1.1 Origins and developments of the phenomenon

Every day the media informs us of the increasingly urgent need to deal with a serious phenomenon among young people: bullying. The exponential growth of this phenomenon, especially in the school context, underlines the importance of tackling this problem, of studying it and understanding it so that bullying is prevented from becoming a real social scourge in the future.

International studies

The first research on the phenomenon of bullying at school developed in Norway and dates back to the early 1980s, when Olweus (1983) conducted a descriptive survey of the Norwegian school population, finding a high incidence and seriousness of the phenomenon in all age groups.

Starting with this first survey, over the years, all over the world, research has aimed at investigating both the frequency of the phenomenon of bullying and exploring the psychological or relational dynamics that are triggered between the subjects involved in bullying episodes. For example, in England research showed that incidences of bullying varied between different types of schools, with 19% of primary school, and 8% of lower secondary school pupils reporting bullying experiences (Whitney and Smith, 1993). However, other research in UK schools showed that, across four terms, anti-bullying interventions were associated with reductions in incidences of bullying in the schools, the levels of improvement being positively associated with the extent of engagement with the interventions among participants (Smith and Sharp, 1994).

Also, large research studies across many other countries, such as Australia, Belgium, Finland, Spain and the United States, show interventions implemented in schools have effects on levels of bullying. However, other variables have also been shown to be important in impacting bullying, such as the age of pupils. These include:

- **Age -** It has been shown that the incidence of bullying behaviors decreases as children get older. However, while incidences of bullying become less frequent, their rate of danger and severity increases (Smith et al., 2008).
- **Gender -** It has been shown that boys engage in a higher percentage of bullying incidents than girls. In contrast, girls use more forms of indirect bullying (Björkqvist, 1994).
- **Place -** School spaces have been shown to be preferential for bullying episodes
- **Stability of roles -** The roles of those involved in bullying tend to remain stable over time. Either as those who engage in bullying behaviour or those who are targets for bullying (Menesini, 2000).

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