

Bullied and Bounced: An Investigation of School Bullying Aftermaths among Pupils with Migrant Background

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Abstract

Purpose. Bullying is one of the most challenging issues faced by schools in Western Countries. Scholars have variously analysed the consequences of bullying, pointing out its deleterious effects on bullied pupils. The aftermaths of bullying are even worse when it is targeted to fragile students, including those with an immigrant background. This paper tries to elicit the negative effects of bullying on school performances of bullied students of immigrant parents, suggesting organizational and management approaches to deal with this issue.

Methodology. Secondary data were collected from the study on the Integration of Second Generations performed in 2015 by the European Fund of Integration and the Italian Ministry of Interior. An *ad hoc* ordered logistic regression model was arranged and implemented to investigate the relationship between bullying, victims’ socio-demographic characteristics, their school performances and behaviours.

Findings. The study results suggested that bullied students were more likely to have poor self-reported school performances. Moreover, they were at greater risks to show one or more failed years and to dropout from school. Interestingly, students who were affected by bullying suffered from social exclusion and performed one or more working activities, in addition to mandatory schooling. Lastly, yet importantly, bullied students expressed lower trust in their teachers as compared with their peers.

Practical implications. Bullying has relevant drawbacks on the quality of education services. Tailored interventions are needed to prevent and/or address bullying in mandatory schools.

Originality/value. This study investigates the negative consequences of bullying and suggests some interventions which may be effective in preventing its occurrence or constraining the magnitude of its aftermaths.

Keywords

Bullying; School performances; Education services; School quality; Immigrants

1. Introduction and research aims

Bullying is an enduring issue in the fields of school management and governance, which is able to negatively influence the quality and the effectiveness of educational services (Corcoran & Mc Guckin, 2014). Moreover, it is a wide-ranging phenomenon, which concerns both developed (Eriksen, Nielsen, & Simonsen, 2014) and developing countries (Santoyo & Mendoza, 2018). Scholars have variously stressed the drawbacks of school bullying at the individual and collective levels (Eriksen, 2018), emphasizing the need for further developments intended to shed light on the policies and strategies which could be effective in curbing its occurrence and in preventing its manifestation (Stassen Berger, 2007).

On the one hand, school bullying alters the social and emotional development of victims; among others, Jantzer, Hoover and Narloch (2006) discussed the negative effects of school bullying on victims' shyness, which – in turn – worsens the individual ability to establish trusted and reliable relationships with peers; also, it has been found to imply poorer mental and physical health, which paves the way for impaired quality of life (Flaspohler, Elfstrom, Vanderzee, Sink, & Birchmeier, 2009). On the other hand, the occurrence of school bullying has momentous side effects on the labour market outcomes, being associated with lower participation in the work force, reduced employment rates, and inferior wages (Drydakis, 2014).

In light of these considerations, there is the need for tailored and focused school programmes, which should be aimed at extirpating the seeds of bullying in schools and at minimizing its consequences on educational services' quality and effectiveness (Ostrander, Melville, Bryan, & Letendre, 2018; Kaufman, Kretschmer, Huitsing, & Veenstra, 2018). However, still little is known about the distinguishing attributes of these interventions, as well as about the essential ingredients of the recipe for successful anti-bullying policies. The lack of straightforward and compelling evidence about the effectiveness of initiatives addressed to tackle the occurrence of school bullying is generally produced by two concurring circumstances. Firstly, bullying is a multifaceted and complex issue, which is concomitantly composed of various and interrelated shades; such a multifacetedness blurs the effects of anti-bullying interventions and make it hard to assess their ability to avoid pupils' victimization (Chandler, 2018). Secondly, school bullying is an evolving issue, which could not be included in clear-cut conceptual boundaries (Stassen Berger, 2007); consequently, it is not easy to pinpoint comprehensive strategies which allow to properly deal with bullying and to restrain its consequences on victims (Zych, Baldry, & Farrington, 2018).

It is worth noting that school bullying is especially dangerous when fragile groups of pupils are concerned, such as those who have an immigrant background. In fact, parents' immigrant status has been identified as a relevant determinant of victimization (Hong & Espelage, 2012). At the same time, previous studies have highlighted that migrant youth are more likely to show and perpetrate bullying behaviours at schools (Lindström, 2001; Walsh, et al., 2016). In other words, there is the risk that bullying and social disadvantage which is usually attached to migrant status are mutually related, requiring special interventions at the individual and organizational levels.

This study is an attempt to illuminate the link existing between the occurrence of bullying and the migrant background of pupils. Particular attention is paid to the likelihood of migrant parents' pupils to be victims of bullying episodes and to the potential consequences of this circumstance on their school performances and well-being; this allowed to collect intriguing

insights to inspire adequate anti-bullying interventions. Ultimately, 2 research questions inspired this study:

- *R.Q. 1*: What are the socio-demographic triggers of bullying victimization among pupils of migrant parents?
- *R.Q. 2*: How does bullying affect the victims' school performances and behaviours?

Secondary data obtained from the ISTAT study on the Integration of Second Generations – commissioned by the European Fund of Integration and the Italian Ministry of Interior – were investigated to provide a tentative answer to these research questions. Even though this study relied on secondary data, the authors autonomously developed and implemented the research strategy and design. Therefore, the results of this work should be exclusively ascribed to the authors, and not to the ISTAT, which was not directly involved in either data analysis or interpretation. The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. The second section briefly depicts the theoretical framework which was arranged to objectify and handle the bullying phenomenon for the purpose of this research. Section 3 describes the methods which were used to analyse the secondary data and rapidly presents the sample which was involved in this study. Findings are summarized in the fourth section, which triggers the main research implications, disclosed in Section 5. Lastly, yet importantly, conclusions stress the contribution of this research, which aims at the enhancement of our conceptual and practical understanding of school bullying characteristics and consequences, providing some insights to inspire effective anti-bullying interventions.

2. Conceptual background

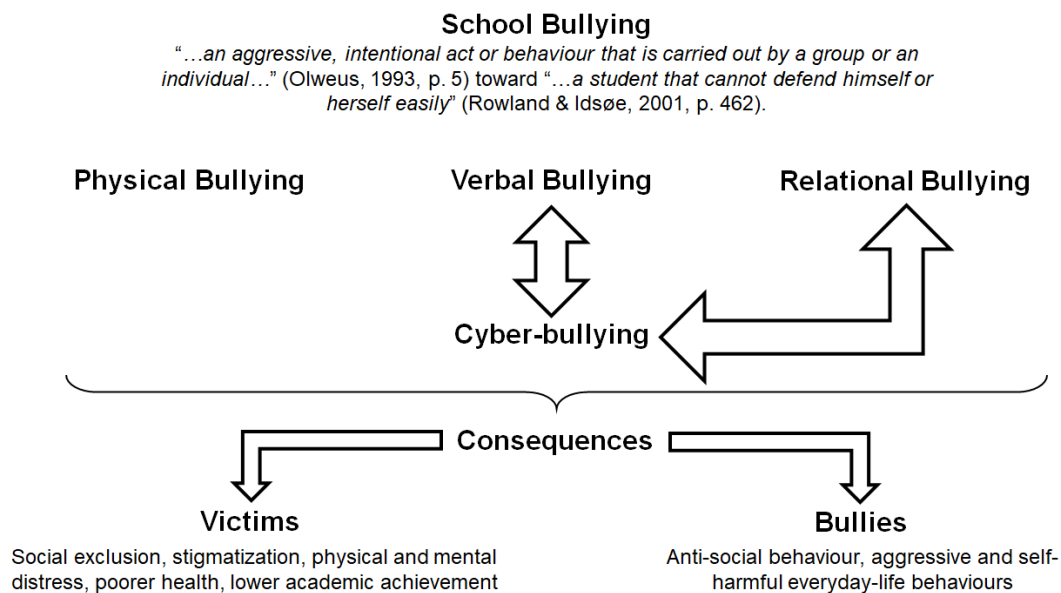
As previously anticipated, school bullying is a complex phenomenon, which shows many facets (Smith, *et al.*, 1999). Drawing on the prevailing scientific literature (Solberg & Olweus, 2009), three different types of school bullying could be identified: physical, verbal, and relational. Physical bullying involves victims' corporal mistreatment (such as punches, kicks, and hits), as well as voluntary damages to personal ownings, physical jokes, and extortion of financial and/or material resources (Fu, Land, & Lamb, 2016). In other words, physical bullying is intended to establish a dominant relationship with the victim, in an attempt to make him/her reliant on the bully's will (Chaux, Molano, & Podlesky, 2009). Differently, verbal bullying is realized through the intentional use of spoken interaction to hurt the victims' sentiments and perceptions (Serra-Negra, *et al.*, 2015); in particular, it may happen through personal insults, as well as offenses based on gender and/or physical aspect, intimidation and/or threats (Chapell, *et al.*, 2006). Relational bullying is specific in that it does not solely affect the one-to-one relationship between the bully and the victim (Wolke, Woods, Bloomfield, & Karstadt, 2000). Actually, it includes social issues, since it is ultimately intended to impair the victims' ability to establish sound and comfortable relationships in his or her everyday living environment. Various approaches could be used for this purpose, ranging from victims' social exclusion and isolation, to the spreading of shameful rumours and uncontrolled disclosure of confidential information about the victim (Chester, Spencer, Whiting, & Brooks, 2017).

It is worth noting that the widespread diffusion of information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digital tools have paved the way for new forms of bullying, which are mainly implemented through personal computers, smartphones and social media. Scholars have coined the “cyber-bullying” construct to depict such an evolution of bullying practices

(Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009). Previous studies have shown that cyber bullying and school bullying partially overlap, with pupils who are bullied at schools being more likely to be bullied through digital tools (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2017). From this point of view, it could be assumed that cyber-bullying – at least in part – represent a mutation of verbal and social bullying, which is aimed at pupils’ victimization by the intermediation of ICTs.

Even though schools represent an appropriate environment to design and implement timely and effective interventions finalized to curb and/or prevent the occurrence of cyber-bullying (Campbell & Bauman, 2018), this phenomenon mainly happens outside schools (Smith, *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, in spite of its relevance, cyber bullying was not contemplated in this research. In fact, schools may not possess adequate management tools to properly steer cyber-bullying and to minimize its side effects on victims’ school performances and well-being. Figure 1 graphically synthesizes the conceptualization of school bullying on which this research relied and points out the main drawbacks which it could produce on bullied pupils.

Figure 1. The conceptualization of school bullying



Source: Authors’ elaboration

Whatever its form, the manifestation and perpetration of school bullying produces significant consequences on both victims and bullies (Zych, Farrington, Llorent, & Ttofi, 2017). The former are likely to suffer from physical and mental distress (Rigby, 2003; Graham, 2016), which is associated with stigmatization and social exclusion (Juvonen & Graham, 2014); in turn, this has relevant repercussion on victims’ academic achievement (Kaur, Areepattamannil, Lee, Hong, & Su, 2014; Zhicheng, Xu, & Zhang, 2017) and on their ability to properly function in the everyday social life (Thornberg, 2015). Otherwise, several studies have highlighted that bullies are at greater risks of showing aggressive and harmful behaviours in adult life, which deteriorate their social functioning in everyday life contexts (Nansel, Overpeck, Haynie, Ruan, & Scheidt, 2003; Rodkin, Espelage, & Hanish, 2015).

3. Research strategy and design

This research relied on secondary data, which were obtained from the national study on the Integration of Second Generations performed in 2015 by the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), with the support of the European Fund of Integration and the Italian Ministry of Interior (ISTAT, 2017). The sampling base consisted of the first grade and second grade secondary schools established in Italy; on the whole, 821 Italian municipalities were taken into consideration, with a total number of 1.400 secondary schools. Both Italian and foreign students with an immigration background were contemplated in the analysis. The final sample consisted of 65.535 students, equally distributed among Italian and non-Italian students.

Four categories of variables were investigated, including:

- *Socio-demographic variables*, which were useful to depict the sample profile;
- *Occurrence of bullying variables*, to discriminate among students who were victims of physical, verbal and/or relational bullying and non-bullied students;
- *School performances variables*, which allowed to examine the consequences of bullying on victims' academic achievement;
- *Relationship with school staff variables*, which assessed the potential drawbacks of bullying episodes on bullied students' trust toward teachers.

A mixed quantitative approach was used to investigate available data. Firstly, a descriptive analysis was performed to collect preliminary evidence on the distinguishing attributes of school bullying. Secondly, a regression analysis was used to investigate the socio-demographic triggers and the consequences of school bullying. To further delve into this issue, an *ad hoc* ordered logistic regression model was implemented.

When quantitative dependent variables are concerned, various estimation procedures are available. However, as far as categorical dependent variables are taken into consideration, fewer options are contemplated. Moreover, if only two outcomes are possible, either a logistic (or logit) or a probit model could be employed. If the outcomes cannot be ordered (as in the case of geographical area and ethnicity), it is appropriate to use a multinomial logit regression model. However, it is worth noting that, if we use this procedure when the response variable is ordinal, there is a significant risk of information loss, since multinomial logit models ignore the ordered aspect of the outcome. On the opposite, ordered logit and probit models provide a means to exploit ordering information.

Going more into details, ordered logistic regression models are especially fitting to investigate the relationship between dependent ordinal variable and its independent variables. Among others, Cameron & Trivedi (2005) described ordered logistic models, where ordinal variables are categorical and ordered. In our case, the occurrence of bullying was designed as an ordinal variable, since its outcomes could be ordered from no occurrence to recurrent occurrence of bullying. An underlying score is estimated as a linear function of the independent variables and a set of cut-points. The probability of observing the outcome “*i*” corresponds to the probability that the estimated linear function – plus random error – is within the range of the cut-points. Such a probability is expressed as:

$$Pr(\text{outcome}_j = i) = \Pr(K_{i-1} < \beta_1 x_{1j} + \beta_2 x_{2j} + \dots + \beta_k x_{kj} + u_j \leq k_i) \quad [1]$$

Where:

- $\beta_1, \beta_2, \dots, \beta_k$: are the coefficients obtained using maximum likelihood estimation;
- K_1, K_2, \dots, K_{k-1} : are the cut-points (K_0 is taken as $-\infty$, and K_k is taken as $+\infty$);
- $x_{1j}, x_{2j}, \dots, x_{kj}$: are the regressors;
- u_j : is the random error.

All ordered logit models have been derived starting with a binary logit/probit model; it is generalized to allow for more than two outcomes. The probability of a given observation for ordered logit is:

$$p_{ij} = Pr(y_j = i) = Pr(K_{i-1} < x_j\beta + u \leq k_i) = \frac{1}{1 + \exp(-k_i + x_j\beta)} - \frac{1}{1 + \exp(-k_{i-1} + x_j\beta)} \quad [2]$$

Lastly, yet importantly, the log likelihood is:

$$\ln L = \sum_{j=1}^N w_j \sum_{i=1}^k I_i(y_j) \ln p_{ij} \quad [3]$$

Where:

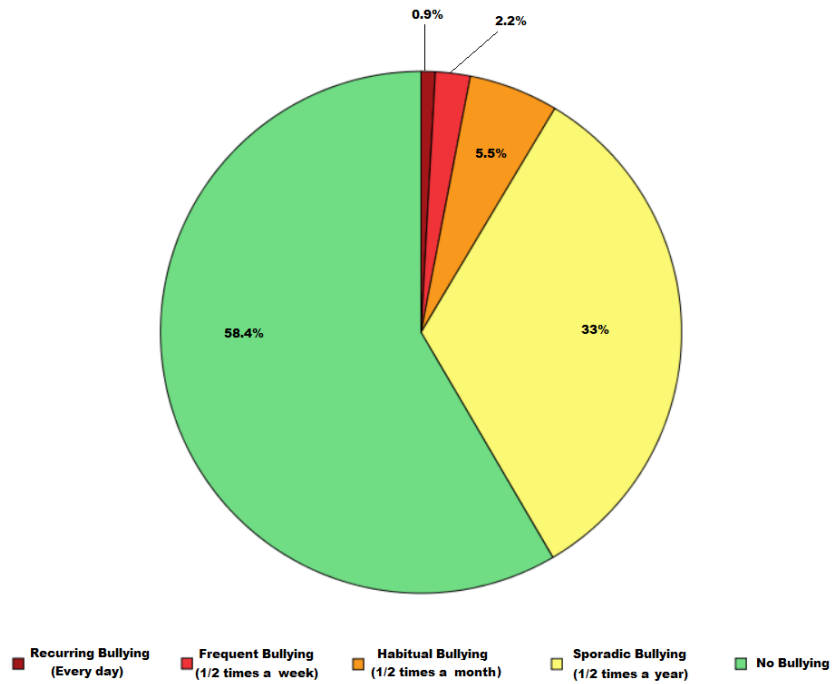
- w_j : is an optional weight;
- $I_i(y_j) = \{1, \text{if } y_j = i \text{ and } 0, \text{otherwise.}$

4. Findings

Bullying was found to be a recurring problem for pupils with a migrant background attending first grade and second grade secondary schools in Italy. Figure 2 graphically summarizes the diffusion of physical bullying. Slightly less than 1% of the sample (956 pupils) reported to suffer from physical bullying every day; moreover, 3.312 students (2.2%) disclosed to be victims of corporal offenses 1 or more times a week. More than 1 out of 20 (5.5%) respondents stated to be involved in physical bullying 1 or more times a month. About a third of the sample revealed victimization by physical bullying at least once a year. In sum, only 58.4% of secondary schools' pupils were not affected by physical offences by their peers.

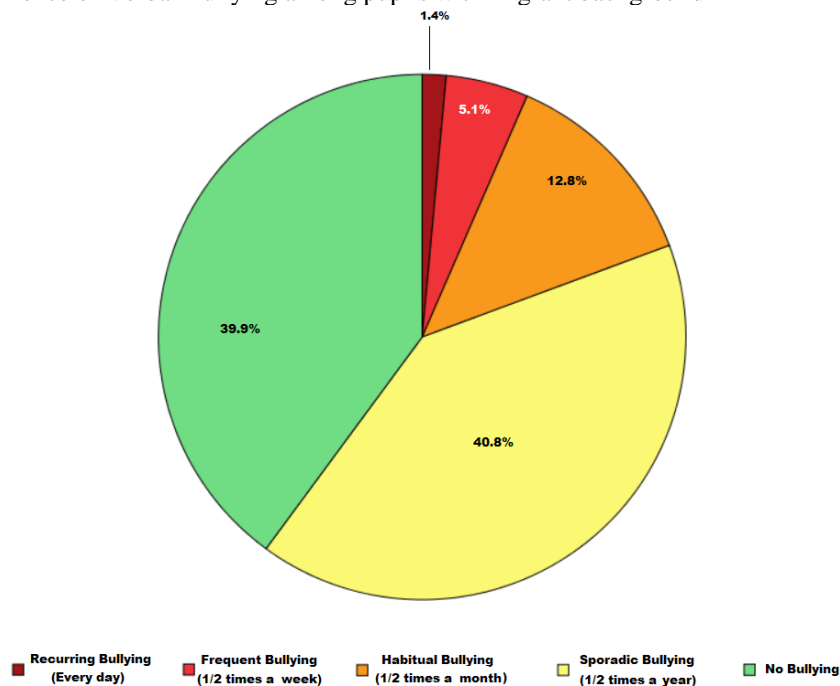
Verbal bullying was found to be more common than physical bullying. In fact, 956 pupils (1.4%) stated to be victim of verbal offenses and threats every day by their peers. In addition, more than 5% of secondary schools' students claimed that they were frequent addressee of verbal attacks at school. More than 1 out of 10 respondents (12.8%) declared to suffer from verbal bullying 1 or more times a month. Lastly, yet importantly, a large part of pupils affirmed that they were targets of verbal insults and offences at least once a year (40.8%); only 39.9% of the sample did not disclose to be victim of verbal bullying.

Figure 2. The occurrence of Physical Bullying among pupils with migrant background



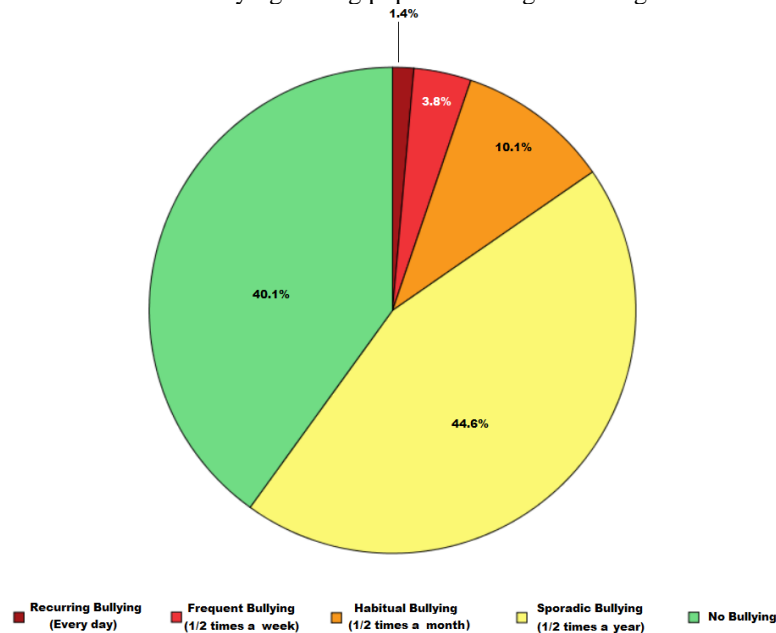
Source: Authors' re-elaboration from ISTAT (2017) data

Figure 3. The occurrence of Verbal Bullying among pupils with migrant background



Source: Authors' re-elaboration from ISTAT (2017) data

Figure 4. The occurrence of Relational Bullying among pupils with migrant background



Source: Authors' re-elaboration from ISTAT (2017) data

Relational bullying seemed to echo the characteristics of verbal bullying. In fact, 921 students (1.4%) reported that they were daily subject to exclusion, isolation and/or to other forms of social victimization. Besides, slightly less than 4% of the sample suffered from relational bullying 1 or more times a week. About 1 out of 10 pupils (10.1%) was involved in relational bullying at least once a month. Slightly less than half of secondary schools' students with migration background (40.1%) did not revealed social victimization; alternatively, more than 4 out of 10 respondents (44.6%) pointed out to be affected by relational bullying at least once a year.

As reported in Table 1, the three types of school bullying showed positive and statistically significant Spearman's rank order correlations. In other words, pupils who were victims of physical bullying were also likely to show both verbal and relational bullying. From this point of view, there is the risk that various forms of bullying are concomitantly used by bullies to victimize their peers. Also, a significant relationship was identified between the occurrence of school bullying and pupils' distrust toward teachers. Interestingly, in this case verbal and relational bullying had relatively higher coefficients as compared with physical bullying, probably in light of the greater ability of teachers to prevent the former as confronted with the latter. Last, but not least, a significant association was found between school bullying and social exclusion, with victims of physical, verbal and relational aggressions being more likely to be excluded at school.

The results of the ordered logistic model suggested that pupils' gender and citizenship were significant regressor of school bullying occurrence. Similarly, both the type of secondary school and the municipality dimension turned out to significantly affect the likelihood of school bullying among students with a migrant background. Due to its size, the log file which reports into details the findings is not included in this paper: nonetheless, readers who are interested in having a thoroughly view of the results provided by the ordered logistic regression model are invited to contact the corresponding author to have a free access to these data.

Table 1. Spearman's rank order correlations between school bullying behaviours, social exclusion and trust

	Physical Bullying	Verbal Bullying	Relational Bullying	Social Exclusion at School	Trust toward Teachers
Physical Bullying	1.000				
Verbal Bullying	.672**	1.000			
Relational Bullying	.588**	.635**	1.000		
Social Exclusion at School	-.230**	-.269**	-.282**	1.000	
Trust toward Teachers	-.079**	-.119**	-.122**	.363**	1.000

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 provides a more straightforward synthesis of the study results, showing the findings of a cross-tabulation analysis between the occurrence of school bullying, the pupils' gender and citizenship, and the secondary schools' attributes. It is worth noting that male pupils were twice as likely as female to report bullying every day or at least once a week. The same was true for non-Italian pupils, who were found to be more inclined to suffer from school bullying as compared with Italian ones. School bullying was more common in first grade secondary school; besides, schools established in small-sized municipalities revealed a greater likelihood of school bullying as confronted with institutions located in large municipalities.

Table 2. Cross tabulation between school bullying, pupils' socio-demographic characteristics, and school attributes

		Citizenship			Gender		
		Italian	Non-Italian	Total	Male	Female	Total
School Bullying	Every day	331	482	813	604	209	813
	1/+ times a week	925	1.253	2.178	1.368	810	2.178
	1/+ times a month	3.277	3.639	6.916	3.802	3.114	6.916
	1/+ times a year	20.853	17.152	38.005	18.691	19.314	38.005
	Never	9.663	7.960	17.623	9.101	8.522	17.623
Total		35.049	30.486	65.535	33.566	31.969	65.535
	Pearson χ^2	305.141			393.866		
	Df	4			4		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000			0.000		
		Secondary School			Municipality size		
		First grade	Second grade	Total	Small	Large	Total
School Bullying	Every day	489	324	813	652	161	813
	1/+ times a week	1.454	724	2.178	1.672	506	2.178
	1/+ times a month	4.565	2351	6.916	5.178	1.738	6916
	1/+ times a year	18.314	19.691	38.005	27.571	10.434	38.005
	Never	7.878	9745	17.623	13.212	4.411	17.623
Total		32.700	32.835	65.535	48.285	17.250	65.535
	Pearson χ^2	1234.334			73.899		
	Df	4			4		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000			0.000		

Table 3. Cross tabulation between school bullying and students' performances

		Failed year		Self-assessed school performances						
		None	1 or more	Total	Very good	Good	Bad	Very bad	Total	
School Bullying	Every day	581	232	813	127	344	214	128	813	
	1/+ times a week	1.679	499	2.178	201	965	724	288	2.178	
	1/+ times a month	5.533	1.383	6.916	655	3.420	2130	711	6.916	
	1/+ times a year	30.845	7.160	38.005	4.468	20.345	10.757	2.435	38.005	
	Never	14.115	3.508	17.623	2.277	9.827	4520	999	17.623	
	Total	52.753	12.782	65.535	7.728	34.901	18.345	4.561	65.535	
	Pearson χ^2	89.157		623.089						
	df	8		12						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000						
		Willingness to continue to study after the first grade			Involved in working activities					
		No/don't know	Yes	Total	Every day	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
School Bullying	Every day	112	377	489	190	175	83	94	271	813
	1/+ times a week	261	1.193	1.454	264	487	285	304	838	2178
	1/+ times a month	542	4.023	4.565	406	1.270	979	1.134	3.127	6.916
	1/+ times a year	1504	16.810	18.314	1.188	5.100	4.804	7.426	19.487	38.005
	Never	777	7.101	7.878	680	2.195	1.775	2.629	10.344	17.623
Total	3196	29.504	32.700	2.728	9.227	7.926	11.587	34.067	65.535	
	Pearson χ^2	302.348		2112.203						
	df	8		16						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000						

The logistic regression model emphasized that bullied pupils were more likely to self-report lower school performances; besides, they were found to show inferior evaluations as compares with non-bullied peers both in mathematics and in Italian. The cross-tabulation between bullying occurrence and students' performances reported in Table 3 helps in shedding light on this issue. Students who claimed to be victims of school bullying were more likely to have failed 1 or more scholastic years. This result was consistent with the greater propensity of bullied pupils to disclose poorer self-reported school performances as compared with their peers. Actually, the higher the recurrence of physical, verbal and/or relational bullying, the lower the self-confidence and self-esteem of students. This had momentous repercussion on the willingness of pupils to continue to study after the end of the first grade of secondary school. Going more into details, students who were bullied at least once a month were twice as likely as those who were not bullied to declare that they were not willing to attend at the second grade of secondary schools. What is even more interesting is that those who reported to be victims of bullying were three times as likely as those not suffering from bullying to perform working activities in conjunction with mandatory schooling.

5. Discussion

The limitations which affected this study helps in better contextualizing its results. Firstly, the use of secondary sources did not allow for tailoring the processes of data collection and analysis to the specific purposes of this research. In spite of this consideration, the data collected from the Italian study on the Integration of Second Generations were consistent with

the objective of shedding light on the triggers and consequences of school bullying. Secondly, the focus on the Italian context prevents the generalization of the research findings at the international level; however, this study suggests several insightful implications, which could be applied beyond Italy. Lastly, yet importantly, the cross-sectional nature of this analysis negatively influences the consistency and the straightforwardness of the results above discussed.

The acknowledgement of the above mentioned shortcomings does not undermine the contribution of this work, which concurs in pushing forward our understanding about school bullying. Echoing previous international studies, school bullying was found to be a significant and common problem (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005), which is able to impoverish the quality and the effectiveness of school services (Bosworth, Garcia, Judkins, & Saliba, 2018). More the 1 out of 6 students with a migration background were found to suffer from school bullying; in line with what has been argued in the scientific literature, relational and verbal aggressions were the prevailing forms of school bullying reported by victims (Hicks, Jennings, Jennings, Berry, & Green, 2018). From this standpoint, tailored anti-bullying interventions are strongly required, in an attempt to prevent and/or curb the occurrence of aggressive behaviours at school (Leff & Feudtner, 2017). On the one hand, the teachers represent the leading agents of such interventions, since they maintain the one-to-one and one-to-many relationships with students, being able to early detect and address the manifestation of school bullying (Fisher, Cassidy, Ren, & Mitchell, 2018). On the other hand, the involvement of parents in anti-bullying interventions may represent an effective strategy to discourage physical, verbal and relational aggressions among pupils through a stricter and more effective control on their everyday behaviours (Lester, et al., 2017).

Even though school bullying was a prevailing issue, male pupils and those who were not Italian citizens were more likely to report to be victim of aggression by their peers. In addition, pupils living in small-sized municipalities and attending first grade secondary schools disclosed greater risks to suffer from physical, verbal and/or relational bullying. This finding is consistent with the arguments of scholars who emphasized that bullying is especially common among pupils who exhibit social disadvantage (Sykes, Piquero, & Gioviano, 2017) and experience inequalities (Kahle & Peguero, 2017). Hence, policies and strategies intended to curb school bullying should be targeted to these specific categories of pupils, in an attempt to timely find and handle the social triggers of bullying behaviours.

The consequences which could be attached to school bullying are significant. Firstly, it has both direct and indirect drawbacks on victims' school performances. In fact, bullied students self-reported lower school achievements as compared with their peers who were not subject to bullying. Moreover, victims revealed greater likelihood of failed years. Probably, this was produced by the side-effects of bullying experiences on the relationship of bullied students with teachers (Konishi, Hymel, Zumbo, & Li, 2010), as well as by the process of social exclusion which is generally associated with bullying (Wang, Iannotti, Luk, & Nansel, 2010). Secondly, it was interesting to note that school bullying was related with the victims' increased willingness to dropout from school after the end of the first grade and with their propensity to perform working activities beyond mandatory schooling. In other words, school bullying was found to have deep and consequential repercussions on bullied pupils' feelings (Bowser, Larson, Bellmore, Olson, & Resnik, 2018), which are likely to generate long-term negative effects on their quality of life (Cornell, Gregory, Huang, & Fan, 2013). Sticking to these considerations, anti-bullying interventions should not be merely aimed at hampering the occurrence of physical, verbal and/or relational violence among students; rather, they should

be addressed at fixing their negative consequences at both the individual and the collective levels. This is possible by directly engaging students in such initiatives, in an attempt to increase their commitment in avoiding violent behaviours at schools (Zambuto, Palladino, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2018; Jiménez-Barbero, *et al.*, 2016).

Further developments are needed to fully illuminate the determinants and the consequences of school bullying. While this studies solely focused on victims, future research should contemplate aggressors, in order to achieve a full-fledged understanding of the way school bullying is able to affect the proper functioning of educational institutions. In addition, comparative cross-sectional analysis will allow to obtain generalizable findings about the factors which spur school bullying and about its effects, thus providing some intriguing insights to assist policy makers in designing timely and effective anti-bullying interventions. Lastly, yet importantly, longitudinal studies will pave the way for the collection of reliable and consistent evidence, which is critical to frame tailored initiatives addressed to minimize the occurrence of bullying at school.

6. Conclusions

The contribution of this paper is twofold. From a conceptual point of view, it emphasized that school bullying is a complex and multifaceted issue, which is able to profoundly impair the proper and effective management of school institutions. In fact, it may happen in various forms and through different means, which are generally out of the control of school staff. What is even more relevant, is that the victims of school bullying are usually targets of multiple kinds of aggression, which range from isolation to physical offence. In light of these considerations, the research findings encourage theoretical advancements intended to shed light on the links between the differing forms of school bullying and on their conjoined effects; such developments will allow a greater understanding of the distinguishing attributes of this phenomenon, as well as of its consequences on victims' well-being. Moreover, a specific focus should be put on the occurrence of bullying addressed to disadvantaged people in contexts which are characterized by territorial deprivation. In fact, physical, verbal and social aggressions are more likely to happen in schools established in small-sized and slowly urbanized environments. This circumstance has severe implications, since schools are one of the most important social contexts for students with a migrant background living in small municipalities. Lastly, yet importantly, this paper establishes a conceptual link between school services' quality and bullying. Indeed, school bullying undermines the quality of educational services provided to pupils, generating greater risks of failed years and dropout from schools.

From a practical point of view, the study results stress the urgency of tailored interventions aimed at preventing the occurrence of bullying at school, in an attempt to achieve excellence in the design and delivery of educational services. Actually, beyond its negative consequences on pupils' school performances, bullying paves the way for a worsened school climate, which further distress victims. On the one hand, the manifestation of school bullying exacerbates the trust relationship between the students and their teachers, who are considered to be unconcerned of the aggressive behaviours taken by bullies at school. On the other hand, bullying produces feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction, which trigger limited commitment in educational activities and, eventually, dropout from school.

Sticking to these arguments, policy makers and school managers should acknowledge school bullying as a critical quality issue, designing and implementing straightforward interventions to minimize its occurrence, as well as to curb its consequences. Among others, the initiatives co-financed by the Italian Ministry of Education, University and Research (MIUR) with the resources allocated by the European Social Fund (FSE) under the Axis 1 – “Instruction”, such as the national calls “*Social Inclusion and Disadvantage Prevention*” (first round, reg. 10862/2016, and second round, reg. 4395/2018) and “*Integration and Inclusion*” (reg. 4295/2017), are illustrative of this effort. Such interventions rely on the direct involvement of pupils and their parents, in an attempt to foster the effectiveness of anti-bullying policies. Besides, their main target is to promote the creation and the continuous nourishment of a school climate which is responsive to the special needs of those who suffer from social exclusion and disadvantage, avoiding that it could turn into physical, verbal and relational aggression.

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