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

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Abstract

Problem. Scientists agree that cyberbullying is a very relevant problem among adolescents (Pilkaukaite-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 attitudes among students 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 behaviour 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.

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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, Pilkauskaitė-Valickienė, Raiziene, Zukauskienė, 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.

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