Social imaginaries of bullying among students at the Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution in Valledupar, Colombia

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Abstract: School bullying, commonly known as bullying, represents a social problem of great magnitude that negatively impacts educational communities worldwide. The social imaginaries that are constructed around this phenomenon have a decisive influence on the way students perceive and experience it. The present research was conducted under the interpretative paradigm and qualitative approach, using the ethnographic method to understand in depth the dynamics of this problem. Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted with students from the Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution, including 10 boys and girls, in addition to participant observation in six focus groups, with participants ranging in age from 10 to 18 years old.

Social imaginaries not only played a crucial role as a theoretical and methodological tool, but also allowed us to interpret the different dynamics of bullying within the school context, identifying different types of bullying: verbal, physical, social, cyber and sexual. Justifications for these practices were also detected, based on religious beliefs, physical characteristics, socio-economic level and academic performance of the affected students. It is crucial that the educational community, based on these social imaginaries, develop a deep understanding of the problem and focus on the creation of pedagogical and didactic strategies that promote values such as respect, empathy and inclusion. These actions should be aimed at building a safe and violence-free school environment, where a culture of healthy coexistence is fostered and discriminatory practices are minimised. The promotion of attitudes that favour an inclusive environment is vital to prevent and eradicate bullying in all its forms, protecting the well-being of all students.

Keywords: Bullying, Social Imaginaries, Educational institutions, Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution

1. Introduction

Bullying, also known as school harassment or bullying, is one of the most widespread and damaging social problems affecting educational communities worldwide. As a result, the social imaginaries that are constructed around this phenomenon play a fundamental role in the way people perceive and understand this problem, influencing their attitudes, behaviours and responses to bullying. In this context, this article aims to interpret the urban social imaginaries linked to bullying among students of the Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution, located in the city of Valledupar, Colombia. In order to achieve this objective, a methodological approach based on the interpretative and qualitative paradigm was adopted, which provides a deep insight into the perceptions, meanings and representations associated with the phenomenon of bullying in this institution.

The theoretical framework underpinning this research is supported by the contributions of renowned

authors such as Hoyos et al. (2008), Olweus (2006, 2013), García and Ascensio (2015), Ubieto (2016), Herrera et al. (2017) and Ordóñez (2021), who have approached bullying from a psychosocial and educational perspective, offering a solid theoretical underpinning for the analysis of this phenomenon affecting students. In relation to the category of social imaginaries, the work of theorists such as Durkheim (1968), Berger and Luckmann (1986), Castoriadis (1989), Pinto (2005), Baeza (2004, 2022), Ugas (2007), Silva (2006), Hiernaux (2007), Carretero (2011), Martínez (2011), Vergara et al. (2017), Segovia et al. (2018), Lindón (2007, 2019) and Martínez (2014, 2021), who argue that social imaginaries are collective constructions that allow each social system to interpret, explain and intervene in what it perceives as its reality. These theoretical frameworks provide a robust basis for analysing and interpreting social imaginaries in the specific context of school bullying in Valledupar.

The results reveal a variety of social imaginaries constructed by students around bullying, highlighting verbal, physical, social, cyber and sexual aggressions within the educational environment as the most frequent forms of mistreatment. These findings indicate that bullying is perceived and practiced as a widespread problem in the city of Valledupar, influenced by four main factors: physical characteristics, religious beliefs, socioeconomic level and academic performance of students.

In conclusion, it is important to understand the social imaginaries of bullying in order to design comprehensive and effective strategies at the Oswaldo Quintana school. It is essential to study the individual and collective experiences of students in order to develop bullying prevention and reduction policies that respond to the social and cultural reality of the local environment.

2. Methodology

The research was developed from an interpretative perspective, which aimed to understand social phenomena through the meanings and interpretations of the individuals involved. To achieve this purpose, a qualitative approach was used, which prioritises subjectivity and the interpretation of information. In addition, ethnographic methodology was used as a tool to deepen the understanding of the social imaginaries related to bullying among the students of the Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution, in Valledupar, Colombia.

The ethnographic method allowed a deep immersion in the school environment, enabling a greater familiarity with the interactions, practices and meanings associated with the phenomenon of bullying. Through participant observation, semi-structured interviews and the review of documents and cultural elements, we sought to capture the complexity of the student experience, as well as the contextual factors that influence the diverse dynamics of bullying.

This methodological approach provided a comprehensive and detailed view of the problem of bullying, which facilitated the identification of the factors that trigger bullying and the choice of appropriate research strategies. Social imaginaries became an essential tool, both theoretically and methodologically, to analyse the dynamics of bullying in an urban context.

To deepen the study, 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted, involving 10 boys and 10 girls, ranging in age from 10 to 18 years old. This process was complemented by the analysis of six focus groups, using observation sheets, also with students of the same age range. This approach allowed for a more in-depth exploration of perceptions, experiences and behaviours related to bullying in the school context. In addition, it was supported by the review of scientific texts and articles, which facilitated the interpretation of the contributions of various authors who have studied both bullying and social imaginaries.

3. Resultado

The results were obtained through the application of the ethnographic method, as an essential methodological tool, which allowed us to interpret the urban social imaginaries related to bullying among the students of the Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution in the city of Valledupar. Through participant observation, semi-structured interviews and the interpretation of documents and cultural elements, the

perceptions and experiences of students related to the different dynamics of bullying were collected.

Through the interviews with the 20 selected students, among them 10 girls and 10 boys, aged between 10 and 18 years old. The following information was obtained as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of mistreatment highlighted by students at Oswaldo Quintana.

Type of abuse	Number of respondents	Percentage
Verbal	15 de 20	75%
Physical	10 de 20	50%
Social	8 de 20	40%
Cyber	6 de 20	30%
Other	3 de 20	15%

Source: the author
These percentages show the frequency with which each type of bullying was highlighted by respondents in the research on bullying in the urban school context. The sum of the percentages may exceed 100% due to the fact that some respondents mentioned more than one type of bullying.

The results obtained provide a clear picture of the frequency with which different forms of mistreatment occur in bullying in urban contexts. According to the data in Table 1, verbal abuse was the most frequent, being mentioned by 75% of the participants, which shows its prevalence among the students of the Oswaldo Quintana Institution.

Physical abuse, on the other hand, was reported by 50% of the students interviewed, revealing that physical aggression continues to be a considerable problem in the school environment.

As for social mistreatment, 40% of the students mentioned it, suggesting that practices such as social exclusion and the spreading of rumours generate concern among the student body.

Cyber-bullying was also mentioned by 30% of students as a form of bullying present in their environment, underlining the growing importance of addressing this type of aggression due to the impact that technologies have on young people's lives.

Finally, 15% of respondents mentioned other types of bullying, which encompasses a variety of behaviours and situations that students perceive as bullying, highlighting the complexity of the phenomenon.

The information gathered through the semi-structured interviews provides an in-depth understanding of students' concerns and experiences of bullying, highlighting the need to address it in a comprehensive way and adapted to the particularities of each educational context.

Continuing with the interview, we can highlight several questions related to the participation of students as actors and observers of bullying experiences in Oswaldo Quintan Quintana school, when consulted, they responded with the following voices:

One day a classmate physically assaulted another classmate in the face and received many blows and the aggressor was expelled from the school (Student Martínez, 2024)

in the classrooms every day a student verbally insults another classmate, every day there is harassment... (Zapata, personal communication, January 16, 2024)

yes, because I am very fat and they make fun of me (Acuña, personal communication, January 16, 2024).
yes, we used to call a classmate sapa and things like that, so when we were in class one day we started to tease a classmate and she started to cry and she was going to change classrooms, she could also say, yes, because we used to insult each other and we didn't respect each other (Daza, personal communication, 16 January 2024).

Yes, I have been a victim of bullying because of the way I am, think, act and even more because of my sexual preferences (Muñoz, personal communication, 17 January 2024).

Yes, because of my hair, because I am Crespo and they used to say offensive comments to me 'pelo de bonbril' and so on (Tobías, personal communication, 17 January 2024).

Yes, I have been a victim when I was in fifth grade, they started to call me big ear and fat, but I didn't think anything of it until I told my teachers and they scolded me (Álvarez, personal communication, January 18, 2024).

one day a classmate kicked me and I fell down and he left me green, then he kept hitting me and bothering me, I got angry and hit him (Noriega, personal communication, 16 January 2024).

I haven't been, it's just cock sucking, cock sucking and that's all, normal, not going to certain extremes, so I can't say if it was bullying, or possibly yes, but my best friend was teased with cock sucking and he started to play with the others, but, but it could become bullying (Sarmiento, personal communication, January 16, 2024).

In the fragments collected from students at the Oswaldo Quintana Quintana Educational Institution in the city of Valledupar, a wide variety of experiences related to bullying are evident. One explicit case is noted where a student was suspended for physically assaulting another, which highlights the seriousness of physical violence as a mechanism for generating fear or intimidation among students. In addition, a perennial pattern of verbal bullying in classrooms is narrated, showing a context where offensive vocabulary is a constant and harmful aspect.

On the other hand, some students report being victims of bullying related to their physical characteristics, such as being fat, which shows how beauty models can become a stimulus to discriminate and cause suffering. In addition, scenarios were recounted where teasing and verbal insults caused tears in schoolchildren and a desire to change classrooms.

On physical aspects, bullying practices related to personal identity and sexual preferences were also reported, demonstrating the weakness of students who are distinguished as different. Offensive actions directed towards students with wavy hair help to create a hostile and exclusionary environment, creating a sense of insecurity among students.

Scenarios of physical attacks between students are abundant, as described by those interviewed, students have been assaulted and have responded emotionally and physically as a defence device. The above events show a dynamic of constant violence that requires serious interventions and prevention measures by the authorities (rector, coordinators, psycho-counsellors and teachers) at Oswaldo Quintana Quintana.

Also, scenarios of 'mamadera de gallo' were reported, where supposedly harmless jokes turn into harassment that affect the emotional wellbeing of students. The testimonies of the interviewees emphasise the complexity of bullying and the urgent need to establish a safe and respectful environment where schoolchildren can be educated and develop freely, without fear of exclusion.

Another aspect that students were asked about is focused on the question: Have you ever been responsible for bullying someone at school? Please tell us what that episode was like.

The following voices are presented below:

yes but I have never done it with bad intentions and it is not and nothing bad has happened then (Martínez, personal communication, January 16, 2024)

yes verbally and physically to several classmates in the classroom, that's what they give you and so on... (Zapata, personal communication, 16 January 2024)

yes because, the child was very conceited and you have to make him learn (Acuña, personal communication, 16 January 2024)... (Zapata, personal communication, 16 January 2024)

yes, I have also verbally bullied a classmate, so my teammates accused her, hit her and picked on her physique because she was dark with afro hair (Muñoz, personal communication, 16 January 2024).

yes when I took a picture of her and a friend sent it to her to bully her and harass her (Álvarez, personal communication, 18 January 2024)

yes when a friend stopped him from hitting another classmate (Noriega, personal communication, January 16, 2024)

In the interpretation of students' voices on the issue of bullying at Oswaldo Quintana School, a variety of perceptions and significant experiences can be distinguished. Many students accept having participated in bullying scenarios, stressing that their actions were unplanned and did not have destructive consequences. This perspective alludes to a lack of awareness of the emotional and psychological damage that such behaviour can create.

On the other hand, events are revealed where bullying was exhibited orally and physically, aggravating several students, manifesting a condition of apathy and in passing justifying its consequences. These arguments reveal a lack of empathy and responsibility on the part of the bullying students, which contributes to the maintenance of a submissive school environment through bullying.

In addition, there are students who accept having bullied others with the excuse of reprimanding behaviour perceived as inappropriate, considering bullying as a permitted way to inflict social injury. This way of justifying bullying is an urgent call to educate in values of respect and tolerance in the school context.

There are also voices expressing a degree of regret and reflection, expressing an effort to promote safety and well-being among students within the educational institution.

The testimonies presented by the different students interviewed show the complexity of bullying as a social problem in the school, where several elements such as lack of awareness, the justification of offensive behaviour and the urgent need for educational strategies that promote respect, empathy and individual and group responsibility are at work. It is important that school policies and preventive work are oriented towards establishing a safe and inclusive environment in all sectors of the educational institution.

Thanks to the interviews conducted with students identified as male and female, information was gathered on the causes and effects of bullying, highlighting the main influence of four aspects: physical traits, religious beliefs, socio-economic status and academic performance of the schoolchildren. The information is summarised in the following table:

Table 2. Students interviewed who report having been bullied because of: Religious Belief - Physical Traits - Social Status - Academic Performance

	Hombre		Mujeres	
Motivo	Numero de entrevistados	%	Numero de entrevistados	%
Creencia Religiosa	6 de 10	60%	5 de 10	50%
Rasgos Físicos	6 de 10	60%	7 de 10	70%
Estrato Social	7 de 10	70%	7 de 10	70%
Desempeño Académico	5 de 10	50%	6 de 10	60%

Source: Author.

The sum of the percentages may exceed 100% because some respondents mentioned more than one reason.

Table 2 shows that 60% of the students who identified themselves as male and 50% of the females interviewed reported having suffered bullying related to their religious beliefs, which is evidence of significant concern within the institution about this issue.

Also, 60% of males and 70% of females reported being bullied because of their physical features, indicating that bodily characteristics can be a source of discrimination or harassment.

Overall, 70% of both male and female respondents reported being bullied because of their social status, suggesting that socio-economic differences play an important role in peer segregation and mistreatment.

Finally, 60% of females and 50% of males mentioned having been bullied because of their academic performance, reflecting possible tensions or conflicts related to academic expectations within the school environment.

These results can be interpreted through social imaginaries, which explain the different dynamics experienced by students in relation to bullying, influenced by factors such as religious beliefs, physical traits, socio-economic status and academic performance in the Oswaldo Quintana educational institution.

In addition, the information obtained from the participant observations carried out in 6 focus groups, composed of students aged between 10 and 18, has been synthesized in Table 3.

Table 3. Frequency of actions related to Bullying

Verbal	18
Physical	17
Social	15
Cyber	2
Sexual	1

Fuente: el autor

The analysis of the table reveals a clear trend in the frequency of actions highlighted for each type of abuse within the 6 focus groups observed. It is evident that verbal and physical abuse are the most common, with 18 and 17 actions reported respectively. This high number shows that these types of abuse are prevalent in the interactions between students in the school environment.

It is also important to note that social mistreatment obtained a significant number of mentions, with 15 actions. This observation indicates that students are also aware of and practice other forms of bullying than verbal and physical, including exclusions, teasing or rumours that can have a profound impact on their emotional and social well-being of other individuals.

In contrast, cyberbullying and sexual harassment were less reported, with only 2 and 1 action reported respectively. These findings show the frequency of these types of bullying may be present to some extent, but they are not as prevalent or overt in the focus groups observed as the three previous types of bullying.

Overall, these results highlight the complexity and diversity of the ways in which the problem of bullying presents itself. While verbal and physical maltreatment are prominent, social maltreatment is also relevant, while cyber and sexual maltreatment may be less salient in this context. This interpretation of bullying dynamics can effectively inform the design and implementation of bullying prevention and reduction policies.

The findings reveal a wide range of social imaginaries that students construct around bullying, comprising all types of mistreatment (verbal, physical, social, cyber and others). These archetypes of school violence emerge as the most prominent in the school context. This variety of perceptions proposes a collective awareness of the bullying phenomenon, demonstrating that it should be a concern not only of the Oswaldo Quintana Quintana educational institution but also of the city of Valledupar.

The results expose a diversity of social imaginaries constructed in relation to bullying among students,

highlighting among them verbal, physical, social and cyber mistreatment as the most representative. These results indicate a tendency to perceive bullying as a common problem within a public educational institution of mixed character, located in the city of Valledupar. Also, it was possible to show how ingrained beliefs influence the causes and consequences of bullying, these beliefs are influenced by factors such as religious dogmas, physical characteristics of people, socioeconomic status and academic performance of students.

4. Discusión

En este sentido, los imaginarios sociales ofrecen un marco teórico y metodológico clave para analizar e interpretar el acoso escolar entre los estudiantes de la Institución Educativa Oswaldo Quintana, en Valledupar, Colombia. El bullying, como problema social relevante, afecta no solo a los estudiantes individualmente, sino también al conjunto de la comunidad educativa, teniendo un impacto negativo en su bienestar emocional, académico y social. En este contexto, se destacan varios tipos de maltrato, siendo los más comunes los verbales, físicos y sociales, aunque el ciberacoso y el acoso sexual, aunque menos frecuentes, también generan preocupación.

Las causas y efectos del acoso escolar en la institución pueden ser asociados a cuatro factores principales: los rasgos físicos de los estudiantes, sus creencias religiosas, su nivel socioeconómico y su rendimiento académico. Al interpretar estos resultados a través de la lente de los imaginarios sociales, se logra una mejor comprensión de cómo las percepciones y creencias colectivas influyen en la forma en que los estudiantes interpretan y responden al bullying como problema social.

Es esencial que la comunidad educativa del colegio Oswaldo Quintana utilice los imaginarios sociales para comprender las dinámicas del acoso escolar y, sobre esa base, desarrollar estrategias pedagógicas y didácticas que promuevan un ambiente seguro y respetuoso. Esto implica la implementación de programas de concienciación, la capacitación del personal educativo en técnicas de prevención e intervención, y la promoción de la participación activa de los estudiantes en la creación de una cultura escolar inclusiva y respetuosa.

Conclusions

School bullying, also known as bullying, bullying, harassment or abuse among peers, has been the subject of study by renowned researchers such as Hoyos et al. (2008), Olweus (2006, 2013), García and Ascensio (2015), Ubieto (2016), Herrera et al. (2017) and Ordóñez (2021). These scholars have examined the phenomenon from various perspectives, seeing it not only as a problem of violent interaction between students, but also as a psychosocial and pedagogical construct. Their contributions analyse complex dynamics that not only explain the origin, causes and effects of bullying, but also propose strategies for prevention and intervention. These studies have been fundamental to understand the nature of bullying and to develop comprehensive approaches to address this phenomenon in educational institutions.

Regarding social imaginaries, theorists such as Durkheim (1968), Berger and Luckmann (1986), Castoriadis (1989), Pinto (2005), Baeza (2004, 2022), Ugas (2007), Silva (2006), Hiernaux (2007), Carretero (2011), Martínez (2011), Vergara et al. (2017), Segovia et al. (2018), Lindón (2007, 2019) and Martínez (2014, 2021), have made valuable contributions to their understanding. These authors argue that social imaginaries are intersubjective constructions that develop through shared social interactions and are influenced by specific historical and cultural contexts. These collective constructs act as a frame of reference that facilitates the interpretation of social reality and affects the way individuals perceive, value and act within a society. Social imaginaries, therefore, not only contribute to the construction and maintenance of social identities, but also to the reinforcement of structures of power and control.

The conclusions of this research, based on the interpretation of social imaginaries about bullying among students of the Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution in Valledupar, represent a significant contribution to knowledge in this field.

The study has shown that bullying has a negative impact on the emotional, academic and social well-being of the students of this institution. Among the most common forms of abuse are verbal, physical and social

aggression, while cyberbullying and sexual harassment are less frequent, although equally worrying due to their implications.

Likewise, the research has allowed us to identify various factors that influence bullying, such as physical features, religious beliefs, socioeconomic level and academic performance of students. These factors influence both victimization and the predisposition to become an aggressor, which demonstrates the complexity of the phenomenon and underlines the urgent need to address it through comprehensive policies.

The study highlights the importance of analyzing both individual and group practices to better understand the dynamics of bullying. This understanding is essential to plan, manage and execute pedagogical and didactic strategies aimed at preventing and mitigating bullying, which must be culturally sensitive and relevant to the context of the educational community of the Oswaldo Quintana Institution, a public institution located in Valledupar. These strategies should not only include corrective measures for cases of bullying, but also training activities that promote values such as respect, empathy and inclusion within the educational community.

In conclusion, this study has not only allowed us to interpret the social imaginaries associated with bullying at the Oswaldo Quintana Educational Institution, but has also provided theoretical and methodological guidelines to develop effective interventions that improve the school environment and promote the comprehensive well-being of students. The findings contribute to the academic knowledge of bullying as a highly relevant social problem.

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