

## PREVENTING AND COMBATING BULLYING: AN ANALYSIS OF HELP TEAMS



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### ABSTRACT

Bullying is one of the biggest challenges faced by schools, profoundly impacting the emotional health and development of students. Recognized as a form of systematic violence by the World Health Organization (WHO), bullying generates serious consequences, ranging from anxiety and social withdrawal to long-lasting psychological problems. In Brazil, the National School Health Survey (PENSE, 2022) reveals that one in five young people practices bullying. This study aims to discuss strategies to prevent and combat bullying, focusing on the implementation of Help Teams, a form of youth protagonism that promotes healthy coexistence and reduces violence. The research was

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conducted through a qualitative approach, based on literature review and analysis of documentary and legislative data, including studies by Tognetta (2022), Loch et al. (2020), and Allen and Kern (2017). The results indicate that Help Teams are an effective strategy to improve the school climate and the well-being of students, providing a reduction in cases of bullying. However, implementation faces challenges, such as a lack of resources and the need for continuous training of educators. The study concludes that, for schools to become spaces for welcoming and preventing conflicts, a collective effort by the school community, institutional support and well-applied public policies are necessary, with youth protagonism as a fundamental tool.

**Keywords:** School bullying, Violence prevention, Youth protagonism, Help Teams.

## INTRODUCTION

Bullying, understood as an insidious form of systematic and repetitive violence, has emerged as one of the most challenging issues in the contemporary educational context, raising significant concerns in educational institutions around the world. This practice involves the intentional aggression and intimidation of individuals in situations of vulnerability, and not only compromises the school environment, but also has profound repercussions on the social and emotional development of students. Studies indicate that bullying can trigger a series of problems such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, making it urgent to implement effective interventions and educational policies that promote an environment of respect and empathy in schools. This phenomenon, by affecting school dynamics, not only harms academic performance, but also weakens students' sense of security and belonging, which are fundamental for their integral development.

Bullying, characterized by the repetition of aggressive behaviors and the relationship of inequality of power between the aggressor and the victim, can manifest itself in different ways, including physical and psychological aggression and, more recently, cyberbullying<sup>12</sup>, which expands the reach of aggression through digital platforms. The World Health Organization (WHO) highlights that bullying is one of the most prevalent forms of violence among children and adolescents, generating devastating effects on both physical and mental health, compromising the social and emotional development of affected young people (Arslan; Allen, 2021). This prolonged impact underscores the importance of understanding bullying not as an isolated problem, but as a public health phenomenon that demands comprehensive and coordinated responses.

In Brazil, the scenario is alarming. The National School Health Survey (PeNSE, 2022) revealed that one in five adolescents, aged 13 to 15 years, admits to having bullied their peers, with 20.8% of the students interviewed directly involved in aggressive actions. These numbers indicate that the Brazilian school environment is marked by the constant presence of aggressive behaviors, which not only harm the school climate, but also significantly affect academic performance and student well-being. The frequency of these aggressive behaviors suggests the urgent need for more effective interventions in schools that address not only the symptoms but also the underlying causes of this violence.

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<sup>12</sup> Cyberbullying is characterized by the use of the internet as a tool to disseminate aggression, maintaining the principles of traditional bullying, such as repetition and inequality of power, but with the ease of anonymity and online continuity, which makes it more difficult to combat (Loch et al., 2020).

Complementary data from DataSenado (2023) reveal that approximately 6.7 million students were victims of some type of school violence in the last twelve months, which represents 11% of students enrolled in the country. When analyzing the experiences of people between 16 and 29 years old, 52% of them report having been bullied during their school days, demonstrating the severity and persistence of this phenomenon, which goes beyond temporal barriers and continues to impact the lives of many individuals even after the end of basic education. These data suggest that bullying is a long-term issue, whose consequences can reverberate for years, affecting the adult lives of those who were victims of this type of violence during childhood and adolescence.

The seriousness and persistence of bullying in Brazilian schools point to the need for more incisive actions by educational institutions. Although there are important legislations, such as Law 13,185/2015, which instituted the Program to Combat Systematic Intimidation, and Law 13,663/2018, which includes the promotion of a culture of peace in schools, the practical application of these rules still faces significant challenges. Many schools lack adequate structure and resources to implement preventive and anti-bullying measures effectively, which limits the reach of these initiatives and perpetuates the cycle of violence. This mismatch between legislation and its practical application highlights the need for greater investment and commitment of public policies so that schools can fulfill their role more effectively in promoting safe and welcoming environments.

This article aims to discuss the main strategies to prevent and combat bullying in the school environment, with emphasis on the implementation of Help Teams, a form of youth protagonism that aims to promote healthy coexistence and reduce violence in schools. By analyzing the emotional, social, and educational impacts of bullying, it seeks to present practical and effective solutions to address this phenomenon and build a culture of respect, empathy, and mutual support in educational institutions. The formation of these teams can be a powerful tool, as it directly involves the students themselves in the process of creating a safer school environment, encouraging collective responsibility and active engagement in combating violence. The hope is that, by empowering young people and providing adequate resources to schools, it will be possible to transform the school environment into a space of welcome and integral development for all.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study uses a qualitative approach, focused on the analysis of documentary data and bibliographic research to investigate strategies to prevent and combat bullying in the school environment, with special attention to the implementation of Help Teams and other intervention methodologies described in the literature. The choice for a qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of the impacts of bullying and the prevention practices adopted in different school contexts.

According to Gil (2010), qualitative research stands out for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, allowing the researcher to explore the subjectivity and complexity of human interactions. Lakatos and Marconi (2017) also emphasize that the qualitative approach is essential for the investigation of specific contexts, since it enables the collection of data that reveal the perceptions and experiences of the individuals involved. In this sense, the use of qualitative methods in this research is justified by the need to capture the nuances of experiences related to bullying and intervention strategies, contributing to a richer and more contextualized understanding of educational practices.

The research is based on a literature review of scientific articles, reports and legislation on the subject, seeking to identify the main theoretical and practical contributions that support the prevention of school violence. National and international studies were analyzed, focusing on research that addresses the role of the school in conflict mediation and in the promotion of a healthy living environment, such as the works of Tognetta (2022), Loch et al. (2020), Allen and Kern (2017), among others.

In addition, this study examines quantitative data from surveys such as the National School Health Survey (PeNSE, 2022) and the DataSenado survey (2023), which offer an overview of the prevalence of bullying in Brazilian schools. These sources allow us to contextualize the dimension of the problem in Brazil, as well as to evaluate the effectiveness of legislative interventions, such as Law 13,185/2015 and Law 13,663/2018.

The analysis of the selected documents allowed the identification of different approaches and intervention methodologies, highlighting the importance of educational programs that encourage empathy, the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the strengthening of bonds between students, teachers and the school community. The review revealed that practices such as the formation of Help Teams and the implementation of awareness-raising activities are fundamental for building a culture of respect and solidarity,

contributing to the prevention of bullying and the promotion of students' emotional well-being. From these contributions, it seeks not only to understand the dynamics of bullying, but also to offer subsidies for the elaboration of policies and strategies that effectively address this issue in the school context.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

The analysis of the data and literature confirms that bullying continues to be a critical issue in Brazilian schools, with serious consequences for the emotional health and development of students. The National School Health Survey (PeNSE, 2022) points out that 20.8% of 9th grade students have bullied, evidencing the prevalence of the problem. These numbers are corroborated by DataSenado (2023), which indicates that about 6.7 million students suffered some type of violence in the last school year, with bullying responsible for 33% of these occurrences.

To face this challenge, several strategies have been implemented in schools, with emphasis on the Help Teams project. Introduced in 2015, these teams are part of a Support System among Equals, in which the students themselves are trained to act as mediators and supporters in situations of bullying, social exclusion, and isolation (Tognetta, 2022). Youth protagonism, promoted by these teams, has been one of the most effective pillars in the prevention of school violence.

Empirical evidence indicates that the implementation of Aid Teams has provided a safe space for students to share their experiences and seek collective solutions to conflicts, promoting a more inclusive and welcoming environment. Studies show that this intervention model not only reduces the incidence of bullying but also strengthens the sense of community among students by developing essential socio-emotional skills such as empathy and conflict resolution (Loch et al., 2020). The success of this approach, however, is directly linked to the continuous training of the members of these teams, which enables them to act assertively and ethically in mediations. This, in turn, contributes to the creation of a more harmonious school climate, in which mutual respect and dialogue are encouraged.

However, it is crucial to recognize that, although initiatives such as the Aid Teams have shown progress, combating bullying requires an integrated commitment from the entire school community, involving teachers, administrators, students and families. The promotion of a culture of respect and the implementation of effective public policies are essential to ensure that schools are not only places of academic learning, but also safe and

healthy spaces for the integral development of students. In this sense, the success of these interventions depends on collaborative and sustained action among all the actors involved, so that the changes are lasting and positively impact school coexistence.

Case studies corroborate the positive impact of Help Teams on school coexistence. In a public school in the interior of São Paulo, the implementation of these teams resulted in a significant reduction in cases of bullying, in addition to an improvement in the overall school climate. The students involved were trained to identify signs of social exclusion, interpersonal conflicts and situations of violence, and acted proactively to welcome and guide the colleagues involved. This process included the creation of spaces for listening and dialogue, in which students were able to express their difficulties and seek collaborative solutions to the problems of coexistence, strengthening the feeling of belonging to the school.

Another relevant example comes from a high school in the city of Americana, where Help Teams organized awareness campaigns about bullying and cyberbullying. In this school, students promoted conversation circles, debates and dramatizations, encouraging reflection on the importance of respect and empathy in the school environment. The impact of these actions was noticeable both in the reduction of reports of bullying and in the increase in students' sense of belonging, as pointed out by Tognetta (2022). These initiatives show how youth protagonism, when well structured, can contribute significantly to the creation of a safer and more cooperative environment.

The success of the Aid Teams is largely due to the direct involvement of students in the process of conflict prevention and resolution. By taking an active role in conflict mediation, students develop socio-emotional skills such as empathy, active listening, and the ability to solve problems collaboratively. This youth protagonism is an essential factor for the transformation of the school environment, allowing the students themselves to become agents of change and contribute to the construction of a culture of respect and solidarity.

In addition, the research reveals that the presence of Help Teams is directly associated with improved emotional well-being of students. Allen and Kern (2017) highlight that the feeling of belonging to school is related to better academic results, higher self-esteem and better psychological adjustment. In the schools where these teams were implemented, there was an increase in student engagement and a decrease in anxiety and loneliness rates, according to studies by Souza and Tognetta (2022), who analyzed the



well-being of 1,981 students from the state public school system in São Paulo. This data reinforces the crucial role that a sense of belonging and emotional safety play in students' academic and social success.

However, the implementation of Help Teams also faces challenges, such as the need for continuous training for students and close monitoring by teachers and school administrators. Although Law 13.185/2015 encourages the creation of programs to combat bullying, many schools still lack adequate resources to carry out these initiatives effectively. The success of the Aid Teams depends on robust institutional support, which includes the continuous training of educators and the involvement of the entire school community, to ensure that preventive actions are sustainable and effective.

In addition to Help Teams, the Shared Concern Method (CPM) emerges as another effective intervention strategy. Focused on engaging all those involved in bullying (aggressors, victims, and bystanders), the MPC promotes the collaborative resolution of conflicts, encouraging dialogue and collective responsibility. A study conducted in private schools in São Paulo demonstrated that the use of the MPC to mediate cases of bullying resulted in the creation of a more cooperative environment, where students could reflect on their actions and commit to behavioral changes.

Therefore, the school should not be seen only as a space where incidents of violence occur, but as a privileged place for the prevention and resolution of conflicts. The promotion of a culture of healthy coexistence, through programs such as the Help Teams, is essential for building a welcoming and safe school environment. However, for these initiatives to be sustainable, a joint effort by the entire school community is needed, in addition to public policies that ensure adequate resources and support for their continuous implementation.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This study highlighted the relevance of systematic and continuous interventions to prevent and combat bullying in the school environment, with emphasis on youth protagonism promoted by the Help Teams. The evidence presented indicates that these teams, when properly implemented, can significantly transform the school climate, contributing to the reduction of violence rates and promoting a culture of respect, empathy and solidarity among students. By encouraging the active participation of students in the



fight against bullying, these initiatives favor the creation of a more inclusive and collaborative atmosphere, essential for the social and emotional development of students.

Help Teams prove to be an effective strategy by engaging the students themselves in the process of mediation and conflict resolution, promoting the development of socio-emotional skills, such as empathy, active listening, and peaceful problem solving. In addition, these initiatives help to strengthen students' sense of belonging to the school community, which is essential for building a positive school culture. The implementation of approaches such as the Shared Concern Method (CPM) complements these actions, offering a reflective and collaborative alternative to deal with bullying cases, by involving both the aggressors and the victims in the search for solutions.

Despite the advances observed, the survey also revealed significant challenges in the implementation of these initiatives, particularly with regard to the continuous training of education professionals and the institutional support necessary to ensure the effectiveness of public policies. Although existing legislation, such as Law 13.185/2015, is promising, its application faces obstacles in Brazilian schools, often due to the lack of resources and the lack of training of educators. This reinforces the importance of greater investments and a more effective commitment on the part of public policies, which must ensure that schools have the necessary means to implement bullying prevention programs in an effective and sustained manner.

Therefore, in order for schools to consolidate themselves as privileged spaces for conflict resolution and promotion of healthy coexistence, it is essential that all parties involved — teachers, students, managers, and the community — act actively and continuously. Youth protagonism, when combined with an education that values dialogue, mutual respect and empathy, presents itself as a promising path to transform schools into safe and welcoming environments, capable of providing a comprehensive education to students. The collaboration of all school actors is essential to ensure that these initiatives not only address bullying, but also promote a culture of peace and harmonious coexistence in educational institutions.

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