Study on the national situation of cyberbullying in Portugal

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Abstract: *The present report is a study of the impact of the cyberbullying and the intervention strategies at national level, with the aim to establish the profiles of the cyberbullying aggressor-victim, for a better identification of the signs of cyberbullying per age category and distribution channels. The report is analysing statistics, support strategies, issues faced and needs of the teachers in the new digital teaching era, selection of cases of cyberbullying, best practices actions. This report is part of the TECPC project - Together Everyone can Prevent Cyberbullying, funded by the European Commission under the KA2 Erasmus+ Strategic partnership Digital Education Readiness Programme, ref.no. 2020-1-RO01-KA226-SCH-095269.*

Part 1 – Literature online review

1. **The current situation of cyberbullying in Portugal**

We decided, then, for this systematic review of the literature to analyze, synthesize and present some constant data in the existing literature on **the state of the art related to cyberbullying in Portugal.** We are interested in ascertaining what type of scientifically validated data and information has already been studied and is available in a database.

We then started our research and used the following keywords that we considered relevant: **bullying, cyberbullying, Portugal, Covid19**. The choice of these keywords refers to the objectives of this review: the anglicisms "bullying" and "cyberbullying" by the theme, "Portugal" by geographical limitation and "Covid19" because we consider it relevant to verify if there is intellectual production that relates the situation to the theme of cyberbullying.

We then decided to use the keywords in a combinatorial way to ensure unique and relevant search results through the Boolean "and" and "or" operators, implying that an article obtained in this survey must include the two terms involved in the sequences:

With these keywords was built the preliminary sequence of systematic research.

i. bullying **AND c**yberbullying

ii. bullying **AND** Portugal

iii. bullying **AND** Covid19

iv. cyberbullying **AND** Portugal

v. cyberbullying AND Covid19

vi. Portugal **AND** Covid19

We began the initial *the early scooping*, and it was found that it would be necessary to find lists of synonyms of the keywords we defined to make our research as comprehensive as possible.

Thus, the following word lists were elaborated by successive stages:

Table 1 - Early scooping

	1ST SCOOP	2ND SCOOP	3RD SCOOP	4TH SCOOP	5TH SCOOP
BULLYING	Harassment				
CYBERBULLYING	Online harassment				
PORTUGAL	-	-	-	-	-
COVID11	Covid-19	Coronavirus	Coronavirus	SARS-CoV-2	Pandemic

Finally, we have defined our keywords for searching databases:

(1) ("Bullying" **OR** "Harassment"**)**

(2) ("Cyberbullying" **OR** "Online Harassment")

(3) Portugal

(4) ("Covid19" **OR** "Covid-19" **OR** "Coronavirus" **OR** "Coronavirus" **OR** "SARS-CoV-2" **OR** "Pandemic")

Subsequently, we defined as a question of review: **"What are the conclusions of studies related to bullying and cyberbullying in Portugal?"**

We define that, in our research, we will consider articles with quantitative approaches and qualitative approaches, because, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), educational research is disciplined research, using quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Then, as database for our research, we opted for the Portal of Scientific Repositories of Open Access in Portugal (RCAAP) because it collects, aggregates and indexes scientific content so long as it exists in the institutional repositories of national higher education entities, and other organizations. We found that the keyword "**(3)** Portugal" is not necessary, because the portal itself presents this option, but can be used in the same form of combination. The research scans were carried out by the "description" option using the Boleyn present in the portal. The results were:

Table 2 - RCAAP preliminary survey results

	1AND2	1AND3	1AND4	2AND3	2AND4	1AND2AND3	2AND3AND4	ALL OF THEM
RCAAP	103	144	1	48	0	20	0	0

We also define the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Table 3 - Inclusion and exclusion criteria

INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Scientific article.	Delete repeated articles.
Access to full text in PDF format.	Delete articles by analyzing titles.
Articles since 2016.	Delete books, book chapters, e-books and theses.
Articles in Portuguese.	Delete articles that do not have a summary and/or keyword.
	Exclude articles not referring to Portugal.
	Delete articles that do not explicitly mention peer review.
	Exclude articles by analyzing the abstracts of the articles.

In the next step, we applied the inclusion criteria defined by us. Thus, the results contained in the later table are presented.

Table 4 - Results with application of RCAAP inclusion criteria

		1AND2	1AND3	1AND4	2AND3	1AND2AND3	TOTAL
CRITERIA	Descriptive	103	144	1	48	20	316
1	Scientific article	36	59	0	15	2	112
2	Access to full text in PDF format	35	56	0	14	2	107
3	Articles since 2016	24	27	0	10	2	63
4	Articles in Portuguese	17	22	0	7	1	47

Subsequently, we obtained the full text of the articles selected in the previous phase, having resorted to a system for the management of bibliographic references that allows the import of bibliographic references from databases and bibliographic catalogs. We then applied the exclusion criteria.

Table 5 - Results with the application of exclusion criteria

		1AND2	1AND3	2AND3	1AND2AND3	TOTAL
CRITERIA	Descriptive	17	22	7	1	47
1	Delete repeated articles.	3	4	2	0	38
2	Delete articles by analyzing titles.	1	4	0	0	33
3	Delete books, book chapters, e-books and theses.	1	1	0	0	31
4	Delete articles that do not have a summary and/or keyword.	0	1	0	0	30
5	Exclude articles not referring to Portugal.	6	0	0	0	24
6	Delete articles do not explicitly mention peer review.	2	4	2	0	16
1	Delete repeated articles.	0	1	1	1	13
7	Exclude articles by analyzing the abstracts of the articles.	0	0	0	0	13

Data extraction

The data will be presented in 2 categories: descriptive data and analytical data.

Descriptive data

We organized the data according to the order number resulting from our research, referring to the name of the articles, their year of publication and authors.

Table 6 - Descriptive data (order number, name of articles, year of publication and authors)

NO.	NAME	YEAR	AUTHORS
1	Cyber)Bullying: systematic review of the literature	2021	Gonçalves,Vitor Vaz, Cátia Emanuela Augusto
6	The promotion of manifestations of bullying in school: positioning of Portuguese adolescent students	2018	Ceron Trevisol, Maria TeresaPereira, BeatrizSpies, Dandara Isabela Mattana, Patricia
7	Association between school bullying and the country of origin: a cross-cultural study	2019	Zequinão, Marcela AlmeidaMedeiros, Pâmella deLise, Fábio AugustoTrevisol, Maria Teresa Ceron Pereira, Beatriz
2	Bullying and cyberbullying at school age	2016	Seixas, Sonia Raquel Pereira Malta Marruaz Fernandes, LuísMorais, Tito
3	Bullying and Cyberbullying: threat to the physical and mental well-being of adolescents	2018	Araújo, João Diogo Oliveira Caldeira, Maria do Rosário
9	Bullying in adolescence: causes and behaviors of Portuguese and Brazilian students	2019	Ceron Trevisol, Maria Teresa Pereira,BeatrizMattana, Patricia
10	Bullying at school: causes and positions of Portuguese and Brazilian students	2017	Ceron Trevisol, Maria Teresa Pereira, Beatriz Mattana, Patricia
4	Bullying, cyberbullying and behavior problems: do gender and age matter?	2019	Carvalho, Marina Branquinho, Cátia Sofia dos Santos Matos, Margarida Gaspar de
14	Cyberbullying: Motives of aggression from the perspective of young Portuguese	2017	Caetano, Ana Amado, João Martins, Maria José D.Freire, Isabel Veiga Simão, Ana Pessoa, Teresa
15	Emotions in cyberbullying: a study with Portuguese adolescents	2016	Caetano, Ana Freire, Isabel Veiga Simão, Ana Martins, Maria José D. Pessoa, Teresa
11	Anti-bullying games: the perception of Portuguese teachers and educators	2020	Vaz, Cátia
12	Thematic Number: Studies on Bullying in Portugal	2017	Almeida, Ana Maria Tomás de Correia, Isabel
5	Victimization by bullying in three countries: a cross-cultural study	2019	Zequinão, Marcela Almeida Medeiros, PâmellaSilva, Jorge LuizSkrzypiec, GraceTrevisol, Maria Teresa Ceron Lopes, Luís; Pereira, Beatriz

Analytical data

we revisit our review question to keep in mind the focus of our study: **"What is the current situation regarding cyberbullying in Portugal?"**. Thus, we summarized the data collected from the conclusions and results of the studies. Consequently, we then established our categories and subcategories of analysis.

A. The aggravating factor of cyberbullying

According to Seixas et al. (2016), communication mediated by a screen has its own characteristics that serve as enhancers and aggravating factors in the case of cyberbullying, in which the interlocutors feel that there is a minimization of authority. This communication context allows a growing disinhibition, more relaxed and with less formality than the real and face-to-face context, enabling anonymity and the illusion of invisibility. At the same time, the aggressor does not have the same access to the victim's reactions as in the real context, which may cause him even less empathy or remorse for the victim.

To Seixas et al. (2016), the fact that when digital content is accessible online can be searched and used freely, repeatedly and without contextualization, further aggravate the problem of cyberbullying. In addition, you don't control the audience that sees online aggression and that, unlike face-to-face bullying that is restricted to a space-time, cyberbullying can happen at any time and anywhere because both aggressors and victims are permanently connected to their mobile devices. Also, Araújo and Caldeira (2018), follow the same line of thought, stating that cyberbullying can exert its effects on the victim at anytime and anywhere, thus being a constant pressure.

Seixas et al. (2016) also argue that the relationship of power inequality inherent in bullying can gain another perspective in the case of cyberbullying, because it is no longer about the aggressor being the strongest physically, but rather the one with greater technological expertise.

For Araújo and Caldeira (2018), cyberbullying is a more complex and violent form of aggression and may even serve as a continuation of face-to-face bullying. For the authors, as occurs in a virtual world, the aggressor feels unpunished, unsupervised and invisible so he can go beyond all limits.

According to Caetano et al. (2016)   the factors of impunity and anonymity are necessary, together with face-to-face removal, which allow the aggressor to perpetuate his behavior because, not visualizing the reactions and suffering of the victim, minimizes feelings of guilt and remorse, combined with the lack of

consequence of his acts. Following this line of thinking, these authors also state that aggressors, due to the context of cyberspace, develop a reduced sensitivity to empathy and suffering of others.

For Caetano et al. (201 7) the new generations that are continuously linked to cyberspace, in which everything happens very fast, almost instantaneous, the aggressors justify their behaviors as play, fun, escape from boredom, pleasure for pleasure, which will entail serious consequences at many levels and particularly in the communicational, moral and ethical development of both the victim and the aggressor.

Considering the specific characteristics of cyberbullying, Seixas et al. (2016), state that victims may present a more oppressive symptomatology, both physically, mentally and socially, than in cases of traditional bullying.

B. Teacher training

According to Gonçalves and Vaz (2021), teacher training is one of the ways to follow, thus betting on the primary prevention of cyberbullying, easing teachers with knowledge and strategies that make it possible to identify behaviors and, in a timely manner, act. According to the authors, their studies suggest the lack of specific training for the educational community.

Also, Carvalho et al. (2019) and Trevisol et al. (2018) state that it is necessary to develop skills in those who are responsible for formal education, so that professionals can recognize and intervene in cases of bullying and cyberbullying.

In studies conducted by Vaz (2020) most teachers report that bullying is currently a worrying problem in schools, but that they never had specific training in this area, although they felt the need for this same training. Thus, the author states that it is essential to develop conceptual training in teachers to face bullying, since they are the ones that can more easily prevent and detect this problem in the school environment.

2.2.3. Intervention programs

According to Araújo and Caldeira (2018), and Carvalho et al. (2019) it is necessary to develop intervention projects, based on public policies, in Education and Health, in the school and community context, centered into the socio-emotional aspects that involve the capacities and competencies of empathy, so that young

people are aware of the phenomenon of cyberbullying and its consequences. For the authors, cyberbullying is   a complex and difficult-to-control phenomenon that awareness-raising campaigns are needed, involving students and families, so that they can anticipate and avoid the harms of cyberbullying.

Also, Trevisol et al. (2018) conclude that prevention and intervention actions are needed, based on programs that promote the development of the formation of the human dimension of students and their relationships, with a view to preventing and intervening the effects of bullying. Of these programs, according to Trevisol et al. (2017), should be part of all: victim, aggressor, spectator, in the sense that everyone feels that the quality of relationships of coexistence in school is a common task.

Caetano et al., (2017) state that it is necessary to develop an effective digital citizenship, which break the cycle of associated violence to prevent cyberbullying and some of the causes that are at its origin. Dealing with and discouraging with cyberbullying will involve the design and application of through intervention projects, which must include all actors: students, teachers and parents, in a systemic approach (Caetano et al.,2016).

In the form of a summary, Zequinão et al. (2019) report that the literature proves the effectiveness of intervention projects for school bullying, referencing the world-renowned KiVa *Antibullying Program* and *the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.*

2.2.4. The game

From Vaz's perspective (2020) the use of play as an instrument that enables the development of critical thinking, cooperative work and problem solving will be a form of primary prevention of the scourge of cyberbullying. The use of educational games as a strategy to combat violence in the school context would act as an instrument for primary prevention and awareness of children.

Gonçalves and Vaz (2021) follow the same line of thinking, in which the game can be an important ally in the fight against cyberbullying, referencing the digital resources available on platforms that aimed at the primary prevention of this scourge.

2.2.5. Cyberbullying in Portugal

According to Araújo and Caldeira (2018), who cited a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Portugal has registered more complaints of bullying than the United States.

To combat the increase in cases of cyberbullying, according to Gonçalves and Vaz (2021), the Ministry of Education has implemented a plan that provides for awareness and prevention of bullying and cyberbullying and, at the same time, defines mechanisms for intervention in school. The authors also highlight a set of projects and campaigns aimed at raising awareness and alerting to the problem, such as: *Safe Internet Center* and SeguraNet. These authors highlight educational instruments in the game format that have been designed in this context and are being implemented in Portugal, namely "Playing and Laughing Bullying Let's Prevent"; quiz4you – Science4you's Seguranet; the game PISCA Mega Quiz"

Gonçalves and Vaz (2021) make explicit reference to the activities promoted by the Safe Internet Center, of which they highlight: Formation of teachers; Contest "SeguraNet Challenges"; Content and awareness-raising materials; Awareness-raising sessions in schools; Safer Internet Day campaign; Campaign "Cybersecurity Month in Schools"; Educational resources; Digital Security Seal; Digital Leaders

2. **The impact of the COVID-19 rapid shift to digital education on students and teachers at national level**

The analysis of the impact of the real dimension of the COVID-19 pandemic will be done later with the necessary temporal and emotional distancing. At the same time, this an opportunity conducive to reflection and innovation, so that dynamic changes can be applied.

In the education field, changes were rapid and abrupt having forced teachers, students and parents to quickly get used to the demand of the situation. The online classes have shown us the fundamental role that schools play in our society. Although the relationship between the school and the educational community has been greatly strengthened in the current context, it is necessary that the educational system is flexible enough to be able to enable and welcome all the changes that are currently inevitable.

At teachers' level, the online classes have exposed the shortcomings in the field of technology of many teachers. Many teachers found themselves obliged to use educational tools for which they had little or none training and which, in many cases, were completely unaware.

According to the study of the National Council of Education (2021), the equipping schools with modern and effective technological equipment, simultaneously with the access to the Internet according to the current requirements, are fundamental for the changes to take place. The same study refers to the lack of skills and training of students and families in the use of digital resources (National Council of Education, 2021) were one of the conditioning factors that most affected non-face-to-face teaching.

It is therefore essential to focus on the development of effective and safe online platforms to support face-to-face classes, the development of digital literacy skills in teachers and students and teacher training in digital resources.

3. **The current situation on the National Policies and Strategies to support the prevention of / to fight against cyberbullying.**

3.1 The existent national policies and strategies

In December 2010, a proposal was presented to the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic that advocated the criminalization of school bullying (Bill 46/XI/2).

Subsequently, the Student Statute and School Ethics (Law No. 51/2012) defines a set of duties of the student aimed at preventing behaviors related to bullying and whose non-compliance causes the author to incur disciplinary infraction and in the possible application of corrective disciplinary measures (alienating i) and j) of Article 10). It also defines for parents the obligation to "contribute to the preservation of the safety and physical and psychological integrity of all those who participate in the life of the school" (Article 43.º, h). With regard to the school, the Student Statute explains the role of the Principal who, "in the face of a situation of danger to the safety, health, or education of the student, in particular by threat to his/her physical or psychological integrity, must (...) do all efforts to terminate it, by strictly appropriate and necessary means and always with preservation of the private life of the student and his family, acting in an articulated manner with the parents, legal representative or those who have the de facto custody of the student" (Article 47.º, n.º 1).

Consequently, the Directorate-General for Education develops initiatives and resources to prevent and combat bullying and cyberbullying within the Framework of the SafeNet Awareness Center and the Health Education Team.

In 2019, Order No. 8404-C/2019, effective the appointment of a working committee that had the function of supervising and promoting the project "School Without Bullying. School Without Violence." This order explicitly defines that the school, along with the family, are privileged spaces in the prevention and fight against violence, namely bullying and cyberbullying.

Law No 75-B/2020 of 31 December, in its article 197, creates the Independent Observatory on Hate Speech, Racism and Xenophobia which promotes and consolidates the strengthening of "measures to prevent and combat hate speech and cyberbullying, racism and discrimination".

3.2 The alignment of national policies at European level

The European Commission has set out the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) with the objectives of promoting quality, inclusive and accessible digital education across Europe. This plan aims to strengthen cooperation at European level and reconfigure education and training for the digital age. It also wants experiences in the unprecedented use of technology for educational purposes that have occurred with the COVID-19 pandemic to be used to improve education systems, supporting digitalization of teaching methods and pedagogies and providing the necessary infrastructure

As a result, the Portuguese Government, with The Council of Ministers Resolution No. 30/2020, approves the Action Plan for the Digital Transition (Plano de Ação para a Transição Digital) that provides for the Action Plan for the Digital Development of Schools (Plano de Ação para o Desenvolvimento Digital das Escolas - PADDE) and the Digital Teacher Training Plan (Plano de Capacitação Digital de Docentes - PCDD), which is based on DigCompEdu, the European Framework for Digital Competence for Educators.

The Action Plan for the Digital Development of Schools (PADDE) will intervene in the different areas of school organization in the field of digital technologies: Professional Engagement, Teaching and Learning, Learning Assessment, Continuous Professional Development and Leadership.

The Digital Teacher Training Plan (PCDD) aims to promote the development of the digital skills necessary for teaching and learning. This plan aims to definitively combine professional and pedagogical practices with the use of technology and digital educational resources, causing a change in school life and in the teaching-learning process.

These above-mentioned documents will be the guiding factors of European Education Policies from 2021 to 2027, and we consider regretting that there is no reference to cyberbullying and to a systemic approach to this problematic.

4. Support strategies in the education sector
4.1 At formal level – school education sector

Order No. 8404-C/2019 of the Ministry of Education promoted the creation of the Working Group called "School Without Bullying. School Without Violence" («Escola Sem Bullying. Escola Sem Violência») who started their duties in the 2019/20 school year, and who have been extended to their term of office for another year. This group promoted the School Without Bullying Plan. School Without Violence, (Plano Escola Sem Bullying. Escola Sem Violência) to be implemented by schools, already in the school year 2019/2020.

This plan was intended to be an aid to support schools, with a view to using different approaches to prevention and intervention, in the face of bullying and cyberbullying and to promote the creation of an action plan around strategies and activities to raise awareness and mitigate the effects of aggressive behavior in the school context. The report of this working group is also awaited, so that the results of the activities carried out can be assessed.

At the same time, the Ministry of Education has been carrying out some initiatives to support schools, drawing attention and trying to minimize the impact of violence in the school context, in particular bullying and cyberbullying. Training was promoted for teaching and non-teaching staff and dynamic initiatives and the production of teaching and learning support materials, through the dedicated teams of the Directorate-General for Education, through the SeguraNet Awareness Center and the Health Education Team, for example, the book Enable (European Network Against Bullying in Learning and Leisure Environments) which brings together resources, prevention and anti-bullying activities, aimed at students, teachers, parents, among other stakeholders.

4.2 At non-formal level – extracurricular activities
N/A

5. **Cases of cyberbullying**

Title of the case	Picture sharing
Country	Portugal
Actors involved	Boyfriend and girlfriend
When happened?	Share of intimate pictures
Brief description of the case	After the breakup, the boyfriend shared in WhatsApp groups intimate pictures that his former girlfriend has sent him

Title of the case	Online mistreat
Country	Portugal
Actors involved	Girl and classmates
When happened?	Overweight girl is called whale
Brief description of the case	Overweight girl is constantly identified by colleagues, on Facebook and Instagram, in photographs with whales

Title of the case	Filmed physical assault
Country	Portugal
Actors involved	Boy and group of girls
When happened?	Assault on a boy is filmed and shared in social media.
Brief description of the case	A boy is attacked by a group of girls and the whole situation is filmed and shared on social media. Later, the police have access to the video and criminalize the offenders.
Link, if the case was public	https://tvi24.iol.pt/sociedade/bullying/figueira-da-foz-video-com-jovem-a-ser-agredido-tem-um-ano

6. **Best practices actions to support the prevention of / to fight against cyberbullying**

Title of the practice	Episode 6: Ciberbullying
Country	Portugal
Link	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSAPIx75aPc
Brief description of the best practice	SeguraNet animations are educational resources to promote Digital Citizenship and Education for the Media. This site also has cartoons on themes and games related to shared security tips.

Title of the practice	Safe Internet
Country	Portugal
Link	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaOUICJ5GvU

Brief description of the best practice	Music that entertains and teaches. The song calls the attention of young people to behaviors, attitudes towards the media and new technologies.

Title of the practice	Game 'Bullying: A day at school'
Country	Portugal
Brief description of the best practice	Two psychologists created a pedagogical board game to help children and adults who play with them to identify bullying situations and develop skills to deal with the problem

7. **Relevant links (resources)**

https://www.amnistia.pt/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Manual_-Stop_Bullying_AI_Portugal.pdf

https://www.seguranet.pt

Part 2 – Practical review

The questionnaire applied to Teachers and Psychologists of Portuguese schools, with approval of the System of Monitoring Surveys in the School Environment of the General Directorate of Education, obtained a total of 96 responses, among professionals working in the public system and in the private system.

From the analysis of the questionnaires, it is concluded that the initial training of the respondents did not prepare them for this problematic and approximately 75% report that they intend training in the area of cyberbullying, due to the fact that 87.2% report that they do not have adequate training to the theme.

Acho que o cyberbullying está a aumentar entre os adolescentes.
94 respostas

Tenho formação antibullying
94 respostas
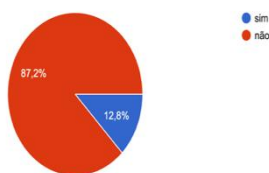
Of the respondents, 50% consider that bullying is more frequent than cyberbullying and 93.6% reported that they consider that cases of cyberbullying are increasing among Portuguese adolescents. Also 94.7% of respondents think that prevention can have an effect against cyberbullying and 95.7% consider that there is a need for intervention to combat cyberbullying.

It is reported by 45.7% that cyberbullying is a problem in their school and that there is clear agreement that these education professionals that schools should have a policy of combating cyberbullying. This agreement also extends to the need for schools to request specific training on this topic, since approximately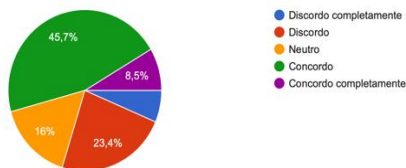 89% of respondents reported being concerned about cyberbullying. 41.5% of cyberbullying behaviors in their school, but 6.4% report that they observe this phenomenon once a week.

Acho que o fenómeno do cyberbullying pode ser diminuído pela intervenção
94 respostas
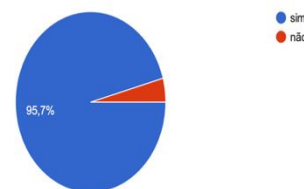
Cyberbullying é um problema na escola
94 respostas

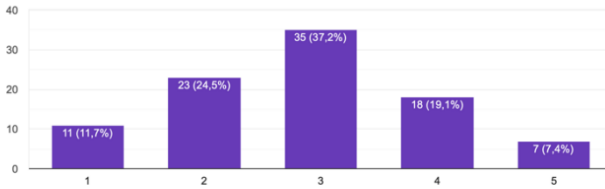It is considered relevant to mention that approximately 25% consider that students exaggerate with regard to cyberbullying and 14.9% put themselves in the "neutral" option in the question "I think cyberbullying prepares students for life". Also, on the question "I think students should deal themselves with cyberbullying situations", although 81.9% disagree with the statement, 9.6% selected the neutral option and 8.5% agreed.

Regarding the specific knowledge about what is the appropriate behaviors in the case of being a victim of cyberbullying, the majority of teachers, in all the questions listed, selected the "undecided" option and the same was seen in the answers related to the teaching of this information to students, so it can be inferred that it is imperative to deepen the knowledge of teachers in this area.