. First, at the individual level the experience of bullying in its various forms impacts the quality of student’s life, and adversely alters learning and interpersonal and social relations (Cava, Musitu, & Murgui, 2007; Observatory on Violence and Coexistence in School, and the Association Living in Peace, 2010). Second, at the institutional level bullying (a) makes school an unsafe place that does not provide welfare to its members, (b) facilitates the insensitivity of teachers and assistants to violence, and (c) creates a culture of tolerance and passive participation (Monks et al., 2009). Moreover, it is known that there are long-term effects of bullying on the offender (Cava, Burlga, Musitu, & Murgui, 2010; OVCE, 2010), which means that offenders are prone to develop antisocial behaviors and to initiate early use of alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Victims of bullying are at increased risk to experience academic difficulties, unhappiness, school dropout, and suicide. The authors of this chapter also conducted extensive interviews with students who were bullied—who suffered severe and frequent acts of bullying, such as insults, beatings, forced request of objects and/or money, and threats of physical harm. In many of these cases, they report symptoms of anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts; they also show an intense desire to drop out of school. Currently, there are no published reports on the psychological impacts of bullying in Perú, but only a report published about its association with self-esteem (Landázuri, 2007). In this report, social and academic self-esteem (as measured with the Self-Esteem Inventory of Coopersmith, 1967) explains a significant amount of variance of the victim and bully roles among high school students.

Manifestation and Extreme Consequences of Bullying

The effects of bullying on social health and quality of life of victims, and the violence path of the bully perpetrator, are factors that could increase violence in institutional and cultural environments in which effective supports for students are not provided. Under these conditions, poor school climate would be a risk factor. Without making visible the problem of bullying, and breaking the code of silence, we could expect more severe levels of damage because of this situation.

Conceptual Basis for Prevention of Bullying in Perú

The Peruvian school curriculum emphasizes learning academic skills and promotes the knowledge of interpersonal values for the development of student wellbeing. However, it does not prioritize interpersonal relationship skills and good practices for civility and coexistence. Teachers are trained in university instruction with a wide didactic repertoire for teaching academic content, but not to teach content on good interpersonal relations that impact students’ behavior. Therefore, changing the educational curriculum from kindergarten to high school level is essential to convey the knowledge and skills needed for positive living. It must be strongly associated with teacher training and supported by research.
The framework of using interpersonal relationships in school as a way to prevent, reduce, and minimize the effects of bullying allows considering prevention in a comprehensive, integrated schoolwide manner. However, individual differences provide a unique variance that cannot be ignored. This means that communication skills, management of anger expression, and stable attributes of personality and temperament may also be moderating factors in the strategies to promote positive interactions among students.

Communication and emotional expression are the main supports of the interpersonal relationships involved with school life. There are also beliefs and ideas in the school that can give rationality and justification for many events that occur in it. One of these situations seems to help define what happens with the invisibility of bullying, due to a common perception that it is natural and normal and which may partially explain the tolerance of the victim and witnesses (bystanders) that is observed in Perú. In analogy to Sartre (1943/1947), the school, parents, teachers, and even students themselves, repeat “hell is other people” (el infierno son los otros); i.e., it means that schools do not have any responsibility for the presence of bullying in the institution, and its causes are mainly the lack of control of parents, internal and subtle traits of the student, and family characteristics of moral and ethical behavior. It also reflects a common Peruvian cultural sentiment that one is either an aggressor or a victim, and that given the two options, it is better to be an aggressor. It is not enough to increase the awareness of bullying among school staff, it must be complemented by an awareness and education about the rights of individuals and how they should be protected and defended. An integrated bully intervention program that involves the entire school system is not frequently implemented in Perú. However, the limited intervention that does occur usually involves the administration of disciplinary measures, including harsh penalties such as expulsion from school.

We consider that the contributions of Bandura (1982) and his theory of social learning, attribution processes (Myers, 2000), psychological reactance (Brehm & Brehm, 1981), and locus of control (Rotter, 1966) as providing a meaningful framework for moving forward with antibullying programs in Perú. We propose that providing bully prevention training to popular students can have clear effects on the behavior of positive interactions among all students on campus. These popular students could receive training in conflict resolution, assertive and effective communication, positive expression of anger and hostility, and constructive strategies for coping with stress. It is expected that this group could learn vicariously to recognize patterns of bullying, identifying bullies, and discussed the protection needs of the school with the school staff.

Description of Specific Antibullying Approaches in Perú

Making Bullying Visible

It is necessary to develop a strong campaign on sensitization and education of bullying in schools and communities, because the problem of bullying is still largely invisible in Perú (Carozzo, 2008, 2009). Currently, one initiative aims to mobilize public opinion, media, and school staff via the publication of a Pronouncement on Bullying and the participation of important academic, political and educational institutions, and Peruvian professionals. The pronouncement is a statement about the problem of bullying, which emphasizes the need for an active and explicit plan to address the conditions that facilitate and maintain bullying in schools. The Pronouncement was written by the Observatory on Violence and Coexistence in School, and the Association Living in Peace (2010), both are Peruvian institutions.
**Thematic Training and Preprofessional Education**

There are university subjects that could integrate the issue of bullying as content to create intervention practices in the community, develop exploratory studies to adaptation of assessment in bullying research tests, or prepare monographs and reviews on the issue of bullying in Perú. These proposals would facilitate collaboration between university and community, create opportunities for applied research, and develop interventions using scientific methodology to measuring of effectiveness. Finally, adaptation and/or construction of psychometrically sound psychological instruments sensitive to change in the Peruvian context could be emphasized during university training.

**Programs of Professional Training and Research Methodology**

In Perú, there is an effort to develop a second degree specializing in antibullying interventions, organized by the OVCE. This is an initiative that aims to empower the capacity of school psychologists, teachers, and other school staff to create effective interventions. Information relevant to this training program can be found at the OVCE website (http://www.observatorioperu.com).

**Altruism and Prosocial Behavior Promotion in School Curricula**

The existence of a greater number of spectators present when school violence occurs must be considered in prevention interventions used in Perú (Carozzo, 2010b). Knowledge about bullying may be increased and the frequency of its occurrence may be reduced via content-against-bullying arts activities (Haner, Pepler, Cummings, & Rubin-Vaughan, 2010). This means the curriculum should include assertive behavior skills, effective solving of social problems, empathic response, and educational organization consistent with prevention plans (Finnessy, 2009).

**Relevant Research and Evidence of Effectiveness**

Until the introduction of the *Pronouncement on Bullying* document (OVCE, and the Association Living in Peace, 2010), there were no reports of the effectiveness of interventions against bullying in Peruvian schools, in scientific or professional journals. Currently, interventions are mainly individual efforts or poor sustainability initiatives by specific school system or by isolated school guidance departments. In addition, there is no evidence of the degree of involvement of school psychologists in the organization, implementation, or evaluation of these interventions.

Within this emerging research, the formal intervention against bullying, Peruvian psychologists’ participation in these two activities (research and intervention) occur unsystematically, without coordination between them and lack of organized actions based on common strategic principles. Also, this growing interest is being expressed to seek more information about the origin and characteristics of the bullying and for effective interventions that produce verifiable results that are consistent over time. Although more insight is needed to recognize research-based practices, educators and teachers are demanding more proactive school psychologists. Meanwhile, school psychologists are involved with individual efforts and seek information on the workshops held for the national association of Peruvian psychologist (Colegio de Psicólogos del Perú). To date, no known published documents describe in sufficient detail the strategies school psychologists, their effectiveness and sustainability of interventions.

Since its establishment in 2008, the OVCE has consistently promoted and demanded action against bullying. This nonprofit association aims to study, research, advice, and guide antibullying
efforts in Perú. It is an agency for (a) receipt of conflicts and complaints about bullying; (b) supervision of research and thesis; (c) organization and implementation of training for educational, professional, and academic institutions; and (d) consulting, prevention, and intervention programs of bullying. The OVCE is planning to implement a National Survey on Bullying in 2011.

An Ongoing Experience of Intervention

In this section, we describe a bullying prevention intervention implemented at a private school in Lima. This intervention strategy provides a model to evaluate current efforts underway in Perú to implement systematic and synergic bullying prevention programs.

1. The program began in February (about the beginning of the annual school activities) with 40 hours of training of teachers and administrative management of the school.

2. In March, classes began, and we administered a survey to teachers and students to obtain their perceptions of school life. Altogether, the survey involved 40 teachers and 300 students of both genders from the last two grades of primary and two secondary grades. The administration of the survey was voluntary, approved for parents and school staff, and anonymous; the reaction of the student was involved and positive. The survey contains questions that directly asked about bullying behaviors, and perceptions of the school and teachers when they tried to cope. These questions were used to obtain information on prevalence of bullying.

3. The results of the survey found that 76% of students admitted that there were acts of harassment in school, 58% indicated that males were the main agents and victims of violence and violence receptors, 38% knew what bullying was, 52% reported that the use of nicknames and insults were the most common types of aggression, and 7% reported that they had been bullied. In addition, 3% admitted to being “leader” when it comes to harassing students; that is, verbal and physical intimidating, hitting, chasing, stealing, or spoiling personal school materials. Eight percent of students reported that they had been harassed and not helped by the tutors. On the other hand, 73% of students indicated that school officials call attention to the aggressor and the victim and do not establish differences between them. This discourages students’ efforts to denounce violence against them or other students. Forty-two percent reported that the institutional environment is not safe.

4. In April, we proceeded with new training and bullying awareness activities. At this school, we included students and parents, in separate sessions. The content of the training focused on strategies of coexistence, conflict resolution, social skills, self-esteem, social learning, cognitive processing of social events and violence, and tolerance.

5. The first two strategies were proposed intervention protocols to monitor the areas where bullying tends to occur (e.g., when students are in transition between classes), and to assist bystanders via a network of “surveillance,” and intervention in areas where bullying was known to occur. Because the most episodes of bullying occurred during the transition between classes (in this period, students are without supervision and monitoring of teachers), the team decided that teachers would stay in their classrooms until the next teacher arrived so that students are not left unattended. As a result, qualitative reports on incidents of harassment from teachers and students decreased. On the other hand, the intervention team made efforts to sensitize and educate the student population who were bystanders during the bullying. Awareness and education was based on the importance of solidarity and companionship, empathy, and zero tolerance of bullying. One consequence of this plan is that there was a greater positive involvement of bystanders in bullying situations. Although no written report is available, we note a decrease in bullying events in various places in school;
it is estimated that less than half the rate previously reported. This decrement was perceived for students and teachers. These two actions (monitoring and network) were considered successful and apparently helped to achieve better security for students and give them greater confidence in their social interaction.

The bullies were aided professionally without the use of aversive strategies, and their parents were involved in psychological counseling. Something similar was done with the victims and spectators. In all cases, parents were invited to report on progress of work with the school psychologist. Specifically, bullies and victims were attended in the department of psychology in the school, coordinating activities with their teachers and parents, to monitor progress toward goals. The main activity was a social skills program for life and resilience (self-esteem, empathy, autonomy, and creativity). Parents and teachers submitted reports related to changes in emotional behavior and affective (tolerance, conflict management and peaceful conflict resolution, ability to communicate in situations of tension and confrontation, attitudes of cooperation and assistance partner, and respect for differences).

Critiques and Limitations of Peruvian Efforts to Address Bullying

The main obstacle to the full implementation of bullying prevention strategies in Perú is that no government-led priorities have been established for research on bullying or for intervention plans. For example, there is no explicit plan for a national prevalence survey of bullying, except for the one developed by OVCE. This lack of proper preparation in methodology of research may be one of the fundamental barriers to developing research projects.

Because Perú is a multicultural country, this diversity in schools may contribute to the bullying of students across different ethnic groups. In the current status of reliable information and published reports, the frequency of bullying and its characteristics, processes, and cultural influences require additional research. In addition, thus far, the prevalence of cultural bullying in Perú is based on data of unknown reliability. This issue of cultural diversity as a basis for one type of bullying is largely unrecognized by school authorities. Successful bullying prevention and intervention in Perú will need to emphasize social inclusion issues. However, it is still difficult to make an effective intervention that involves an entire school system to promote the bullying prevention. This may indicate, perhaps, a reluctance to accept changes of a systemic nature within the school environment, which may manifest a reluctance to accept bullying as a problem that is serious. To this is added that in the annual plan of educational and administrative activities, school principals generally do not include activities of primary or secondary prevention, or an antibullying policy. This work plan is approved at the beginning of every year and can be a great opportunity to prepare members of the school community to give antibullying answers, and begin research on the correlates of bullying. On the other hand, usually, the teachers feel they are burdened by demands in return for poor compensation. There is also a belief among some educators that the way to combat bullying is to implement severe disciplinary measures and punitive actions at home and at school.

School psychologists need to be prepared to deal with bullying, but also how to address barriers to the implementation and sustainability of school system initiatives. The knowledge and strategies must be appropriate for changes in communication systems in the functional structure and intergroup cooperation. Although the Peruvian Ministry of Education has not taken a role in leading antibullying intervention, private institutions are providing training and consultation to schools and school psychologists. Moreover, the research in school psychology in Perú is still emerging in this area. However, the biggest challenge of Peruvian research psychologists is to publish their results, generate knowledge that impacts professional practice, and help to change
educational policies of peaceful coexistence. And, to the psychologists in professional practice, the greatest challenge is to be good consumers of research and to use their judgment to design interventions on research-based evidence.

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