Bullying among medical students: Integrative literature review

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ABSTRACT

This integrative literature review aimed to identify the prevalence and characteristics of bullying among medical students. The bibliographic survey was carried out in six databases: LILACS, PsycINFO, PubMed, SciELO, SCOPUS and Web of Science. In all bases the crossings of keywords were carried out: bullying AND medical students; bullying AND medical school. Only articles published in the last 10 years and published in Portuguese, Spanish and English were selected. Among the 111 identified articles, nine have met the inclusion criteria and were analysed. All of them were published in the last five years (2014-2018). The quantitative method was the most used (77.8%). The prevalence of bullying ranged from 12.3% to 98.69%, with average percentage of 39.1%. The most prevalent aggression was verbal, followed by physical and cyberbullying. Verbal aggression was the most practiced by both sexes. Men practiced more physical aggression toward women. The places where the aggressions occurred most frequently were in the classroom, social networks, university exit, restrooms and cafeterias. When there was some help to the victim, it was performed by friends, most of the time. It is concluded that bullying has a high prevalence among medical students. Thus, better identification of bullying by the university, training of teachers and the provision of a support network and student orientation are fundamental to prevent and reduce this occurrence. Keywords: Bullying; Medical students; Medical school; Integrative literature review.
INTRODUCTION

School bullying refers to acts among peers characterized by intention, repetitiveness and imbalance of power among students. These acts can be physical (e.g., hitting, kicking, pushing), verbal (e.g., calling names, swearing at the victim, laughing), or relational (e.g., socially isolating the victim, spreading rumours, or manipulating relationships) (Silva et al., 2016). Although bullying is considered a phenomenon during infancy and adolescence, it can also be present in the interaction of university students. To suffer, to practice and to testify the bullying at the university can cause sensations of fear and insecurity, besides producing negative effects in the mental health, academic performance and quality of life of the university students. These effects can be higher in the medical students, for being a course that requires a lot of pressure and generally produces high levels of stress when compared to other courses (Pagnin & Queiroz, 2015). Hence, the objective of this study is to identify the prevalence and the characteristics of the bullying in the students of medicine.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This project is an integrating review literature, performed by the following steps: 1) Identification of the topic and performing of a search question; 2) establishment of inclusion and exclusion criteria; 3) definition of the information to be extracted from the studies; 4) evaluation of the included studies; 5) interpretation of the results and; 6) presentation of knowledge synthesis (Mendes et al. 2008).

The bibliographic survey was carried out in the month of October 2018 in six databases: LILACS, PsycINFO, PubMed, SciELO, SCOPUS and Web of Science. In all databases the crossing of the keywords were carried out by: bullying AND medical students; bullying AND medical school. The guiding question of the bibliographic search was: What is the prevalence and characteristics of bullying among medical students? It was elaborated according to PVO strategy (Population, Variables and Outcomes).

Publications of the last ten years (2009-2018) were included, with the purpose of recovering the most recent production on the subjects investigated. Only articles were selected, because they were evaluated more rigorously before being published. In addition, only articles with a specific focus on the subjects investigated and published in Portuguese, Spanish and English were inserted.

The process of search and bibliographic selection was carried out independently by two reviewers. The divergences between the searchers were discussed until a consensus could be found. For the selection of the articles found in the bibliographic search, it was carried out a reading of the titles and abstract. In this stage, those who didn’t meet the search question and the previously defined inclusion criteria were excluded.

In order to support the work of the reviewers, a spreadsheet in the Excel program was composed by the following data: article title, authors, author’s institution, year of publication, name of the journal, place of research, study objective, method, main results and conclusions.

RESULTS

Among the 111 identified articles, nine met the inclusion criteria and were analysed. All of them were published in the last five years (2014-2018). The quantitative method was the most used (77.8%). The prevalence of bullying ranged from 12.3% to 98.69%, with a mean percentage of 39.1%. The most prevalent aggression was verbal, followed by physical and cyberbullying. Verbal aggression was the most practiced by
both sexes. The men practiced more physical aggression toward women. The main perpetrators were peers and residents. The places where the aggressions occurred most frequently were the classroom, social networks, university exit, restrooms and cafeterias. When there was some help to the victim, it was performed by friends, most of the time. Students considered that there was not much to do, they generally ignored the aggression or avoided the aggressor.

DISCUSSION

This review evidenced the existence of high rates of bullying among medical students, indicating the need to study this phenomenon in depth and to adopt academic policies and strategies to prevent and reduce this phenomenon in the university (Reyes et al., 2015). It was also identified the need to increase the awareness of medical students about the harmful aspects of bullying, aiming to improve the coexistence between them (Silva-Villarreal et al., 2013). Similarly, it is important to look for ways to improve the students, residents and physicians’ communication skills, especially those with more aggressive communication styles in order to reduce the occurrence of verbal bullying (Lazarus et al., 2016). As men and women practice and suffer bullying differently, it is critical that the interventions consider gender differences. The scarcity of studies identified in the literature search indicates the need for more research on the subject.

CONCLUSION

It is concluded that bullying is prevalence among medical students. Thus, better identification of bullying by the university, training of teachers and the provision of a support network and student orientation are fundamental to prevent and reduce its occurrence.

REFERENCES


