
Threats to Digital Safety of Young People in the Light of Research

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Abstract:

Purpose: This article aims to indicate the threats posed by the violation of digital security among young people with the presentation of research on cyber aggression occurring among adolescents in Szczecin secondary schools.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The article uses a diagnostic survey method and a research technique in the form of a questionnaire. Based on a specially prepared survey sheet, data were obtained and processed in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The survey's subject was cyberbullying as perceived by high school students from urban areas.

Findings: The surveys carried out do not give a clear picture regarding the awareness of students of Szczecin high schools of cyber aggression. They are only an attempt to determine the scale of the problem and require further verification. However, the data obtained show that the phenomenon of cyber aggression is widespread and known to teenagers.

Practical Implications: The article contains a lot of valuable information that can serve as background material and a reference for further research by scientific specialists studying cyberbullying issues among students or institutions helping victims of online violence.

Originality/Value: Electronic aggression, called cyberbullying, is a serious problem among teenagers. Modern technological solutions such as the Internet and cell phones are tools whose use exposes students to a new form of violence called cyberbullying or electronic violence. Along with traditional violence, it represents a new variety of problem behaviour among young people. The presence of this phenomenon raises periodic interest in the media. Nonetheless, it has become a socially essential and cognitively interesting area for scientific research.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, Internet, violence.

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1. Introduction

From the late 1990s to the present, there has been a noticeable increase in the use of electronic media by children and adolescents. The process of media convergence on the digital plane (the Internet) is associated with a fundamental change in the technical nature of the means of communication (Goban-Klas, 2008). Another milestone is the technological novelty of social media, which - using online and mobile technologies - has transformed communication into an interactive dialogue, dramatically changing communities and individual users are organized (Mazurek 2003; Barkeley, 2005). Because of the possibilities for creating and sharing information, the newest media determine the shape of the information society.

Among the specific features of the new media, the following are especially noteworthy: interconnectedness; access of individual users, who can be both senders and receivers; interactivity; the multiplicity of uses and openness; ubiquity; spatial indeterminacy; and relocation (McQuail, 2007). The new media differ from their predecessors of the shift from mass communication to network communication, the fragmentation and further obliteration of the media institution, and the weakening of social control (Manovich, 2006).

The authors' observations of this article show that the average Polish child of school age spends much more of their spare time in contact with new media than on genuine relationships in the family home or among peers. However, this time is mainly related to such devices' communication and entertainment functions. Paradoxically, looking from the perspective of parents, it can be noted that most people, when equipping their kids with electronic devices, assume that electronic media are primarily intended to support their development, learning process, and perceptiveness. There are many risks associated with cyberspace. Many are social risks, as they are culturally based, such as constructing a virtual identity or interactions in social networks.

In the literature, the use of communication (the Internet and cell phone) as an instrument for the realization of aggressive behaviour against others is called cyberbullying, aggression, violence or electronic bullying, or cyberbullying. Thus, the critical element of the phenomenon so defined becomes the tool itself for the realization of aggressive acts (Pyżalski, 2012).

For all actions referred to as cyberbullying, email, chat rooms, instant messaging, websites, blogs, social networking sites, newsgroups, SMS and MMS services are primarily used (Kowalski, Limber, and Agatson, 2010).

Electronic aggression can take many forms, the gravity of which and harm to victims vary from single acts, such as a one-time publication of an offensive comment in a chat room, to more severe in their consequences, such as setting up a fake account for someone on a social networking site and sending hurtful material to others on

their behalf. The most severe cases of online aggression, which have characteristics similar to traditional violence, i.e., intentionality, regularity (repetition) and power imbalance, produce the most harmful effects on the victims.

Scientific literature discussing the problem of cybercrime in Polish schools has appeared only recently. However, two items are worth mentioning here. The first is by Waligóra-Huk (2015). It discusses cybercrime among youth from rural schools. At the same time, the second is a joint work by Barlinska and Szuster (2014). It describes the threats and opportunities for reducing this phenomenon among peer groups.

However, most of the literature in this area is translated from English and deals with Western European countries and the United States. English-language publications use terms such as cyberbullying, online bullying or cyberaggression when defining electronic media violence. They can be treated as synonyms, but cyberbullying is often identified with violence involving children and adolescents. At the same time, cyberstalking and cyberharassment explain violence involving adults (Wojtasik, 2009).

Today, cyberbullying is defined as a virtual space created by a combination of digital media and used for social communication (Dziwisz, 2013). Willard (2007) identified the different varieties in which cyberbullying manifests itself:

Flaming: sending aggressive, vulgar messages about a specific person to a group or oneself *via* email or other forms of text communication.

Online bullying: repeatedly sending offensive messages via email or other text to the bullied person.

Cyberstalking: online bullying in the form of threats.

Discrediting: sending false, defamatory, cruel information about a specific person to others or posting such information online.

Impersonation: impersonating a specific person and sending or posting information in that person's name online to demean that person (Willard, 2007).

Other authors pointed out:

Harassment (stalking) - consists of deliberate, malicious disturbance of some person to annoy them through the use of the Internet and repeated repetition of some action directed at someone against their will (Podlewska and Sobierajska, 2012).

Trolling - is unfriendly behaviour pertaining to other online users aimed at interrupting a conversation, for example, on discussion forums, chat rooms or groups (Jachyra, 2011).

Grooming - is a process in which an adult tries to instil trust in a child to abuse them sexually. Over time, the perpetrator introduces erotic themes into conversations and shows pictures or videos with such themes (Fenik, 2008).

Sexting was coined in the early 21st century from a combination of the words sex and texting. This activity involves sending erotic messages, erotic photos, and pornographic videos to one's circle of acquaintances or friends (Wojtasik, 2014).

Happy slapping - is the phenomenon of attacking random people by beating, stealing or destroying property and filming the entire incident. Such a video is then published on the Internet (Ochwat, 2014).

Cyberbiting - is a separate form of cyberaggression, increasingly used by young people against their peer group but also teachers. This phenomenon is called cyber provocation and involves deliberately provoking a teacher, causing him to react based on yelling and breaking down. Students film the incident with their cell phones and then post it on social networks or other websites, thus discrediting the teacher (Szajda, 2014).

Rivers and Noret (2010) studied threatening texts and emails received by 7th and 8th graders (aged 11-13) attending 13 schools in northern England between 2002 and 2006. The results indicate that the number of those receiving such messages at least once increased over the five years, the increase being more tremendous among the girls surveyed. In contrast, the number of consistently receiving this type of message was comparable over the above time frame. In the boys' group, they were received by students experiencing physical violence, while in the girls' group, they tended to target less popular girls. Boys tended to receive messages with content based on feelings of hatred, while girls were usually the victims of verbal assaults (Rivers and Noret, 2010). Groups of people are more likely to be the target of online attacks (Mitchell, Finkelhor, and Wolak, 2003).

Olweus (1993) believes that although there is no single victim profile, children who are victims of cyberbullying exhibit one or more of the following characteristics:

they are usually quiet, cautious, sensitive, and prone to crying;

they may be insecure, have little self-confidence, and have low self-esteem; they often have a narrow circle of friends and are socially isolated;

they fear being hurt; they may be nervous or depressed; they are usually physically weaker than their peers (especially in the case of boys);

they may prefer to spend time with adults (parents, teachers', coaches) than peers (Olweus, 1993).

According to research conducted by National Research Institute „NASK” (Report, 2019), teenagers are most likely to experience online aggression due to:

views (14.9%),
appearance (13.5%),
tastes (11.6%),
nationality (8.1%),
clothing (8.0%).

Other motives:

sexual orientation (4.6%),
religion (4.5%),
skin colour(4.3%),
gender (4.2%),
bad financial situation (3.8%).

It raises the question of what measures to take to reduce cyberbullying at school. The first tip mentioned by Hinduja and Patchin (2006) is to gain knowledge about the scope of the problem within school activities. They advise collecting data through surveys, interviews, or both with students to get an idea of the situation at school. Gaining knowledge is an essential prerequisite for implementing preventive measures. The primary purpose of surveys should be information based on which students and teachers' can be educated about online safety and how to use the Internet creatively and effectively (Hinduja and Patchin, 2006).

Teachers' and educators' awareness of the causes of cyberbullying can vary (Kochenderfer-Ladd and Pelletier, 2008) and requires having an extensive fundamental knowledge of aggression, the fact that many of its manifestations are subtle, hidden and undetectable, but at the same time have overwhelming consequences. The main factor, apparent violence, is easy to see, but other forms of relational aggression are covert in nature, such as exclusion and ridicule (Ryan, Kariuki, Yilmaz, Gazi, Ogun, Atlas, and Burston, 2011). Lack of knowledge on this subject can make teachers' unable to properly assess relational aggression and fail to intervene if such problems occur. Therefore, assessing the ability of school educators to recognize the signs of cyberbullying is one of the essential elements in combating this type of problem (Craig, Henderson, and Murphy, 2000).

2. Materials and Methods

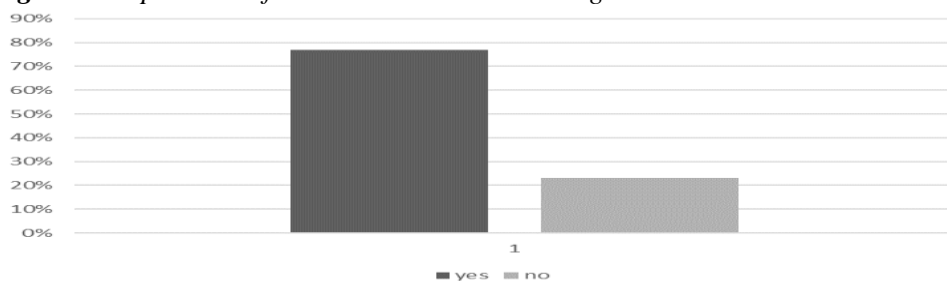
The article uses a diagnostic survey method and a research technique in the form of a questionnaire. Based on a specially prepared survey sheet, data were obtained and

processed in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The survey's subject was cyberbullying as perceived by high school students from urban areas. The main objective, in turn, was to examine how students perceive the phenomenon of cyberbullying. The survey included 112 students between the ages of 15 and 18. The survey was conducted in 2021.

3. Results and Discussion

Figure 1 shows that as many as 77% of students have experienced cyberbullying. The remaining 23% of students responded that they had never experienced cyberbullying. The most well-known types of cyber aggression used were humiliation and ridicule.

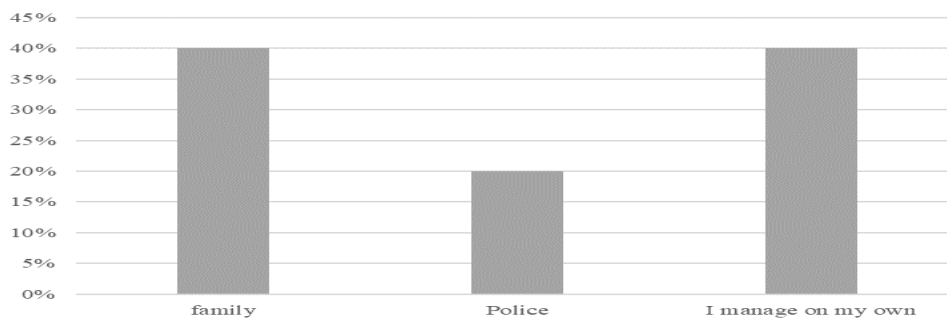
Figure 1. Experience of internecine violence among students



Source: Own study.

Another area addressed in the survey was how to counter violence and sources of support for victims of cyber aggression. Half of the students in a cyberbullying situation do not react at all, and the other half seek help. As Figure 2 shows, the most preferred source of help is family (parents, blings, or both). This answer was given by 40% of respondents. Another source of help is reporting violent situations to the Police - 20% of students. On the other hand, as many as 40% of respondents said they deal with cyberbullying themselves.

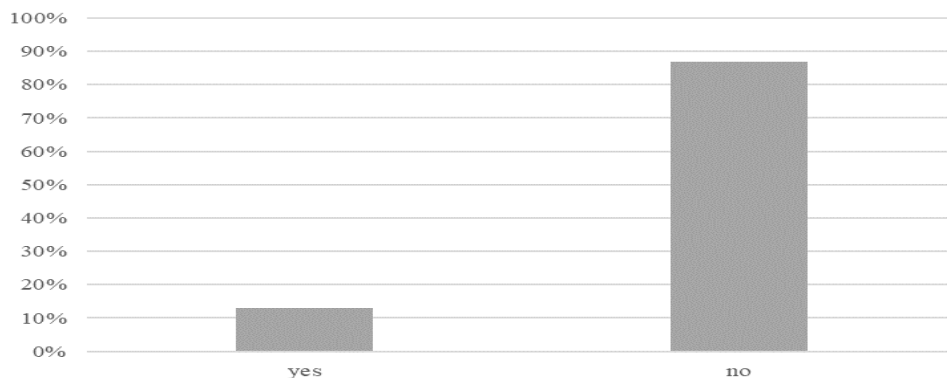
Figure 2. Possible sources of support for victims of cyberbullying in the opinion of students



Source: Own study.

In addition, there is a perception among respondents that the occurrence of cyber aggression is a serious problem - 68% of students are very concerned. In contrast, 32% of respondents indicated that they treat cyberbullying as a joke. In the research area of coping with cyberbullying, the students were also asked about their knowledge of organizations or institutions to which they can turn for help. As Figure 3 shows, the vast majority of respondents could not name any organization (87%). Only 13% of respondents answered in the affirmative.

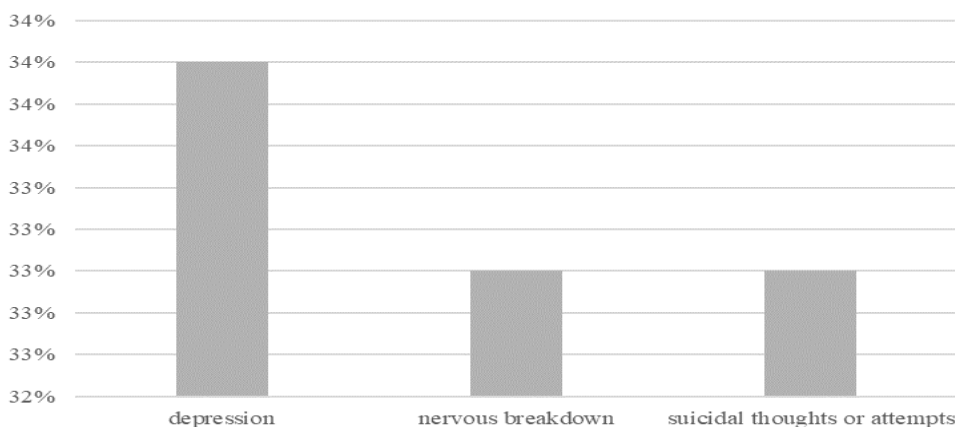
Figure 3. Knowledge of organizations assisting in situations of cyberbullying in the opinion of students



Source: Own study.

Figure 4 provides information on the individual psychological effects experienced by cyber aggression victims in students opinion. Respondents indicated three main adverse effects of violence: depression - 34%, nervous breakdown - 33%, and suicidal thoughts and attempts - 33% of the respondents.

Figure 4. Psychological effects experienced by victims of cyber aggression according to students



Source: Own study.

The survey shows that cyberbullying among students is a serious problem. Cyberbullying was encountered by 77% of those surveyed. At the same time, nearly half (40%) of the students said they would not turn to anyone for help if they experienced cyberbullying. Helping students experiencing cyberbullying, in addition to their families, was left to the Police.

4. Conclusions

The surveys carried out do not give a clear picture regarding the awareness of students of Szczecin high schools of cyber aggression. They are only an attempt to determine the scale of the problem and require further verification. However, the data obtained show that the phenomenon of cyber aggression is widespread and known to teenagers. The vast majority of them take the phenomenon of cyberbullying seriously. After the survey, it can be concluded that students have a general level of knowledge of the psychological effects that occur among victims of cyber aggression. The vast majority of those surveyed could not identify an organization that assists in combating the phenomenon described above.

In combating the phenomenon of electronic aggression, it is important to realize that some teenagers using Internet resources are unaware of this type of danger. Users think that since they create a fictional account for themselves, they automatically become anonymous and don't have to worry about harming others with their online behaviour. .

They can also often fall victim to such behaviour themselves. Such awareness can be due to many reasons. One of them is the lack of or insufficient coverage of the subject of cyberbullying in the core curriculum of schools at all levels. Therefore, it is reasonable to take measures to increase the awareness and competence of teachers'' in recognizing cyber-aggressive actions and taking appropriate action when this phenomenon occurs among students.

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