

Systematic Review On Bullying Situations And Intervention Programs In Early Childhood Education

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ABSTRACT

Background: Bullying is a traumatic event that is observed from the early stages of the educational system. Ensuring an adequate socioemotional development through the implementation of activities or intervention programs based on the work of Emotional Intelligence in the Early Childhood Education stage where empathy, assertiveness, emotional intelligence, social skills, values... are worked on, with the aim of preventing/eradicating situations of violence in educational environments, is essential to put an end to this problem.

Goal: To find out whether there is evidence of bullying at the early childhood education (ECE) stage and to investigate whether bullying prevention work is carried out at this educational stage.

Method: A systematic review, following the PRISMA 2020 Declaration, was carried out in the Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus (SJR) databases from January to March 2023. The search terms used were: "Children", "Health Education" and "Bullying". Only articles in Spanish and English published from 2013 to 2023 were selected, in which bullying in the ECE stage is analyzed. The last filter applied was related with research areas of Psychology and Education. The sample is composed of a total of 4 articles, most of them published abroad.

Findings: According to the studies reviewed, there is little concern about bullying at the ECE stage, and there is little concern about the implementation of prevention programs for this problem

KEY WORDS Children, health education, bullying, prevention, emotional intelligence.

Introduction

In a society where there is an increasing percentage of cases of bullying at an earlier age, there is a need to investigate this problem in order to eradicate it from its origins (Hamodi yJiménez,2018). In Olweus (2022) it is stated that, according to data from the PISA report, the rate of bullying in Spain is 17% and, despite being below the average of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (23%), the figure has been increasing in recent years (14% in 2015).

Bullying is a term of Anglo-Saxon origin that refers to the persecutory behavior manifested with physical or psychological violence by a group of students, who torment other classmates who take the role of victim. This behavior is carried out repeatedly, prolonging the action over time for months or years (Olweus, 1998).

According to Sánchez-Venteo (2016), bullying or school harassment is an aggressive behavior among students. Such aggressive behaviors are manifested through insults, physical and psychological harassment, threats or blackmail, among others.

The first studies on peer violence were conducted by Olweus, who in the late 60s and early 70s of the twentieth century carried out studies on violence in the classrooms of schools in his country, Norway, after numerous suicides of young victims of bullying. Namely, in 1982, the suicide of two young people who had been victims of bullying for a long period of time made the Ministry of Education to find a national solution, resulting in 1983 in a national campaign in Norway on bullying in which the researcher Olweus participated. This campaign was the first to deal with bullying, and therefore it caught the attention of the media, schools and local communities (Crespo,2019).

In the 1990s, research on bullying was conducted in Germany; in 1996, in Italy, a pioneering study on bullying was developed by Genta, Menesini, Fonzi, Costabile, and Smith (León et al., 2012).

Garaigordobil and Oñederra (2010) conclude that all these investigations have bullying as a common point as a conflict present in countries around the world that generates severe problems in the victims. Hamodi and Jimenez (2018) expose that such problems are externalized through the various forms of bullying such as:

- Physical: personal injuries on the victims or damages on their belongings.

- Verbal: The victim is intimidated through insults, name-calling, threats, etc.
- Psychological: This has the greatest impact on the victim. It involves the persecution and lowering of the victim's self-esteem with the aim of isolating her.
- Social: Behavior aimed at isolating the victim. Feeling of not belonging to the group.
- Sexual: Victims' sexual inclinations are criticized or references are made to parts of the victim's body.
- Cyberbullying: Intimidation of the victim through technologies and social networks.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2020), it should be considered that violence is generated when there is a bad interaction between people and the environment in which they live. Therefore, it is essential that students acquire social skills that allow them to deal peacefully with conflict situations in any social environment. These inappropriate interactions are carried out by a series of participants who fulfill roles known as the "bullying triangle" (Arellano, 2008). The following table shows the roles and classifications of each of the participants involved in bullying situations:

Table 1 Participants in bullying

Victim	Aggressor	Spectator
It occurs in any social class and equally in boys and girls. The profile of the victims is usually weak and insecure people, with low self-esteem and confidence. They have an aggressive attitude in the family environment.	They show no empathy and act violently towards the victim. To carry out the harassment, they choose passive people with few friends. Many aggressors are not aware of the mistreatment.	They act in support of the harasser, silencing the facts and not avoiding the harassment situations, which leads to an increase in violence that the harasser exerts against the victim. The way the bystanders act will determine, to a large extent,

Classification of victims	Classification of aggressors	Classification of viewers
<p>-Provocative victim. He/she problems regarding social relations and is the object of harassment. As a remedy to the confrontation, he/she uses provocation.</p> <p>-Aggressor victim. In this case, the victim is an aggressor at any time. This victim suffers harassment and, in turn, harasses other colleagues whom he/she considers weaker.</p> <p>-Typical victim. Does not provoke the aggression. This is the predominant profile.</p>	<p>-Aggressive stalker. This is the most common. He/she is stronger than the victim and lacks empathy.</p> <p>-Passive bully. This is a person with low self-esteem and with problems in the family environment. This type of harasser joins the harassment when it has already started, which makes him/her an active participant.</p> <p>-Victim bully. He/she is weaker than the children who harass him/her and stronger than his victims.</p>	<p>the time and intensity of the aggressions, as well as the situation of the victim.</p> <p>-Encouraging. They do not directly participate in the aggression, but they encourage it to be committed.</p> <p>-Defender. Minor who stops the aggression.</p> <p>-Accomplice. Usually belongs to the aggressor's circle of friends.</p> <p>-Neutral. The one who avoids getting involved and does nothing to prevent the aggression for fear of retaliation.</p>

Note: Table showing the role of bullying participants and their classification. Adapted from “Intervention program in EI to prevent and eradicate anti-LGTB sentiment” by Agudo (2023).

Today, a report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2019) brings together quantitative and qualitative data from a series of global and regional surveys covering 144 countries and territories in all regions. The report reveals that one out of three students (32%) have been bullied by their peers at school at least once in the past month and a similar proportion have been affected by physical violence.

These data reaffirm the conclusions of Garaigordobil and Oñederra (2010). Bullying behavior is aggravated by the code of silence existing in these situations where bystanders do not report cases of bullying for fear of reprisals and social rejection (Save the Children, 2019). The so-called code of silence emerges in power-submission

relationships. This is rarely seen in friendly relationships where there is group cohesion and friendship bonds (Carrozo, 2015).

Calmaestra et al. (2016) state in the report “I don’t play the game” published by Save the Children that the main problem facing the issue of bullying is the lack of knowledge about the characteristics of this problem, which has led to numerous myths far away from reality. It also makes it difficult to identify the problem and contributes to prolong it over time. Some of these myths are (Plaza, 2022):

- Cases of bullying are isolated and occur in low percentages.
- The most damaging manifestation of bullying is physical violence.
- These behaviors are normal among children and they have to learn to solve their problems on their own.
- It is not a big deal; this has always happened and will disappear over time.

- Nowadays everybody talks about bullying, that is why more cases are appearing...

Oñate and Piñuel (2006), together with their research team Cisneros X, revealed the 8 most frequent bullying modalities:

- Social blocking (29.3%). It consists on showing the child as someone fragile within the group.
- Harassment (20.9%). The victim is psychologically harassed by hatred, disrespect, etc.
- Manipulation (19.9%). Behavior that aims to distort the social image of the victim and turn others against him/her.
- Coercion (17.4%). Forcing the victim to perform or omit to perform certain action against his or her will.
- Social exclusion (16.0%). It consists on excluding the victim from participating on any activity and isolating him/her from the social group.
- Intimidation (14.2%). It consists on frightening the victim, instilling fear, intimidating him/her...
- Aggressions (13.0%). The victim is verbally, psychologically or physically attacked.
- Threats (9.1 %). Threats against the physical integrity of the victim or family environment.

In response to the increase in cases of bullying, the implementation of programs for interventions to prevent/eradicate the problem in the educational environment has increased (Jiménez et al., 2016).

But prevention programs are often targeted at higher stage learners. Studies such as Iloa et al. (2016) highlight the importance of focusing programs on children who are in the earlier stage, given that the results of their research confirmed that bullying

behaviors were a common phenomenon among children in that stage.

Therefore, it is essential to implement activities or intervention programs in the ECE stage based on empathy, assertiveness, emotional intelligence (EI), social skills, values, etc., with the aim of preventing/eradicating situations of violence in educational environments and outside of them, thus promoting a good school environment and creating resolute adults in conflict situations (Viguer & Solé, 2012).

Among the different bullying prevention programs based on training on values and social skills to ensure a peaceful coexistence, we can find the peer tutoring program. As indicated by Ferrer et al. (2019), this program was developed in 2002 and implemented in different schools in Spain in 2003. It is a coexistence program to prevent violence and bullying, and involves the entire educational community. The program is implemented in the educational stages of Primary, Secondary and Special Education. It is implemented in the ECE and vocational training stages in an experimental phase.

Another program that has a 98% success rate regarding its implementation is the Kiva Program. This program is carried out in schools in Finland. The objective of the program is the prevention of bullying in schools by achieving a well-being school. The program consists of three units for the primary and secondary school stages. Therefore, it does not include the ECE stage in its project.

In order to promote safe schools by improving the school environment, there must be an active participation of the entire educational community: teachers, families and students who are part of the intervention programs aimed at the prevention and management of bullying. However, there are fewer studies about these programs (Ferrer et al., 2019).

Likewise, the fact of introducing competencies, objectives, contents, evaluation criteria and basic knowledge on bullying in the ECE stage is supported by the Spanish Royal Decree (RD) 95/2022, of February 1st, which establishes the organization and minimum curricula of ECE stage in Spain. In Section 7 of this RD, we can find the objectives. We will cover here the objective e), which states the following: "To relate with others in equality and to progressively acquire elementary guidelines for coexistence and social relations, as well as to exercise in the use of empathy and peaceful conflict resolution, avoiding any type of violence" (p. 6).

In addition, the above-mentioned RD organizes the educational contents in areas corresponding to the specific areas of children's experience and development. Specifically, it mentions "Area 1. Growth in Harmony", which explains that, with the incorporation to the educational system, children develop their interpersonal relationships, empathy and trust, which form the basis for the socialization of infants. The classroom is transformed into a community where social skills are developed, where each person can be assertive and empathetic, understanding mutual respect and the rules of coexistence, learning to manage and resolve conflicts through dialogue, without any manifestation of violence or discrimination.

Likewise, among its specific competences, item No. 4. states "Establish social interactions under conditions of equality, valuing the importance of friendship, respect and empathy, in order to build their own identity based on democratic values and respect for human rights" (p. 16).

Given that the ECE stage is divided into two cycles, the evaluation criteria for the 1st cycle (from 0 to 3 years old), and competence 4, include creating positive bonds showing empathy towards others.

Reproduction of observed behaviors in their environment through role-play based on respect, empathy and non-discrimination. In addition, it shows the beginning of conflict resolution with their peers with the help of adults. At the end of this cycle, the basic knowledge of community life through warm and respectful relationships and strategies for conflict management, which is closely related to the topic of this study, is presented among their basic knowledge.

As for the 2nd cycle (from 3 to 6 years old), the RD sets out among its evaluation criteria for competence 4 certain specific criteria that point out the participation in collective games with an attitude of affection, empathy and avoiding any hint of discrimination. Symbolic play free of stereotypes and the development of skills for positive conflict management.

As in the 1st cycle, for the 2nd cycle, it sets out some "basic knowledge" that deals with the resolution of conflicts, friendship as an element of protection and prevention of violence and the promotion of a culture of peace.

After analyzing the RD, the need to work with children in the promotion of environments based on respect, tolerance and acceptance from the educational environment and from the early stages is observed. In addition, this official regulation shows that the prevention of child bullying is a task of vital importance, which is reflected in each of its curricular elements.

Therefore, the goal of this paper is to conduct a systematic review to analyze existing studies that show the existence of bullying in the ECE stage (0-6 years), and studies that explain the implementation of educational intervention programs based on proper management of emotional intelligence (EI) and social skills in order to eradicate or prevent this problem.

Method

The method used to carry out this study was systematic review. For this purpose, the PRISMA 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021) was followed in order to obtain an adequate structure and to organize the manuscript.

Search procedure and strategy

The search was conducted from January to March 2023 in the WoS and SJR databases. The main topic of this research deals with aggressions and violence that emerge in classrooms at the ECE stage. The search terms were: "Children", "Health education" and "Bullying".

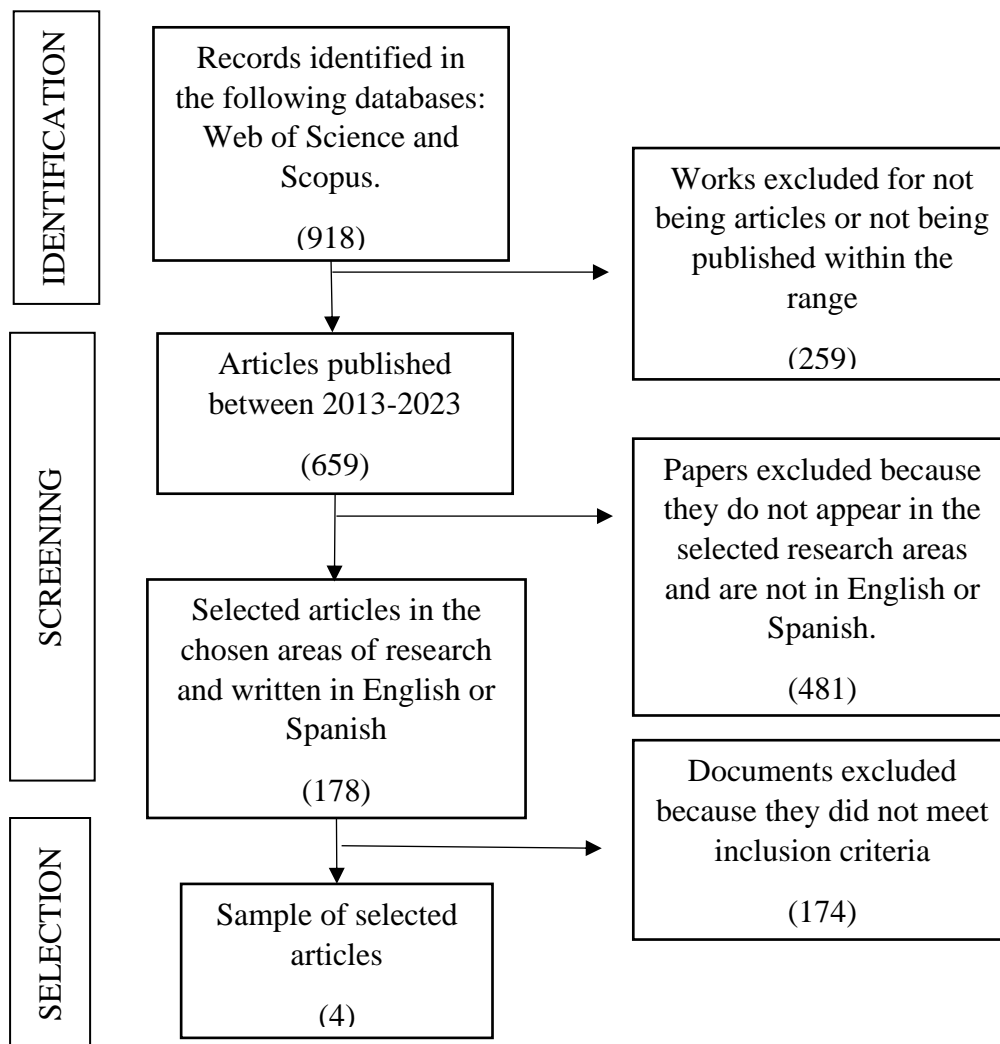
The initial research yielded 918 papers. A time frame was applied, selecting only papers published between 2013-2023, resulting in 722 studies. The search was refined by selecting those papers that were "articles" yielding a total of 659, decreasing this number to 648 when all articles that were not in English or Spanish were excluded. Finally, we filtered by the

following research areas: "Psychology" and "Education" obtaining a compendium of 178 articles before applying the specific inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The following inclusion criteria were established: 1) Studies analyzing the presence of violence and/or aggression in ECE stage; 2) Studies analyzing the effectiveness of programs in emotional intelligence and/or social skills to reduce or prevent bullying in the ECE stage.

For the application of these criteria, a preliminary reading of the title and abstract of each article was made, which made it possible to discard the studies that did not meet the above-mentioned criteria. Subsequently, we proceeded to an exhaustive reading of the selected articles, resulting in a final sample of 4 scientific papers (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Flowchart of the selection of the items that make up the sample

Results

Table 2 presents a summary with significant data on the selected sample. The data collected include the year of publication and authors, country in which the study was carried out, research objective, methodology, evaluation instruments, age and number of the sample, and conclusions.

Table 2 Base corpus of the study

Author and year	Country	Goal of the research	Methodology	Evaluation instrument	Age and sample number	Conclusion
1. Beauchesne et al. (2016).	USA	Designing projects to involve and raise awareness among pre-school children to protect themselves from bullying.	- Conducting an initial discussion on bullying with the support of illustrations made by the participants and with EI activities. - Puppet show.	- Discussion groups.	20 participants from 3 to 5 years old.	- Young children can talk about their feelings. - The most prominent manifestation of bullying at this stage is physical. - The design of the project to educate about bullying prevention among preschool children was successful.
2. Navarro et al. (2019).	Spain	Early identification of children who may be victims of bullying, as well as the possible alarm factors of victimization as assessed by the questionnaire. SDQ (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire).	Longitudinal study on behavioral problems in pre-school children, and annual follow-up up to 9 years of age.	- Interview - Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ).	622 families of children between 4 and 5 years of age.	- Bullying begins in the ECE stage. - Early detection of bullying situations can help reduce the risk of escalation in the following stages. -Early intervention eradicates bullying at later stages.

3. Lee (2020)	South Korea	Examining the relationship between harassment roles.	Application of questionnaire to teachers ad hoc	-Ad-hoc questionnaires to measure children's behavior and peer relationships. - Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Teacher Form (PSBS-TF).	62 kindergarten teachers.	- The presence of bullying is shown in the early childhood education stage. - Bullying situations persist in later stages. -Teachers can play a key role in bullying prevention.
4. Sansone and Latesta (2021)	USA	Testing the effectiveness of the Seeds of Unity curriculum in a classroom of four- to five-year-olds.	-Application of test -Exposure to the program (does not explain it).	- Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS) by Gresham and Elliott (1990).	14 participants between 4 and 5 years old.	- Bullying behaviors do not occur in children with a good level of emotional competence. -Applying bullying prevention programs that address emotional competence is effective in eradicating aggressive and prejudiced behaviors. -Lack of social skills and inadequate emotional regulation in children increases aggressive behaviors.

Note: Table showing the compendium of articles selected for the systematic review.

One out of the four studies included in the sample was carried out in Spain (article 2) and the remaining 3 abroad (South Korea and the USA). Obtaining such a small sample of research papers on the topic of bullying in the ECE stage shows that more research is needed, since the results obtained in the systematic review indicate that bullying situations occur from the early educational stages (Beauchesne et al. (2016); Navarro et al. (2019); Lee (2020); Sansone and Latesta (2021)). It is worth noting the low proportion of proposed works (articles 1 and 4) that carry out intervention programs to deal with this problem for infants in the ECE stage.

Regarding the methodologies used in the selected studies, quantitative and qualitative methodologies were found. In articles 2 and 3, questionnaires are used to obtain information from families and teachers. In article 4, a scale is applied to the participants, while in article 1, qualitative methodologies are used, such as discussion and interview. In article 3, the instrument used is not validated since it uses items from other questionnaires (Preschool Social Behavior Scale-Teacher Form, PSBS-TF), among others, and adapt them from English to Korean.

It should be noted that articles 1 and 4 do not explain the intervention programs they carry out. Article 1 explains an incompletely developed project since it does not determine which EI activities are carried out nor the exposure time of the project. Similarly, article 4 states that participants are exposed to an EI and social skills program for 10 months, but does not explain the program, only the results obtained from the scale application. In the two studies, the number of participants is small (20 in the 1st and 14 in the 4th).

Discussion

The aim of this systematic review has been to analyze what studies exist in relation to

bullying in the ECE stage. According to the data obtained, there is a clear lack of research papers dealing with bullying in the aforementioned stage despite having been proved that bullying starts so early, such as article 2, conducted by Navarro et al. (2019), which reveals that 4.2% of children of infant age presented warning signs of victimization at 4 and 5 years old. Furthermore, it concludes that early detection of bullying situations can help reduce the risk of escalation at later stages and that early intervention eradicates bullying at later stages.

Likewise, in article 3, Lee (2020) supports this with his research in which he exposes the presence of bullying in the ECE stage and adds that this situation persists in later stages. He points out that teachers can play a key role in its prevention.

It is therefore essential to carry out intervention programs that prevent or eradicate these situations from the basic stage of the educational system. In this sense, article 1, by Beauchesne et al. (2016), shows the success obtained after designing a series of projects to involve and raise awareness among preschool children to protect themselves from bullying. It points out the methodology carried out in one of their projects conducted with 20 participants from 3 to 5 years old, from which they obtain the information through focus groups and analysis. In this project, it is explained that an initial discussion on bullying was carried out with the support of illustrations made by the participants and with EI activities, in addition to a puppet show where they involved the participants by creating scenarios for a greater internalization of the topic. The authors concluded that young children can talk about their feelings, that the most prominent manifestation of bullying at this stage was physical, and that the project design for school prevention among preschool children was successful.

The study conducted by Sansone and Latesta (2021) in article 4 provides favorable results obtained by passing the Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS) of Gresham and Elliott (1990). During the pre-test and post-test period, they indicate that the program based on EI activities to prevent bullying is carried out with 14 participants between 4 and 5 years old. The study concluded that bullying behaviors do not occur in children with a good level of emotional competence, that the application of bullying or violence prevention programs that address emotional competence are effective in eradicating aggressive and prejudiced behaviors, and that the lack of social skills and inadequate emotional regulation in children increases aggressive behaviors.

Other authors such as Ilola et al. (2016) conducted a clinical study in Turku and its surrounding municipalities to find out whether bullying behaviors were occurring in preschool children. Their results showed that 35% had bullied other children having a similar victim prevalence result. These results agree with the research carried out by Lee (2020) in article 3, and Navarro et al. (2019) in article 2. In addition, Ilola et al. (2016) conclude that importance should be given to the implementation of bullying prevention programs in preschool children.

Despite the results found in research with preschool children on emotional and behavioral problems, adult observers are often the only informants, as reflected in the articles by Lee (2020), Navarro et al. (2019), and Ilola et al. (2016).

In this sense, Ringoot et al. (2013) present the Berkeley Puppet Interview (BPI) as a reliable instrument for obtaining information, which was developed to assess emotional and behavioral problems, and social and school functioning in children between 4 and 8 years old, since it is relevant in children of those ages.

Another reliable instrument for obtaining information in preschool children is the discussion. This methodology is present in the research of Beauchesne et al. (2016) in article 1, conducted with participants from 3 to 5 years old.

The 4 papers in the sample highlight the presence of bullying in the ECE stage and the importance of carrying out prevention intervention programs that work with EI and social skills to eradicate/prevent these behaviors and prevent them from being postponed to later stages (Ilola et al., 2016).

It is noteworthy that only one of the four selected articles is carried out in Spain (article 2) and deals with the prevalence of bullying in the ECE stage, as Bautista (2020) indicates; it states that the first manifestations of these behaviors can be found in the ECE stage, which shows that in Spain this problem is contemplated; he proposes the following measures: prevention, work on values and establishment of behavioral norms, detection (being vigilant before the appearance of the problem and intervention), being able to give an adjusted and appropriate response to each case.

As didactic tools to work on prevention in these stages, he proposes establishing classroom rules through dialogue, carrying out cooperative activities and the use of children's literature, theater or puppets as excellent resources to make children aware of the feelings of others and the behaviors that should or should not be allowed.

Lastly, Hamodi and Jiménez (2018) reinforce the idea that working empathy in the ECE stage helps to improve the development of their cognitive abilities and their emotional and social development, and they propose that it can be carried out through the socio-affective method. In addition, in the analysis of bullying prevention models developed by these

authors in their research, they show the lack of programs applied in the ECE stage.

Conclusions

It is concluded that this study has found 4 articles that analyze bullying in the ECE stage. Foreign publications predominated.

The data obtained show the lack of concern of researchers for the need to incorporate intervention programs for the prevention or eradication of bullying in preschool children, as well as the low inclusion of this educational stage in the realization of investigations that demonstrate bullying situations in this stage. Most of the studies analyzed have been carried out with children from the primary education stage onwards.

As a general conclusion, it is stated that few studies have been found that have included the ECE stage in the analysis of their research on bullying, despite the fact that its existence has been proven in the analysis of this review.

As for the limitations that have been found during the conduct of this research, they have been the scarce relation of works found that dealt with bullying in the ECE stage through activities that promote the management of EI and social skills. In addition, the choice of key words was complicated because there were no words that referred to the desired search.

In relation to the first limitation found, a search for research on bullying in this educational stage will be carried out in future studies using children's literature as a pedagogical tool, since, after the review carried out, projects have been found that work on this problem through literature promoting EI and social skills.

As for the limitation found regarding the search for keywords, for future research, the number of keywords will be expanded to search for the desired topic in order to obtain

broader results that will allow to conduct more comprehensive research.

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