

Sexual harassment in students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Chile: A cross-sectional observational study

Acoso sexual en estudiantes de la Facultad de Medicina, Universidad de Chile: Un estudio observacional transversal

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Abstract: Sexual harassment in the educational context is a type of sexual violence. At the University of Chile, it has been addressed through the "Protocol for action against complaints about sexual harassment, workplace harassment and arbitrary discrimination" which has sought to eradicate sexual harassment and reduce gender violence at the University of Chile based on a program to prevent these behaviors and care for affected people. Objective: To determine the prevalence of self-perception of sexual harassment at some point in their university career in students of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile and to describe the knowledge and use of the current protocol in said institution. Method: Cross-sectional prevalence study carried out during the years 2021-2022, the total number of participants was 550 students, selected by convenience sampling by career strata. The survey considered 3 items: personal characterization, prevalence of sexual harassment, action protocol of the faculty. The data was collected through an online survey. Results: The prevalence of sexual harassment in students at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile was 14%, of which the majority are women harassed by male students. Although 43.09% of those surveyed state that they are aware of the current action protocol, only 1.09% of them state that they have a lot of knowledge about how it works. Conclusion: With the results obtained in this study, the importance of addressing this problem comes to light, since an insecure study environment can have negative consequences in the professional training process and consequently in working life.

Keywords: Sexual harassment; students; School of Medicine.

Resumen: El acoso sexual en el contexto educativo es un tipo de violencia sexual. En la Universidad de Chile se ha abordado a través del "Protocolo de actuación ante denuncias sobre acoso sexual, acoso laboral y discriminación arbitraria" que ha buscado erradicar el acoso sexual y reducir la violencia de género en la Universidad de Chile a partir de un programa que permita prevenir estas conductas y atender a personas afectadas. Objetivo: Determinar la prevalencia de la autopercepción de acoso sexual en algún momento de su trayectoria universitaria en estudiantes de la Facultad de Medicina de la Universidad de Chile y describir el conocimiento y la utilización del protocolo vigente en dicha institución. Método: Estudio transversal de prevalencia realizado durante los años 2021-2022, el total de participantes fue de 550 estudiantes, seleccionados/as

mediante un muestreo por conveniencia por estratos de las carreras. La encuesta consideró 3 ítems: caracterización personal, prevalencia de acoso sexual, protocolo de actuación de la facultad. Los datos se recolectaron por medio de una encuesta online. Resultados: La prevalencia de acoso sexual en estudiantes en la Facultad de Medicina de la Universidad de Chile fue de un 14% de los cuales la mayoría son mujeres acosadas por estudiantes hombres. Si bien un 43,09% de los y las encuestados/as declara conocer el protocolo de actuación vigente, solo un 1,09% de estos refiere tener mucho conocimiento acerca del funcionamiento. Conclusión: Con los resultados obtenidos en este estudio sale a la luz la importancia de abordar esta problemática, ya que un entorno inseguro de estudios puede traer consecuencias negativas en el proceso de formación profesional y por consiguiente en la vida laboral.

Palabras clave: Acoso sexual; estudiantes; facultad de medicina.

1. Introduction

Sexual violence is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as "any sexual act, attempt to consummate a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or actions to commercialize or otherwise use sexuality of a person under duress by another person, regardless of the relationship of the latter to the victim, in any setting, including the home and workplace" (1). This is a violation of human rights and can affect anyone, of any age and situation. However, worldwide the highest prevalence is suffered by young women and the relationship between the aggressor and the victim is an asymmetry of power (2). Sexual harassment in the educational context, for its part, is a type of sexual violence defined as: "any practice with implicit or explicit sexual connotation exercised by one or more people towards another, whose link is given by an educational context" (3). Currently, sexual harassment in the educational context is a topic that has come to light after multiple student mobilizations that have developed, so the literature is scarce. In a study carried out in a student community of a University in Colombia in 2008 (4), it was observed that the prevalence of sexual harassment is 6.8%, which occurred in the first 4 semesters and that this was carried out by teachers (50%) and classmates (21.4% men and women in equal proportion).

In Chile, in July 2020, a national survey on sexual harassment in different areas was published, including harassment in the educational context, reflecting that 34.1% of the people interviewed declared having lived at least a situation of sexual harassment, of which 41.4% correspond to women and 26.4% to men (3). In this study (3) it was observed that the perpetrators were mainly classmates with a 65.4% prevalence, followed by teachers with 22.8%. On a legal level, in 2018 Law No. 21,094 on state universities was published, which mentions that all institution personnel will have legal protection against any act of sexual harassment perpetrated by university personnel, an important point, given that previous laws only included personnel as dependents or public officials (5). On the other hand, in 2021 Law No. 21,369 was established, which "*regulates sexual harassment, violence and gender discrimination in the field of higher education*"; This law is in charge of ensuring the rights of the people who belong to said institution and also preventing, investigating, punishing and eradicating sexual harassment, violence and gender discrimination in victims of higher education. In addition, this law will investigate and penalize events that do not occur at the university but that have been perpetrated by someone belonging to said institution (6). One year after the publication of this law, institutions that do not have a protocol for action against sexual harassment will be penalized and may even harm them in the accreditation process (7). Among those universities where the current law should apply is the University of Chile, the institution where this study was conducted (8). Said university presented an institutional response in

2015 to sexual harassment, which aimed to review university regulations and determine measures to comply with the obligation to respond to cases of sexual harassment. In it, the duty of students to safeguard internal coexistence is discussed, without delving further into the subject (9). Subsequently, in 2016, a descriptive study was carried out throughout the university that measured the incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment. The sample was probabilistic, representative by class and by sex with the participation of all faculties and services. In general, in the university community, the results indicated a prevalence of sexual harassment of 14% in total, with 21% of women affected, which doubles that of men, which reaches 9%. Of the total cases of sexual harassment, in 71% of the cases the victim is a woman; 42% correspond to the student class, 29% to the civil service class and 29% to the academic class. 86% of the harassment situations were perpetrated by men, 42% carried out by people belonging to the academic establishment and 32% by students (10). This study was carried out on the entire university community in a general way, and not differentiating by careers and/or faculties, so there is no updated or specific knowledge about the problem by faculties or careers belonging to the University of Chile, considering it important to investigate in this study what happens specifically in the Faculty of Medicine.

With the aforementioned results obtained, in 2017 the "Protocol for action against complaints about sexual harassment, workplace harassment and arbitrary discrimination" was generated, whose objective is "to eradicate sexual harassment and reduce gender violence in the university of Chile based on a program that makes it possible to prevent these behaviors and care for affected people" (11). As evidenced in the previous paragraphs, sexual harassment is present in the educational context and this can have multiple effects, so when a person faces this situation, they are not exempt from having traumatic consequences, these depend on social and cultural conditions. that make violence visible or not, in addition to the event that occurred, the perception of the event, the life risk suffered, the existence of previous histories, the support received, and the resources to deal with it (10). For all of the aforementioned, the objective of this study is to determine the prevalence of sexual harassment in students at some point in their university career at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile , as well as to describe the level of knowledge and use of the protocol. of sexual harassment in force in said institution.

2. Methods

Type of study. A cross-sectional observational prevalence study was carried out.

Universe. The participants correspond to students of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile during the academic years 2021-2022. The inclusion criterion was to be a student with active enrollment in the faculty. No exclusion criteria were determined. The universe considered was 4,100 students enrolled in the year 2020. To calculate the sample to estimate a proportion , a prevalence of 26% of sexual harassment was considered in a previous study carried out at the university level (10), precision 4% and confidence of 95%, with which a minimum sample of 462 students was calculated. These were selected by convenience sampling, maintaining the stratification of the careers in the universe in the sample, in this way the distribution by careers that was sought was the following: medicine 29%, nursing 15%, medical technology and obstetrics 13%. , occupational therapy 9% and nutrition, kinesiology and speech therapy 7%.

Instrument. The data collection instrument used was an online survey, prepared for this study. An existing instrument, previously used in the country, was adapted, the "First survey of street harassment in Chile in 2014" carried out by the observatory against

harassment in Chile (12), which was adapted considering the reality of the medical school and the existing context of the pandemic, in order to follow the approach proposed in the study, the problem, its objectives and scope (13). Prior to its use, a pilot test was carried out on 10 students and from this test no changes were made to the instrument. The survey was disseminated internally in the faculty and through social networks of the student centers of the same careers. This considered 3 items: personal characterization, situation of sexual harassment and the protocol for action against sexual harassment in force at the university. The survey was available on the Google forms platform, which could only be accessed by people with an institutional email that was intended to ensure that it was not answered by other people and avoid duplication in the response (Annex 1). For the analysis, the quantitative variables were analyzed using measures of central tendency and dispersion and the qualitative variables by absolute and relative frequency. Stata 14 statistical program was used.

limitations. The limitations of this study are inherent to the method, since when disseminating through social networks it is difficult to find the motivation of the participants. In order to reduce the effects of this limitation, 2 data collection processes were carried out, each process lasting approximately 1 month. With this, we sought to receive as many responses as possible.

Ethical considerations. The research was approved by the Ethics Committee for Research in Human Beings of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile, the project number is No. 031-2022. When opening the survey in Google Forms, the informed consent slipped, after this it was specified that by advancing to the next page it is understood that this consent is accepted. In addition, it is worth mentioning that the students who indicated they had been harassed were not contacted by the researchers in order to avoid possible re-victimization and this is made explicit in the informed consent. However, at the end of the survey an option is available for those people who require help where information is found on where to go or what number to call. The survey was confidential, the institutional email of each participant was recorded to ensure that whoever answers is from the university and to avoid a duplicate response.

3. Results

The total number of students surveyed was 550, which corresponded to a greater number of surveys in the calculated sample, distributed as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by races.

	number of students	Proportion of each race in the sample	proportion of each race in the universe
Medicine	150	27.3%	29%
Nursing	83	fifteen%	fifteen%
Medical technology	68	12.4%	13%
Obstetrics and childcare	85	15.5%	13%
occupational therapy	47	8.5%	9%
Nutrition	40	7.3%	7%
kinesiology	40	7.3%	7%
speech therapy	37	6.7%	7%

The characterization of the respondents is presented in Table 2. Our data indicate that 42% of the students are aware of situations of sexual harassment at the university (Figure

1) and 75 students (14%) declare that they have been victims of sexual harassment since they were at the University (Figure 2).

Table 2. Characterization of the students of the Faculty of Medicine included in the study.

Variable	No.	%	Variable	No.	%
Sex			Course		
Women	394	71.64%	1st	64	11.64%
Man	156	28.36%	2nd	117	21.27%
intersex	0	0%	3rd	119	21.64%
Gender			4th	142	25.82%
Female	391	71.09%	5th	102	18.54%
Male	157	28.55%	6th	6	1.09%
non binary	2	0.36%	7th	0	0%
Career			Age (years)		
Nursing	83	15.09%	Half	21.35	
kinesiology	40	7.27%	minimum	18	
speech therapy	37	6.73%	maximum	30	
Medicine	150	27.27%			
Nutrition	40	7.27%			
Medical technology	68	12.36%			
Obstetrics and Child Care	85	15.45%			
Occupational Therapy	47	8.55%			

Figure 1. Cases of sexual harassment In Medical School of the Universidad de Chile known by students, between 2021 and 2022

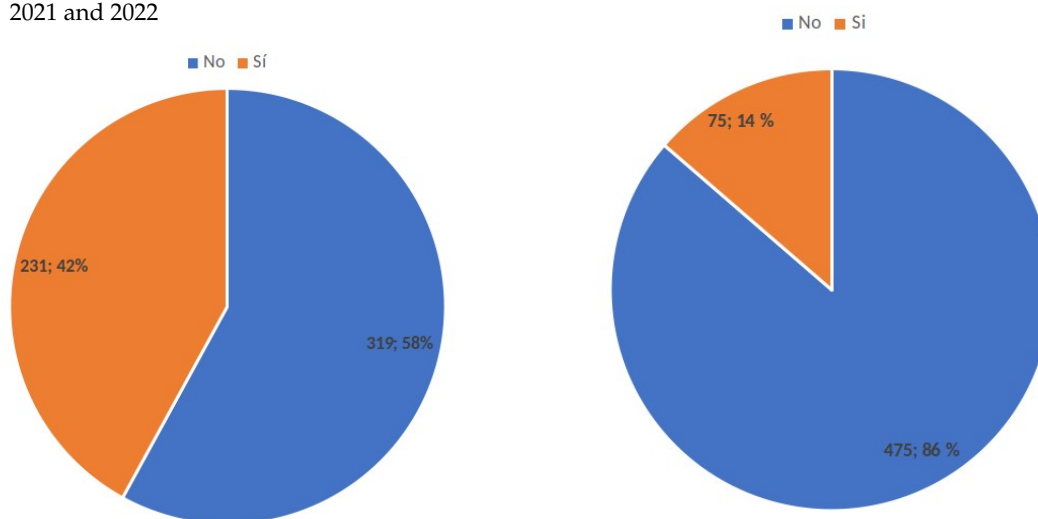


Figure 2. Cases of sexual harassment in students of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile, between the years 2021-2022.

Of the people who have suffered sexual harassment, 57 (76%) are women and 10 men (24%); Table 2 shows the characteristics of the students surveyed. And Table 3 describes specific characteristics of the bullying situation experienced by the people who declared they were victims. Table 4 shows the help received by the harassed people, both from the university, their close environment or other means. Table 5 shows the level of knowledge of the protocol for action against sexual harassment in the students of the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile. Table 6 shows the level of use and qualification of the operation of the action protocol in the event of sexual harassment. It is important to highlight that of the 75 students who state they have suffered sexual harassment, only one person mentions having used the action protocol against sexual harassment in force at the University, which corresponds to 1.33% of the students who have suffered sexual harassment; This person declares that they are not satisfied when using the protocol. However, in general terms, 98.36% of the students surveyed recognize the importance of knowing the action protocol in force at the university. Finally, an open question was asked to the respondents, in order to find out where they think it would be appropriate to report on the current action protocol of the faculty and the responses were grouped according to the most mentioned (Table 7).

Table 3. Characterization of the situation of sexual harassment reported by students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Chile.

Variables	N	%	Variables	N	%
Course when you were bullied for the first time			Forms of sexual harassment		
1st	37	49.33%	Only	21	28%
2nd	25	33.33%	Multiple	54	72%
3rd	11	14.67%	Types of sexual harassment suffered		
4th	1	1.33%	Leering	33	20.37%
6th (medicine only)	1	1.33%	Whistles and other sounds	8	4.94%
The bullying was a situation			Soft compliments (flattery)	31	19.14%
Isolated (once)	60	80%	Aggressive compliments	17	10.49%
Constant (more than once)	fifteen	twenty %	Intimidating approach	39	24.07%
Frequency with which you are bullied			"Grabs"	17	10.49%
Several times a day	1	1.33%	Pressure on the genitals	9	5.56%
Two to three times a week	3	4 %	Persecution	5	3.09%
Once a week	5	6.67%	Exhibitionism or masturbation	1	0.62%
A couple times a month	13	17.33%	Rape	2	1.23%
Few times a year	31	41.33%	Place where the bullying occurred		
It's only happened once	22	29.33%	Classroom	11	8.80%
Sex of the person harassing			Café	1	0.80%
Male	64	85.33%	Hallways	20	16.00%
Female	11	14.67%	Bathrooms	2	1.60%
Status of the person who harasses			Gym	1	0.80%
Teacher	11	14.67%	Playground	43	34.40%
Student	55	73.33%	Library	0	0%
Professor in clinical field	1	1.33%	Social networks	19	15.20%
Professional in clinical field	0	0%	clinical fields	2	1.60%
Other (patient, external to faculty and staff)	8	10.67%	Courtyards of the faculty	9	7.20%

	Other (a student's house, metro, outside the faculty, teacher's office, zoom)	17	13.60%
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Table 4. Help received by people who were victims of sexual harassment.

Variable	N	%
Got help		
Yes	35	46.67%
No	40	53.33%
This help was provided by:		
A network	32	91.43%
More than one network	3	8.57%
Where did you get the help from?		
University of Chile	0	0%
Close environment	32	91.43%
Close environment and professor from another university	1	2.86%
Close environment, psychologist and psychiatrist	1	2.86%
University of Chile and nearby environment	1	2.86%

Table 5 . Level of knowledge of the protocol for action against sexual harassment.

Variable	N	%
Knowledge of the existence of the protocol against sexual harassment		
Yes	237	43.09%
No	313	56.90%
Knowledge level of the current protocol		
Have you heard of it?	32	4.83%
You have heard of it and seen it on platforms, but you have not read it	126	23.90%
He has read it but he no longer remembers what it said	53	9.64%
You have read part of the document, but you do not fully know the elements that are established there	20	3.64%
You have read it and are fully aware of the elements established therein	6	1.09%
Not aware of the existence of the protocol	313	56.90%
Means by which you learned about the protocol		
University social networks	106	36.80%
Faculty social networks	99	34.37%
University website	9	3.12%
Faculty website	5	1.73%
Seminars and conferences	11	3.81%
Other	58	20.13%

Table 6. Level of use of the "protocol of action against sexual harassment" by people who have suffered sexual harassment .

Variable	N	%
Use of the protocol		

Yes I have used it, since I have been a victim	1	1.33%
I have not used it, although I suffered sexual harassment	74	98.5%

Table 7. Where you would propose to publicize the protocol for action in the event of complaints about sexual harassment.

Where would you propose?	N	%
Social networks	193	35.09%
Social networks and common spaces	132	24.00%
University common spaces	131	23.82%
Classes / assemblies / course orientation	71	12.91%
Email	13	2.36%
N/A	10	1.82%

4. Discussion

In 2016, a descriptive prevalence study was carried out on students from the University of Chile that measured the incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment, which is why it was decided to analyze the same situation in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile in a way that more specific, in order to evaluate if the characteristics of this faculty and the presence of different instances such as the interaction with officials and users of different clinical fields. When comparing both studies, at the faculty level, 14% declare having suffered sexual harassment compared to the 15.7% prevalence observed at the student level in the study at the university level (10).

The results of this study show that the students harassed in the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Chile are mostly women, where the person who harasses is a man, mostly fellow students, but also teachers and university staff. A comparison was made with an article published on sexual harassment in medical training, which evaluated the frequency and type of harassment in internal medicine residents (14) and it was observed that women are the ones who suffer sexual harassment the most, as well as the present study, which leads to certain spaces being perceived as masculine and generates that instances of learning and growth become hostile and uncomfortable environments. In addition, it was observed that 22.4% of the people sexually harassed were men (14), which is similar to this study where a prevalence of 24% was presented and that the harasser in these cases is mostly a woman. This is an important aspect, since sexual harassment in general and sexual harassment of men can often be made invisible, a fact that could be based on machismo and the belief in the superiority and dominance of men over women (15). From a masculinity approach, it is essential to show that harassment would not be a problem specific to women, although it is much more prevalent in them. According to the first national survey on street, workplace, educational and cyberbullying sexual harassment in Chile in 2020, it was declared that 7 out of 10 women are victims of harassment, unlike men, who only 3 out of 10 suffer from it. (3). Therefore, it is important to survey so as not to generate vulnerability and gaps in the care of cases of harassment in men since they are not exempt from these situations, even if less frequently.

On the other hand, the most prevalent place where situations of sexual harassment are generated is in the "playground" (34.4%), which corresponds to a place belonging to the Faculty of Medicine where students meet and share in a social context not linked to academic activities, where other factors that are not found in academic environments may be present, such as alcohol consumption, which makes this specific place a space of greater

vulnerability. According to a study carried out in Spain, it was stated that alcohol consumption in girls makes them more vulnerable to suffering some types of violence in contexts of nightlife (16). Despite this, from a rights perspective, it is important to highlight that the consumption of alcohol and substances, on the one hand, does not exempt the aggressor from responsibility, and on the other, being deprived of reason due to the effects of alcohol makes it difficult to practice consent (17).

On the other hand, another context that was shown to be important in this study is that of social networks. The study was carried out under a different health situation, in which many students did not attend classes in person, or they were developed in a hybrid way. Despite the fact that this situation suggests that the prevalence of sexual harassment in the educational context will be lower, it can be observed that it is similar and that new instances of harassment have been added, such as social networks. According to the results of this study, social networks are positioned as the third most prevalent place where bullying situations are generated. Cybersexual harassment is defined as “any practice with an implicit or explicit sexual connotation carried out by one or more people, the Internet and/or electronic devices, carried out without the consent of the person who suffers it, causing discomfort in the affected person” (3). According to the first national survey of sexual, street, workplace and cyberbullying in Chile in 2020, 18.8% of the total sample surveyed acknowledged having suffered sexual cyberbullying and later, when specifically asking about cyberbullying situations, it was evidenced that more than Half of the people consulted (52%) had suffered from one of these at least once in their lives. What makes us know that this type of harassment comes from before the pandemic, due to the use and existence of social networks for many years. Has this cyberbullying increased during the pandemic? According to a systemic review carried out in Ecuador, due to the confinement due to the global health situation, the use of social networks became essential to maintain contact with close people and carry out daily activities, such as work or academics. Due to this, several complaints of harassment were developed by this type of communication medium from 2020-2021 (18).

Regarding the types of harassment that are most repeated, leering glances and intimidating approaches, as observed in the first national survey on harassment in Chile, where the most frequent types of harassment are those of a non-verbal nature such as sounds and/or whistling, comments about physical appearance, touching, among others (3). This could be due to the naturalization and normalization of certain situations that historically were understood as “compliments”, as can be seen in a testimony of an interview carried out by the Central University of Mexico on “Normalization of gender violence as a methodological obstacle for its implementation.” comprehension” in which an interviewee declared: “ *I am concerned that whistles, shouts, gestures and glances have stopped seeming “so serious” to me today, they have become part of everyday life*” (19) .

Continuing with the characterization of the bullying situation, the majority suffered it when they were in their first and second year of university and this situation was isolated, that is, it only happened once. If we compare it to a study of sexual harassment in students from the University of Manizales in Colombia, 35.7% of the students suffered harassment in the first semester and 28.6% during the fourth semester, and also it was an isolated situation (4). With these results we can ask various questions. Is one more vulnerable when entering the university for the first time? Is there less information in first-year students regarding university protocols? Is there a more noticeable power relationship towards first-time students?

Regarding the action protocol, most do not know of its existence, and those who do know it have not used it, so it is difficult to categorize if it is used correctly, 46% of the people who suffered harassment received help. Of the percentage of people who did not receive help, some of them did not believe it was necessary to request help or believed that they would not receive it, which can be compared to the study of sexual harassment in medical training where 77% of the harassed women believed the same (14). It can be argued that this could be due to the existing misinformation about the steps that must be followed to denounce or learn about the existing protocols in each institution, or because of fear or shame of telling the situation experienced. A study carried out in Mexico in 2007 ensures that only four universities have a protocol for action against sexual harassment, which could affect the reproduction of these situations because they do not have a regulation or sanction (20). In relation to the Chilean context, as mentioned above, Law No. 21,369 obliges higher education institutions to have a protocol for action against sexual harassment (5), to which is added a document created by the Ministry of Education as a guide with suggestions for the elaboration of said protocol (21). However, as we saw in this study, the biggest problem does not lie in the existence of the protocol, but in its ignorance. We do not know if the protocols against sexual harassment are disseminated internally in other Chilean universities and the way in which they are presented to their students, but it is observed that each institution has its protocol visibly on their respective websites. For all these reasons, progress must be made to strengthen the dissemination and detailed knowledge of these protocols with continuous work that allows them to become a tool that allows education about the problem and also truly protects the victims. The limitations of the sampling must also be considered for the adequate contextualization and generalization of the results (22), since the sampling used was for convenience due to the moment in which this study was carried out, under mobility restrictions due to the pandemic and thus have greater accessibility and availability of students.

5. Conclusions

- Sexual harassment in the educational context is an issue that has recently come to light after multiple student mobilizations that have taken place in the country. However, it is not a new issue, on the contrary, bullying is a prevalent situation that has been made invisible and normalized.
- It is extremely important to consider and address these problems, since an insecure study environment can have negative consequences in the professional training process and consequently in working life.
- Measures should be generated whose main objective is the prevention of bullying situations, through education and delivery of tools.
- It is important to have an action protocol against bullying situations that is up-to-date and known by students and that is available and informed from the moment they enter the institution.

Supplementary documentation: see annex.

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