

TEENAGERS FEEL LONELY. ONE IN TWO IS A VICTIM OF BULLYING

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Nine teenagers out of 10 feel lonely, one in 2 has suffered acts of bullying. This is some of the data that was published on Thursday, 3 March, **during the National Day against Bullying and Cyberbullying, organised by the Indifesa Observatory of Terre des Hommes and OneDay, who, with the help of ScuolaZoo** and of its communities, have kept in touch with more than 50,000 young people, aged 14 to 26, since 2014, namely, Gen Z, whose dreams, difficulties and demands they talk about.

BULLYING AND LONELINESS: THE DATA

One teenager in two (51% in Lombardy) has suffered acts of bullying, has felt deep pain as a result of discrimination because of **sexual orientation, racist offences, body shaming, acts of denigration, violence and incitement to commit suicide**.

The younger generations are very aware of the dangers of the web: **7 out of 10 say they do not feel safe when surfing the Internet**. What worries them most is **the danger of cyberbullying (68.8% nationally, 66% in Lombardy), followed by revenge porn (60%), identity theft (40.6%) and stalking (35%), but also alienation from real life (32.4%)**, with the creation of unattainable models and standards, which are sources of great frustration.

Away from the screens, 50% of teenagers say they are afraid of suffering psychological violence and bullying (44%; these values are slightly lower in Lombardy, with 47% and 41% respectively).

What also emerges clearly is the **very deep psychological unease caused (or exacerbated) by the two years of pandemic**. In Lombardy, 45.8% of the teenagers interviewed fear social isolation (more than the national average of 37.5%); 36.6% of them are afraid of suffering from depression (compared to the national average of 35%); 24.3% fear loneliness (22% in Italy).

Eighty eight percent of the survey participants (this year, 1700 teenagers were interviewed) **say they feel lonely or very lonely** (93% in 2020). Among the causes of their loneliness, 31% of them say they do not feel their families listen to them, and 30% do not feel loved; then, **29.2% do not go to meeting places** (33%, one out of 3, in Lombardy).

“We have a dramatic picture of 2021, from the Indifesa Observatory, in which **bullying and violence are everyday occurrences in the lives of girls and boys**,” said **Paolo Ferrara**, the general director of Terre des Hommes Italy. “The two years of pandemic have led to a **significant increase in psychological and psychiatric disorders among teenagers**. This is unease that adults can no longer

pretend not to see. The psychological bonus could have been a response to the emergency, but psychological assistance for teenagers must become structural.”

With the Indifesa Observatory, Terre des Hommes listens to teenagers and gives them opportunities to meet in order to foster participation in the decisions that affect them.

GEN Z IS CALLING FOR ATTENTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

From the answers of the boys and girls, who took part in the Indifesa Observatory, what emerges is all **the suffering caused by bullying and cyberbullying, as well as the suffering from the deep loneliness experienced at this moment in history**. However, plenty of suggestions, reflections and stimuli have been put forward by teenagers themselves, to face these problems.

Teenagers are on alert and are demanding **that their distress be taken seriously by adults (firstly, by teachers and parents)**.

“Adults should look out for the hidden feelings of teenagers, and if they notice anything strange (like loneliness, which is one of the consequences of bullying), they should give importance to this feeling and **should not give answers like ‘You’re making too big a deal out of this’ or ‘It’s normal, this is how you shape your character’**”, Giada, 13, wrote.

The demand for **access to psychological support to overcome moments of difficulty** is loud and clear.

Moreover, Gen Z think it is crucial not to remain indifferent and always to speak up about these topics with peers and to have the opportunity to attend education courses on emotions and more awareness-raising initiatives. Boys and girls know the importance of teaching small children a culture of respect for and welcoming others, and among the proposals made, there was also that of **involving the main social networks to reinforce the mechanisms of reporting inappropriate contents**.

THE RESPONSE OF THE SOCIAL NETWORKS

The research carried out this year by the Indifesa Observatory was extended with a survey on the Instagram profiles OneDay and ScuolaZoo, which reconfirm the trend of the research: of a total of 23,292 answers, 45% of teenagers claimed they had suffered bullying.

Moreover, from the survey of the social media, it emerges that the **main places where boys and girls are subjected to bullying are school, places for sport, and public spaces** (near the school, parks, town squares, and in the streets).

Only a small number of the boys and girls who have suffered bullying have been helped: of 11,394 answers, only 2995 (about one in 4) got any form of help, which primarily came from parents, friends, teachers, school psychologists and sport coaches.

ACTIONS FOR INCLUSION

“For years, OneDay and Terre des Hommes have together organised **social awareness-raising campaigns for young people on the topics of inclusion, diversity, and the dangers of the Internet**, but bullying and cyberbullying remain a central problem in teenagers’ lives,” said Gaia Marzo, from OneDay Group. “Teenagers are the architects who will draw the world of tomorrow, and it’s our duty to help them so that they can imagine and experience a free and just world, without discrimination. We’ve been doing our part with this Observatory, since 2014, **by standing on the side of teenagers, and being a spokesperson for them before the authorities.**”

“This partnership is important for the BIC Corporate Foundation, because it invites adolescent boys and girls to be creative and innovative, and, at the same time, to face the tough problems they’re dealing with, like bullying, discrimination, gender equality and many others,” said **Alicia Ruiz Huidobro**, of the BIC Corporate Foundation. “We believe this partnership will enable us to help these young people, thanks to **the increased awareness generated by the web radio stations.**”

Translated by Nicole Dall’Osto e Camilla Tofanelli

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