

Bullying Against Children with Special Needs in Greek Schools. What Action Do Teachers Take?

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Abstract: The aim of this research is to evaluate the actions of education when dealing with the phenomenon of aggressiveness and bullying towards disabled students in primary schools of North Greece. In the quantitative research conducted by means of a questionnaire, 126 primary school educators took part. The results of the research have shown that incidents of aggression and bullying with children with special needs as victims appear since pre-school and their frequency is highest near the end of primary school age. From the findings resulting that the children with SN victimized in moderate degree in the general school. Also the prominent reason that causes the expression of bullying is the type of disability. School bullying is most often expressed at the school yard. Educators take certain measures to reduce bullying incidents and they state that they are moderately ready to handle them.

Keywords: Children with disabilities, General school, Classmates, Teachers

Introduction

Disability is a multidimensional phenomenon, which is directly related to the size of the gap between the individual's skills and the demands of society, with emphasis on functional abilities, which are vital with regards to the autonomy and participation in social life. The barriers faced by people with disabilities in their daily lives are due to the existence of this gap between the needs of their own disability and the structure of the society they live in, which has not taken into account the characteristics of this population group.

Child aggression is one of the issues that has been extensively studied in social sciences. The search for effective, timely interventions in aggressive children is based on the close relationship between early aggression, and subsequent psychopathology, including school failure, delinquency and crime. Olweus (1997) provides a general and comprehensible definition of bullying by identifying it as the state in which the student is exposed repeatedly and for some time to negative actions by another or other students. Negative act or aggressive behavior is considered to be one of the following: when a person collides or attempts to hit or injure or hurts someone, verbal aggression (threats, teasing), strokes, strokes, kicks, physical contact, offensive gestures, a person's forbearance from the group, or the obstruction of another's wishes. The four characteristics of intimidation is: (a) power imbalance between individuals, (b) the intention of the attacker, (c) Failure, e.g. sole and / or distress the victim, (d) Frequency and extent of the repeatability. In the victim-victimizer relationships there is an imbalance of physical and psychological power among individuals and aggressive acts are recurring within a relatively long time (Atlas & Percler, 1998).

Children with special educational needs are a high-engagement risk group in regards to bullying and victimization in relation to the standard development students (Kourdounouli, 2017, Andreou, Didaskaloy & Vlachou, 2013). In the case of these children the risk of exposure to victimization situations is increased up to 3 times (Blake, Lund., Zhou, Kwok, & Benz, 2012). 67% of students with disabilities have been intimidated compared to 25% of the general student population (Beatly & Alexeyev, 2008). Diversity itself is expected to sharply increase the chances of intimidation (Knox & Conti-Ramsden, 2003). In addition, Rose, Espelage, Aragonal & Elliott, (2011) report that the more serious the disability is, the higher the chances of intimidation.

Disabled children are a high-risk group involved in the phenomenon, as they have certain peculiarities that target them among peers, and it has been noticed that some children with behavioral problems, emotional difficulties or developmental disorders often adopt more aggressive ways of conciliation with others, in this way the perpetrators (provocative victims). In particular, students with developmental disabilities encounter greater difficulties in shaping and concluding social and interpersonal relationships, which may be due to the inability to properly decode social stimuli and non-verbal use of language (Rose 2011, in Cordunuli, 2017). Kourkoutas et al. (2013) report that children with special educational needs often lack the necessary psychosocial powers to express their problem or to defend themselves and properly process the emotional effects of victimization. Research data suggest that the people involved have difficulties in the field of mental health, social adaptation and schooling (Andreou et al., 2003).

Supporting victim-pupils and fostering them through psychosocial skills and counseling programs to strengthen their mental resilience, which will reduce both anxiety and emotional difficulties, appears to be an important parameter of new intervention programs. Thus, for pupils with special educational needs at risk of victimization, individualized behavioral programs, such as social skills training and mental health counseling, should be provided to enable them to integrate into the standard classroom (Cordunuli, 2017).

Regarding the context of the class, interventions include usually the use of organized and structured psychopedagogical techniques that contribute to the creation of a receptive and supportive climate within the classroom that focus on the development of psychosocial skills and promote communication and collaboration among students (Giovazolias, Kourkoutas, Mitsopoulou, & Georgiadi, 2010). The class is an important supportive system for vulnerable, very stressed and mentally handicapped children. Teachers should be aware of the social interactions between pupils with and without special educational needs and create a positive environment that supports the individual differences of students (Meadan & Monda - Amaya, 2008).

Method

The aim of this research is to evaluate the actions of education when dealing with the phenomenon of aggressiveness and bullying towards disabled students in primary schools of North Greece. For this reason, focused on the teachers who are considered to have key roles in management of incidents bullying. The research questions of this study are as follows:

- A. To what extent victimized children with SN in the general school?
- B. To what extent the type of disability is related to the role that pupils have with SN in bullying incidents?
- C. What are the actions of the teachers to deal with bullying incidents involving students with SN?

The quantitative survey involved 126 teachers. One hundred and ten (110-87,3%) participants were elementary school teachers and sixteen (16-12,7%) participants were kindergarten teachers. In addition, the 99 (78,6%) were women and 27 (21,4%) were men. Average age of participants: 43,1 years. Average service in schools participants: 17,3 years.

Data Collection Instrument : Questionnaire with 17 questions, 15 closed type and 2 open type was used. The invited and sample were 167 teachers and the participants 126 (75.4%). The survey was conducted from February to June 2017 in Northern Greece. For on analysis was used the software SPSS v . 2 3 .

Results

The main findings of the study are reported below. Out of the 126 teachers, 106 (84.1%) had Bachelor's degree and 20 (15,9%) Master's degree. Seventy-seven (77-61.1%) teachers were educated on school bullying, of which only 5 (6.5%) teachers had been trained on bullying issues where children attend Special Needs (SN). The 49 (38.9%) teachers were not trained for bullying at all.

All teachers reported they did not use physical or verbal violence against children-victims with SN. They also believe that intervention is the responsibility not only of the SN but also the other teachers. Most sample teachers (81,9%) stated that there is an official "policy-regulation" of the school on issues of coping with bullying. However a percentage of 63% of teachers said that the regulation was applied to a small & moderate degree. Also most educators based on their answers are of the opinion that this Regulation parents do not know.

The analysis showed that teachers with a master's in special education, perceive to a greater extent bullying incidents involving children with SN, in relation to general education teachers ($\chi^2=19,372$ $p=0,03<0,05$). Most teachers (54,0%) said they were prepared "moderately" and "A little" to deal with general bullying incidents (fig. 1).

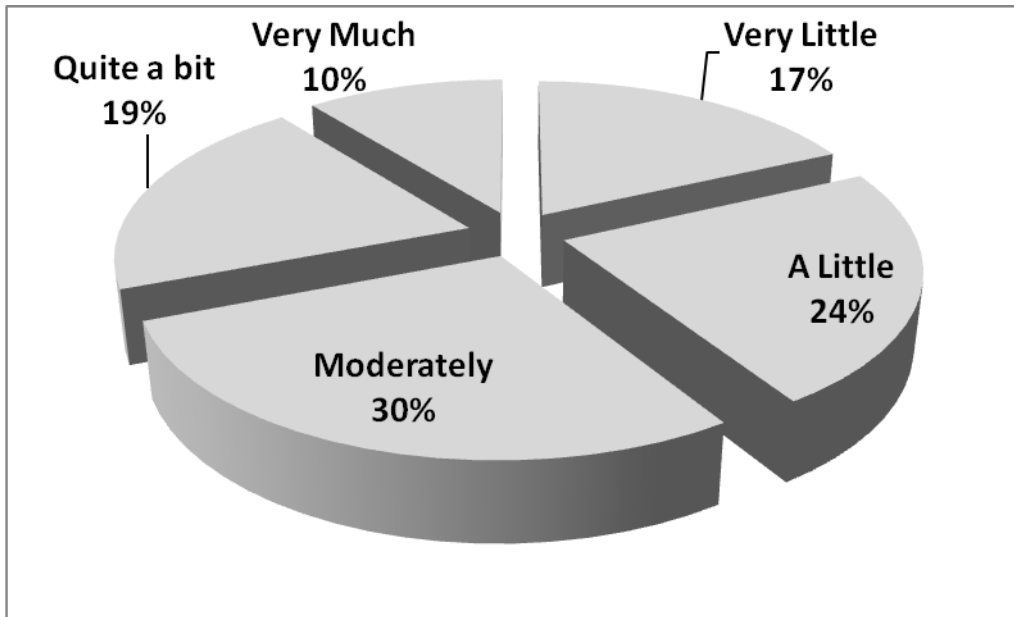


Fig.1 Readiness of teachers

Also, 65% of teachers said " Very Little " and " Little " for their readiness to face school bullying incidents involving children with SN (Fig. 2)

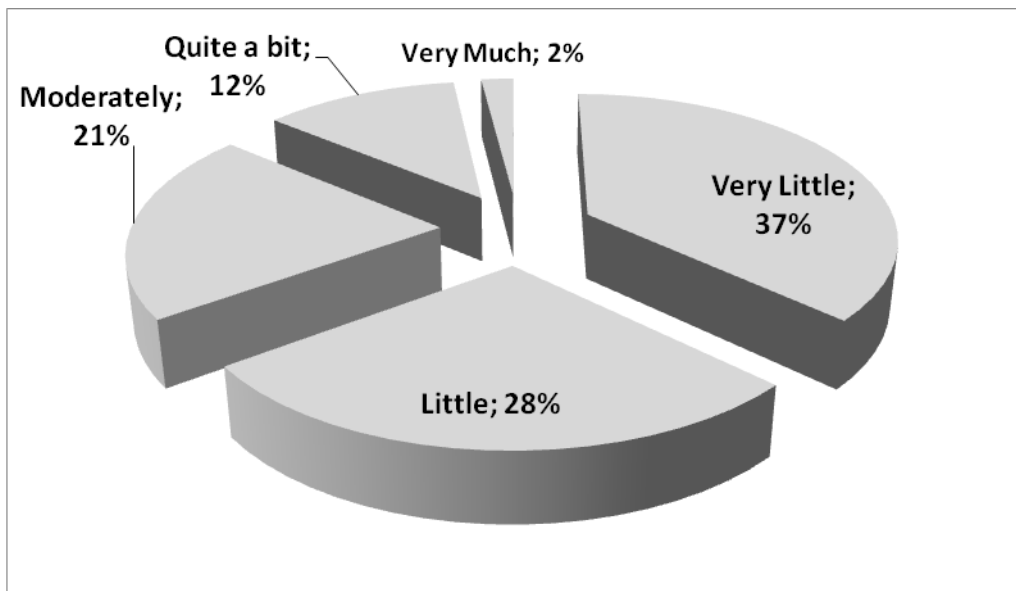


Fig2. Teacher training for bullying with students with SN

The analysis showed that there was no difference in the incidence of bullying incidents with pupils with SN , in relation to the size of the school (Small schools <120 students) ($\chi^2=19,372$ $p=0,02<0,05$). Additionally, the analysis revealed that teachers with postgraduate education in special education are more aware of the incidents of bullying in relation to general education teachers ($\chi^2=17,693$ $p=0,02< 0,05$).As for the degree of victimization of students with SN in heterogeneous groups of pupils in the general school it was found that the largest percentage of the survey sample stated " moderately " & " little " (fig. 3).

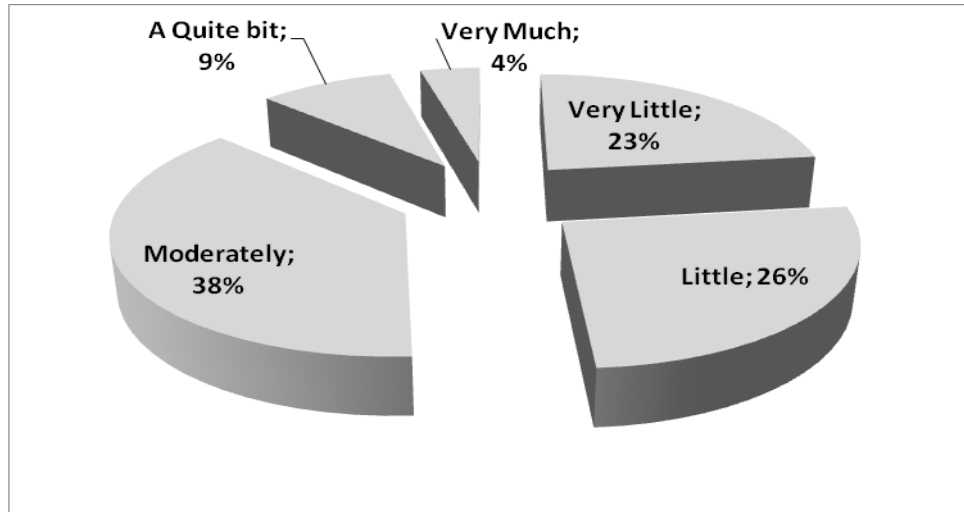


Fig 3. Victimization of pupils in heterogeneous groups of pupils

Table 1 shows the role of pupils with SN (Victimizer or victims) in bullying incidents, based on their diagnosis. The sample responded that all children with ADHD (100%) had the role of a victimizer, while all children with Down (100%) were victims.

Table 1. Roles students with SN in bullying by diagnosis

DIAGNOSIS	Victimizer	Victim	"I am not sure"	Σύνολο
	N-%	N-%	N-%	N-%
LEARNING DISABILITIES	14-30.4%	25-54.3%	7-15.2%	46-100%
ADHD	16-100%	0-0.0%	0-0.0%	17-100%
INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY	4-36.3%	5-45.4%	2-18.2%	11-100%
AUTISM	5-33.5%	8-61.5%	0-0%	13-100%
PHYSICAL DISABILITIES.	4-36.3%	4-36.3%	3-27.3%	11-100%
.DOWN	0-0%	4-100%	0-100%	4-100%
TOTAL	43-42.1%	46-45.1%	13-12.8%	102-100%

The analysis showed that boys with SN have a greater role as a victimizer than girls with SN. While girls with SN victimized to a greater extent than boys with SN (Table. 2).

Table 2. Gender correlation of SN pupils or victims

SEX	Very Little	A little	Moderately	Quite a bit	Very Much	χ^2 -test statistics
	1	2	3	4	5	
VICTIMIZERS						
BOYS	7 (7.6%)	16 (17.4%)	47 (51.1%)	18 (19.6%)	4 (4.3%)	$\chi^2 = 21.720$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$
GIRLS (N=92)	16 (17.4%)	32 (34.7%)	30 (32.6%)	9 (9.7%)	5 (5.4%)	
VICTIMS						
BOYS	12 (13.1%)	16 (17.4%)	46(50.0%)	10(10.9%)	8 (8.7%)	$\chi^2 = 34.865$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$
GIRLS (N=92)	9 (9.7%)	20 (21.7%)	25 (27.2%)	26 (28.2%)	12 (13.1%)	

Table 3 shows the perceptions of teachers regarding with the space of school where appear incidents bullying. As the frequencies in the first column are low, the x 2 test statistic and statistical significance show values after the collapse and recode of the first response anchor. The place where incidents of school bullying appear more frequently is the courtyard of the school, following the corridors, toilets and the classroom.

Table 3. School areas

School area	Very Little 1	A little 2	Moderately 3	Quite a bit 4	Very Much 5	χ^2 -test statistics
Courtyard (N=102)	2 (1.9%)	5 (4.9%)	7 (6.9%)	57(55.8%)	31 (30.4%)	$\chi^2 = 20.310$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$
Corridors (N=98)	5 (5.1%)	11 11.2%)	18 (18.4%)	43(43.8%)	21 (21.4%)	$\chi^2 = 31.422$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$
Bathrooms (N=105)	6(5.7%)	5 (4.8%)	37(35.2%)	39(37.1%)	18 (16.6%)	$\chi^2 = 34.897$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$
Class (N=105)	24(22.9%)	28 (26.6%)	36(34.2%)	6(5.7%)	11 (10.5%)	$\chi^2 =175.623$ $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$

Teachers said that in 68 episodes of bullying , kind of bullying who received a higher percentage of children with SN was isolation (> 50%) followed by gestures and insults (Fig. 4).

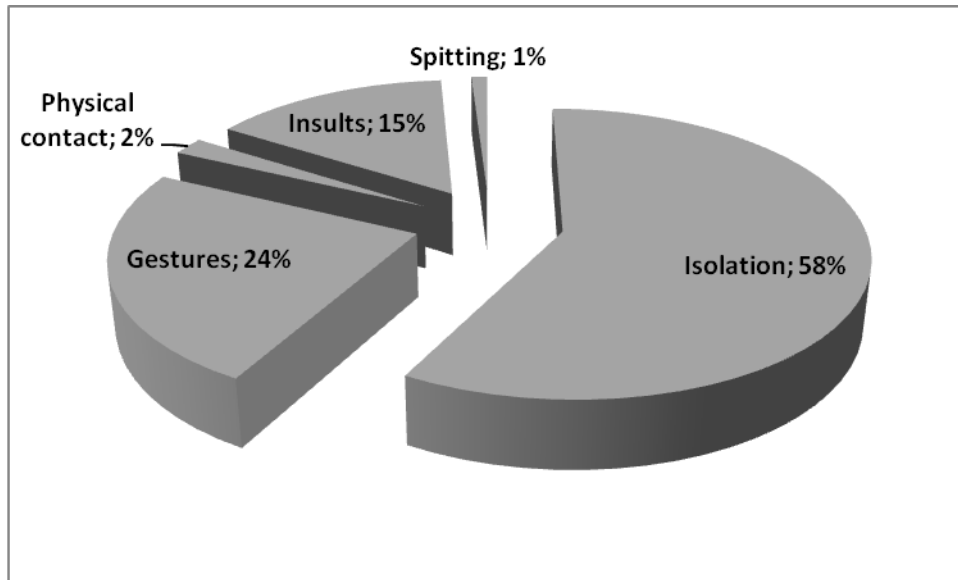


Fig. 4. Type of victimization

In bullying incidents where students with SN were victimizers, the first action of most teachers (44, 34.9%) was to inform the class teacher who attends the child (Fig.5)

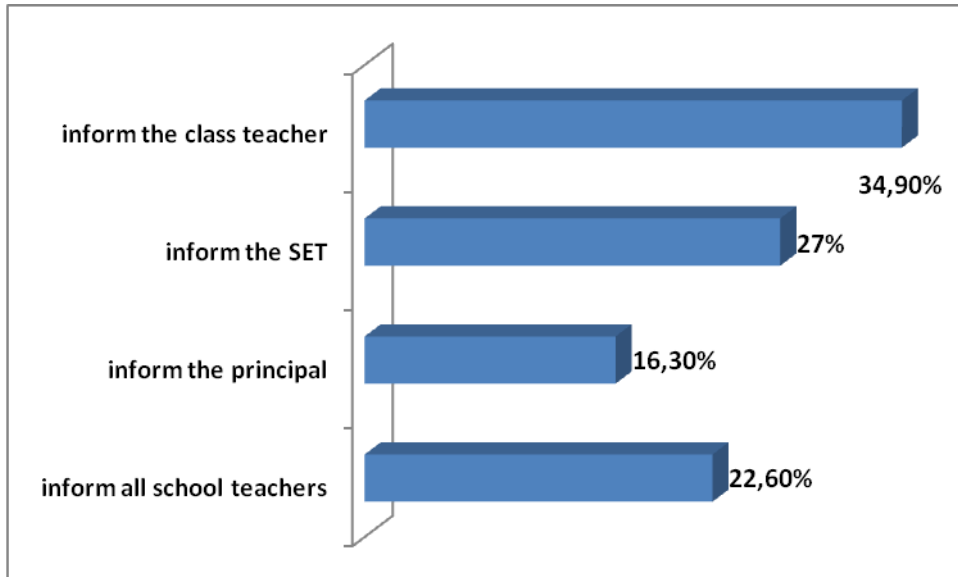


Fig . 5. H first action of teachers when children with SN are the perpetrators

In bullying incidents where students with SN were the victims, the first action of most teachers (51, 40.4%) was to inform the special education teacher (Fig. 6)

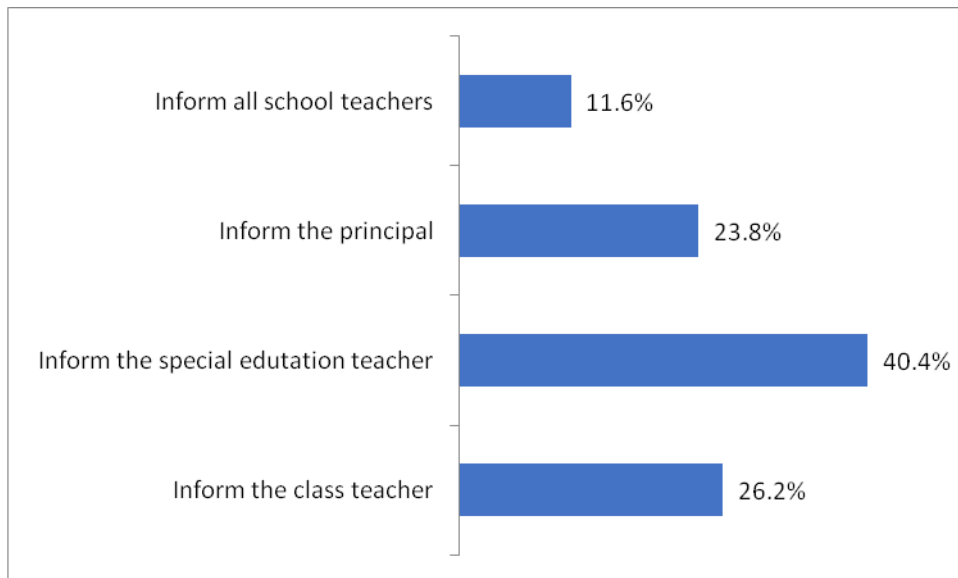


Fig . 6 . The first action of teachers when children with SN are the victims

Discussion

The aim of our study was to investigate circumstantial bullying, where they participate as victims or victimisers and pupils with special educational needs. An effort was made to record the relevant actions of primary school teachers. Teachers said they were generally aware of bullying , but were briefed on bullying issues involving pupils with SN is very limited. Similar findings have also emerged from related surveys (Forber-Pratt, Espelage& Aragon, 2013). An inadequate factor in effective management of the phenomenon is the inadequate training of teachers on issues related to coping with bullying and victimization at school. As a result teachers feel insecure in front of such behaviour and do not know how to intervene effectively (Kokkiadi & kourkoutas, 2016). Children with disabilities are somewhat involved in aggressive behaviour. Our finding is related to the results of similar research (Rigby, 2008 ; Swearer et.al., 2010). Also, the results showed that students with mental and emotional disabilities, as well as girls, are more likely to play the role of victims of school bullying, while for children with physical disabilities the role between the victim and the victimizer is shared. This finding can be explained by the fact that children who are in the autism spectrum but also with a mental

disability have difficulty in shaping and concluding social and interpersonal relationships due to the inability to correctly decode social stimuli. Episodes of aggressive behaviour appear in less well-supervised places, with a first occurrence in the school yard. In these spaces there are loose rules compared to the classroom, which exploits child offenders to impose on the most vulnerable students. This is also confirmed by the Rigby survey (2008), according to which the highest level of intimidation occurs during breaks, as there is less surveillance. The same conclusion was reached in the investigation of Didaskalou, Andreou & Vlachou, (2009) who talked about the difficulty faced by teachers ineffectively managing these problems in the "open" spaces of the school. Based on the statements of educators, the most common form of bullying that pupils receive with SN, is the isolation, followed by aggressive gestures and insults. This finding may be due to children with SN have not been accepted by their classmates. For example, do not play together during breaks, and not invite them to social events outside school hours (birthdays, holidays, etc.). It is noted that in a related study by Koster, Pijl, Nakken & Van Houten, (2010) states that placing a disability learner in general education does not automatically ensure his social participation in the environment. The child may have difficulty with limited friendships and lack of acceptance by his classmates. Findings from international surveys show that pupils and their parents have a neutral to negative attitude towards the education of children with disabilities in general education (De Boer, Pijl & Minnaert, 2010; Nowicki & Sandieson, 2002). However, they differ from the type and severity of special needs. Thus, they have a more positive attitude in creating relationships-friendships with a mentally handicapped child as well as with moderate / severe behavioural problems (Alghazo, & Naggar Gaad, 2004). Also most teachers said that when they notice a bullying incident where students with SN are involved, their first action is to inform the Special Education Teacher (SET). It seems that teachers trust SET's knowledge and experience and that it can help to properly manage the bullying incident. On the other hand, few teachers refer first to the pupil-pupil with SN to the school principal. Although due to his position the role of the school principal is crucial in solving the phenomenon, it is observed that as a practice is not very often chosen by the teachers. This may be due to the fact that teachers perceive that the role of the school principal is more authoritative.

Conclusion

Taking into account the results of the survey and the needs of teachers, a series of suggestions are considered to be important. As far as the phenomenon of school bullying is concerned, it is noted that the information of the teachers is limited. For this reason it is necessary for the teachers to be trained with seminars and workshops that have an experiential character on the issues of prevention and counteraction of school bullying, conflict and crisis management. Thus, it is considered necessary to establish social services in the school area, where specialized personnel, such as consultants, psychologists and social workers, will cooperate at regular intervals with the teachers and more generally with the staff of the school in order to inform them any case to intervene to solve problems. Except, of course, teachers will also need to work with parents, who are an integral part of the school environment, in order to jointly design intervention plans to address the phenomenon. It is well known that intimidation affects the psychosocial development of the people involved within and outside the school community. Finally, school bullying is not only about the class teacher or the educational special education, but about the entire school community. The school should take all necessary measures to ensure the physical and mental health of children with or without special needs.

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