1.7.1 The causes of bullying

Individual, family and social contexts are risk factors that affect the behaviours of children and determine the aggressiveness of a CYP engaged in bullying behaviour.

On an individual level, these may relate to temperament, a predisposition towards violent games, an established diagnosis (or tendency) towards attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, limited problem-solving skills and abilities. In children who tend to be more 'impetuous' and have a 'strong temper' there is a greater likelihood of developing bullying behaviour in the future. Although this is not a certainty, on a statistical level, it has been proved that children who are more impetuous, tend over time to be more aggressive and have manifestations tending towards bullying behaviour: children who love 'contact games', who are perpetually ready to intervene in any situation, who tend not to be very shy. Those, on the other hand, who have a calmer temperament and are described as shy, risk-averse, the classic 'good boy' in a nutshell, will find it more difficult to develop such attitudes. These are obviously percentages: it is more or less probable, but not 'certain' or 'to be excluded'. The propensity towards games and manipulative attitudes also constitutes another predisposition factor to the development of bullying behaviour. Finally, the presence of limited problem-solving competence (that is the ability to find more effective and appropriate solutions in response to the actions performed by the others), can be regarded as a risk characteristic: the subject actually fails to relate adequately with others because he or she does not possess the tools to do so.

By analysing the diagnostic grouping of 'Attention deficit disorder and Disruptive Behaviour Disorder' in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders), it is easy to see how bullying can straddle the line between conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder.

Conduct Disorder is characterised by a repetitive and persistent pattern of behaviour in which the fundamental rights of others or the norms or rules of society are violated. This type of behaviour is present in various environments and may cause clinically significant impairment of social, school, or family functioning.

Children and adolescents may display an overbearing, threatening, or intimidating behaviour; can be physically cruel to people or animals; deliberately damage others' property, etc.

The affective sphere is compromised, in fact, when the subject carries out the violent action, he/she does not feel any remorse or empathy for his/her target but reacts with deep frustration and high reactivity to stimuli, going so far as to commit actual violence (DSM-5 American Psychiatric Association, 2014).

Oppositional Defiant Disorder, on the other hand, does not manifest itself through acts of direct aggression but rather through a negativistic, defiant, disobedient and hostile attitude towards authority figures, particularly adults. Hostility and provocation are expressed with persistent stubbornness, resistance to directives, and unwillingness to compromise, surrender or negotiate

with both adults and peers (DSM-5 American Psychiatric Association, 2014). This type of disorder is less severe than the previous one but can evolve into Conduct Disorder when it transforms from a natural behaviour for a certain developmental stage to abnormal and persistent oppositionality, which affects both social relationships and school performance (DSM-5 American Psychiatric Association, 2014). There are many theoretical models that have attempted to explain aggression and bullying and, in order to better understand the factors of distress or deviance, researchers have usually focused on two lines of research: on one hand, a strongly environmentalist approach that attributes the causal origin of 'deviant' behaviour to socio-familial factors; but on the other, we find the genetic-biological approach that reduces risk factors to the constituent components of the individual (Rutter, Giller, & Hagell, 1998). Research has emphasised that both social interaction theory and social control theory contain in a nutshell the main factors of deviance (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992). Both theories state that the child's personality is structured from the relationship with parents, who become facilitating agents of conventional values and consequently of the acquisition of control functions (ibid.). It is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1989) that clarifies the protective function that a healthy relationship with the caregiver can assume in the child's development, or, on the contrary, how much a conflictual relationship can lead to difficulties in the development process. Moreover, one should not forget the large body of literature that shows how bullying episodes, suffered, and perpetrated in childhood and adolescence are highly likely to lead to serious conduct disorders in late adolescence and adulthood (Menesini, 2000). Oliverio Ferraris (2008) summarizes the original causes of persecutory acts by stating that bullying is based on a family discomfort that leads the person to engage in harassing behaviour essentially for two different motivations: learning and revenge. In the first case, the person re-proposes in the classroom the model of violent behaviour learned from his/her family. In the second, he re-updates what he/she learnt as a target of aggression but reverses his/her own role. These theories are fundamental for understanding the phenomenon of bullying, but if considered individually they are not exhaustive. In fact, this type of aggressive behaviour leaves no room for unilinear causal models, as it appears as a multi-componential phenomenon resulting from the interaction of numerous distal and proximal factors, which explain not only the different types, but also the varied evolutionary trajectories and the multiple rates of stability or change over time (Fedeli, 2007). In this regard, an important variable that is often underestimated is the period of onset of bullying behaviouring, a fundamental index of the chronicity and/or transience of the phenomenon over time. The onset, starting as early as the first years of childhood of violent behaviour - not only directed at peers but also directed at adults - in association with a very impaired emotional modulation, presents a strong stability over time and cross-situationally that is more likely to lead to the chronicity of such behaviour and to forms of aggression of increasing severity (Fedeli, 2006). Aggressive actions, which arise in adolescence, on the contrary, take on a primarily relational value with the aim of making the individual assume an identity, role and position within the group and therefore their nature is purely situational and limited in time (Vitaro, Tremblay, & Bukowski, 2001), even if the particular phase of onset, already in itself characterised by disturbances and changes, has catch scholars’ attention on the criticalities that can be highlighted in the previous phases of development. Some American researchers (Loeber & Hay, 1997), for instance, have been concerned with tracing the age of onset of three different types of aggression, subdivided by levels of severity, arriving at the empirical finding that it is possible to trace an order of onset in relation to the greater or lesser severity of aggressive forms, but above all, they have verified that antisocial phenomena with the highest levels of severity occur precisely during the adolescent period, confirming not only the relational nature of such behaviour during the adolescent phase of

individuals' lives, but also the greater inability of adolescents themselves to manage their emotions and their predilection for behavioural modes of transition to the act.

In the family environment, particularly aggressive behaviour by parents or incorrect educational styles such as permissive, or overly authoritative, distracted, or authoritarian, can lead to bullying.

Parents who often have aggressive attitudes or frequently resort to violence provide the wrong role model. For this reason, children who live in hostile family environments are more likely to develop bullying behaviour later. Thus, families in which borderline or clearly delinquent attitudes are widespread are obviously higher risk environments. But also, a lack of attention to their children's habits, needs, passions and interests, and educational disinterest or disengagement with them, affect the development and behaviour of children: sometimes parents are totally unprepared for what happens to their children daily.

Also, the imposition of strict rules on their part, which are then not enforced, promises of punishments that are then not followed up, or even exaggerated reactions that alternate with attitudes of indifference, lead to an increase in misconduct on the part of the children, who, as a result, are not fully able to understand and comprehend the seriousness of their actions.

The group of friends, the school environment and the social environment are influencing factors on a social level.

Bullying is also, and above all, a group phenomenon characterised by a particular dynamic, in which not only the CYPs engaged in bullying and targets play a decisive role, but also all those who appear to be uninvolved or supporters of one or the other (Salmivalli, Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Kaukiainen, 1996). The group, in such situations, takes on the appearance of a monad (Anzieu, 1986), functioning as a self-sustaining unit in its members' need to endorse each other's anxieties through sharing. Adolescent grouping, specifically, tends to assume a self-referential task that concerns the group's well-being. Sharing becomes, therefore, the identifying and defining condition of the group, leaving the appearance of the threatening outside. Hence, in a constant interaction between the inside (to be safeguarded) and the outside (the enemy), the action becomes the expression of internal frustration that must be discharged, removed towards something other than oneself: the target (Ingrascì & Picozzi, 2002). As a collective phenomenon, it cannot be separated from the context in which it is acted out, namely the school (Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Berts, & King, 1982). In the early work of Olweus (1983), conducted on more than 130,000 Norwegian children between the ages of 8 and 16, the author found that 15% of the students were involved, either as actors or targets, in bullying behaviour at school. Subsequent studies confirmed the incidence and prevalence of this phenomenon in schools. In Italy, the first data collected in the 1990s on a sample of 1,379 pupils between the ages of 8 and 14 indicated that 42% of pupils in primary schools and 28% in secondary schools reported having been bullied (Menesini, 2003). These studies therefore make it possible to highlight how schools can become possible places of persecution and violence (Petrone & Troiano, 2008) and how the subjects involved can be summarised in three categories: the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour, the target, the group.

Within the group, the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour often tends to seek out companions who can support him/her and approve of his/her behaviour. In fact, when he/she engages in aggression against weaker individuals, he/she receives attention and approval from his/her peers who see him/her as a brave, a 'hero'. This causes gratification and satisfaction in him/her, leading him/her to repeat his/her actions again. This attitude, which can also be contagious and repeated by observers, tends, therefore, to promote and accept forms bullying behaviours: one speaks of 'social contagion', as the other children, to assert themselves in the group, follow the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour's example.

At the educational level, the alliance between school and family is crucial. In fact, just as the parents' attitude at home has an influence on their children's behaviour, the teachers' attitude also affects their conduct at school. Teachers, therefore, will try to collaborate with parents to implement a correct education of the children and must behave consistently, condemning and severely punishing bullying attitudes that occur at school.

By social environment we refer to the public context in which a child lives daily and in which he/she interacts. Often, when reference is made to realities in which there are obvious forms of discomfort and subcultural phenomena, the parenting style tends to refer to a greater acquisition by children of 'tough guy behaviour'. In some cultures, in fact, the CYP engaged in bullying behaviour is regarded as a 'heroic' subject capable of earning the respect and esteem of all and is therefore compared to a model to be followed and admired. Therefore, in order to prevent such behaviour over time from consolidating aggressive or unfair attitudes on the part of children, it is first of all necessary not to underestimate them and to intervene with effective and appropriate actions that tend to stem their development.

Key aspects such as awareness of the suffering of others, appreciation of empathy together with knowledge of emotions should be emphasised in both the family and the school environment.

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