

Differences in the Perception of the Victim and the Perpetrator in the School Context: An Analysis Based on Teacher Age and the Emotions Triggered by Cyberbullying.

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ABSTRACT:

The objectives of this study are to determine whether there are differences among teachers—young adults and middle-aged adults—regarding their perceptions of the characteristics associated with the victim and the perpetrator, the intervention strategies adopted in response to bullying and cyberbullying situations, and to identify the training needs of both groups; furthermore, a qualitative analysis seeks to identify the primary emotions teachers experience when confronted with the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

The results of the quantitative analysis show significant differences among teachers regarding the characteristics associated with the victim and how they should respond to a case of cyberbullying, although no significant differences were observed in the characteristics associated with the perpetrator. From the qualitative analysis, we can conclude that teachers experience and are negatively affected by bullying and cyberbullying, which can impact their emotional well-being and teaching quality.

The results of this study continue to highlight a clear lack of standardized and regulated training aimed at improving prevention measures and safeguarding teachers' mental health.

Keywords: bullying; cyberbullying, teacher training, emotional competence.

1. Introduction and Rationale for the Study. Teacher Training and Its Effects on Bullying.

Although a substantial body of research has examined school violence and bullying, limited attention has been paid to age-related differences in teachers' perceptions of and responses to these phenomena. Similarly, it is important to consider the training teachers receive when facing a problem as devastating as violence in schools (Martí, et. al, 2025). Against this background, the present study examines age-related differences in teachers' understanding of and responses to bullying and cyberbullying, as well as the potential influence of teacher training on these perceptions. Response protocols must be consistent when addressing a problem that affects the physical and mental health of minors, and a commitment to training and continuous improvement serves as an effective form of primary prevention.

1.1. History of Bullying and Cyberbullying and How They Are Perceived in Society.

Bullying is not a new problem in our society, nor is it exclusive to any one country (Olweus, 1993). However, awareness and understanding of its causes and prevention methods—as well as society's views on the phenomenon and how schools address it—have changed in recent years, from the LOGSE to the LOMLOE.

According to the Ombudsman's report from the year 2000, the term used for what we understand as bullying, as defined by Olweus (1978), is equivalent to school abuse or peer violence (Ortega, 1997). Epistemically speaking, the term “bullying” refers to a specific type of violence among students or peer groups that is characterized by occurring within the school context (Valdés et al., 2012) and is defined by three fundamental aspects:

- It must be sustained over time.
- There is a power imbalance between the parties involved.
- There is an intent to cause harm.

In the 1990s, research on bullying was spurred by the serious consequences it was causing and

its high prevalence rates, and the importance of bystanders' involvement in the phenomenon was highlighted (Cuevas and Marmolejo, 2016). Salmivalli et al. (2014) focused on the impact that bystanders have on the evolution of the phenomenon itself. Since then, rather than focusing on the primary participants in bullying individually (bully-victim), researchers have studied the phenomenon by examining all the individuals they considered to be involved in one way or another.

Pizzi (2008) states that school violence occurs primarily among students aged 7 to 16 and, for the first time, includes the roles of perpetrator and victim, with significant parity between perpetrator and victims.

Meanwhile, Alcantará (2008) defines bullying as intimidation and mistreatment that occurs among students, repeatedly over time and with the intent to humiliate and abusively subjugate a defenseless victim by one or more perpetrator through physical, verbal, or social aggression, resulting in psychological victimization and social rejection; and finally, Gairín et al. (2013), cited by Armas and Armas (2005), consider that “the phenomenon of bullying has always existed and has occurred in all types of educational institutions: private or public, selective or marginalized, located in large cities or small towns” (p. 24).

When examining the risk and protective factors associated with this phenomenon, Lisbosa and Koller (2009), cited by Olivera and Yupanqui (2020), note that bullying is linked to serious future risk factors for victims, such as suicide and depression; furthermore, bullies tend to experience difficulties in their relationships with others, including delinquency and violence, among other issues, which is why, in their view, urgent interventions are needed to prevent this violence from continuing throughout these minors' lives.

Bullying can take many forms; it is not limited to physical harm. It can be classified into eight different forms (Oñate and Piñuel, 2007): social exclusion, harassment, manipulation, coercion,

social isolation, intimidation, aggression, and threats.

- Social isolation includes actions that seek to socially isolate and marginalize the victim. For example, forbidding the victim from participating in group
- games or from speaking or communicating with others. These actions seek to stigmatize the peer, portraying them to others as weak, defenseless, or unworthy...
- Harassment manifests itself through offensive and psychologically abusive behaviors that demonstrate contempt, disrespect, and disregard for the victim's dignity.
- Social manipulation is a way of distorting the child's image in the eyes of their peers. The bully paints a negative picture of the victim; no matter what the victim does or says, everything will be used to provoke rejection and discrimination.

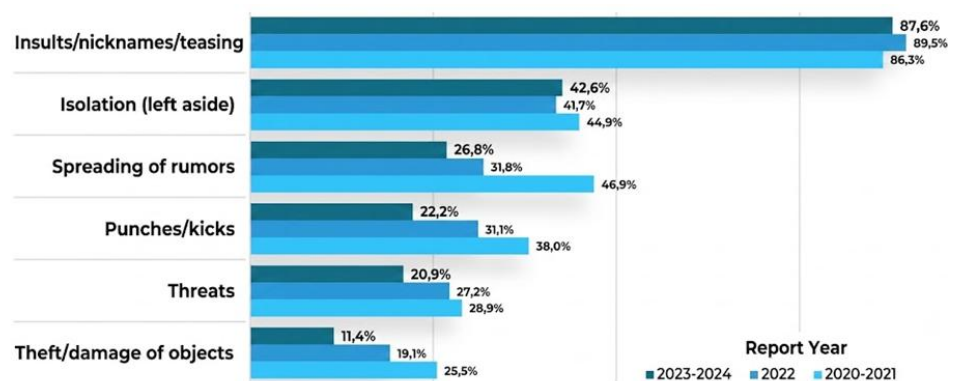
○ Coercion aims to force the victim to act against their will. These actions include humiliation, abuse, and unwanted sexual conduct, to which the victim is compelled to submit out of fear of retaliation.

○ Social exclusion aims to exclude the victim from participating in games and activities with their peers and to isolate them from school life.

○ Intimidation includes behaviors intended to instill fear in the victim, seeking to intimidate and cow them.

According to the latest report by the ANAR Foundation and Mutua Madrileña (2024), covering the years 2020–2021 and 2022, all forms of aggression have decreased, except for insults/nicknames/taunts, which increased slightly (+1.3 percentage points) compared to the 2020–2021 period, and isolation (being left out), which increased in 2022 (+0.86 p.p.)

Figure 1. Trends in types of aggression:



Source: Students' Opinions. Sixth Report on the Prevention of Bullying in Educational Institutions.

Regarding cyberbullying—a form of violence carried out via ICT—the ANAR Foundation's report concludes that 1.1% of violence in classrooms occurs through new technologies, with the majority of victims being girls. , the average age is between 11 and 12 years old. This report also notes that most incidents of bullying occur via WhatsApp (71.9%), followed by Instagram (44.8%) and TikTok (41.7%).

1.1.1 Characteristics of the Victims

In studies focusing on victims, multiple investigations indicate that men tend to play a more significant role in direct harassment—both

as perpetrators and as victims—at a higher rate than women (Jiménez et al., 2021). However, other studies indicate that no gender differences are observed in terms of direct involvement (Campbell et al., 2012).

Regarding age-related characteristics, evidence shows that incidents of bullying occur most frequently around age 14, during the middle school years, indicating a higher prevalence of bullying and cyberbullying (Fitzpatrick et al., 2007). After this age, trends show a decline as students progress to the next educational stage, likely because adolescents, as they mature and grow, develop better coping strategies for

resolving conflicts compared to younger children.

A review conducted by Puértolas and Montiel (2017) found that some of the characteristics of victims included low self-esteem, shyness, low assertiveness, and internalizing symptoms. They also showed that victims experience more difficulties with social skills, feelings of isolation, a lack of popularity, and a small circle of friends.

Similarly, the variable of leadership has been found to be closely related to the prosocial behavior of bystanders. In this regard, the study by Moreno et al. (2021) explains these results, noting that students who are leaders are less likely to face retaliation from others and have more leeway to intervene.

Leadership is considered a human strength that arises from a positive relationship between a leader and followers; this relationship enables them to achieve common goals. During adolescence, leadership is essential—among other things, to provide support and a listening ear—and it is also a fundamental tool for negotiation and mutual respect (Giménez, 2010).

1.2. Teacher Responses to Bullying and Teacher Training.

Given the significant increase in bullying and cyberbullying in recent decades, schools and educational administrations have become increasingly concerned with implementing prevention and response models, which has created a demand for training for all those involved in the field of education (Garaigordobil and Oñedra, 2014). To this end, teacher involvement is essential for the success of these programs, although it is still evident that many teachers—do not engage in addressing the issue (Boxer et al., 2006; Nicolaides et al., 2002; Díaz-Aguado, 2004; Justicia, Arco, and Benítez, 2003; O'Moore, 2000). This lack of involvement may stem from a lack of knowledge about the problem and difficulties in diagnosing and assessing the phenomenon, despite the stress they experience from having to deal with bullying in their classrooms (Smith and Smith, 2006).

In the first study by the Ombudsman (DP, 2000), which included a sample of 300 deans of students from 300 secondary schools (ESO) throughout Spain, the percentage of instances (0, 1–3, 4–6, 7–10, 11–20, more than 20) that different types of disciplinary actions had been taken. The results showed that 86.7% were direct disciplinary actions, 48.3% were expulsions processed by the School Council, 18.7% were reports filed with the police, and 19% resulted in a transfer. A subsequent study by the Ombudsman (DP, 2007), using an identical sample, yielded the following results: 92.3% direct disciplinary actions, 59.3% expulsions processed by the School Council, 26.3% reports filed with the police, and 24% transfers to another school. A comparison of the two Ombudsman studies (2000, 2007) shows that in secondary education, all disciplinary actions evaluated have increased over time.

In a study aimed at understanding the beliefs and knowledge about bullying held by future elementary and secondary school teachers—in which third-year teacher education students and students in the Pedagogical Adaptation Course (CAP) participated, and which was conducted by Alonso et al. (2007)—the participants' opinions on disciplinary measures to be taken in bullying situations were analyzed. The results showed that, although there were no significant differences between the two groups, teacher education students considered more disciplinary measures (immediate punishment, removal from class, opening an official investigation) than CAP students; however, their proposed actions were more pedagogically oriented (talking with those involved, not ignoring what happened).

In line with the findings of the 2016 study by Cerezo and Rubio, not all schools include specific actions against cyberbullying in their protocols; only 25% of the autonomous communities referenced concrete measures to address cyberbullying. Regarding the measures adopted by schools, this same research reveals that although most studies propose educational measures—such as restorative and rehabilitative measures—as the most effective, as opposed to

punishment and repression (United Nations, 2011b), nevertheless, most protocols include corrective and/or disciplinary measures targeting bullies, as well as support and protection for victims, while educational preventive measures and group-based interventions are excluded from the actions implemented by schools (Fernández-Montalvo & Peñalva, 2015). In this regard, and consistent with Paredes (2025), educational institutions should adopt comprehensive pedagogical approaches based on programmes and projects tailored to students' needs and interests while systematically promoting respect, tolerance, inclusion, and equality among students.

Regarding teacher training on school violence, Makrakis (2005), cited by Montoro and Ballesteros (2016), asserts that teachers have an obligation to take on new roles and receive appropriate training that enables them to respond to new social demands. It is important for teachers to be well-trained in digital coexistence, civic competence, tolerance among peers, and respect for others (Bernate et al., 2020). Teachers must respond to the technological landscape in which many young people develop a large part of their social relationships beyond the classroom walls, and to this end, these types of competencies must be included in teacher education and training curricula.

1.3. Teachers' Emotional Competence.

Research conducted by Bisquerra and Pérez (2007) asserts that the application of emotional competencies in business, health, and education promotes the dissemination of emotional education and effectively contributes to both formal education and family life by strengthening interpersonal relationships, thereby reducing conflicts related to academic performance and well-being.

Davis and Qualter (2020) conceptualise emotional competence as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional knowledge, perception, expression, regulation, empathy, and emotional self-efficacy. Hué (2008) argues that emotional competence comprises both

intrapersonal skills associated with personal growth and interpersonal skills that facilitate effective relationships with others.

Abarca et al. (2002) and Vallés and Vallés (2003) highlight several key responsibilities that teachers undertake in promoting students' socio-emotional development:

- Emotional stimulation and the regulated expression of positive feelings and, even more difficult, of negative emotions (e.g., anger, envy, jealousy, among others);
- Creating environments (school assignments, group work dynamics, among others) that develop socio-emotional skills and facilitate the resolution of interpersonal conflicts;
- Exposure to experiences that can be resolved through emotional strategies
- Teaching empathy skills by showing students how to pay attention, listen actively, and understand others' perspectives.

In this regard, developing strong emotional competence as a teacher allows one to enjoy the profession and helps students learn more effectively. A teacher's emotional competence lies in their ability to integrate personality traits with learned emotional and empathetic skills that are integral to the teaching-learning process. Without emotional competence as a teacher, it is difficult to teach that very competence. Since it can be learned, it seems advisable for future teachers to receive training in this area and for current teachers to acquire and improve these skills (Sánchez and Martínez, 2024). Therefore, the importance of emotions in the field of education is undeniable. Any meaningful educational activity involves a continuous exchange of emotions between teachers and learners, shaping the educational relationship and influencing the teaching and learning process. (Torrijos, 2016).

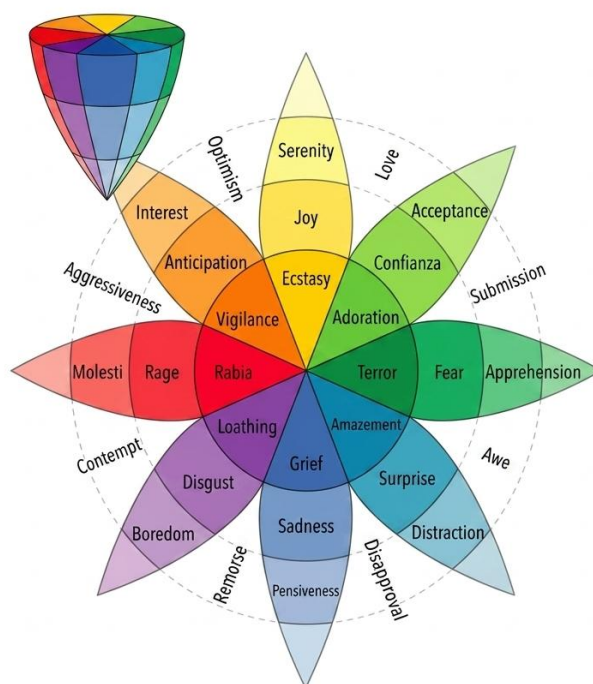
Likewise, in 2022, a study was conducted by Martínez-Saura, Sánchez-López, and Pérez-González that highlighted the need for professional development. The study consisted of a sample of 92 Early Childhood Education (ECE) and Elementary Education (EE) teachers

from public schools in the Region of Murcia, and another sample of 290 fourth-year students in the ECE and EE bachelor's degree program at the University of Murcia. Both samples were selected using purposive non-probabilistic sampling. The total sample size was 382 participants. Among the findings, it is worth noting that the most empathetic teachers and students were those who appeared to have a greater capacity to share both positive and negative emotions and to put themselves in another's shoes. Furthermore, the results supported the hypothesis of a positive association between adequate emotional training and more satisfying professional development for teachers, making them less vulnerable to burnout and presumably more conducive to positive classroom relationships.

Furthermore, according to Plutchik (1980), emotions arise as a reaction to the adaptive

function of human beings, depending on the situation they face. From this perspective, it can be said that there are no negative or positive emotions; rather, each is determined by a behavior that prepares the individual to react to specific situations: "emotions have an adaptive function" (p. 214). Plutchik (1980) points out that emotions are directly related to color and that this color is determined by the intensity with which a particular emotion is expressed; the more intense an emotion is, the more intense the color representing it will be. Emotions intensify as they approach the center of the wheel; if an emotion is not regulated, it can shift from one emotional state to another. Furthermore, he notes that emotions without a color are those that arise from the combination of two primary emotions, known as dyads or secondary emotions. Figure 2 illustrates the structure of emotions:

Figure 2. Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions.



Source: Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions (1980).

The use of the wheel of emotions is not limited to psychotherapy. Its simplicity and effectiveness make it useful in other contexts (Vilar, 2021):

a) Emotional education: This tool is widely used in education to teach children and adolescents to recognize and manage their emotions, promoting better emotional communication from an early age.

b) Emotional intelligence: Companies are adopting the wheel to foster emotional intelligence in their teams, improving communication and teamwork.

c) Self-awareness: Individuals seeking to better understand themselves can use the wheel to reflect on their emotional reactions in various everyday situations.

For all these reasons, this study aims to examine differences among teachers by age regarding their perceptions of the characteristics associated with the victim and the perpetrator, the intervention strategies adopted, and the need for training. Additionally, it seeks to analyze the emotions that bullying and cyberbullying evoke in teachers.

2. Method

This study was based on a quantitative ex post facto design with a prospective approach and a single measurement point. The sample was selected through convenience sampling from faculty members and prospective teachers enrolled in different academic programmes at Spanish universities. Data were collected through an online survey.

Descriptive and exploratory analyses of the main variables were conducted, along with correlational analyses and comparisons of means using t-tests. SPSS version 25 was used for the necessary statistical calculations. Regarding the emotional aspect, a qualitative analysis was used to determine the primary emotions that cyberbullying evoked in faculty members, students, and/or professionals. The Atlas.Ti software (version 9) was used for this purpose.

This project adheres to the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki, and informed consent was obtained from the participants. The evaluation protocol was approved by the ethics committee of the Corporación Universitaria Iberoamericana. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, and all participants were informed about the objectives of the study and the scientific use of the collected data (1993).

2.1. Sample

The sample consists of 317 current and prospective teachers from various fields of study (education, health, business, humanities, and sciences). In terms of gender, the sample consists of 246 women and 71 men; the participants' ages range from 19 to 62, with a mean of 34.20 years (SD: 10.83). The sample was divided into age groups: the first group, classified as younger teachers (ages 19–35), consisted of 193 participants, and the second group, classified as older teachers (ages 36–62), consisted of 124 participants.

2.2. Instruments

The set of questions consisted of a questionnaire designed to identify key characteristics such as gender, professional experience, prior education, etc.

The study also employed the Teacher Perception Questionnaire on Cyberbullying. The reliability of the entire instrument was $\alpha = .84$. Of this questionnaire, 11 items refer to the causes attributed to cyberbullying ($\alpha = .65$), 12 items to perceptions of intervention strategies at the school level ($\alpha = .69$), and 16 items to intervention strategies developed by teachers ($\alpha = .88$). The first two scales measure responses using a 5-point Likert scale, and the last scale uses a 4-point Likert scale.

To analyse the qualitative data, emotions were classified according to Plutchik's (1980) psychoevolutionary model of emotions, which organises eight primary emotions into four opposing dimensions. Thus, similar emotions are positioned in opposition to one another, resulting in the following four axes: joy-sadness, disgust-acceptance, anger-fear, and surprise-anticipation." (Díaz and Flores, 2001). Following this model, we classified the emotions using the Atlas.Ti software.

3. Results

The qualitative analysis conducted using the Atlas.ti software revealed the following groups and subgroups of emotions.

Figure 3. Basic and complex emotions, feelings, and others.

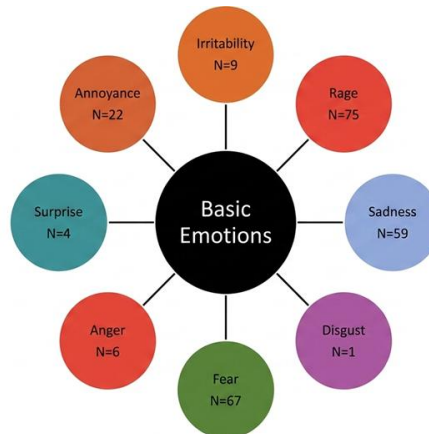


Source: created by the authors using Atlas.ti

reflecting on experiences of bullying and cyberbullying.

Figure 3 presents the emotions, feelings, and related concepts reported by teachers when

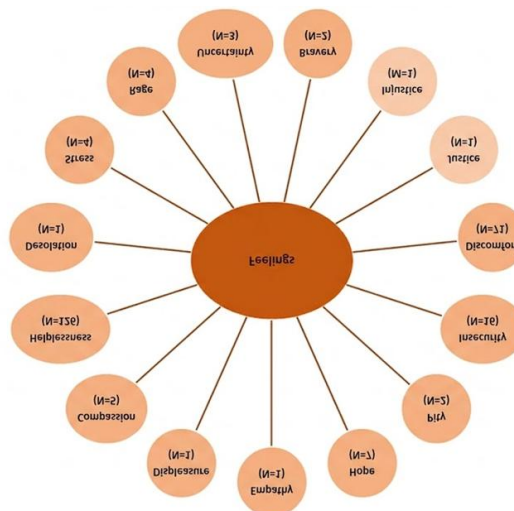
Figure 4. Basic emotions.



Source: Author's own work

Figure 4 shows the basic emotions, including the colors according to Plutchik (1980) and the number of times (n) each emotion appears.

Figure 5. Complex emotions.



Source: Author's own work

Figure 5 shows the complex emotions reported by teachers in relation to bullying experiences and the number of times they have appeared.

Figure 6. Feelings.

Source: Author's own work

Figure 6 shows the feelings that bullying has evoked in teachers and the number of times each feeling appeared.

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for Young Adults and Middle-Aged Adults. Statistically significant differences were found in the variable "Leadership, as a characteristic associated with being a cybervictim" between the two age groups, where the scores for the young adults group ($M = 1.78$, $SD = 0.838$) were lower than those for the

middle-aged adults group ($M = 2.15$, $SD = 0.109$).

Significant differences were also found between age groups in the following variable: "What would you do in a case of cyberbullying? It is not my responsibility but that of the school coexistence committee," where the scores for the young adult group ($M = 1.52$, $SD = 0.941$) were lower than those for the middle-aged adult group ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 1.245$).

Finally, significant differences were observed between age groups in the variable "What topics would you like to receive training on? Direct intervention with victims and perpetrators," where the scores for the young adult group ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .828$) were higher than those for the middle-aged adult group ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.023$).

Table 1

Values	Young adults Middle-aged adults			
	means	SD	Means	SD
Leadership Associated with Cybervictims	1.78	.838	2.15	.109
It's not my responsibility	1.52	.941	1.94	.1.245
Direct intervention with the victim and the perpetrator	4.56	.828	4.24	1.023

Means and Standard Deviations for Young Adults and Adults on the variables "Leadership as a characteristic of the cybervictim," "What would you do in a case of cyberbullying? It is not my responsibility but that of the school coexistence committee," "What topics would you like to be trained on? Direct intervention with victims and perpetrators."

4. Conclusion

Cyberbullying continues to represent a significant challenge for the educational community and remains a major concern for schools worldwide. However, the findings raise the question of whether teachers are prepared to effectively address school violence, both in terms of prevention and intervention.

The objective of this study was to determine whether there were differences among teachers—young adults and middle-aged adults—in terms of their perceptions of the characteristics associated with victims and perpetrators, the intervention strategies adopted, and the training needs of both groups.

Regarding the strategies they consider appropriate to implement in the face of cyberbullying, it has been found that young adults—teachers and students between the ages of 19 and 35—are more likely to believe that situations involving bullying or cyberbullying fall outside their purview and that this matter belongs to the student conduct committee. In its 2020 global survey, UNESCO highlights the importance of teachers in preventing and addressing school violence. However, nearly half

of the respondents in that study stated that they lacked the necessary training to manage school violence and that they acquire this knowledge through their teaching experience. A lack of knowledge about the phenomenon, and the lack of specific training in appropriate intervention, may explain these results, as noted by Lanzillotti & Korman (2018), and would be consistent with the findings of our study, in which teachers and future teachers report needing more training regarding direct intervention with the victim and the perpetrator than the general adult population. Future studies should explore whether teachers' age and years since qualification influence perceptions of bullying and cyberbullying, as well as the effectiveness of intervention strategies.

There is no previous literature regarding differences among age groups of teachers concerning the characteristics associated with victims. In this study, the results indicate that the older the teacher, the stronger the perception that "leadership" is a characteristic commonly associated with cybervictims. On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the older group of teachers shows significant differences compared to the group of younger teachers on the item "it is not my responsibility but that of the school coexistence committee" in response to the question "what would you do in a case of cyberbullying?" It can be inferred that, in general, there is less interest or less training on this topic as teachers get older, or that younger teachers are more aware of the issue.

The qualitative analysis, for its part, describes how bullying elicits certain emotions that are largely common among teachers, such as the basic emotions of sadness, anger, or fear, or the

complex emotions of helplessness (also considered a feeling), concern, and shame, among others. It also suggests feelings that are sometimes common, such as insecurity and unease. These results suggest that, to a large extent, bullying evokes negative emotions and feelings among teachers. Therefore, if teacher training initiatives are to be effective, they must also address the emotional impact that bullying and cyberbullying have on educators; we must provide them with psychoeducation and support networks so they can overcome these challenges and help their students without suffering negative personal consequences. Consequently, another conclusion of this study is the importance of examining teachers' psychological well-being when they face these types of situations.

Regarding the study's limitations, it would be interesting to increase the number of participants and address the scarcity of prior literature on the subject. Furthermore, obtaining a sample of older teachers would help us identify potential differences in a more longitudinal manner. This study underscores, once again, the need for unified and integrated training within formal education programs on the phenomenon of violence in classrooms, its causes, and effective measures for intervention and prevention. Involving the entire teaching staff—both young and experienced teachers—is no easy task, and there are evident differences that must be addressed to improve effectiveness in combating bullying and cyberbullying. Regarding emotional well-being, it is necessary to reflect on how teachers' mental health may be affected by bullying and cyberbullying and, consequently, to propose preventive measures for mental health and emotional well-being.

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7. Author Declaration

- Confirm originality of work
- State no conflicts of interest