1.1 Origins and developments of the phenomenon

Every day, the media alerts us to the increasingly urgent need to deal with a phenomenon that is rampant among young people: bullying. The exponential growth of this phenomenon, particularly in the school context, underlines the importance of addressing this issue, studying it and learning about it to prevent it from becoming a real social scourge in the future.

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

Starting from this first survey, over the years, research has multiplied all over the world to investigate both the frequency of the bullying phenomenon and to explore the psychological and relational dynamics that are triggered between those involved in the phenomenon itself. In England, for example, Whitney and Smith (1993) conducted a survey which showed that, although the incidence of the phenomenon varied between the different types of schools studied, in primary schools the percentage of victims was never less than 19% and that of victims in secondary schools was never less than 8%. Smith and Sharp (1994) worked in 23 schools in the United Kingdom for four quarters and observed that, following their intervention, the improvement of the problem was positively correlated with the extent of the participants' commitment. In many other countries, such as Australia, Belgium, Finland, Spain and the United States, large-scale interventions have been implemented, making it possible to arrive at a series of variables that seem to be present in all the realities studied and which, therefore, make it possible to identify certain cross-cultural specificities of the bullying phenomenon. It has been shown that the percentage of behaviour that can be categorised as bullying decreases as the age of the children involved increases, but this does not imply an improvement or regression of the phenomenon, only a change. Indeed, bullying incidents become less frequent but their dangerousness and severity rate increases (Smith et al., 2008). Furthermore, it has been shown that it is usually males, with a higher percentage than females, who take on the role of bullies, but conversely it is girls who make greater use of indirect forms of bullying (Björkqvist, 1994)- such as cruel words, refusals of requests to partner on projects or participate in groups.

Other typical elements, which have emerged from the various studies conducted in different parts of the world, concern the preferential places of manifestation of bullying phenomena, which turn out to be school spaces, but also the fact that the roles of bully and victim retain their stability over time (Menesini, 2000).

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