

WHY ARE TEACHERS NOT ALWAYS WILLING TO FIGHT AGAINST CYBERBULLYING? EXPLORING THE BELIEFS, ATTITUDES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF TEACHERS IN A MULTI-COUNTRY CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

Magdalena Iorga^{1,2*}, M. Agati³, L. Coutinho⁴, R. Gizir⁵,
Daiva Malinauskienė⁶, P. Milios⁷, Cintia Colibaba^{8,9}

“Grigore T. Popa” University of Medicine and Pharmacy Iasi, Romania,

1. Faculty of Medicine, Behavioral Sciences Department

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, Romania,

2. Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences

3. PIXEL, Florence, Italy

University of Minho, Braga, Portugal,

4. Research Centre on Education, Institute of Education

5. Çukurova National Directorate of Education, Adana, Türkiye

6. Lithuanian Association of Adult Education, Soros International House, Lithuania

7. DIAN, Athens, Greece

8. University of Life Sciences of Iasi, Romania

9. EuroEd School, Iasi, Romania.

*Corresponding author. E-mail: magdalena.iorga@umfiasi.ro

WHY ARE TEACHERS NOT ALWAYS WILLING TO FIGHT AGAINST CYBERBULLYING? EXPLORING THE BELIEFS, ATTITUDES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF TEACHERS IN A MULTI-COUNTRY CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY (Abstract): The increasing phenomenon of cyberbullying among adolescents in all countries needs preventive, educational, legal, and psycho-interventional measures. The present study **aimed** to identify the opinions of teachers about cyberbullying and their coping strategies. **Material and methods:** The study included 798 teachers from six countries (Italy, Portugal, Greece, Türkiye, Lithuania, and Romania). An online questionnaire was especially constructed for this research, gathering socio-demographic and job-related data along with information about teachers' opinions about the cyberbullying phenomenon, about victims and perpetrators, and their most frequent behaviors and coping strategies used to deal with the problem. The questionnaire also included 3 psychometric instruments. **Results:** The analysis of questionnaires revealed that even if only 38.5% of the teachers took a course on cyberbullying, more than 70% of them answered that they knew how to deal with cyberbullying. In teachers' opinions, cyberbullying occurs equally in boys and girls. The age 11-14 is the most exposed to bullying, while 15-18 is the most exposed to cyberbullying. More than 60% considered that students were responsible for bullying and cyberbullying. Age, gender, length of experience in the field of education, type of institution, and marital status influence cyberbullying perceptions and coping strategies. **Conclusions:** Personal beliefs and the occurrence of observed and reported incidents determine teachers' willingness to intervene in cyberbullying. The results are important for teachers and trainers to consider the teachers' role in analyzing both duties and barriers in fighting the cyberbullying phenomenon. **Keywords:** CYBERBULLYING, ADOLESCENT, VICTIM, PERPETRATOR, BYSTANDER, TEACHER, SCHOOL, COPING STRATEGIES.

Teaching is a noble profession that needs a powerful determination for life-long learning about science, skills, and communication techniques in order not only to transfer knowledge or to develop skills and capabilities but also to create emotion, build self-confidence, and stimulate curiosity in all kinds of students. Teachers enrich minds and souls, develop behaviors, form characters, and shape personalities. Involvement in the transformation and progress of students is inevitably accompanied by their own development.

The student–teacher trust relationship uniquely contributes to students’ performance through school adjustment and academic motivation (1). Scholars discovered that a lack of trust between students and teachers, as well as feeling unsafe in school, increase the risk of mental health problems, traditional bullying, cyberbullying, various health problems, a low level of well-being and quality of life, and learning difficulties (2, 3). According to Wang and Degol (4) a safe school environment consists of three components: physical safety (reduced violence and aggression), emotional safety (lack of traditional bullying and psychological support and counseling), and order and discipline (school rules, conflict resolution, clarity, and fairness in decision making).

As a result, some studies have linked a deteriorating school climate to increased aggressive behavior among adolescents (5). Bullying, in all its forms, is an increasing phenomenon in all countries, especially in developed ones (6, 7, 8). Due to the increased use of the internet for academic tasks but also for communication, fun, social networking, or entertainment, the online bullying, also known as *cyberbully-*

ing, has become a systemic public health issue (9) with a great impact on the physical, psychological, and social health of all those involved (victims, perpetrators, and bystanders). Cyberbullying rates worldwide vary from 2% to 56% and the “EU KIDS ONLINE” study of over 25,000 children between the ages of 9 and 16 reported a prevalence of cybervictimization ranging between 2 and 14%, the highest rates being found in Estonia and Romania and the lowest in Italy and Portugal (10) while Ortega and colleagues found a rate between 4 and 6.2% in Spain, Italy and UK (6, 7, 8).

Cyberbullying (CB) has been defined as an aggressive and deliberate behavior that is frequently repeated over time, carried out by a group or an individual using electronics and aimed at a victim who cannot defend himself/herself (11). The impact of cybervictimization has both short-term and long-term consequences, such as depression, anxiety, sleep-troubles, drop-off, suicide thoughts, self-isolation, and inconsistency in behavior (12-15). Due to its consequences on students’ psychological, physical and social lives, and considering the negative impact on their academic performance, teachers are the key to solving bullying problems.

Reporting bullying behaviors to adults is crucial. According to Blomqvist *et al.* (16), being told about victimization was the best single predictor of teachers’ intervention, frequently exceeding the effect of direct teachers’ observations. Reports by victims are often teachers’ only source of information about aggressive behaviors that take place in and outside the school environment. Bokkel *et al.* (17) mentioned that teachers are the only people to whom victimized students turn because of their proximity to all students (especially those hav-

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

ing difficult relationships with other adults, including parents) and their responsibility to create a safe classroom climate.

Data showed that when victimized students decide to tell someone about being bullied, they tend to tell friends rather than adults (16), and they tell parents more frequently than teachers (18,19). In fact, looking for help in school environments is low, and only 3-18% of the victims report the incidents to teachers. The decision to disclose to a teacher is a complex trade-off between potential costs and losses. First, they may be anxious that their situation will worsen when they tell their teacher (20). Further, students may be ashamed, convinced they will not be taken seriously or even be blamed by teachers for provoking or not standing up to victimization (21). In turn, teachers may misinterpret non-disclosure by a victimized student as the absence of a need for support, while the student might have that need. This begs the question to what extent teachers can facilitate disclosure. Cortes & Kochenderfer-Ladd (22) showed that punishing bullies can be associated with a lower likelihood of reporting to a teacher.

Teachers and other adults at school seemed to fail to recognize bullies, and the lack of identifying the victims led to a lack of appropriate intervention and encouraged bullying acts to continue. Blomqvist *et al.* (16) identified that the factors related to increased likelihood of telling an adult about cybervictimization were female gender, age, the chronicity of victimization, perceived negative teacher attitude towards bullying (teacher not tolerating bullying), and perceived peer support for victims (classmates' tendency to defend students who are victimized). Shaw (23) highlighted that talking about victimization was more

likely among students who had been bullied for longer periods of time, with the result suggesting that when teachers found out about cyberbullying incidents after a considerable period of time, the students failed to stop the acts of aggression. When teachers do not intervene immediately, bullies may perceive an implicit consent to keep up their behavior (24). On the other hand, bystanders may feel less motivated to intervene with victims and report or blame the perpetrators (25). Therefore, a vicious circle is constructed and maintained.

All these aspects identified by a plethora of studies proved that dealing with cyberaggression and cybervictimization is a challenging task for teachers. The prevalence of cyberbullying involvement is largely inconsistent. Recent studies and meta-analyses indicated that bully prevention programs produce minimal change in student aggressive behavior and that there was a need for increased training for teachers on how to identify and combat cyberbullying (16, 23, 25). Despite the progress in cyberbullying research in recent years and the programs that were implemented in diverse countries, cyberbullying is still a challenging task for teachers. To cover the nowadays space, the aims of the study were: a) to identify the personal beliefs about this phenomenon among teachers and b) to identify the attitudes and strategies used to cope with cyberbullying among pre-university teachers in six countries and factors that influence them. Based on these, we assessed if there will be differences in what concern cyberbullying perception and strategies used to cope with cyberbullying considering the variables gender, number of children, marital status, length of experience, type of institution and experience with cyberbullying.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants, eligibility criteria and informed consent

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board No. 192/30.04.2022 of EuroEd School, Iasi, Romania. The questionnaire was distributed online simultaneously among teachers from six countries (Romania, Greece, Lithuania, Portugal, Italy, and Türkiye) in twenty-two middle and high schools from rural and urban areas between May 1st to June 30th, 2022.

To facilitate the approach of the group of teachers, invitations to complete the survey were sent by individual schools. The researchers first informed the principals of the schools regarding the study and the questionnaire was distributed to the teaching staff. Participants were informed online about the purpose of the study and

ethical principles of the research (voluntary participation, protecting the confidentiality of data, the right to withdraw from the research at any time, being an *ERASMUS+* research and principal investigator contact). No incentive was given to the participants. After providing digital informed consent, participants were asked to complete the questionnaire.

The inclusion criteria were questionnaires filled in by teachers enrolled in private, public, or special schools, submitting fully filled in questionnaires before the deadline. The criteria for excluding questionnaires from the research were questionnaires not fully completed or submitted after the deadline. A total of 853 surveys were filled in. After excluding a number of 55, finally 798 questionnaires were included in the research. Figure 1 provides details on the response rate.

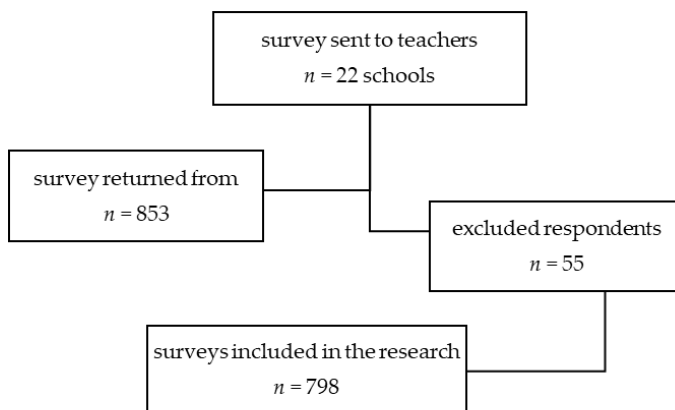


Fig. 1. Study profile.

Data collection and instruments

The questionnaire was constructed using the Google Forms application (Alphabet, Mountain View, CA, USA), was translated from English into all six national languages, and was developed to address

the prevention, recognition, and intervention of online harassment against its cruel social, psychological, medical, and educational impact on adolescents.

a) The first section of the questionnaire collected socio-demographic information

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

(such as country, age, gender, marital status, number of kids, profession, length of experience, total number of years in teaching at their current school, and type of school where they teach).

b) The second part contained items about the teachers' opinions regarding the knowledge of bullying and cyberbullying behaviors, including their skills in recognizing the signs of bullying, preventing, and acting in such incidents among their students. Answers were registered with YES/NO or TRUE/FALSE about if they have taken anti-bullying courses; if they think that bullying is more common than cyberbullying; if they think that bullying and cyberbullying occur more frequently in the case of girls; if they teach students how to deal with bullying behaviors; and what they consider to be the age range at which bullying and cyberbullying occur most frequently.

c) The third part examines teachers' perceptions about cyberbullying by using a questionnaire developed by Li in 2009 (26). The instrument contains 22 items regarding perceptions about cyberbullying and about teachers' educational experiences in relation to cyberbullying. Responses to each item were indicated using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

d) The fourth part of the survey collected information about teachers' views on the actions that teachers, parents, school principals, or even the Ministry of Education should take in order to prevent cyberbullying in schools. Participants also answered questions about those responsible for bullying or cyberbullying (students, parents, teachers, or the school) as well as the school's clear position on bullying, compliance or non-compliance against bullying,

the impact of cyberbullying on students, and how teachers or the school principal intervene in cases of observing such behaviors. In addition, teachers were asked whether they agreed that students were exaggerating about cyberbullying behaviors, whether students should manage bullying and cyberbullying on their own, and whether they were confident that they could recognize and manage bullying and cyberbullying situations. Self-assessed items were constructed, and responses were assessed on a 5-point Likert scale.

e) In the next section, respondents were asked to tick the number that best matches the following statements (on a Likert scale from 1 to 5, where 1 = never and 5 = always): requesting a discussion with parents when it comes to issues related to cyberbullying among students, sending students to the principal when it comes to cyberbullying, or not involving teachers in these issues. Respondents continued to answer YES/NO to questions about rumors that students were harassing each other during or outside class; if cyberbullying intensified among teenagers; if some students even complained to teachers about the situations of cyberbullying in which they had taken part, if the teachers knew of students who were harassing or had been harassed online; if parents, the school principal, or the school counsellor were informed; if teachers were told or even witnessed bullying behavior; and not least if teachers considered that cyberbullying could be reduced by prevention or intervention.

f) The sixth section includes questions about the frequency of bullying and cyberbullying behaviors observed or reported by others among students, and how often teachers intervened to discipline or

counsel students during this behavior. Answers range on a Likert scale from 1 (several times a day) to 7 (never). In addition, some questions were raised about the risks that some children had (obese, mentally ill, with physical syndromes, those with a single parent, those with a precarious economic situation, introverts, those with a high or low level of intelligence, or those with poor school results) could be subjected to cyberbullying. Answers range on a Likert scale from 1 (very low risk) to 5 (very high risk).

g) The final part of the questionnaire addressed two psychometric instruments used to identify the ways teachers succeeded in perceiving cyberbullying problems and to identify what kinds of strategies they usually used in order to deal with this phenomenon among their students:

The *Teacher Cyberbullying Perception Scale* (TCPS) is a 14-item scale which was created by Ayas and Horzum in 2011 (27) to determine how well teachers perceived the problems of cyberbullying among their students. A 5-point Likert-type rating was used to express the level of agreement with the items on the scale. This rating is: always (5), often (4), sometimes (3), rarely (2), and never (1).

The *Strategies for Coping with Cyberbullying Scale for Teachers* (SSBCS) was created in 2018 by Altundag and Ayas (28). It is a measurement tool for the coping strategies of teachers often witnessing cyberbullying events experienced by adolescents. The measurement tool consists of two sub-domains, the 'knowledge area' and the 'application area'. The scale was prepared in a five-point Likert type, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). High scores on both the knowledge and application areas of the

scale indicated the high level of teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying coping strategies.

Statistical analysis

All analyses for this research were performed using IBM *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS) Statistics for Windows, version 29 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Results for descriptive statistics were expressed as means and standard deviations (SD).

The normality of data distribution was assessed by using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Given the fact that all data points are not normally distributed, bivariate analysis will be performed and non-parametric tests will be applied.

To assess comparative results considering gender, profession, and taking anti-bullying classes, the Mann-Whitney test was performed. Similarly, comparative results considering country, marital status, the number of children from a household, and the type of school where the respondents teach were assessed using the Kruskal-Wallis H test to determine if there were statistically significant differences between more of two groups of an independent variable on a continuous or ordinal dependent variable.

The Spearman correlation was used to assess the relationship between variables. A p-value < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic data, family characteristics, professional details

Teachers included in the research were from six different countries: Romania (n = 343, 43.0%), Türkiye (n = 197, 24.7%), Portugal (n = 94, 11.8%), Greece (n = 59,

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

7.4%), Lithuania ($n = 59$, 7.4%), and Italy ($n = 46$, 5.77%). More than half of the participants were married ($n = 556$, 69.7%) and had an average of $M = 1.35 \pm 0.97$ children.

The mean age of the teachers participating in the study was $M = 46.90 \pm 9.66$ with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 68 years old, more than 3/4 being women (76.47%). The results of the study showed that the participants had practiced their profession for an average of 21.29 ± 10.76 years. In the school where the respondents now teach, they had been within the department for $M = 11.19 \pm 9.46$ years.

Most of the respondents included in the study were teachers ($n = 753$, 94.4%) and very few were school counselors ($n = 45$, 5.6%). Moreover, most teachers worked in public schools ($n = 718$, 90.0%).

Teachers' opinion about the age and gender of students who are more prone to experiencing cyberbullying.

More than half of the teachers had never taken anti-bullying courses ($n = 491$, 61.5%). However, more than half of the teachers considered that they knew how to deal with cyberbullying ($n = 560$, 70.2%).

More than half of the teachers believed that bullying occurred more often than cyberbullying ($n = 509$, 63.8%), and a similar percentage believed that bullying ($n = 499$, 62.5%) and cyberbullying ($n = 502$, 62.9%) did not occur more frequently in girls.

Moreover, more than half of the teachers pointed out that the age most prone to bullying is between 11-14 years old ($n = 489$, 61.3%), followed by the categories of 15-18 ($n = 252$, 31.6%) and 6-10 years old ($n = 57$, 7.1%), while in terms of cyberbullying, the most exposed age categories are

approximately equal: 15-18 ($n = 405$, 50.8%) and 11-14 ($n = 367$, 46.0%) years old.

Teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying

The third part of the research focused on teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying and their educational experiences in relation to cyberbullying. Answers for each perception item were indicated using a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (strong disagreement) to 5 (strong agreement). The Alpha coefficient of the internal reliability of the instrument was 0.90.

The majority of the teachers also agreed that they were concerned about cyberbullying. Data analysis showed that only a quarter of the teachers thought that cyberbullying was a problem in schools, while less than half held neutral positions. When asked if the children were affected by cyberbullying, the pattern changed. Approximately 65% of the teachers agreed that cyberbullying affected children. Regarding teachers' confidence in approaching cyberbullying, it was found that about half of them had confidence in both identifying and managing cyberbullying issues with a gender difference (teachers' confidence in approaching cyber-bullying).

Teachers' beliefs about the importance of school engagement were examined and were broadly defined to include aspects from school policy and classroom strategies to school activities. Thus, the results showed that more than 75% of the participants agreed that all these strategies should be addressed to prevent or deal with the problem of cyber harassment.

Finally, the questionnaire aimed to find out how prepared the teachers were to

manage bullying and cyberbullying incidents. The responses showed that less than half of the teachers felt that their current university education did not prepare them to deal with cyberbullying, and more than

half of them wanted to spend more time studying to learn more about cyberbullying. Detailed results regarding the answers to the mentioned items are presented in first table.

TABLE I.
Teachers' perceptions about cyberbullying¹

ITEMS	Disagree or strongly disagree	Neutral	Agree or strongly agree
Problems in schools	255 (32.0)	334 (41.9)	209 (26.2)
Children are affected	112 (14.1)	166 (20.8)	520 (65.2)
Teachers are concerned	49 (6.1)	144 (18)	605 (75.8)
Identifying cyberbullying	93 (11.7)	216 (27.1)	487 (61)
Managing cyberbullying	13, (17.5)	281 (35.2)	378 (47.4)
Schools' policies	30, (3.8)	97 (12.2)	670 (84)
Training teachers	34 (4.3)	69 (8.6)	695 (87.1)
Curriculum	54 (6.8)	134 (16.8)	609 (76.3)
Classroom activities	4 (5.3)	113 (14.2)	643 (80.6)
School-wide activities	31 (3.9)	79 (9.9)	688 (86.2)
Discussing with parents	29 (3.7)	87 (10.9)	681 (85.3)
University prepares teachers	350 (43.9)	183 (22.9)	263 (32.9)
Teachers want to learn more	110 (13.8)	189 (23.7)	498 (62.4)

*1Number (n) and percentages (%).

Scale results for teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying and their educational experiences in relation to cyberbullying ranged from 27 to 109 ($M = 84.05 \pm 10.47$).

The Mann-Whitney U test revealed significant gender differences ($U = 47726.50$, $Z = -2.975$, $p = 0.003$), with men ($Mdn = 83.00$) scoring lower on the scale that measures teachers' educational experiences in relation to cyberbullying than women ($Mdn = 85.00$) but higher regarding the confidence in approaching cyberbullying ($U = 48590.000$, $Z = -3.222$, $p = 0.001$), showing that male teachers ($Md = 4$) were

more confident than women ($Md = 3$).

Significant differences were found regarding the type of institution in which teachers work ($U = 19710.00$, $Z = -3.837$, $p < 0.001$) in the sense that teachers from public schools ($Mdn = 85.00$) had higher scores on this scale compared to teachers from private schools ($Mdn = 81.00$). Additionally, a Mann-Whitney U test revealed significant differences in terms of participants' marital status ($U = 3572.50$, $Z = -2.630$, $p = 0.009$) in the sense that married teachers ($Mdn = 84.00$) had higher scores on the scale which measured teachers' perceptions and educational experiences in

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

relation to cyberbullying than single teachers (Mdn = 78.00).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in these scale scores among teachers between countries of origin. As assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot, the distributions of these scale scores were not similar for all groups. Median scores were statistically significantly different between the countries, $\chi^2(5) = 94.528, p < 0.001$. A pairwise comparison method was performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted *p*-values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in median scores of this scale between: Romania (85.00) and Lithuania (81.00) (*p* = 0.002), Romania (85.00) and Greece (70.00) (*p* < 0.001), Romania (85.00) and Portugal (89.00) (*p* = 0.003), Greece (70.00) and Portugal (89.00) (*p* < 0.001), Greece (70.00) and Italy (86.00) (*p* < 0.001), Portugal (89.00) and Lithuania (81.00) (*p* < 0.001), Portugal (89.00) and Türkiye (83.00) (*p* < 0.001), Italy (86.00) and Türkiye (81.00) (*p* = 0.015), Lithuania (81.00) and Italy (30.00) (*p* = 0.012), Türkiye (81.00) and Greece (70.00) (*p* < 0.001), Türkiye (81.00) and Romania (85.00) (*p* < 0.001).

**The opinions of teachers
Regarding the institutions
or responsible that should take
attitude in preventing cyberbullying**

More than half of the participants agreed that teachers (56.9%, *n* = 454), parents (53.1%, *n* = 424), school principals (54.3%, *n* = 433), and the Ministry of Education (50.9%, *n* = 406) should do more to prevent cyberbullying. Furthermore, more than half of the teachers (60.3%, *n* = 481)

agreed and strongly agreed that students were responsible for bullying and cyberbullying. Additionally, more than half of the teachers agreed that parents and the school were responsible for tackling cyberbullying inside the school. Detailed results are presented in second table.

TABLE II.

Responsibility of cyberbullying¹

The most responsible for cyberbullying phenomenon	Disagree or strongly disagree	Neutral	Agree or strongly agree
Teachers	266 (33.3)	242 (30.3)	290 (36.4)
Parents	208 (26)	242 (30.3)	347 (65.2)
School	162 (20.3)	219 (27.4)	416 (52.1)

¹Number (*n*) and percentages (%).

Teachers were asked to express their opinion regarding the schools' rules established against bullying and cyberbullying, and most of them considered that these rules were followed. When it comes to the impact of cyberbullying on students, most teachers believed that there was a negative impact of cyberbullying such as depression and poor academic performance.

Most teachers stated that they agreed (51.8%, *n* = 413) and totally agreed (36.7%, *n* = 293) to intervene if they noticed aggression among students. They declared that the school principal approved of the teacher's decision to act in cases of cyberbullying of students (agree: 53.0%, *n* = 423; totally agree: 17.5%, *n* = 140). Most of them stated that they agreed (50.6%, *n* = 404) and totally agreed (21.9%, *n* = 175) that it was their duty to intervene in any

incidents of cyber aggression among their students. The analysis of answers revealed that more than half of the teachers did not agree that these conflicts prepared students

for life, or that victims should manage these situations on their own. Table III presents the detailed results regarding the teachers' answers to the mentioned items.

TABLE III.
Results regarding the teachers' answers

ITEMS	Disagree or strongly disagree	Neutral	Agree or strongly agree	M ± SD
Non-compliance with school rules regarding bullying	376 (47.2)	244 (30.6)	177 (22.1)	2.64 ± 1.04
Non-compliance with school rules regarding cyberbullying	46 (57.7)	243 (30.5)	93 (11.7)	3.67 ± 0.85
Negative impact of cyberbullying	134 (16.8)	85 (10.7)	576 (72.2)	3.88 ± 1.12
Cyberbullying causes depression in students	20 (2.5)	82 (10.3)	694 (87)	4.16 ± 0.72
Cyberbullying causes poor academic results in students	28 (3.5)	127 (15.9)	64 (80.5)	4.03 ± 0.77
Students exaggerate cyber aggression	292 (36.6)	321 (40.2)	185 (23.2)	2.80 ± 1.09
Cyberbullying prepares students for life	63 (79.4)	97 (12.2)	68 (9.5)	1.75 ± 1.09
Students should handle bullying situations on their own	594 (74.5)	136 (17)	68 (8.5)	2.10 ± 0.90
Students should handle cyberbullying situations on their own	513 (64.3)	152 (19)	132 (16.5)	2.32 ± 1.03

¹Number (n), percentages (%), and means and standard deviations (M ± SD).

Self-evaluation about the attitudes and behaviors in case of bullying and cyberbullying incidents

In general, most teachers believed that the phenomenon of cyberbullying was intensifying among adolescents and that this phenomenon could be eradicated by both intervention and prevention. A series of items were used to evaluate the attitude of teachers in the event of being told about an incident. The analysis of answers revealed that more than a third of the teachers (37.6%, n = 300) said they sent students to the principal for cyberbullying problems only occasionally. Also, in more than a

third of cases (38.2%, n = 305), teachers always asked for a discussion with their parents when it came to cyberbullying among students. In similar percentages (35.2%, n = 281), respondents said they never agreed with the non-involvement of students' cyberbullying.

The data gathered showed that few students reported bullying events to teachers as victims (whether they had been the subject of malicious gossip, received malicious messages, their identity had been stolen etc.). Instead, most teachers reported any events they attended or heard about to parents (tab. IV).

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

TABLE IV.

Self-rated items regarding teachers' behavior in case of bullying events¹.

ITEMS	YES	NO
I was told that students harass each other online during class	161 (20.2)	636 (79.7)
I was told that students harass each other online after class	271 (34)	527 (66)
I think that the phenomenon of cyberbullying is intensifying among teenagers	69 (86.6)	106 (13.3)
The students complained directly to me that they had received malicious text messages on the phone about themselves	240 (30.1)	552 (69.2)
The students directly complained to me that they had been the subject of online rumors.	224 (28.1)	573 (71.8)
My students complained directly about receiving malicious/threatening emails/messages.	167 (20.9)	630 (78.9)
My students complained directly that someone had hijacked their identity online	116 (14.5)	682 (85.5)
I know students who are cyber-harassed by others	237 (29.7)	561 (70.3)
I know students who cyberbully other students in my school	152 (19)	645 (80.8)
I always inform parents about an incident of aggression that I witness	634 (79.4)	162 (20.3)
I always inform parents about an aggression incident of which I am informed	629 (78.8)	168 (21.1)
I believe that the phenomenon of cyberbullying can be mitigated by prevention	720 (90.2)	78 (9.8)
I believe that the phenomenon of cyber harassment can be mitigated by intervention	721(90.4)	74 (9.3)

¹Number of answers (N) and percentage (%).

Frequency of bullying behaviors and typology of victims

Teachers were asked what their views were on how exposed certain children were to becoming victims of cyberbullying. The results showed that children with mental illness (34.2%, n = 273), obesity (30.6%, n = 244), physical syndromes (31.2%, n = 249), and introverted children (31.3%, n = 250) were at a very high risk of becoming victims. On a Likert scale from 1 to 7,

where: 1 = several times a day, 2 = once a day, 3 = once a week, 4 = once a month, 5 = once every few months, 6 = once a year or once every few years 7 = never, the analysis of the responses revealed that teachers did not see or report bullying behaviors in school very frequently. In addition, in very few cases, teachers did not intervene to discipline or counsel during the bullying or cyberbullying process. The distribution of the answers is presented in table V.

TABLE V.
Self-rated items regarding teachers' behavior in case of bullying events¹.

ITEMS	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	M ± SD
How often have you directly noticed aggressive behavior in your school?	57 (7.1)	58 (7.3)	139 (17.4)	101 (12.7)	172 (21.6)	130 (16.3)	141 (17.7)	4.54 ± 1.81
How often have you been told about aggressive behavior in your school?	42 (5.3)	49 (6.1)	140 (17.5)	142 (17.8)	176 (22.1)	147 (18.4)	102 (12.8)	4.52 ± 1.65
To what extent did you personally intervene to discipline, send, or counsel during the assault process?	21 (2.6)	49 (4.9)	86 (10.8)	97 (12.2)	176 (22.1)	186 (23)	192 (24.1)	5.13 ± 1.61
To what extent did you personally intervene to discipline, support, or counsel during the cyberbullying process?	9 (1.1)	21 (2.6)	75 (9)	71 (8.9)	149 (18.7)	151 (18.9)	320 (40.1)	5.59 ± 1.52

¹Number of answers (N) and percentage (%).

Teacher Cyberbullying Perception Scale (TCPS)

The global cyberbullying perception scores of teachers as measured with the TCPS ranged from 15 up to 67 ($M = 28.09 \pm 7.14$). For the present study, the Cronbach Alpha score was 0.822. There are significant differences on this scale in terms of participants' gender ($U = 45357,500$, $Z = -4.203$, $p < 0.001$) in the sense that women had a lower score on cyberbullying perception ($Mdn = 26.00$) compared to men ($Mdn = 30.00$).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in TCPS scores among teachers between countries of origin: Italy ($N = 46$), Greece ($N = 59$), Lithuania ($N = 59$), Portugal ($N = 94$), Romania ($N = 343$), and Türkiye ($N = 197$). As assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot, the distributions of these scale scores were not similar for all groups. Median Cyberbullying Perception scores were statistically significantly different between the countries, $\chi^2(5) = 151.254$, $p < 0.001$. Subsequently, pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure

with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. Adjusted p-values are presented. This post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in median TCPS scores between: Romania (25.00) and Lithuania (28.00) ($p < 0.001$), Romania (25.00) and Greece (37.00) ($p < 0.001$), Greece (37.00) and Italy (27.00) ($p < 0.001$), Greece (37.00) and Lithuania (28.00) ($p < 0.001$), Portugal (25.00) and Greece (37.00) ($p < 0.001$), Portugal (25.00) and Türkiye (30.00) ($p < 0.001$), Italy (27.00) and Türkiye (30.00) ($p = 0.006$), Lithuania (28.00) and Türkiye (30.00) ($p = 0.008$), Türkiye (30.00) and Greece (37.00) ($p < 0.001$), and Türkiye (30.00) and Romania (25.00) ($p < 0.001$).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in *Cyberbullying Perception* scores among teachers between the numbers of children: none ($n = 179$), one kid ($n = 252$), two kids ($n = 296$), three kids ($n = 57$), four kids ($n = 11$) or more than four children ($n = 3$). As assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot, the distributions of these scale scores were not similar for all groups. Median TCPS

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

scores were statistically significantly different between the mentioned categories, $\chi^2(5) = 15.339$, $p = 0.009$. Post hoc Mann Whitney analysis showed that teachers who had no children ($U = 3933.50$, $Z = -2.605$, $p = 0.009$, $Mdn = 26.00$) or only one child ($U = 4959.50$, $Z = -3.654$, $p < 0.001$, $Mdn = 26.00$) had a lower score on the *Perception of Cyberbullying Scale* compared to teachers who had three children ($Mdn = 30.00$).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in the *Teacher Cyberbullying Perception* scores between types of institutions in which teachers work: public schools ($n = 718$), private schools ($n = 76$), and special schools ($n = 3$). As assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot, the distributions of these scale scores were not similar for all groups. Median Cyberbullying Perception scores were statistically significantly different between the mentioned categories, $\chi^2(2) = 32.213$, $p < 0.001$.

Post hoc Mann-Whitney analyses showed that teachers who worked in a public school ($U = 17240.50$, $Z = -5.288$, $p < 0.001$, $Mdn = 27.00$) had a lower score on the scale of perception of cyberbullying compared to those who worked in a private school ($Mdn = 32.50$), while teachers in both public ($U = 23.500$, $Z = -2.930$, $p = 0.003$) and private schools ($U = 16.000$, $Z = -2.516$, $p = 0.005$) had a lower score on the scale of perception of cyberbullying, compared to teachers working in special schools ($Mdn = 49.00$).

Strategies for Coping with the Cyberbullying Scale for Teachers (SSBCS)

The total score for the SSBCS scale was on average $M = 144.47 \pm 18.68$, scores ranging from 36 (0.1%, $N = 1$) to 180 (0.8%, $N = 6$). The Cronbach Alpha score was 0.944.

There are significant differences on this scale in terms of participants' gender ($U = 46782.50$, $Z = -3.682$, $p < 0.001$), in the sense that women had a higher score on the SSBCS scale ($Mdn = 147.00$) compared to men ($Mdn = 143.00$). Additionally, the Mann-Whitney U test ($U = 15339.00$, $Z = -6.284$, $p < 0.001$) showed that there was a significant difference on this scale between the types of institutions in which teachers worked, meaning that teachers from private institutions ($Mdn = 81.00$) had lower scores on this scale than teachers from public schools ($Mdn = 85.00$).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted to determine if there were differences in these scale scores among teachers' marital status: unmarried ($n = 146$), in a relationship ($n = 76$), married ($n = 556$), or widowed ($n = 20$). As assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot, the distributions of these scale scores were not similar for all groups. Median scores were statistically significantly different between these categories, $\chi^2(3) = 13.124$, $p = 0.004$. A Mann-Whitney U post hoc test ($U = 16861.50$, $Z = -2.858$, $p = 0.004$) revealed that married teachers ($Mdn = 147.00$) had higher scores than teachers who were in a relationship ($Mdn = 143.00$) on the scale which measured teachers' coping strategies for perceptions cyberbullying. Furthermore, another Mann-Whitney U post hoc test ($U = 3779.50$, $Z = -2.436$, $p = 0.015$) showed that married teachers ($Mdn = 147.00$) had higher scores on this scale compared to single teachers ($Mdn = 136.50$).

A Kruskal-Wallis test was also conducted to determine if there were differences in SSBCS scores among teachers between countries of origin. As assessed by visual inspection of a boxplot, the distributions of these scale scores were not similar for all groups. The Median SSBCS scores

were statistically significantly different between countries, $\chi^2(5) = 162.178$, $p < 0.001$. Subsequently, results of post hoc analysis revealed statistically significant differences in median SSBCS scores between: Romania (149.00) and Greece (108.00) ($p < 0.001$), Romania (149.00) and Italy (143.00) ($p < 0.001$), Romania (149.00) and Lithuania (136.00) ($p < 0.001$), Greece (108.00) and Portugal (147.50) ($p < 0.001$), Greece (108.00) and Lithuania (136.00) ($p < 0.001$), Portugal (147.50) and Lithuania (136.00) ($p < 0.001$), Portugal (147.50) and Romania (149.00) ($p = 0.020$), Italy (143.00) and Greece (108.00) ($p < 0.001$), Italy (143.00) and Lithuania (136.00) ($p = 0.022$), Lithuania (136.00) and Türkiye (149.00) ($p < 0.001$), Türkiye (149.00) and Greece (108.00) ($p < 0.001$), Türkiye (149.00) and Italy (143.00) ($p < 0.001$).

Correlation analysis

The results of the Spearman correlation analysis showed that there were negative correlations between the total number of years the teachers had been practicing, as well as their beliefs that the phenomenon of cyberbullying was on the rise among adolescents ($r = -0.579$, $p < 0.001$) and their perception of cyberbullying ($r = -0.092$, $p = 0.010$), in the sense that the higher the number of years in education and the higher the teachers' beliefs that cyberbullying was rising, the lower the teachers' perception regarding cyberbullying. There are also negative correlations between the TCPS scale and the SSCBS scale ($r = -0.442$, $p < 0.001$) in the sense that as teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying increase, the teachers' coping strategies regarding cyberbullying decrease.

The total number of years that teachers worked correlates positively with the scale

of teachers' coping strategies in terms of cyberbullying ($r = 0.074$, $p = 0.036$), in the sense that the higher the number of years worked, the higher the score on the SSCBS scale. Furthermore, there is a negative correlation between teachers' beliefs that the phenomenon of cyberbullying is on the rise among adolescents and the SSCBS scale ($r = -0.159$, $p < 0.001$), in the sense that the higher the teachers' beliefs that cyberbullying is rising, the lower the teachers' coping strategies regarding cyberbullying.

Both positive and negative correlations were identified between teachers' views of those responsible for cyberbullying, the main factors that could prevent cyberbullying, its negative effects, and the number of children in the teachers' families, the number of years they had been practicing, their faith in the fact that cyberbullying is becoming more prevalent among teenagers and the TCPS and SSCBS scales (tab. VI).

Strong positive correlations were identified between age ($r = 0.144$, $p < 0.001$), the total number of years of experience in the education field ($r = 0.135$, $p < 0.001$), teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying ($r = 0.122$, $p = 0.001$), and the frequency with which teachers had observed aggressive behavior in their school, in the sense that the older the teachers, the more experience they had and the more increased perception of cyberbullying, the more often they observed aggressive behaviors in school, and the more sensitive and empathic they were.

Some other variables, such as age ($r = 0.094$, $p = 0.008$), the total number of years teachers had been working ($r = 0.110$, $p = 0.002$), and the scale of coping strategies for cyberbullying ($r = 0.158$, $p < 0.001$) correlated positively with the frequency of observing aggressive online behaviors. Other significant and relevant correlations are presented in table VII.

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

TABLE VI.
Correlational results of teachers' views on the actors that could prevent cyberbullying¹

ITEMS	Parental status (no. of kids)	Length of experience in the field	Cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon	TCPS scale	SSCBS scale
I think I should do more to prevent cyberbullying	no correlation	no correlation	$r = -0.192$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.332$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.296$ $p < 0.001$
I believe that parents should do more to prevent cyberbullying	$r = -0.211$ $p < 0.001$	no correlation	$r = -0.185$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.381$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.231$ $p < 0.001$
I believe that principals should do more to prevent cyberbullying	$r = 0.130$ $p < 0.001$	no correlation	$r = -0.158$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.289$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.309$ $p < 0.001$
I believe that the Ministry of Education should do more to prevent cyberbullying	$r = -0.097$ $p = 0.006$	no correlation	$r = -0.173$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.423$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.266$ $p < 0.001$
I think students are responsible for bullying and cyberbullying	$r = 0.134$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.077$ $p = 0.029$	no correlation	no correlation	$r = 0.101$ $p = 0.004$
I think teachers are responsible for tackling cyberbullying inside the school	$r = -0.093$ $p = 0.008$	$r = -0.139$ $p < 0.001$	no correlation	$r = -0.124$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.077$ $p = 0.029$
I think parents are responsible for tackling cyberbullying inside the school	$r = -0.214$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.123$ $p = 0.001$	$r = -0.105$ $p = 0.003$	$r = -0.186$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.081$ $p = 0.023$
I think the school is responsible for tackling cyberbullying inside the school	no correlation	$r = -0.073$ $p = 0.039$	$r = -0.130$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.176$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.131$ $p < 0.001$
I believe that cyberbullying causes depression among the victims	no correlation	no correlation	$r = -0.201$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.409$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.353$ $p < 0.001$
I believe that cyberbullying causes poor academic results in performance among victims	no correlation	no correlation	$r = -0.194$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.361$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.316$ $p < 0.001$

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$.

TABLE VII.
Correlation analysis considering the type of vulnerable child for cyberbullying as a variable¹

ITEMS	Cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon	TCPS scale	SSCBS scale
Obese children are at risk of being cyberbullied	$r = -0.201$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.337$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.165$ $p < 0.001$
Children with mental illness are at risk of being cyberbullied	$r = -0.181$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.316$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.203$ $p < 0.001$
Children with physical syndromes are at risk of being cyberbullied	$r = -0.193$ $p < 0.001$	$r = -0.324$ $p < 0.001$	$r = 0.208$ $p < 0.001$

ITEMS	Cyberbullying is a growing phenomenon	TCPS scale	SSCBS scale
Children in precarious economic situations are at risk of being cyberbullied	r = -0.117 p = 0.001	r = -0.270 p < 0.001	r = 0.158 p < 0.001
Children with one parent are at risk of being cyberbullied	r = -0.096 p = 0.006	r = -0.222 p < 0.001	r = 0.137 p < 0.001
Introverted children are at risk of being cyberbullied	r = -0.171 p < 0.001	r = -0.331 p < 0.001	r = 0.242 p < 0.001
Children with a high level of intelligence are at risk of being cyberbullied	r = -0.086 p = 0.015	r = -0.215 p < 0.001	no correlation
Children with a low level of intelligence are at risk of being cyberbullied	r = -0.149 p < 0.001	r = -0.287 p < 0.001	r = 0.241 p < 0.001
Children with poor school results are at risk of being cyberbullied	r = -0.163 p < 0.001	r = -0.268 p < 0.001	r = 0.245 p < 0.001

*p < 0.05; ** p < 0.001

DISCUSSION

Most of the teachers included in the research (86.6%) sustained that cyberbullying was an increasing phenomenon among adolescents. Even if there was a worrying perception about this problem, only 38.5% of the teachers had taken a course on cyberbullying. Less than three quarters of the teachers answered that they knew how to deal with cyberbullying, but it is evident from the analyze of the answers that even if one third of them had taken a course about cyberbullying, twice as many teachers rated themselves as capable of handling it. Less than half of the teachers felt that their current university education had not prepared them to deal with cyberbullying, and more than half of them wanted to spend more time studying more about cyberbullying. Our data are consistent with those presented by scientific literature. For example, the Dutch teachers included in a study conducted by Oldenburg *et al.* (29) gave incomplete definitions of bullying. The authors identified that respondents had limited strategies to find out about bullying, and many of them never recognized the

self-reported victims in their classroom. These extremely important results suggested by some research on teachers revealed that, even if teachers have a central role in tackling bullying, they are not always fully trained for this task. Similar results were found in a study conducted by Khanolainen *et al.* (30). The research identified that the majority of the teachers indicated either seeing no bullying or only seeing bullying rarely as a justifiable reaction to provocation, while their students reported that bullying and cyberbullying incidents were quite frequent in their school and sustained that “teachers are seeing nothing”.

It is important to separate the skill of identifying bullying and cyberbullying incidents in general and the willingness to do it. Rigby and his team (31, 32) found that a large proportion of adolescent girls (43.0%) and boys (51.4%) were not confident in teachers’ ability to respond effectively. Shaw *et al* (23) found that if students perceived that teachers were unlikely to intervene or that the school climate was tolerant of bullying, they would be less likely to disclose that they were being vic-

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

timized.

A sequence of items investigated teachers' sensitivity to the phenomenon. In total, 20% of the teachers sustained that they were informed about cyberbullying in school and 34% of them about cyberbullying incidents outside of school. Considering the gender of their students and cyberbullying victimization, respondents appreciated that cyberbullying occurred equally in boys and girls, and more than 60% considered that students were the main ones responsible for bullying and cyberbullying incidents. In their opinion, the age 11-14 was the most exposed to bullying, while 15-18 was the most exposed to cyberbullying. Age (more frequent, the older teachers were more prone to being sensitive to victimization), gender (more women than men), length of experience in the field of education (experienced teachers were more prone to identify victimization), type of institution (teachers from public schools were more sensitive to cyberbullying than teachers from private schools), and marital status (married teachers and those who had children) were influencing cyberbullying perceptions and the coping strategies that they used in order to solve cyberbullying incidents. Similar findings were identified by Yilmaz (20) Yildirim *et al.* (33) who suggested that married teachers had a higher level of cyberbullying sensitivity.

The key to success in the elimination of cyberbullying and its negative effects lies in school policies, parental support, and cyberbullying sensitivity, the last one being the most important tool for teachers. Our study identified that age, length of experience, and a high level of perception of cyberbullying were related to a high level of identifying aggressive behavior in school. Furthermore, women obtained higher scores on the scale

that measured teachers' educational experience than men. We noticed that married teachers had higher scores on the scale which measured teachers' coping strategies for perceptions of cyberbullying than teachers who were not married yet, and the same when compared to single teachers. This variable was mentioned in some studies focusing on teachers' perception of cyberbullying. For example, Yildirim *et al.* (33) sustained that it can be suggested that married teachers had a higher level of cyberbullying sensitivity, and that analyzing teachers' cyberbullying, and cyber victimization experiences should be related to cyber sensitivity. The authors identified that teachers who had an undergraduate degree had a higher level of cyberbullying sensitivity. As Eden *et al.* also identified, female teachers were found to express more concern than male teachers, as did teachers of younger children.

Our study identified that teachers appreciated that children with mental illness, obesity, diverse physical syndromes, and introverted kids are at a very high risk of becoming victims. These results are congruent with data obtained by Zhu, (34) Olenik-Shemesh *et al.* (14), Bokkel (17) and Fossum (33). Evaluating all the risky variables identified by the scientific literature, the most common are, of course, the variables that are easily identified by direct observation. But some other characteristics of the students must not be neglected, and preconceptions should guide the interventions in the case of cyberbullying with precociousness. For example, some authors (30-32) maintain that even popular students or students with high academic grades are victims of cyberbullying, but usually they do not share this in order not to be seen as weak or to lose their status in school or class. Moreover, mentally ill students and

lonely ones usually do not share in order not to be more severely aggressed by the persecutor. Considering the small percentage of teachers that are being told about, we can consider that these answers are the results of their experience with reporting incidents or of their preconceptions (opinions) regarding the type of the victims. The students who were identified as being more vulnerable to victimization need more attentive care and permanent supervision, in general, due to their mental, physical, or emotional condition.

The current research also highlights some dilemmatic results. We identified that the higher the number of years in education and the higher the teachers' beliefs that cyberbullying is rising, the lower the teachers' perception regarding cyberbullying. There were also negative correlations between the TCPS scale and the SSCBS scale, meaning that as teachers' perceptions of cyberbullying increased, the teachers' coping strategies regarding cyberbullying decreased. Additionally, the length of experience in the field positively correlated with the score on the Scale of Teachers' Coping Strategies, in the sense that the higher the number of years worked, the higher the score on the SSCBS scale. Furthermore, the higher the teachers' beliefs that cyberbullying is rising, the lower the teachers' coping strategies regarding cyberbullying. These results could be sustained by the fact that respondents realized that cyberbullying is increasing extremely rapidly, and there is no possibility to fight by themselves, or the phenomenon that is spreading becomes normality in the school environment.

The results identified by this study and that can also be seen in some other published research led to a general, common idea that teachers did not invest time and

effort in countering the phenomenon of bullying and cyberbullying and were not always willing to get involved in mediation between the victim-aggressor-witnesses (30-32).

Many of the teachers declared that bullying, in all its forms, prepared students for adult life, although a large part of them admitted that there were important negative consequences on the physical and mental health, as well as the academic results of the victim, with a long-term impact even in adult life.

The first explanation would be the lack of training programs. Teachers must be trained in how to identify, analyze, behave, intervene, and constructively manage the bullying phenomenon in their classes, and how to help the victim, perpetrator, and bystander. Studies have shown that students lose confidence if the first reported incident is not resolved conveniently. Additionally, the literature presents studies that explain the way in which the victim reaches the aggressor's turn in order to defend themselves, and the active spot witnesses are also considered aggressors (30-32). Passivity in the case of bullying and cyberbullying incidents only induces the aggressor to believe that he/she is right and powerful, and the victim will have a high risk of self-isolation, helplessness, depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. In this sequence of changing roles, the importance of the teacher's intervention is crucial in reducing the incidence of aggressive behaviors.

The second explanation would be the focus on the didactic activity rather than the counseling activity - the teachers believe that the time should be invested in teaching, and the class time should be dedicated to science, for the benefit of all stu-

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

dents.

A third explanation can be related to the fact that some teachers consider fighting bullying at school useless because some of them are themselves victims of bullying by the same students who bully their colleagues.

Fourthly, the recognition of a problem must come together with the structuring of intentions to intervene over a long period, to find solutions together with students, parents, school management, school psychologists, and other stakeholders, which means that the teacher must invest time, effort, and resistance to stress, denial, and frustration from others.

Fifthly, the recognition of a behavior problem and some incidents that take place in the school space may induce the opinion that the other colleagues or the members of the school committee consider them unskilled in solving such cases, the explanation being, therefore, the desire to shield themselves from a negative evaluation from the teaching staff.

The sixth explanation could be due to the students' disclosure. A lot of studies show that students are not willing to report bullying incidents to their teachers, and most of them talk about an aggressive issue to a friend, a colleague, or a parent. Bullying incidents are deliberately hidden from teachers; in general, teachers' responses were perceived as ineffective, insensitive, or excessive, and even peers discourage 'telling tales' to adults. For example, some researchers (35-38) identified that pupils reported a reluctance to tell adults, particularly teachers, about their experiences of bullying, and this tendency increased with age. The implications of the present findings, also revealed by some scarce literature, are important for the advancement in

anti-bullying policy and practice that received support from schoolteachers.

The seventh explanation is related to the personal aspects such as personality, life experience, familial-socio-professional status, and their own representation of bullying and cyberbullying and aggressive behavior in general. Some studies revealed that teachers with victimization antecedents were more prone to identify and interfere in cyberbullying incidents (32-25).

An eighth explanation could be related to the high level of knowledge about traditional bullying and a good package of skills applied in the classroom to stop bullying behaviors, a situation that makes teachers feel powerless in cyberbullying situations. For example, a study by Elledge *et al.* (39) and Paez (40) showed that when the students evaluated their teacher as highly capable of intervening in a traditional bullying incident, the other type of aggression-cyberbullying - increased. So, the perpetrators will try to find ways to aggress others by engaging in more covert instances of bullying (online) because traditional bullying incidents are more likely to be halted by their high-intervening teachers.

Taking into account the aspects mentioned above (which, of course, do not cover the entire range of explanations because they do not refer to others, such as cultural, religious, or ethnic variables as well as the legislative aspects specific to each country), the intervention and prevention programs that take place in schools, with the help of teachers, must be built in such a way that they are adapted to the needs of students but also to the possibilities of teaching staff to get involved in the management of bullying and cyberbullying incidents. (41-44) As we have sustained by the results of the present study, school

rules, peer-cultural acceptance of aggressive behaviors, the student-teacher relationship, but also the perception and previous experience of students regarding the ability of teachers to resolve aggressive incidents are important in the fight against cyberbullying. The involvement of teachers depending on the way in which they manage to overcome their own personal barriers in the face of repetitive aggressive behaviors should also not to be neglected.

Strengths and limitations of the study

The results of the present study are important because they mirror the current opinion of teachers regarding cyberbullying. Studies have shown an increasing use of the internet in the last decade. Apart from that, we must consider the enormous use of the internet and digital technologies in school activity, imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown all over the world. The research points out the big gap between the reality of cyberbullying and the lack of preparedness of teachers to deal with this impactful phenomenon.

This research has some limitations. The first limitation is related to the unbalanced gender distribution of respondents that is imposed by the specifics of the teaching profession. More women are embracing this job compared to men. The second limitation is due to the unbalanced distribution of respondents by country, and that is why comparative analysis must be treated with precociousness. But this limitation should also be seen as a productive one, because studies showed that cyberbullying is a widespread phenomenon, with no geographically related cause. The adverse effects caused by cyberbullying, including reduced safety, lower educational attainment, poorer mental health, and greater

unhappiness among students in all countries, led UNICEF to state in 2017, that “*no child is absolutely safe in the digital world*”. (45) The third limitation is determined by the restrictions imposed by the questionnaire. It did not consider variables that could influence teachers’ opinions regarding cyberbullying, such as psychological troubles (depression, burnout), job-related factors (dissatisfaction with their job or with the relationships with students/colleagues/managers), the personal experience as a victim of cyberbullying or having a member in the family (husband, child) with such an experience, negative antecedents concerning solving cyberbullying problems among their students or being the victim of cyberbullying by one of the students in the school.

CONCLUSIONS

This research confirms the major role that teachers have in fighting the increasing phenomenon of cyberbullying and the fact that this role must be constantly prepared by awareness, training, and collaborative relationships with students, parents, and colleagues. The results are important for students, teachers, parents, and school staff in order to realize the tremendous need for good communication, for training and developing skills in order to manage cyberbullying by encouraging the disclosure of incidents, being able to identify cyberbullying in the school environment, and offering help to all those involved (victims, perpetrators and bystanders). The results showed that policy makers should consider teachers’ experiences and needs in designing policies aimed at preventing and managing the online deviant behaviors among children and adolescence immediately that the aggressive acts are reported.

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This study is conducted within the project TECPC - Together Everyone Can Prevent Cyberbullying (2020-1-RO01-KA226-SCH-095269), in the framework of the

ERASMUS+ Programme -KA2 Strategic Partnerships Digital Education Readiness.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

1. Lee SJ. The relations between the student–teacher trust relationship and school success in the case of Korean middle schools. *Educational studies* 2007; 33(2): 209-216 / doi: 10.1080/03055690601068477.
2. Fossum S, Skokauskas N, Handegård BH, Hansen KL, Kyrrestad H. The Significance of Traditional Bullying, Cyberbullying, and Mental Health Problems for Middle School Students Feeling Unsafe in the School Environment. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 2021; 67(5): 1-13 / doi: 10.1080/00313831.2021.2006305.
3. Wang MT, Degol JL. School climate: A review of the construct, measurement, and impact on student outcomes. *Educational Psychology Review* 2016; 28(2): 315-352 / doi: 10.1007/s10648-015-9319-1.
4. Athanasiou K, Melegkovits E, Andrie EK, *et al.* Cross-national aspects of cyberbullying victimization among 14-17-year-old adolescents across seven European countries. *BMC Public Health* 2018; 18(1): 1-5 / doi: 10.1186/s12889-018-5682-4.
5. Wang MT, Dishion TJ. The trajectories of adolescents' perceptions of school climate, deviant peer affiliation, and behavioral problems during the middle school years. *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 2012; 22(1): 40-53 / doi: 10.1111/j.1532-7795.2011.00763.x
6. Gómez-Ortiz O, Apolinario C, Romera EM, Ortega-Ruiz R. The role of family in bullying and cyberbullying involvement: Examining a new typology of parental education management based on adolescents' view of their parents. *Social Sciences*. 2019; 8(1): 25.
7. Gómez-Ortiz O Romera EM, Ortega-Ruiz R, Del Rey R. Parenting Practices as Risk or Preventive Factors for Adolescent Involvement in Cyberbullying: Contribution of Children and Parent Gender. *Int J Environ Res. Public Health* 2018; 15: 2664 / doi: 10.3390/ijerph15122664.
8. Gómez-Ortiz O, Del Rey R, Romera EM, Ortega-Ruiz R. Los estilos educativos paternos y maternos en la adolescencia y su relación con la resiliencia, el apego y la implicación en acoso escolar. *Anales de Psicología/Annals of Psychology* 2015; 31(3): 979-989.
9. Campisi SC, Carducci B, Akseer N, Zasowski C, Szatmari P, Bhutta ZA. Suicidal behaviours among adolescents from 90 countries: a pooled analysis of the global school-based student health survey. *BMC Public Health* 2020; 20(1): 1-1 / doi: 10.1186/s12889-020-09209-z.
10. Livingstone S, Haddon L, Görzig A, Ólafsson K. Risks and safety on the internet: the perspective of European children: full findings and policy implications from the EU Kids Online survey of 9–16-year-olds and their parents in 25 countries. *2011 European Community Safer Internet Plus Programme and Sonia Livingstone, 2011*. Available online at EU Kids Online. Accessed on August 10th, 2022.
11. Smith PK, Mahdavi J, Carvalho M, Tippett N. An investigation into cyberbullying, its forms, awareness and impact, and the relationship between age and gender in cyberbullying. *Research Brief No. RBX03-06*. London: DFES. 2006.
12. Turliuc MN, Măirean C, Boca-Zamfir M. The relation between cyberbullying and depressive symptoms in adolescence. The moderating role of emotion regulation strategies. *Computers in Human Behavior* 2020; 109: 106341.
13. Grigore AN, Maftei A. Exploring the Mediating Roles of State and Trait Anxiety on the Relationship between Middle Adolescents' Cyberbullying and Depression. *Children* 2020; 7: 240 / doi: 10.3390/children7110240.

14. Altundag Y, Ayas T. Scale of Coping Strategies with Cyberbullying for Teachers: validity and reliability study. *Anadolu Psikiyatri Dergisi* 2018; 19(S1): 84-93.
15. Olenik-Shemesh D, Heiman T, Eden S. Cyberbullying victimization in adolescence: Relationships with loneliness and depressive mood. *Emotional and behavioral difficulties*, 2012; 17(3-4): 361-374 / doi: 10.1080/13632752.2012.704227
16. Şahin M. The relationship between the cyberbullying/cyber victimization and loneliness among adolescents. *Children and Youth Services Review* 2012; 34(4): 834-837 / doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2012.01.010.
17. Blomqvist K, Saarento-Zaprudin S, Salmivalli C. Telling adults about one's plight as a victim of bullying: Student-and context-related factors predicting disclosure. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 2020; 61(1): 151-159.
18. ten Bokkel IM, Stoltz E, van den Berg YH, de Castro BO, Colpin H. Speak up or stay silent: Can teacher responses towards bullying predict victimized students' disclosure of victimization? *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* 2021; 18(6): 831-847.
19. Fekkes MF, Pijpers IM, Verloove-Vanhorick SP. Bullying: Who does what, when and where? Involvement of children, teachers and parents in bullying behavior. *Health Education Research* 2005; 20: 81-91 / doi: 10.1093/her/cyg100
20. Smith PK, Shu S. What good schools can do about bullying: Findings from a decade of research and action. *Childhood* 2000; 7: 193-212 / doi: 10.1177/090756820000700.
21. Yilmaz, H. An examination of preservice teachers' perceptions about cyberbullying. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education* 2010; 6(4): 263-270 / doi: 10.12973/iejmste/75248.
22. Bjereld, Y. The challenging process of disclosing bullying victimization: A grounded theory study from the victim's point of view. *Journal of Health Psychology* 2018; 23(8): 1110-1118.
23. Cortes, K. I. & Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. To tell or not to tell: What influences children's decisions to report bullying to their teachers? *School Psychology Quarterly* 2014; 29: 336-348 / doi: 10.1037/spq0000078.
24. Shaw T, Campbell MA, Eastham J, Runions KC, Salmivalli C, Cross D. Telling an adult at school about bullying: Subsequent victimization and internalizing problems. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 2019; 28(9): 2594-2605 / doi: 10.1007/s10826-019-01507-4.
25. Wachs S, Bilz L, Niproschke S, Schubarth W. Bullying intervention in schools: A multilevel analysis of teachers' success in handling bullying from the students' perspective. *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 2019; 39(5): 642-668 / doi: 10.1177/02724316187804.
26. Baraldsnes D. Bullying prevention and school climate: Correlation between teacher bullying prevention efforts and their perceived school climate. *International Journal of Developmental Science* 2020; 14(3-4): 85-95 /doi: 10.3233/DEV-200286.
27. Li Q. Cyberbullying in schools: An examination of preservice teachers' perception. *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology* 2009; 34(2). Canadian Network for Innovation in Education. Retrieved September 21st, 2022, from <https://www.learnlib.org/p/42831>.
28. Ayas, T., & Horzum, M. B. Exploring the teachers' cyber bullying perception in terms of various variables. *International Online Journal of Educational Sciences* 2011; 3(2): 619-640.
29. Altundag, Y. and Ayas, T., Scale of Coping Strategies with Cyberbullying for Teachers: validity and reliability study/Ogretmenler için Sanal Zorbalıkla Basa Cikma Stratejileri Olcegi: Gecerlilik ve guvenilirlik calismasi. *Anadolu Psikiyatri Dergisi* 2018; 19(S1): 84-93.
30. Oldenburg B, Bosman R, Veenstra R. Are elementary school teachers prepared to tackle bullying? A pilot study. *School Psychology International* 2016; 37(1): 64-72.
31. Khanolainen D, Semenova E, Magnuson P. 'Teachers see nothing': exploring students' and teachers' perspectives on school bullying with a new arts-based methodology. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 2021; 29(3): 469-491.
32. Rigby K. *Multi-perspectives on School Bullying: One Pair of Eyes is Not Enough*, Routledge, 2021,

Why are teachers not always willing to fight against cyberbullying? Exploring the beliefs, attitudes and coping strategies of teachers in a multi-country cross-sectional study

33. Rigby K, Bagshaw D. Prospects of adolescent students collaborating with teachers in addressing issues of bullying and conflict in schools. *Educational Psychology* 2003; 23(5): 535-546 / doi: 10.1080/014434 103 2000123787.
34. Yildirim A, Celikten, M, Desiatov T, Lodatko Y. The Analysis of Teachers' Cyber Bullying, Cyber Victimization and Cyber Bullying Sensitivity Based on Various Variables. *European Journal of Educational Research* 2019; 8(4): 1029-1038.
35. Zhu C, Huang S, Evans R, Zhang W. Cyberbullying among adolescents and children: a comprehensive review of the global situation, risk factors, and preventive measures. *Frontiers In Public Health* 2021; 9: 634909.
36. Kaiser S, Kyrrestad H, Fossum S. Help-seeking behavior in Norwegian adolescents: the role of bullying and cyberbullying victimization in a cross-sectional study. *Scandinavian Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Psychology* 2020; 81-90 / doi: 10.21307/sjcapp-2020-008.
37. Shaw T, Campbell MA, Eastham J, Runions KC, Salmivalli C, Cross D. Telling an adult at school about bullying: Subsequent victimization and internalizing problems. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 2019; 28(9): 2594-2605
38. Buelga S, Pons J. Agresiones entre Adolescentes a través del Teléfono Móvil y de Internet. *Psychosocial intervention* 2012; 21(1): 91-101.
39. Oliver C, Candappa M. Bullying and the politics of "telling." *Oxford Review of Education* 2007; 33(1): 71-86.
40. Elledge LC, Williford A, Boulton AJ, et al. Individual and contextual predictors of cyberbullying: the influence of children's provictim attitudes and teachers' ability to intervene. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 201; 42(5): 698-710 / doi: 10.1007/s10964-013-9920-x.
41. Paez, G.R., Assessing predictors of cyberbullying perpetration among adolescents: the influence of individual factors, attachments, and prior victimization. *International Journal of Bullying Prevention* 2020; 2(2): 149-159.
42. Haddon L, Livingstone S. EU Kids online: national Perspectives 2012. Retrieved from EUKids Online. Website: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%20Kids%20III/Reports/ Perspectives Report. pdf>
43. Calmaestra J, Rodríguez-Hidalgo AJ, Mero-Delgado, O, Solera, E. Cyberbullying in Adolescents from Ecuador and Spain: Prevalence and Differences in Gender, School Year and Ethnic-Cultural Background. *Sustainability* 2020; 12: 4597 / doi: 10.3390/su12114597.
44. Horwood J, Waylen A, Herrick D, Williams C, Wolke D. Common visual defects and peer victimization in children. *Investigative Ophthalmology & Visual Science* 2005; 46(4): 1177-1181 / doi: 10.1167/iovs. 04-0597.
45. Martínez J, Rodríguez-Hidalgo AJ, Zych I. Bullying and Cyberbullying in Adolescents from Disadvantaged Areas: Validation of Questionnaires; Prevalence Rates; and Relationship to Self-Esteem, Empathy and Social Skills. *Int J Environ Res Public Health* 2020; 17: 6199 / doi: 10.3390/ijerph17176199.
46. UNICEF ed. Children in a Digital World. New York, NY: UNICEF (2017) presented in Keeley, B. and Little, C., 2017. The State of the World's Children 2017: Children in a Digital World. UNICEF. 3 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017 Mesch GS. Parental mediation, online activities, and cyberbullying. *Cyber Psych Beh Soc N* 2009; 12: 387-393 / doi: 10.1089/cpb.2009.0068.