Brief report

Traditional bullying and cyberbullying: Differences in emotional problems, and personality. Are cyberbullies more Machiavellians?

Santiago Resett[a,*], Manuel Gamez-Guadix[b]

[a] Universidad Argentina de la Empresa, Argentina
[b] Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Few studies have examined differences in emotional problems and personality of traditional bullies and cyberbullies. The present study aimed to determine whether those engaged in cyberbullying differ in emotional problems, and personality from those engage in traditional bullying perpetration. An Argentinean sample of 898 high school students was recruited (56% female; mean age = 15.2 SD = 1.6). Adolescents completed measures of traditional bullying, cyberbullying, self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and personality. A 6% were traditional bullies; 8%, cyberbullies; and 4% were involved in both forms; the remainders were non involved. Results indicated that cyberbullies showed less depression and anxiety than traditional bullies. Also, cyberbullies scored low in neuroticism and high in agreeableness compared to traditional bullies. The results suggest that cyberbullies are characterized by an emotional and personality profile different from traditional bullies. In the discussion we analyze the implications of these results.

1. Traditional bullying, cyberbullying, and mental health

The vast majority of researchers agreed that cyberbullying is an intentional, aggressive, and harmful behavior that occurs through electronic media (Kowalski, Giumetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Sontag, Clemans, Graber, & Lyndon., 2011). Cybervictimization has been related to a plethora of psychological problems, such as anxiety, depression, among others (Mehari, Farrell, & Le, 2014). Thus, much is known about the effects on cyberbullying on victims compared to cyberbullies (e.g., Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013). Cyberbullies do not present more mental problems, with the sole exception of being engaged in antisocial behavior. However, recent investigations found that being a cyberbully was linked to a poor psychological functioning (Fletcher et al., 2014; Wong, Chan, & Cheng, 2014).

2. Comparation between traditional bullying and cyberbullying

Researchers have presented diverse views about cyberbullying (Kowalski & Limber, 2013). Some of them suggested that cyberbullying is merely an extension of traditional bullying perform through electronic devices (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010; Juvonen & Gross, 2008). Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) found that students involved in cyberbullying were a subset of those involved in traditional bullying. Considering this assertion, one might anticipate that the core characteristics of cyberbullies were no different from traditional bullying.

---

* Corresponding author. Universidad Argentina de la empresa, 222 Laurencena Street, Paraná, Entre Ríos, Argentina.
E-mail address: santiago_resett@hotmail.com (S. Resett).

Others authors suggested that cyberbullying differs from traditional bullying in some important aspects (e.g., anonymity, massive audience) and they pointed out that cyberbullying is perpetrated by different groups of individuals and its psychosocial correlates are different from traditional bullying (Dehue, Bolman, & Völlink, 2008; Kubiszewski, Fontaine, Potard, & Auzoult, 2015). Kubiszewski et al. (2015) detected little overlap (22%) between those who perpetrated traditional bullying and those involved in cyberbullying.

Thus, previous researches have been inconsistent in its conclusions regarding the relationship between traditional bullying and cyberbullying.

3. The present study

Previous research providing information in this topic has been somewhat limited, mainly in Latinamerican countries, such as Argentina. Therefore, the aims of this study were:

1) Measure the degree of overlap between traditional bullying and cyberbullying; 2) Examine correlates of emotional problems and personality in those involve in traditional bullying and compare with those involve in cyberbullying.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

The sample comprised 898 students (56% females; mean age = 15.2 SD = 1.6; range = 12–19) from three state high schools in Paraná, Entre Ríos, Argentina. Argentina is a developed Latin American country. It ranks 46th among 169 nations of the world on the Human Development Index. Parana, with a population of 250,000, is the capital of Entre Rios, a province with over 1.2 million inhabitants. Of the sample, a 15% attended 7° grade; 16%, 8° grade; 17%, 9° grade; 19%, 10° grade; 21%, 11° grade, and the remaining attended 12° grade of high school.

4.2. Measures

Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire (OBVQ, Olweus, 1993). The OBVQ is a 39-item self-report for students in 3–12 grade (Olweus, 1993). Of the 39 items, 10 comprise a victimization subscale and 10 comprise the bullying subscale (i.e., calling someone mean names, among others). Items are rated on a 5-point scale (0 = *It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months*, 1 = *Only once or twice*, 2 = *2 or 3 times a month*, 3 = *About once a week*, and 4 = *About several times a week*). The responses for questions regarding victimization and bullying can be mean or sum to construct an index (Olweus, 2013).

Cyberbullying Questionnaire (CBQ, Calvete, Orue, Estévez, Villardón, & Padilla, 2010). It is composed of two different subscales, one for measuring cyberbullying (14 items) and one for measuring cybervictimization (14 items). The adolescent must indicate how often he or she had performed these behaviors, such as sending threatening or insulting messages to other people, among others. The original response format is: 0 (*Never*), 1 (*1 or 2 times*), 2 (*3 or 4 times*), or 3 (*5 or more times*). However, in the present study we use a 5-point scale, similar to the Olweus questionnaire (0 = *It hasn't happened to me in the past couple of months* to 4 = *About several times a week*).

Rosenberg Psychosomatic Scale (RPS, Rosenberg, 1965). The 10 items of the RPS measures anxiety by an autonomous activation system (Rosenberg, 1965). The responses are coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 4 (*Many times*).

Kovacs Child Depression Inventory (CDI, Kovacs, 1992). CDI includes 27 items. Each item consists of three statements graded in order of increasing severity from 0 to 2, participants select the one that characterize them best during the last two weeks.

Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale (RSES, Rosenberg, 1965). The 10 items of the RSES assess a person's overall evaluation of his or her worthiness (Rosenberg, 1965) and responses are coded on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly agree*).

The GSOEP Big Five Inventory Scale (BIF-S, Gerlitz & Schupp, 2005). BIF-S assesses the Big Five Personality (Consciousness, Agreeableness, Extraversion, Openess to Experience, and Neuroticism) by means of three items per dimension. In the present study we use a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *Does not apply to me at all* to 5 = *Applies to me perfectly*). The responses are sumed. BIF-S has showed good psychometric properties (Hahn, Gottschling, & Spinath, 2012).

4.3. Procedure and data analysis

After granting the permission schools' principals and parents, participants were informed of the anonymous and voluntary nature of the questionnaire. Data analyses were performing using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.

5. Results

Participants were categorized as non involved, traditional bullies, cyberbullies, and traditional/cyberbullies by combining students with the sum of the eight dichotomized forms of traditional bullying and the 14 dichotomized forms of cyberbullying (0 = non involved and 1 = bullies). We used a conservative criterion of two or three times a month (Kowalski & Limber, 2013; Olweus, 2012). Results for females and males are displayed in Table 1. We found that 82% (*n* = 713) of participants were non involved; 6% (*n* = 65), traditional bullies; 8% (*n* = 76), cyberbullies; and 4% (*n* = 44), traditional/cyberbullies. As Table 1 shows, more males than females belonged to cyberbully groups and traditional/cyberbully status: 11% versus 5%, 6% versus 2% $\chi^2(3) = 27.55$ *p* < 0.001.