

Research Highlights for Children's Online Safety #109 March 2017



Cyberbullying Involvement Roles and Viewing of Suicide-Related Web-Content

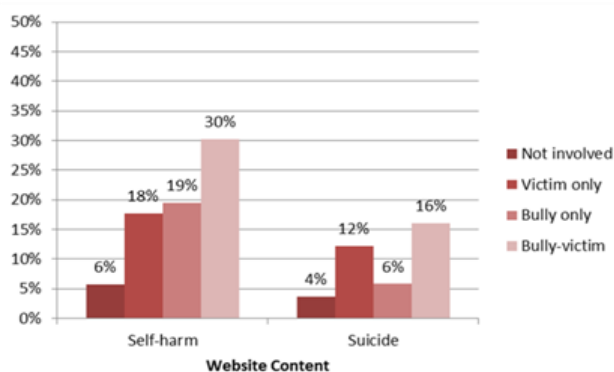
Aims

The current study compared adolescents' viewing of web-content related to self-harm and suicide, as well as associated psychological problems, between young people involved in different cyberbullying roles (bullies, victims or bully-victims). It also explored whether the relationship between these types of involvement and viewing of suicide-related web-content was influenced by the experience of psychological problems.

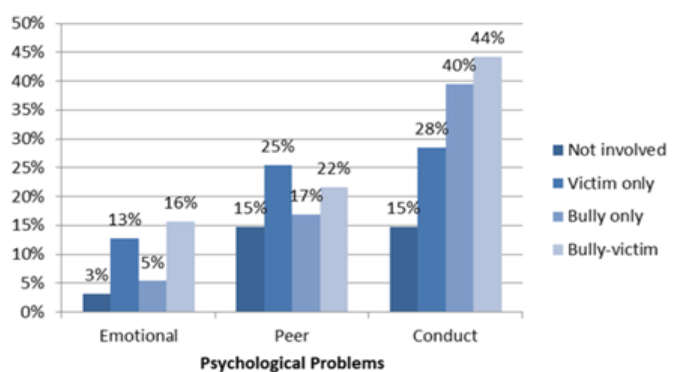
Key Findings

Initial descriptive analyses provided an insight into the extent of viewing of web-content related to self-harm and suicide, as well as psychological problems, for each of the cyberbullying roles (see Figures 1-2).

Percentages for Viewing of Suicide-Related Web-Content within Cyber-bullying Involvement Types.



Percentages for Psychological Problems within Cyber-bullying Involvement Types.



Inferential analyses determined whether there were statistically significant differences in the proportion of young people viewing suicide-related web content and psychological problems between those involved in cyberbullying (as victim, bully, bully-victim) compared to those not involved. The key findings were:

Suicide-related web-content and cyberbullying roles

- Bullies, victims and bully-victims were more likely to view web content relating to self-harm than those with no cyberbullying involvement.
- Victims and bully-victims were more likely to view web content relating to suicide.
- Bully-victims were the most likely to have viewed either content.

Psychological problems and cyberbullying roles

- Victims were more likely to have peer problems.
- Victims and bully-victims were more likely to have emotional problems.
- Bullies and bully-victims were more likely to have conduct problems.

Relationship between psychological problems, cyberbullying involvement and viewing of suicide-related web-content

- The relationship between cyberbullying involvement and viewing of suicide-related web-content was not influenced by the experience of psychological problems.

Implications

The results suggest that all adolescents involved in cyberbullying are in some way psychologically vulnerable. It appears that cyberbully-victims are perhaps the most vulnerable group, and arguably the most in need of support for various psychological problems. Meanwhile, more targeted interventions could focus on support for the emotional and peer problems of cybervictims, as well as targeting conduct problems in cyberbullies. There is some indication that a significant proportion of youths involved in cyberbullying, who also consider suicide-related behaviours, are amenable to support from web-resources. Intervention strategies targeting those involved in cyberbullying and suicide-related behaviours might consider investigating the use of internet platforms for implementation.

Background

Public interest in cyberbullying has been spurred by media coverage of cases of young people who have attempted suicide as a consequence. However, media reports often appear to exaggerate the prevalence rates for cyberbullying, as well as the direct causal link with suicidal behaviours (i.e., "cyberbullying will cause suicide"). Nonetheless, there is evidence that cyberbullying involvement (as victim, bully or bully-victim) increases the risk of viewing websites where suicide-related content is discussed, as well as suicide-related behaviours (i.e., suicidal ideation, suicide attempt, self-harming)¹. Adolescents who have been contemplating suicide-related behaviours are likely to view these websites for a range of reasons (e.g., searching for information on carrying out the actual behaviours, seeking support)². There is also evidence that the link between bullying and suicide-related behaviours might be due to an increase in psychological problems; however, the research evidence here is mixed^{3,4}. Evidence from traditional bullying has shown that different types of bullying involvement are linked with specific psychological problems (e.g., emotional, conduct or peer problems) as well as suicide-related behaviours⁵.

Methodology

Data came from the LSE EU Kids Online study (www.eukidsonline.net), a random sample of 25,000 Internet-using children aged 9-16 across 25 European countries. For ethical reasons answers from 11-16 year olds only were used for this study, resulting in a sample of 19,406 (50% girls).

Source Görzig, A. (2016). Adolescents' viewing of suicide-related web-content and psychological problems: Differentiating the roles of cyberbullying involvement. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, 19(8), 502-509. (<http://repository.uwl.ac.uk/2676/>)

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