Comparison Of Attitudes Towards Help Seeking Between Schoolchildren With And Without Experience Of Cyberbullying

Loreta Gustainienea*, Dovile Valiunea

*Vytautas Magnus University, Jonavos str.66, Kaunas 44191, Lithuania

Abstract

Problem. Scientists agree that cyberbullying is a very relevant problem among adolescents (Pilkauskaite-Valickiene, 2009). Cyberbullying is unique to other more traditional forms of bullying because of the perpetrator’s anonymity, ability to harass their victim 24 hours a day and it happens often outside school (Smith, 2008; Johnson, 2009). Cyberbullying is shown to be related to low self-esteem, stress, anti-social behaviour, lower academic performance, depressiveness, suicidal thoughts (Patchin, Hinduja, 2010; Faryadi, 2011; Schneider, 2012; Sticca, 2013). Peers and parents were identified as key sources of help dealing with cyberbullying (Spears, 2015). Therefore, the right attitudes towards help seeking should influence the actions against cyberbullying. Nevertheless, relatively little is known about the differences in attitudes towards help seeking among schoolchildren with and without the experience of cyberbullying. Purpose of Study – to compare the attitudes towards help seeking among children who experienced cyberbullying and schoolchildren who did not. Methods. Cyberbullying at school and help-seeking attitudes were measured by a questionnaire composed according to literature data. 357 adolescents from Lithuania participated in the study (152 boys and 205 girls), aged 12 to 18 (mean age 15.36, SD = 2). 90 schoolchildren have reported being cyberbullied. Findings and Results. The results showed that attitudes towards help seeking were statistically significantly different among boys who were harassed by cyberbullying and boys who did not. The attitudes towards help seeking behaviour statistically significantly differed among girls who had been harassed by cyberbullying and girls who had not. Conclusions and Recommendations. Schoolchildren who had suffered from cyberbullying had worse attitudes towards help seeking as compared to the ones who had not experienced cyberbullying. Therefore, schoolchildren should be taught to change their attitudes toward help seeking if they encounter cyberbullying.
1. Introduction

Due to increasing popularity of communication technologies cyberbullying is becoming a global problem (Garaigordobil, Martinez-Valderray, 2015; Gedutiene et al., 2012). Cyberbullying can be defined as ‘an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a person or a group, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself’(Smith et al., 2008). Cyberbullying includes bullying using mobile phones, internet via email, texting, chat rooms, social networks, mobile phone cameras, etc. which are being used by adolescents to bully peers (Smith et al., 2008; Campbell, 2005). Modern technologies enable communication 24-hour 7-day per week, thus creating vast opportunities for incidents of cyberbullying, where a bully can harass the victims anonymously, making the problem still worse (Smith et al., 2008; Johnson, 2009; Donegan, 2012; Gedutiene et al., 2012; Notar, Padgett, Roden, 2013).

Increasing use of communication technologies are related to the increasing number of cyberbullying making it a global problem reported in countries such as the United States, Canada, Japan, Scandinavia, the United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Australia, Estonia, Lithuania, Sweden, etc. (Campbell, 2005, Livingstone, 2009, Pilkauskaite-Valickiene, Raiziene, Zukauskiene, 2009). Currently cyberbullying has become an important issue in academic research, also it is of major concern in the school environment (Gedutiene et al., 2012; Notar, Padgett, Roden, 2013).

Any form of violence has harmful long-term and short-term consequences on a person, and if violence, as is the case with cyberbullying, occurs among children its harmful effects become still worse (Garaigordobil, Martinez-Valderray, 2015; Sourander et al., 2010; Davison, Stain, 2014).

Cyberbullying is related to serious mental health problems, including adolescents’ depression, anxiety, emotional distress, substance use (Nixon, 2014). Cyberbullying is related to such psychological and behavioural problems as low self-esteem, stress, anti-social behaviour, lower academic performance, depressiveness, school delinquency, suicidal thoughts (Patchin, Hinduja, 2010; Faryadi, 2011; Schneider et al., 2012; Sticca et al., 2013; Barboza, 2015). Cyberbullying is reported to be related to adolescents’ physical health (Nixon, 2014).

Having this in mind, one more issue, related to cyberbullying, is helping cyberbullies and cyber victims to overcome harmful consequences.

Negative outcomes of cyberbullying must lead to elaboration and implementation of preventive measures. Prevention should aim at reducing cyberbullying incidents not only at schools but outside of schools as well and there is a possibility that school authorities would implement the existing preventive programmes (Stauffer et al., 2012).

At present, there is a lack of empirical research regarding effective prevention and intervention efforts to combat cyberbullying (Snakenborg, Van Acker, Gable, 2011), although some traditional methods for reducing bullying may be useful for cyberbullying as well (Smith et al., 2008). Nevertheless, recent research data indicate that bully prevention programs have little effect on student behavior (Stauffer et al., 2012), and prevention is often directed towards victims rather than perpetrators of cyberbullying (Slovak, Singer, 2014).

One possible explanation of inadequate effectiveness may be due to teachers understanding of the problem. Research suggest that teachers often ignore bullying behavior, believing that it is a normal circumstance of child development (Ross, 2013). Other research findings indicate that almost one fourth of teachers assume cyberbullying does not have long-lasting negative effects and that cyberbullying “prepares students for life” (Stauffer et al., 2012).

Although bullying prevention includes increasing student willingness to seek help when they directly experience or witness serious incidents of bullying or threatening behavior (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2009), it was found that many young people who are being cyberbullied are more reluctant to seek help from the available sources (Dooley et al., 2010). Therefore, it is important to find out how help seeking attitudes relate to help seeking behavior.

2. Methodology

2.1 Aim

Purpose of the study is to compare help seeking attitudes among schoolchildren who reported having experienced cyberbullying and the ones who reported as having had no incidents of cyberbullying.
2.2 Sample

Sample consisted of 357 adolescents (205 girls and 152 boys), aged 12 – 18, (average age was 15 years and 4 months, SD=2).

2.3 Procedures

Research was conducted with the consent of parents and school principals. Adolescents participated anonymously and on a voluntary basis. Part of the questionnaires was filled in in classroom, and part was sent to schoolchildren via school e-mails. Administration of the questionnaire was not time-limited.

2.4 Instruments

Cyberbullying at school and help-seeking attitudes was measured by a question about the frequency of cyberbullying incidents within the last two months. Attitudes towards help seeking were measured by three questions about the belief that it was bad and useless to tell adults about cyberbullying incident, and the belief that cyberbullying is a normal part of students’ life.

Socio-demographic data such as age, gender and grade were also included.

3. Results

The Independent Samples t-test was used for comparison of two groups, i.e. students who reported having experienced cyberbullying and the ones who did not. Comparison of attitudes towards help seeking between the boys who experienced cyberbullying (group 1) and the boys who did not (group 2) is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>t(150)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes of help seeking</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>7.12</td>
<td>1.98</td>
<td>-3.29</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>[-1.88, -.39]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Comparison of attitudes towards help seeking between the boys who experienced cyberbullying and the boys who did not

An independent samples t-test showed that the difference in attitudes toward help seeking scores between the boys who experienced cyberbullying (n = 34, M = 6.00, SD = 1.7) and boys who did not (n = 118, M = 7.12, SD = 1.98) was statistically significant. Boys, who reported cyberbullying incidents within the last two months, had lower scores on help seeking attitudes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Group 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Group 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>t(74)</th>
<th>p</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes of help seeking</td>
<td>6.84</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>7.79</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>-3.50</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>[-1.48, -.41]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Comparison of attitudes towards help seeking between the girls who experienced cyberbullying and the girls who did not

An independent sample t test showed that the difference in attitudes toward help seeking scores between the girls who experienced cyberbullying (n = 56, M = 6.84, SD = 1.87) and girls who did not (n = 149, M = 7.79, SD = 1.27) was statistically significant. Accordingly, girls who reported cyberbullying incidents within the last two months, had lower scores on help seeking attitudes.
4. Discussion

The present research showed that schoolchildren, who had suffered from cyberbullying, had worse attitudes towards help seeking as compared to the ones who had not experienced cyberbullying. This means that adolescents, who have encountered cyberbullying, thought that it was wrong to report the incident to adults, and that it is useless to inform adults about the cyberspace bully, and that cyberbullying is normal behavior on the internet and nobody can stop it. In this way, such negative attitudes towards help-seeking behavior prevent from fighting with cyberbullying properly. If adolescents informed about cyberbullying early it would be easier to stop it.

Our findings go in line with similar research. Cyber victims most often chose to either tell their friends or no one at all about the cyberbullying event, hence adults may not be aware of cyberbullying (Slonje, Smith, 2007).

Another research indicated that victims of cyberbullying were active in using a wide range of coping strategies. One of such strategy was to seek support. However telling someone else helped stop the bullying in only about half of the cases (Machackova et al., 2013). It is possible that if adolescents, who had informed about cyberbullying, do not get appropriate support or help, next time they would not be willing to seek help from adults. The authors suggested this may be based on a lack of skills among adults about how to deal with bullying (cyber in particular). This lack of skills could explain why students were not inclined to seek help (Dooley et al., 2010). Also ineffective responses to cyberbullying can endanger victims and further reinforce students’ decisions to confide in peers rather than adults (Holfeld, Grabe, 2012).

Also it was found that adolescents exposed to cyberbullying, unlike their peers who do not have such experience, show less satisfaction with friends and dissatisfaction with their family (Bilic, Flander, Rafajac, 2014). It seems that adolescents, who are victims of cyberbullying, fall into a dysfunction circle: they do not seek support and when nobody helps, they feel dissatisfaction with friends and family. Therefore it is very important to teach adolescents to trust adults. Telling someone about cyberbullying could be the most effective strategy, and it may also contribute to emotional coping - even though other people may not have the means to solve the situation, they are a rich source of emotional support (Machackova et al., 2013). Parents should also be informed about the possible signs of cyberbullying (Davison, Stain, 2014). Adolescents commonly agree that adults are less aware of text, email and phone call bullying, than of traditional bullying because these types of bullying occur without any audience. However, a minority of schoolchildren argued the opposite: that there was a greater chance for adults to notice these kinds of cyberbullying, because of available proof (one could save the text message or email) (Slonje, Smith, 2007). Therefore adolescents and adults should be educated about the signs of cyberbullying and the ways to provide help. There exists a number of resources available to victims, educators, and parents to help cope with cyberbullying. Understanding and awareness of the problem is the first step in ending it (Davison, 2014).

Cyberbullying often happens in closest social groups (class, school), and adolescents, involved in traditional forms of bullying, often participate in cyberbullying, too (Bilic, Flander, Rafajac, 2014). Therefore adults should be aware of bullying at school and if they recognize traditional bullying, they should evaluate possible experience of cyberbullying.

This study had several limitations, which should be considered. One limitation is that the study involved a relatively small number of respondents. Other limitation concerns the nature of the data collected. i.e., all measures were self-reports. Future studies should evaluate the relationship between help seeking attitudes and help seeking behavior.

References


