



ICERI **2014**

**7TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF
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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

**SEVILLE (SPAIN)
17-19 NOVEMBER 2014**



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We hope you take ICERI2014 as an opportunity to exchange ideas and results, to discover different ways of applying new educational technologies and broaden your vision about new ways of teaching and learning.

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BULLYING IN HAZING PRACTICES: A STUDY ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Studies about bullying, mostly diffused from Olweus' studies since the 1970s, have been, in the most part, focused on non-higher education. However, problems between higher education students have started to arise in Portugal, some of which seem to be associated to hazing practices. Due to this new challenge within higher education, some studies that aim to develop instruments to assess situations of aggression and intimidation on this level of education have started to be performed [1, 2], while others try to disclose the role of hazing practices [3] in students' lives.

This research aims to contribute to the demand placed by this new challenge in higher education. More specifically, it focuses on how students from a Portuguese higher education institution perceive hazing practices and bullying situations in hazing practices, while putting in perspective implications on academic performance.

Data was collected through the scale in "*Avaliação das Situações de Bullying nas Praxes do Ensino Superior*" (Evaluation of Situations of Bullying in Hazing Practices in Higher Education), a 15-item scale divided in three dimensions: 1) Positive relation with the hazing practices; 2) Negative relation with the hazing practices and 3) Social dimension [1]. 247 students of both sexes, aged 18 to 43 and from different grade levels, courses and departments have taken part in this study.

The results, using non-parametric techniques, confirm significant differences in "Positive relation with the hazing practices" between males and females ($p=.001 < \alpha=.05$) and among age groups ("20 years old or less" and "more than 20 years old"; $p=.024 < \alpha=.05$). Furthermore, they allow us to observe significant differences between the students' grade levels (1st, 2nd or 3rd year) taking into account the "Positive relation with the hazing practices" ($p=.04 < \alpha=.05$) and the "Social dimension" ($p=.017 < \alpha=.05$). Besides, significant differences have been noted between the departments where students belong regarding "Positive relation with the hazing practices" ($p=.02 < \alpha=.05$) and "Negative relation with the hazing practices" ($p=.02 < \alpha=.05$).

The correlations between the utilized subscales ("Positive relation with the hazing practices", "Negative relation with the hazing practices" and "Social dimension") are statistically significant, taking in consideration the significance levels of 1% (respectively $p=.02$; $p=.00$ and $p=.00$).

Keywords: Bullying, higher education, hazing practices.

1 INTRODUCTION

A student's entrance in higher education corresponds to a transition characterized by new challenges to individual development, both in the perspective of the building of the self as a person, as of the role of student. For a positive and successful adaptation to these new challenges the personal capital with which each one faces the transition process matters, but also how the institution welcomes newcomers and offers them social support. This role may be shared with Academic Associations [4]. It is in this context that the academic hazing, promoted by different Academic Associations in the reception of new students, may become important as a way of integrating them in the new institution and as a way of making the creation of new relational dynamics easy, as well as a way of promoting a sense of belonging [3, 4, 5].

Indeed, in a short survey of what is meant by hazing one finds the idea of the sense of integration in a given group. For example, to McGlone and Schaefer [6] the concept of hazing is a broad term that encompasses many activities, situations and actions that a person must tolerate in order to be part of a group. Vieira [3] considers that "hazing is a broad group of traditions, rituals, ways and habits that are put into practice repeatedly in a community, academic or otherwise, over the years". Loureiro et al.

[7] define hazing like as “a group of habits and traditions generated among higher education students, which become the essence of a very special and different way of life – the Academic life – that has been passed on between generations for centuries”. Finally, Tavares (2008, cit in [4]) think that:

“Hazing can be perceived as an organism that celebrates the students’ passage to higher education, allowing them to enter the academic community and to share an identity with all the other students and its function is to support the newcomers by encouraging their integration in the academic environment, giving them opportunities to enlarge and deepen their social support networks namely between peers.”

But this is a controversial topic that produces different reactions in the Portuguese student community, as investigation in the area testifies and as presented shortly. Hazing can play a facilitative role in the integration of the new students, contributing to their adaptation [3], provided that there is compliance with the rules of hazing, that one respects the will of the students to participate or not, and that situations involving humiliation, embarrassment or other forms of physical or psychological violence don’t occur [7].

Some empirical evidence on this integrative aspect is brought by a study in a School of Health in Portugal [5], with 273 participants around 20 years of age, mostly tend to agree with the idea that the practice helps new students to meet and relate with colleagues and the institution of education through fun activities and a lively atmosphere. Despite this show of sympathy for hazing, more than a third of respondents still seems to distance himself from that position by stating that the reception and integration of newcomers could render differently from the one practiced.

Following the adoption of alternative ways of integrating new students, many institutions of higher education that have adhered to and promoted the concept of "solidarity hazing", materialized in promoting initiatives in health (blood donation), sport, leisure (championship games), culture (theater, music), education (donation of books), environment (growing plants, recycling) and social support (donation of clothes, food, toys) in order to promote citizenship and the welfare [8].

Mascarenhas et al. [8] show, in a study with Portuguese and Brazilian students, that the idea can be inferred that the practice is inclined to be seen as more inclusive than threatening, although the border is thin, because about 40% of the respondents stated that there was a negative relationship with hazing. This study also revealed significant gender differences in a positive relation with the practice tending towards young men, and significant differences between the years of courses for students in later school years.

Also an investigation by Costa et al. [9] with first-year students of Nursing, Dentistry, Medicine, Physical Education and Biology, from Montes Claros State University, in Brazil, with the aim to identify the opinion of first-year students on hazing, one can conclude that the rituals of reception tend to be seen as attractive, and not repulsive and intimidating. 202 students participated in this study (80.8% of the institution) entering university for the first time, aged 17 to 37 years (mean = 20:13). All in all, 77.5% of the interviewed said they did not see hazing as a form of violence, and 67.8% have revealed that they adhered to this set of initiatives to enter university. Like the study of Mascarenhas et al. [8], it was observed that women tended the most to associate hazing to a form of violence. The association between hazing and violence has emerged among beginning students who said they did not know anyone or have friends in university and among students entering university with more advanced age (equal or higher than 21 years). Finally, a comparison between courses showed that more medical students shared this point-of-view.

Notwithstanding the testimony found on the positive effects of hazing, it may also be noted that there is indication of some hazing receptions to new students being based on power relations, inequality and coercion, raising fear of reprisal and triggering feelings of apprehension, anxiety and humiliation, thus hampering the transition and adaptation to higher education [4, 7, 9]. For instance, Silva [2] found that some students refer to the practice as a means of facilitating integration, but other students mention the existence of humiliating situations of mandatory nature which continue over time. Also in [10]) there is the idea that during the course of hazing, there are activities, such as running errands or perform other tasks requested by hazing students that although indicating unilateral exercise of power, do not harm the newly arrived student; but the same reasoning does not apply when it comes to forcing the consumption of alcohol or other intoxicating substances, new students being subject of aggression, simulated or actual sexual acts. These are clearly abusive activities, severe and damaging, both from a physical standpoint and from the point-of-view of psychology.

These behaviors of abuse and humiliation of new entrants are often reported as occasional excesses of so-called "doctors" when they exceed the rules of the code of hazing [2, 3], which are justified by social peer pressure and fear of reprisal and isolation felt by the new students [11]. However, there are authors who say they cannot treat the practice as a mere excess of a fun ritual initiation and integration, since that it has always been marked by violence and humiliation, characteristics which have widened over time [12]. and that have led to the silence, loneliness and fear within the university [13]. Some authors even claim that hazing may be a form of bullying in which "the victim often submits so they won't be marginalized" [14] and which consequences are manifested at the level of "low self-esteem, low academic performance, school evasion, stress, anxiety and aggressiveness" [15], compromising their academic and social life.

In the study of Miranda et al. [14], about bullying in higher education, it is concluded that the most frequent behaviors of young men are physical and verbal aggression, while young women use indirect relational aggression, such as spreading rumors or making social exclusion, similarly to what happens in other levels of education. As also happens in other contexts, the victims usually have low personal and interpersonal skills, an aspect that hinders the identification and timely stopping of the aggressive situation and makes them easy targets for bullies, for their insecurity and emotional fragility [2].

According to Akerman et al. [13], "the intimidation, abuse and asymmetry in power between students don't occur only in the newcomers' reception, [...] they are acts that persist along the year" and hazing practice, with a clear distinction between 'stronger' and 'weaker', turns out to be a means to introduce and justify perpetrating bullying in university. In this perspective, "a violence in academic hazing becomes one of the problems in the educational system to be faced" [9]. University, being an institution that rejects any practice associated with bullying or any behavior that harms the dignity of the students or reflects physical or psychological damage, offering legal procedures to eradicate these misconducts, has the duty to prevent any abusive hazing practice, outside or inside the premises, punishing those responsible according to their internal rules [16].

In this framework, the present study aimed to know how the students of a Portuguese institution of higher learning – the University of the Azores – perceive bullying situations, in order to obtain useful knowledge that can contribute to more informed decisions by Governing Bodies of the University and the students' Association, thus facilitating the emergence of practices of reception and integration of new students, favoring their better adaptation to higher education.

2 METHODOLOGY

247 students participated in this investigation of the 1st Cycle of Studies, in the University of the Azores, of both sexes, aged between 18 and 43 years (mean=21.66), from different years, courses and departments. This sample is representative of the student population of the institution, having been obtained by the method of quota sampling (non-probabilistic) considering the variables (gender and department).

The sociodemographic characteristics considered in the study were gender (male, female); age (variable coded into two categories: 20 years or less and more than 20 years); department of the university to which the course of the student is associated (coded into nine categories); year of the course the student attends (1st year, 2nd year and 3rd year).

The instrument used was the "Escala de Avaliação das Situações de *Bullying* nas Praxes do Ensino Superior" [the Bullying Situations in Higher Education Hazing Practices Evaluation Scale] from Matos et al. [1], which assesses situations of bullying in the contexts of practices in university educational establishments. It is an instrument consisting of 15 items of autoresponse, in a Likert scale whose extreme positions are 1 "strongly disagree" and 5 "strongly agree", and items 8, 11, 12, 14 and 15 are read backwards. This instrument was applied and validated in Portugal (n = 210), and has a factorial structure with three factors, with an explained variance of 63.19% a KMO of 0.905 and an internal consistency of Cronbach's alpha of 0.904. The first factor called "positive relationship with hazing" is composed of six items (3, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10), the second factor, termed "negative relationship with hazing" has six items (8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15), and the third factor, called the "social dimension" has three items (1, 2, 4), as shown in Table 1 [1].

Table 1 – "Evaluation Scale of Bullying Situations Praxes in Higher Education" - distribution of items per factor

	Item	Factor
1	There are rules for who hazes	F3
2	I can talk about the hazing practices whenever I needed	F3
3	I'm glad when I'm hazed	F1
4	I can count on my family when I need	F3
5	I believe that the hazing practices contribute to my university integration	F1
6	Those who hazed me liked me	F1
7	I like to be hazed	F1
8	I'm looking forward to the end of the hazing	F2
9	I like to participate in hazing	F1
10	They respected my desire to be or not to be hazed	F1
11	Hazing contained some violence	F2
12	I was assaulted by acts or words	F2
13	Managed to cope well with hazing practices	F2
14	I was disgusted	F2
15	My self-esteem was damaged	F2

The same instrument was later applied in Brazil (n = 206), and its psychometric properties have been replicated (Cronbach's alpha = 0.707; factor analysis of the scale presented a KMO of 0.711), allowing the conclusion that the scale is valid for assessing the relationship between higher education students with hazing [8].

In terms of procedure, the data from this study were collected in April 2014, in the classroom. The variables used are qualitative in the case of sociodemographic characteristics and are rated on a nominal scale and in the case of variables characterizing the items related to the "Evaluation of Situations of Bullying in Higher Education Hazing Practices" are on an ordinal scale. In terms of data processing, a Kolmogorov-Smirnov adhesion test was applied for normality of the variables in the study population, verifying that these variables do not follow a normal distribution, so that the application of inductive statistics had to choose to use non-parametric tests.

Statistical techniques were used in order to verify if there are significant differences between groups. In the case of sociodemographic variables coded into two categories (gender and age) the U Mann-Whitney test was applied (nonparametric test for the case of two independent samples) and in the case of sociodemographic variables subdivided into more than two categories (department year of course) the Kruskal-Wallis test (nonparametric test for the case of k independent samples) was applied. The Spearman correlation coefficient was also used between the items on an ordinal scale, inquiring also whether or not this correlation is significant for the population.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As mentioned, the present study aimed to know how students from the University of Azores perceive hazing practices.

On a global perspective, as to consider hazing as a form of welcoming new students, a little defined standpoint was observed among students, although there was a slight prevalence (37.7%) of those who disagree over those who agree (30.4%) that the idea that the activities practiced by hazers to new students contribute to the integration of the latter (24.7% did not agree nor disagree; 7.3% did not answer). Just over a third of respondents (35.6%) claims to have participated in hazing, having been registered a slight supremacy of students who reported that they had not enjoyed the activities

practiced (38.7%) over those who reported liking them (32.4%) and over those who expressed indifference (28.8%) (10.3% did not comment on this topic). Most students said they did not see hazing as a form of violence (92.8%) and in an intra-group analysis it is observed that this opinion was tendentiously more marked among young men (95.2%) than among young women (91.4%). Finally, the expressions of satisfaction at the participation in the practices came mainly from the 1st year students (41.1%), followed by the 2nd (39.2%), the 3rd being the most distant (19.7%).

These results do not overlap with others equally drawn from studies with Portuguese students in higher education, which have recorded a greater tendency to agree with the idea that hazing can facilitate the integration of newcomers [5, 8], and greater agreement with the practice of students in more advanced years [8]. One already observes these studies are more in tune regarding gender, because globally young men are the ones who are inclined to agree and adhere to the practices [8], and regarding the perception of the practice as not threatening or violent [5, 8].

Therefore, the results of this study seem to indicate little recognition of the initiatives that define hazing practices at the University of the Azores for the transition and adjustment of students to higher education and poor adherence to proposed activities. Despite the prevailing opinion that they are not violent or coercive actions, their attractiveness is reduced. Eventually, alternative ways of integrating new students, which may be the adoption of some hazing practices within the "solidary hazing", may increase sympathy and adherence of students to this type of initiative.

In order to deepen the understanding of the impact of hazing in the academic experience we also performed a study on the factors "Positive relationship with hazing" and "Negative relationship with hazing" and "Social Dimension" according to their sociodemographic characteristics. To facilitate the apprehension of the type of relationship between the variables and the factors of scale, there is a schematic overview in Table 2.

Table 2 - Type of differences found between the sociodemographic variables and the factors of "Scale Evaluation of Situations Bullying in hazing practices on Higher Education"

Sociodemographic variables	Factors		
	Positive relationship with Hazing	Negative relationship with Hazing	Social dimension
Sex	Significant differences	No	No
Age group	Significant differences	No	No
Department	Significant differences	Significant differences	No
Year attended	Significant differences	No	Significant differences

It was observed that the "positive relationship with hazing" showed statistically significant differences considering the groups defined by gender ($p = 0.001$), age ($p = 0.024$), department ($p = 0.002$) and year of the course taken by students ($p = 0.040$), in favor of young men, the younger students, students of the Biology department (medical school) and the School of Nursing and students of 1st year. These results replicate the previously presented ones related to the overall treatment. When compared with other studies one observes a further element of distinction. While at the University of the Azores students in the area of health (especially medicine) show a better relationship with hazing practices, a survey carried out in Brazil [9] shows that medical students have a most apparent perspective of the practices as an intimidating phenomenon.

In the case of "negative relationship with hazing" there are only significant differences regarding the department ($p = 0.020$) to which the student is allocated, including the departments of Economics and Management and of History, Philosophy and Social Sciences. Finally, the "Social Dimension" only revealed significant differences taking into account the year of the course taken by students ($p = 0.017$), observing the overhang of 1 year (39.6%), followed by 2 years (34.0%) and 3 years (26.4%).

Finally, in each of the factors on which significant differences were found with regard to sociodemographic variables, we tried to see if anything was punctuated prominently. Data concerning the crossing of the items of each of the factors and sociodemographic variables are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Crossing items of factors 1, 2 and 3 of "Rating Scale of Bullying in hazing situations on Higher Education" with sociodemographic variables. Study of the significance of the relationship.

Factors	Items	Sociodemographic variables			
		Sex	Age group	Department	Year attended
1	3	There is no relation	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.041)	There is no relation
	5	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.000)	There is a relation (p=0.014)	There is no relation
	6	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.09)	There is a relation (p=0.009)	There is a relation (p=0.027)
	7	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.038)	There is no relation	There is no relation
	9	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.007)	There is a relation (p=0.017)	There is no relation
	10	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.021)	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.003)
2	8	There is no relation	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.003)	No
	12	There is no relation	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.028)	There is no relation
3	4	There is no relation	There is no relation	There is no relation	There is a relation (p=0.002)

In the case of items of factor "Positive relationship with hazing" (items 3, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10) the variable "Sex" did not stand out as a differential; differences occur significantly in terms of age in the case of items 5 (p = 0.000) 6 (p = 0.09), 7 (p = 0.038) 9 (p = 0.007) and 10 (p = 0.021) in favor of younger students. It was the students up to 20 years old who said that they believe more in the facilitator role of hazing for their integration into academic life, who manifested that they felt cherished and respected by hazer students, as well as happy to be hazed and participate in that activity. It should be noted also that there were significant differences between some departments in the case of items 3 (p = 0.041), 5 (p = 0.014), 6 (p = 0.009), p = 0.017); and between the years attended at the level of items 6 (p = 0.027) and 10 (p = 0.003), always in favor of the students in the area of health (medical and nursing).

In the case of items of "negative relationship with hazing" (items: 8, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15), there were significant differences between departments in items 8 (p = 0.003) and 12 (p = 0.028) in favor of the School of Nursing and the Department of Modern Languages and Literature. In the case of items of "social dimension" (items: 1, 2, 4) the occurrence of significant differences in item 4 (p = 0.002) was verified between the years of the 1st cycle, having recorded the highest value in the 3rd year (92.5%)

and the lowest value in the 2nd year (82.3%), which may suggest that it is when entering and leaving university that students perceive family support more strongly.

In light of these results, and to summarize, one might think that students of the University of the Azores perceive hazing as a relatively sane event, though it doesn't set high attractiveness.

Finally, strengthening the idea that the instrument used is useful for measuring aggression and bullying in higher education hazing practices, since the correlation coefficient of Spearman, used to measure the intensity of the relations between the factors, informs that the correlations are significant ($\alpha = 0.01$), but relatively weak (positive versus negative relationship, $r_s = 0.213$ and $p = 0.002$, positive relationship versus social dimension, $r_s = 0.344$ and $p = 0.000$; negative relationship versus social dimension, $r_s = 0.249$ $p = 0.000$). The low intensity of the correlation ensures that the items that are the factors, although they concern a common idea, relate to relatively independent aspects, thereby allowing to capture a variety of facets on any constraints perceived by the university students.

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