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Review Article

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Effects of Cyber Bullying on Teenagers; a short review of Literature

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Abstract

Among the numerous advantages of the internet, there is an unintended outcome of the internet's extensive reach: the growing rate of harmful offences against children and teens. Cyber-bullying victimization has recently received a fair amount of attention due to some heart-breaking events orbiting in schools and even at homes. Although research has already demonstrated a number of serious consequences of cyber-victimization, many questions remain unanswered concerning the impact of cyber-bullying. This study gathers literature from 18 studies pieces together only the factors that kick-start cyber-bullying perpetration and victimization but also the effects of bullying on the victims as well as the bullies.

1. Introduction

Cyber-bullying interactions are usually defined as "repeated, harmful interactions which are deliberately offensive, humiliating, threatening, and power assertive, and are enacted using electronic equipment, such as cell (mobile) phones or the Internet, by one or more individuals towards another" [1]. It might be a continuation of real life bullying but can also exist on its own [2].

Smith divided cyber-bullying in seven subcategories, namely: text message bullying, picture/ video clip bullying, phone call bullying, email bullying, chat-room bullying, bullying through instant messaging (18%) and bullying via websites among which picture/video clip and phone call were perceived to have the most impact [3]. Even though chat room, instant messaging and email bullying were perceived to have the least impact on the victim another study deems it most common among all (18% and 13.8%, respectively) [4].

2. Review of Literature

2.1. Nature of Harassment

The nature of harassment ranges from ignoring, disrespecting, threatening, calling names, spreading rumors, email bombing, picking on and ridiculing [4] to hiding names while sending SMS or when in a

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chat room, kicking someone out of a chat room, and violating the privacy of someone by a webcam [5].

2.2. Comparison with Traditional Bullying

Electronic communications allows perpetrators to maintain anonymity, access to a wide audience and 24/7 attainability. In addition, private nature of the communication devoid of non-verbal quos makes cyber-bullying different from traditional bullying. Perpetrators may feel reduced responsibility and accountability leaving victims more vulnerable **[6-8]**.

2.3. Causes of Cyberbullying Perpetration

According to studies there was no correlation between age and cyber-bullying (p=0.39) [1]. Males were more likely to cyber-bully others than females (p=0.021) [9]. Only 43.6% of cyber-bullies thought that their bullying behavior was harsh to very harsh on the victims (Cyber victims: 66.4%), similarly, only 26% thought their actions had an impact on their victim's life (Cyber victims: 34.6%). Those who bullied others scored higher on the peer relationship problems scale (p=0.001) [1]. Cyber-bully statuses were independently predicted by conduct (OR = 2.6; 95% CI, 1.5-4.5; P < .001) and hyperactivity problems (OR = 2.4; 95% CI, 1.4-3.9; P < .001) and pro-social problems (OR = 2.3; 95% CI, 1.5-3.4; P< .001). No significant difference was observed between children of two biological parents and children living in a family with other than two biological parents [4]. Traditional bullies tended to be cyber-bullies as well (p < 0.001). Within a group of school bullies, 85.5% reported that they were also victims and even though almost 30% in this group were cyber-bullies, 27.3% were cyberbully victims [10].

Anonymity associated with electronic communication tools promotes cyberbullying and makes it difficult to prevent [7,10]. The frequencies of public school students who indicated being cyberbullies were higher than those of the private school students [5]. Although the frequent use of communication tools significantly promoted cyberbullying in female students (p = 0.001), male students did not have the same effect (p = 0.431). On the other hand, the role of risky internet use in promoting cyber-bullying was not significant for female students (p=0.721), it was significant for male students (p = 0.001) [11].

3. Causes of Cyberbullying Victimization

3.1. Age

Although a decrease is seen in exclusive school bullying from ages 14 (16.6%) to 18 (7.1%), cyberbullying actually increases between the ages 14 (6.2%) to 18 (7.4%) [10].

3.2. Gender

Although some studies show no significant difference between the proportion of male and female adolescents who reported being bullied (p=0.91).(9) There are reports indicating higher occurrence of cyber-bullying among females than males (18.3% vs 13.2%) [**12,13**].

3.3. Race/ Ethnicity

Whites/Caucasians were more prone to be victimization [14].

3.4. Physical Appearance

Females seen as less or more attractive than others were at the highest risk for harassment while some students were also targeted on the basis of disability **[9]**.

3.5. Traditional Bullying Victim

Traditional bully victims were also likely to be cybervictims (p = 0.022) [15].

3.6. Family Composition

Cyber-victim only status was associated with living in a family with other than 2 biological parents (6.2% vs 4%) [4].

3.7. Sexual Orientation

Youngsters who identified themselves as heterosexual were less likely to be victimized as compared to their non-heterosexual counterparts (6% vs 10.5%) **[12]**.

3.8. School Performance

Students who performed poorly in school (D & F grade holders) were more than twice as likely to be victims of either traditional or online harassment, or both, as compared to students who received A-grades (16.1% vs 7.4%) **[12]**.

3.9. Technology Use

The risky internet use and usage frequency predicted cyber-bullying victimization significantly when compared with traditional victimization among female ($\Delta R2 = .133$, F (2, 83) = 6.78, p = .002) as well as male students ($\Delta R2 = .216$, F (2, 108) = 15.98, p = .000) [11]. In another study, Eric Rice reported high levels of texting (OR = 2.1; 95% CI = 1.1, 4.0; P < .05) and Internet use (OR = 2.0; 95% CI = 1.0, 3.64; P < .05) were associated with being a cyber-victim [14].

3.10. Type of School

Public school students reported experiencing cyber harassment more frequently than those studying in the private school [5].

4. Effects of Cyberbullying on the Perpetrator

It was observed that 39% of students who harassed others online dropped out of school and 37% showed delinquent behavior [1]. About 32% of online harassers were frequent substance abusers, while some reported frequent smoking and drunkenness. A study reported that about 16% perpetrators were severely depressed [1] while in another study there reports of bullies feeling unsafe in school [4].

5. Effects on Cybervictims

In relation to combating cyber-bullying males responded more actively and with physically retaliatory behavior, whereas females' responses indicated more passive and verbally retaliatory behavior [**15**]. About 1 in every 4 individuals reported fear for their safety most of whom most reported getting targeted by an adult. Sourander et al reported association between victimization and sleeping problems (p < 0.001), bed-wetting, headaches (p < 0.001), and stomachaches [**4**]. Girls were significantly (P=0.003) more likely to reports 2week sadness (36% vs. 21%), suicidal ideation (19% vs. 12%), suicide plan (15% vs. 11%), attempt (10% vs. 6%), and treatment for attempt (3% vs. 2%) as compared to boys [**16**].

Students categorized as "other" race (20%) and Hispanics (14%) presented with higher suicide ideation, as well as were more likely to report having made a suicide attempt (10% and 11%, respectively) compared to Caucasians (6%) and African-Americans (8%) **[16]**. The analysis showed that female cybervictims were more likely to inform adults than males (p = 0.012) and among students who knew someone being cyber bullied, only 30.1% told adults with no correlation to gender [9]. Non-heterosexual groups were far more likely to report bullying (33.1% vs 14.5%) [12].

Both public and private school students revealed seeking help from their friends (28.6% vs 43.6%) however only a few of the public school students stated that they had asked for help from their teachers while none of the private school students reported asking help from them [5].

6. Interventions

6.1. Educating Children

Warning from the dangers that lurk in cyber space and training of children must start at a young age, involving them in discussions about the dangers of bullying and how to by an ally when they see cyberbullying behavior and who to report to? **[15]**

6.2. Educating Teachers

Educators should become "safe contacts," giving students a place to turn if they are victims or want to report perpetrators [15].

6.3. Educating Parents

Monitoring their child's online behavior, implementing internet usage rules and what to do if they discover that their child is a participant or a target is part of parent education in combating cyberbullying.(15) The percentage of youth reporting the existence of parental rules on Web sites (p < 0.01), time allowed online (p<0.01) and filter restricting online activities (p < 0.05) is higher among nonvictims than among victims [13].

6.4. Role of School

Another role of schools is to help students cope with social tension especially those that center on relationship issues, assess of students in order to determine bullying behavior and get to the root of it **[15]**.

6.5. Technological Coping Strategies

Instituting strict privacy settings on Internet-based technologies such as instant messengers and e-mails, changing usernames and or e-mail addresses [17].

7. Conclusion

This review of 18 studies gathers literature regarding cyber-bullying in multiple conceptual areas. The factors that seem to positively correlate to cyberbullying perpetration are male gender, incorrect perception of impact, poor peer relationships, and poor mental status, being bullied by other means, anonymity and frequent use of technology. Whereas, factors that positively correlate cyber-bullying victimization include increasing age, female gender, Caucasian ancestry, the difference in appearance and disability, not having two biological parents, a victim of bullying by any other means non-heterosexual orientation, poor school performance, frequent use of technology and studying in public school. Poor school performance, acquiring addictions and psychosomatic plague the cyber-bullies while the victims end up with retaliatory behavior, distress, psychosomatic problems and suicidal tendencies. All the individuals involved need to actively address cyber-bullying and effectively take measures to combat it.

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