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Student's Experiences with Traditional Bullying and Cyberbullying: Findings from a Romanian Sample

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Abstract

The field of cyberbullying is relatively new and there is no universal consensus on its definition, measurement and intervention. Authors agree that bullying has entered into the digital domain and professionals require the skills to help identify and prevent these behaviours. Ninety two students were surveyed to determine their experience with different types of bullying behaviors (face-to-face, cyberbullying or both), as bully, victim or witness. Our objective was to explore the association between those types of bullying and anxiety . The results suggest a significant association between face-to-face bullying and anxiety. Similarly, there was significant association between experiencing both types of bullying and anxiety. Further studies are required with larger and more diverse samples in order to verify current fidings and to test for additional associations.

Keywords: cyberbullying; face-to-face bullying;,anxiety,depression.

1. Introduction

According to experts and trainers, new technical developments combined with a lack of media education lead to cyberbullying, the newest form of bullying (Jäger, João, Matos & Pessoa, 2010). Cyberbullying behaviors include email abuses, fake websites, the denigration of reputation through visual images (Spears et al., 2011), the invasion of privacy, and the use of personal information to humiliate the target (Kift, Campbell & Butler, 2010).

Spears et al. (2009) found that the consequences of cyberbullying for the target range from strong negative feelings and emotions (anxiety, fear of going out, embarrassment, loneliness, sadness), to damage of self esteem

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and disruption of different levels of targets' lives (e.g. leaving the school, moving towns). A study on 3820 students (13–16 years old) from Sweden indicates an association between bullying and psychosomatic problems, in both types of bullying- traditional and cyberbullying (Beckman, Hagquist & Hellström, 2012). An explanation could be that online victimization was reactivated at school and this reproduced the trauma (Ševčíková, Šmahel & Otavová, 2012). Also, students involved in cyberbullying report more externalising problems (instrumental and reactive aggression) than non-involved students (Schultze-Krumbholz, Jäkel, Schultze & Scheithauer, 2012).

Other studies have reported that bullies have similar levels of depressive symptoms as their victims (Forero et al. 1999; Kaltiala-Heino et al. 1999). Researchers point out more similarities between perpetrators and victims: they are feeling freer online than offline, both are high internet users and have less control of themselves online, they experience a poorer relationship with their parents and they are less happy with themselves (Jansen, Veenstra & Kerstens, 2011). Moreover, less empathy and higher relational aggression was found with cyberbullies and cybervictims, compared to non-involved students (Schultze-Krumbholz & Scheithauer, 2009).

The impact of phone call and text messaging bullying (Smith et al., 2008) or e-mail bullying (Slonje & Smith, 2008) was considered less damaging than face-to-face bullying. A study from The Nederlands mentioned that the most frequently used means for bullying were name-calling and gossiping (Dehue et al., 2008). School victims are significantly more often chat victims, according to a German study (Katzer, Fetchenhauer, & Belschak, 2009). Also, consequences of using means such as picture/video clip were considered worse than face-to-face bullying. Cyberbullying could have a greater impact on victims because indirect means of contact (Internet, phone) implied a *wider audience, a 24/7 nature of bullying, a more enduring nature of the written word and anonymity of the bully (Campbell, 2011).* The absence of direct contact with the victim could also be an explanation for cyberbullies' lack of compassion or regret (Strom & Strom, 2005).

A strong argument for including cyberbullying and bullying in the analysis is a high prevalence of students who suffered from both types of abuse (Perren, Dooley, Shaw & Cross, 2010). Cross et al. (2009) brought to light that 92% of students who were cyberbullied were also face-to-face bullied.

Cybervictims' reactions range from pretending to ignore this phenomena to bullying the person who first bullied them (Dehue, Bolman & Vollinik, 2008). As stated by EU Kids Online Network, the coping strategies used by cyberbullied children are: trying to fix the problem (36%), telling someone (77%) or blocking the bully (46%). However, sometimes victims don't look for help because they fear the bullies or they are ashamed (Bijttebier and Vertommen, 1998; Naylor and Cowie, 1999; Naylor, Cowie and del Rey, 2001). Students in Australia consider that reporting the abuse to adults doesn't have any effect (Cross et al, 2009).

During 2011-2012, Romanian Association "Save the Children" found 105 cases of online harassment, 41 cases of using personal data for illegitimate purposes and internet frauds, 63 cases of people complaining of violent or sexual images and 15 persons suffering from internet/games addiction. About 15% of Romanian parents are concerned about the risks associated with internet use because their children have already experienced online problems and 23% of them believe their children will have similar problems in the future.

Firstly, our objective was to examine Romanian students' experience with different types (face-to-face; cyberbullying) and different degrees of associations (e.g. as bullied, bully, or as witness) with the bullying behaviour. Secondly, we wanted to determine if distinct groups can be identified based on depression, anxiety, stress symptoms and environmental circumstances: judgments on adults' behavior.

We hypotesized that there is a significant correlation between experiencing different types of cyberbullying (bullying, cyberbulling or a combination of both) behaviours and anxiety , among Romanian university students .

The age when cyberbullying is most prevalent is school-age and youth therefore most studies include students and young people (Smith, 2009). Our purpose was to include students (age 18-20), taking into consideration the fact that, so far, we lack information about how university students from Romania experience cyberbullying. From our perspective, it is important to focus on this particular group in our research.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants

The study was carried out in Bucharest. A convenience sample of 92 students from University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences, was recruited for the current study. The students volunteered after anonymity was guaranteed during the entire process, and no names or other identifying data were gathered at any time.

2.2. Procedure

A questionnaire-based survey developed by Campbell (2010) was utilized to collect information from 92 University students. The survey included sociodemographic information, bullying information, and it also included The Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS-21) by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), and The Strenghts and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) by Goodman (1997) that measures both positive and negative attributes (emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/ inattention, peer relationship problems and pro-social behaviour).

2.3. Analyses

SPSS v.17 (2009) was used for the analyses. Reliability analyses were performed to determine the psychometric properties of the DASS-21 and SDQ. Descriptive analyses were performed and Pearson Correlation Test was used for hypothesis testing, after verifying the parametric assumptions of normal distribution and homogeneity of variances. An alpha level = 0.05 was established for the analyses.

3. Results

Descriptive analyses revealed that 8.7% reported having been cyberbullied this year; 2.2.% cyberbullied someone this year; 18.5% know someone that has been cyberbullied this year; 18.5% have been bullied on some occasions, 2.2% have cyberbullied someone before this year; 10.9% know someone that has been cyberbullied before this year; 31.5% have been bullied face-to-face this year; 10.9% have bullied someone else face-to-face this year; 32.6% know someone being bullied this year; 6.5% have been both cyberbullied and bullied face-to-face this year. Reliability analyses for the Adults' behaviour when facing cyberbullying were α=.80; for the Adults' behaviour when facing face-to-face bullying was α=.84; Reliability of the DASS-21 was α= .92 and reliability for the SDQ was α = .70. Pearson's correlations show significant and negative associations between judgments on adults behavior against cyberbullying and anxiety (r_{xy} = -.217; p=.04), and difficulties (r_{xy} = -.245; p=.02). Significant and negative association was found between having been face-to-face bullied this year and adults' behaviour when dealing with face-to-face bullying (r_{xy} = -250; p<.05). Significant and positive associations were found between having been face-to-face bullied this year and anxiety (r_{xy}= .317; p<.01), and difficulties (r_{xy} = .221: p<.05). Similarly, a significant and positive association was found between having been cyberbullying and face-to-face bullying this year and anxiety (r_{xy}=.212; p<.05).

4. Conclusions

By using a self-report behavioral screening device, such as The Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale (DASS-21) and The Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), we found data about emotional symptoms associated with cyberbullying. The results of our study suggest a significant association between face-to-face bullying and

anxiety. Similarly, there was significant association between experiencing both types of bullying (traditional and cyberbullying) and anxiety. Consistent with previous studies (Juvonen and Gross, 2008), our findings indicate that traditional as well as cyberbullying is associated with high levels of social anxiety. As for the prevalence of cyberbullying behaviours, another similar study found that 62% of the Australian university students had experienced cyberbullying in the past year (Zhang, Land & Dick, 2010).

A similar survey study conducted on university students from Turkey showed that more than half of the subjects have been negatively affected by cyber violence (Turan, Polat, Karapirli, Uysal & Turan, 2011).

Many studies focused on young people (9 to 16 years old), but it seems that the lack of prevention and intervention methods leads to a high prevalence of this phenomena later in life (Chapell et al., 2006). Longitudinal studies support this finding: from 40% to over 50% of students who had been bully-victims or bullies in high school repeat this behaviour in university (Walker, Sockman & Koehn, 2011). Vandebosch and van Cleemput (2008) found that the main reason for students to bully others was the previous experience as victims in highschool. Further work found a significant positive correlation between being a bully in university, high school and elementary school, with 21% of participants having been bullied (Chapell et al., 2006). From this point of view, longitudinal studies are required.

5. Discussions

Research in the area of cyberbullying has practical relevance in order to create prevention strategies, as well as recognition of cyberbullying and the timely legal and professional attempts. Our study provides a new field for researchers, in order to have a better understanding of users' perceptions and attitudes towards online communication, especially with respect to cyberbullying tendencies. Families and teachers should recognize the cyberbully or the victim and institutions must provide the guidance and prevention activities meant to diminish bullying and cyberbullying consequences for the both victims and perpetrators.

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