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Validity and reliability of the Cyber-aggression Questionnaire for Adolescents (CYBA)



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ABSTRACT

Cybercrime is a growing and worrisome problem, particularly when it involves minors. Cyber-aggression among adolescents in particular can result in negative legal and psychological consequences for people involved. Therefore, it is important to have instruments to detect these incidents early and understand the problem to propose effective measures for prevention and treatment. This paper aims to design a new self-report, the Cyber-Aggression Questionnaire for Adolescents (CYBA), to evaluate the extent to which the respondent conducts aggressions through a mobile phone or the internet and analyse the factorial and criterion validity and reliability of their scores in a sample of adolescents from Asturias, Spain. The CYBA was administered to 3,148 youth aged between 12 and 18 years old along with three self-reports to measure aggression at school, impulsivity, and empathy. Regarding factorial validity, the model that best represents the structure of the CYBA consists of three factors (Impersonation, Visual-sexual Cyber-aggression, and Verbal Cyber-aggression and Exclusion) and four additional indicators of Visual Cyber-aggression–Teasing/Happy Slapping. Regarding criterion validity, the score on the CYBA correlates positively with aggression at school and impulsivity and negatively with empathy. That is the way cyber-aggression correlates with these three variables, according to previous empirical evidence. The reliability of the scores on each item and factor of the CYBA are adequate. Therefore, the CYBA offers a valid and reliable measure of cyber-aggression in adolescents.

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Validez y fiabilidad del Cuestionario de Ciberagresión para Adolescentes (CYBA)

RESUMEN

Los ciberdelitos constituyen un problema creciente y preocupante, sobre todo si están involucrados menores. Las ciberagresiones en adolescentes, en concreto, pueden generar consecuencias legales y psicológicas muy negativas para los implicados. Es importante, por tanto, disponer de instrumentos que permitan detectar precozmente estos hechos, así como comprender el problema de cara a plantear medidas eficaces para su prevención y tratamiento. El objetivo de este trabajo es diseñar un nuevo autoinforme, denominado Cuestionario de Ciberagresión para Adolescentes (CYBA), para evaluar en qué medida el informante ejerce agresiones a través del teléfono móvil o Internet y analizar la validez factorial y de criterio y la fiabilidad de sus puntuaciones en una muestra de adolescentes de Asturias (España). Para ello, se aplicó el CYBA a 3.148 jóvenes de 12 a 18 años, junto con tres autoinformes para medir agresión escolar offline, impulsividad y empatía. Respecto a la validez factorial, el modelo que mejor representa la estructura del CYBA es el compuesto por tres factores (suplantación, ciberagresión visual-sexual y ciberagresión verbal/exclusión) y otros cuatro indicadores de ciberagresión visual-burlas/happy slapping. Respecto a la validez de criterio, la puntuación en el CYBA correlaciona de manera positiva con agresión

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escolar offline e impulsividad y negativa con empatía, tres variables con las que la evidencia empírica previa indica que correlaciona la ciberagresión. La fiabilidad de las puntuaciones en cada ítem y factor del CYBA son adecuadas. Por todo ello, se concluye que el CYBA ofrece una medida válida y fiable de ciberagresión en adolescentes.

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The rapid development of electronic devices and applications for communication has recently changed the way adolescents socialise. The use of such communication methods is practically universal among youth in technologically developed countries. In Spain, 90.3% of 15-year old children have a mobile phone (Instituto Nacional de Estadística–INE [National Statistics Institute], 2014), and 90% have a profile on at least one social network (Ministerio del Interior [Home Office], 2014). These percentages are similar to those from other European countries, such as France (Pouria & Brousse, 2011), Ireland (O'Neill & Dinh, 2015), or Sweden (Findahl, 2014). Despite the great advantages that these tools offer for establishing new friendships or maintaining contact with family or friends, they also present some significant potential dangers.

Sometimes adolescents take advantage of the anonymity offered by these media to intentionally harm, offend, or hurt other adolescents. The term *cyber-aggression* is typically used to refer to this type of behaviour (Corcoran, McGuckin, & Prentice, 2015). Aggression through electronic devices can be even more serious than face-to-face aggression. It can occur at any time of the day and can be spread immediately to many people and, because it occurs at a distance, the perpetrators do not see the negative effects of aggression on the victim, hindering empathy and promoting recurrence (Álvarez-García, Dobarro, & Núñez, 2015).

Cyber-aggression among adolescents occurs in many countries and constitutes an international problem (Li, Cross, & Smith, 2012). However, the estimated percentage of adolescents involved in such acts varies depending on the definition of cyber-aggression, the sample, and the methodology used for the analysis. A recent study in Spain based on a large nationwide sample estimates that 4.2% of students in compulsory secondary education (CSE) admit to having recorded a peer through the use of a mobile phone audio or video application to use it against him/her; 3.4% admit to having recorded a peer to later force him/her with threats to do something that he/she did not want to do; 4.6% have sent messages over the internet or by mobile phone in which a peer was insulted, threatened, offended, or frightened; and 3.8% have spread photos or images over the internet or by mobile phone of a peer to use them against him/her (Díaz-Aguado, Martínez, & Martín, 2013).

Cyber-aggression can lead to significant negative consequences in adolescent development, not only in victims but also in perpetrators. In victims, it can lead to depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation in the most severe cases (Arce, Velasco, Novo, & Fariña, 2014; Gini & Espelage, 2014). In perpetrators, their behaviour can be reinforced through peers, favouring a more general pattern of antisocial behaviour. Previous studies suggest that cyber-aggression forms part of a larger pattern of behaviour characterized by low empathy (Brewer & Kerlake, 2015), deficits of self-control (Vazsonyi, Machackova, Sevcikova, Smahel, & Cerna, 2012), and the emergence of other antisocial behaviours in the real world, including theft (Hemphill, Kotevski, & Heerde, 2015) or aggressions at school (Baldry, Farrington, & Sorrentino, 2015).

In addition to these psychological and behavioural consequences, cyber-aggression may also involve legal consequences. Many activities that define cyber-aggression constitute criminal offenses in most countries. In Spain, the Penal Code classifies the following behaviours as crimes: threats, coercion, slander, deception over the phone or internet of a minor less than 16 years old to obtain pornographic material in which a minor appears, or

crimes against privacy (for example, seizing a victim's personal messages without his/her consent, accessing private or intimate data or information and sharing it, or disclosing images of another person against his/her will that were obtained with his/her consent on a personal level). According to the Organic Law 5/2000, January 12, regulating the criminal liability of minors, if a criminal act has been committed by a minor between 14 and 18 years old, corrective measures aimed at rehabilitation (such as providing community service activities, attending day care centres or institutionalisation in re-education centres) should apply instead of adult penalties (such as imprisonment or fines). Offending minors under age 14 may not be held criminally liable, and the Administration, through Social Services, is to promote measures designed to control, re-educate, and protect in cases of familial neglect. The minor's family will assume civil liability that may arise from the committed act. However, the vast majority of cyber-aggression in adolescence may have an educational solution in family and school environments before it becomes a criminal matter (Contreras, Molina, & Cano, 2011; Cutrín, Gómez-Fraguela, & Luengo, 2015).

Thus, it is important to understand this new type of aggression as well as to identify these types of incidents early to minimise their psychological and legal consequences. This process requires appropriate evaluation tools. Because cyber-aggression occurs in a virtual and often private environment, detecting it via direct observation or consultation with teachers or family members can be difficult. Even interviews or focus groups with adolescents can be fruitless because participants lack awareness of the incidents or harbour shame or fear of reporting or acknowledging particular cases of cyber-aggression, particularly those of a serious nature. Therefore, applying anonymous self-reports in which adolescents are asked to what extent they conduct or suffer from cyber-aggression may be more appropriate. Furthermore, the self-reports are more manageable as a *screening* measure because they can assess many people quickly; they allow coding and analysis of the obtained information more easily than other techniques, such as observation, interviews, or focus groups; and, applied collectively and anonymously, they favour honesty from the respondent.

For self-reports to be useful, their measures should be valid and reliable. In recent years, some self-reports have been published that are designed to evaluate how frequently the respondent is the perpetrator via mobile phone or the Internet and are validated with adolescents. Those validated in Spain are very rare, and the items related to cyber-aggression constitute only one factor. Both the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire (ECIPQ) by Del Rey et al. (2015) and the Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ) by Gámez-Guadix, Villa-George, and Calvete (2014) include two factors (cyber-aggression and cyber-victimization), and the Cyberbullying test (Garaigordobil, 2013) includes three (victimization, aggression, and observation). This coincides with other validated self-reports at the international level: the Cyberbullying Scale (CS) by Menesini, Nocentini, and Calussi (2011) includes two factors (cyber-aggression and cyber-victimization); the Virtual Aggression among Students subscale by Jiménez, Castillo, and Cisternas (2012) includes two factors (“conducted or observed virtual aggressions” and “victimisation through virtual aggression”); the Multidimensional Peer Bullying Scale (MPVS-RB) by Betts, Houston, and Steer (2015) measures a factor consisting of cyber-aggression behaviours and the rest relating to offline

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