Coping Strategies of Cyberbullying

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Abstract

This article is a literature review that aims to explore the best strategies that can help to deal with the effects or consequences of cyber bullying victims. Cyber bullying is a widespread phenomenon nowadays. Most of the studies are focused on factors that affect cyber bullying, gender differences, cyber bullying impacts, but not in concrete strategies that can be successful against cyber bullying. This literature review can serve as an orientation and a way to get more information on cyber bullying strategies.

Key words: cyberbullying, coping strategies, family, school, friends

Introduction

For some time now cyber bulling has become a constant part of life especially for youngsters who are Internet savvy and simultaneously impressionable. Although not as developed, Albania has also become part of this development as according to Internet World Stat, in Albania, by June 2016, 1,823,233 people were Internet users and 1,400,000 were Facebook users. The high rate of internet users increases the risk of experiencing negative experiences such as cyber bullying.

Cyberbullies do not have to be strong; they only need a phone or computer and the desire to do it. Although it has been going on for some time now, we still lack a clear picture of this phenomenon since it is complex and has numerous definitions. What we would like to note in this review article is the definition of Li (2007) of cyber bullying as the "use of information technology and communication such as e-mail, cellular, messages, personal site web site, to support a repetitive,

premeditated and hostile behavior by an individual or group that is meant to harm others" (78).

This review article aims to summarise how these factors affect the young age cohort and identify the mechanisms most suitable to deal with these experiences. Coping strategies are defined as responses (behaviors, but also emotions/cognitions) that are successful (or unsuccessful) against cyber bullying. Most of these papers report findings regarding general prevention strategies (e.g. anti-bullying policies or cyber safety strategies) and the use of coping strategies such as seeking support, reactions towards cyber bullies (retaliation or confronting), technical solutions and avoidant and emotion-focused strategies.

Methodology

This literature review aims to identify cyber bullying coping strategies used by cyber bullying victims, family and schools.

To realize this paper are included and excluded many students, based on some criteria that have been set. The following inclusion criteria were used:

- Empirical studies on cyber bullying
- Who is coping: Parents, Teacher (Schools) or students
- Paper should include some measures of coping strategies

Combating cyberbullying

Technical strategies

Cyber bulling victims can undertake different actions, such as : a) blocking a sender (Price, & Dalgleish 2010;) b) restricting particular screen names from their buddy list (Juvonen & Gross 2008) c) using different identity (online) - the username (Juvonen & Gross 2008), e-mail address (Smith et al. 2008), one´s mobile phone number (Price & Dalgleish, 2010) d) deleting violent messages (Chesney et al., 2009) e) reporting (Chesney et al. 2009) f) tracing an aggressor to identify his/her identity (Stacey 2009) According to the studies, "blocking" was one of the most usual action undertaken by cyberbulling victims (Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Smith et al. 2008). Furthermore, deleting violent message action was considered to be really common among cyber bullying victims (Chesney et al. 2009). On the other hand, tracing an aggressor to identify his/her identity (Stacey 2009) was found to be the least common. Although a large number of technical strategies and variability

in preferences is apparent, their effects have been measured only in a single study which was included in the present literature overview. Specifically, according to Price and Dalgleish (2010), blocking a sender has been found to be the most helpful.

Confronting a bully

There are two main different methods of confronting a cyber-bully: retaliation and non-aggressive confrontation.

According to the articles that are included in the present literature overview retaliation is explored on two distinct levels: offline and online retaliation. Juvonen and Gross (2008) found that cyber victims were more likely to retaliate offline (60%) than online (28%). Furthermore, there were observed gender differences regarding the preferences of the place for retaliation. Specifically, males' responses revealed more active and physical retaliatory behavior (by physical assault), whereas females' responses indicated more passive and verbal retaliatory behavior (by changing her e-mail address or screen name and sending a message back) (Hoff & Mitchell 2009). However, other studies provide evidence that offline or online retaliation was less prevalent than other coping strategies (Price & Dalgeish 2010). To conclude, the findings on the place of retaliation do not unequivocally support the assumption that victimized adolescents take advantage of the anonymity of cyberspace for revenge. Instead, they only show adolescent girls that seem to be more likely to turn to the Internet to retaliate.

Differently from retaliation, it has been found that some cyber victims tried to confront in a non-aggressively way their cyber bullies. Based on the samples, the percentage of teenagers who took this action varied from 16.4% to 25% (Juvonen & Gross 2008). According to the Price and Dalgleish (2010) study, confronting a bully offline was the most often used action against bullying, and yet also the least helpful one. On the other hand, Huang and Chou (2010) have shown that personal confrontation was well accepted among children (10-13 years) in cases where students were harassed by someone they knew.

During the research we also identified papers that are based on the coping strategy referred to as doing nothing/ignoring. This can also be represented by actions such as to stop looking at websites where the events happened or just staying offline (Price & Dalgleish 2010). Apart for some exceptions, doing nothing or ignoring was a relatively often used strategy and was generally proposed by students (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Price & Dalgleish, 2010; Smith 2008). However, two studies have shown its ineffectiveness (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Price & Dalgleish 2010).Especially, Hoff and Mitchell (2009) came to the conclusion that the victims simply did not know what else to do, since "doing nothing" resulted in an escalation of cyber bullying.

Instrumental and Emotional Support

During the research we took into consideration papers that addressed support from adults, teachers, peers or friends and other types of support or help. Some papers included empirical data regarding these different types of supports but others are more theory-based papers that give suggestions/advice about what different providers of support can do about cyber bullying. Firstly, we distinguished between instrumental and emotional support where instrumental support was defined through "the most concrete direct form of social support, encompassing help in the form of money, time, in-kind assistance, and other explicit interventions on the person's behalf", while emotional support captured support from family and close friends including empathy, concern, caring, love, and trust (House 1981 cited by Cohen & Wills 1985). According to the findings, studies lack this approach and seem not to distinguish between asking for help and asking for support. Therefore, in this report we decided to address them together.

Cyber bullying has a serious emotional impact and it has been found that telling others about it, such as parents, careers and teachers, is helpful (Price & Dalgleish 2010). However, studies point to the fact that most of victims did not seek this support and that the majority of them lack coping strategies to deal with cyber bullying (Li 2006; Price & Dalgleish 2010).

Adults Support and Help from Parents, Teachers and Other Adults

According to some studies telling a parent about cyber bullying is one of the most popular coping strategies (Smith et al. 2008). However, others documents argue that seeking support from adults was not popular although it was deemed effective regarding helpfulness (Price & Dalgleish 2010). In fact only a few of cyber victims and of students that knew about cyber bullying told their parents or adults about it (e.g. Aricak et al. 2008; Li 2006/2007). There are also empirical findings providing evidence that telling a teacher was relatively effective. However, this also was not a popular strategy (Price & Dalgleish 2010). According to some empirical studies the percentage of cyber victims that told their teachers about the abuse was minimal (Aricak et al. 2008). In a focus group study, students admitted that they would discuss cyber bullying with their school counselor (Wright, Burnham, Inman, & Ogorchock 2009). But the truth is different, they usually do not talk with their parents or other adults, including school counselor or teacher, about cyber bullying phenomenon (Hoff & Mitchell 2009; Juvonen & Gross 2008; Li 2006/2007)

Students think that adults are quite unaware of what cyber bullying is (Mishna, Saini, & Solomon, 2009) and only a few tell adults (from school or outside of it) about bullying and ask their help (DiBasilio 2008). Even so, they seem not to be ready to talk with their teacher or counselor and more likely to tell their parents (DiBasilio 2008). In the retrospective study developed by Hoff and Mitchell (2009), only a small percentage of students (16.7%) informed school authorities about cyber bullying incidents. According to these students, 70.7% claimed that the school authorities frequently did not do anything to prevent this phenomenon or help them. They think that schools didn't take seriously these incidents. Most of them perceived that schools wanted distance from this problem. When asked about anti-cyber bullying school policies 36.1% reported that their school had a policy, 15.4% reported that their school did not have one and 48.6% of students reported that if there was such a policy in their school they were not aware of it (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009). On the other hand, Li (2006) notes that only 64.1% of students believed that adults from their schools would try to help them after becoming aware of it.

They admit that there are different reasons not tell about cyber bulling phenomenon. Some of the reasons are the fact that students believed that they need to learn how to deal with cyber bullying themselves, the fear that this would complicate their problems even further since adults mostly don't understand their online world, the fear of being advised to ignore the situation, the perception that school actors do not do anything against cyber bullying, the wish to be independent, the necessity to avoid worrying or angering parents, and the desire to avoid the loss of their computer or cell phone privileges or to hide embarrassing/non comfortable behavior (Hoff & Mitchell 2009; Juvonen & Gross 2008; Mishna et al. 2009).

Students think that bullying is ignored or not noticed by school staff for almost half of the time. Some also perceive negatively the prevention strategies carried out by the school and believe that's the reason why cyber bullying occurs outside school. According to some students, teachers cannot do anything (Mishna et al., 2009). But some others believe that, even if it occurred outside school, school authorities should and would deal with cyber bullying (Mishna et al. 2009). Students aged between 13 and 15 admitted that they would like to choose they problem themselves and the older ones (16-17yrs) believed even more on themselves (Stacey 2009). They used various strategies to be safe on the cyberspace and considered that it was only necessary to involve adults in exceptional circumstances (Stacey 2009).

Although teachers and counselors can take several actions or measures (e.g. dealing with bullying or the bully-victim; ignoring it; calling the parent; bringing bullying to the attention of the school principal and actors; addressing this issue during the lesson; using one specific method for reducing bullying; teachers bringing bullying to the attention of counselors and teachers helping students

work it out themselves), none of the cyber bullying victims would tell their teacher about the victimization as they did not agree that it was right to punish the bull.

Friends Support

Generally, help from parents and teachers is perceived positively by children (10-13yrs) but many of the students admitted that they are more likely to get help from their peers (Stacey 2009). In fact, empirical research demonstrated that cyber victims actually ask for help after a cyber-bullying experience mostly from friends and less so from parents and teachers (Topçu, Erdur-Baker & Capa-Aydin 2008). Students admitted that they would tell would tell a peer about cyber bullying and previous research suggests that peers can help dealing with and preventing this phenomenon (DiBasilio 2008). In fact, 43.6% of students from private schools and 28.6% from public schools asked help from their friends (Topçu et al. 2008). Another study reports that 15% of cyber bullied students told their friends (Aricak et al. 2008). Clearly then, being closed to a friend is the most helpful strategy to deal with victimization and it is also the second most frequent reaction to it after confronting the bully (Price & Dalgleish 2010). When asked about their possible reaction to cyber bullying participants reported that they most probably seek help from friends (Wright, Burnham, Inman & Ogorchock 2009).

Although children (10-13yrs) believed that help from adults was a good manner to deal with cyber bullying, they still believe more the idea that peer mediation is effective to combat cyber bullying compared to an adult intervention (Stacey 2009). Early teenager students (13-15yrs) also expressed their preference for the peer group, particularly the possibility of discussing cyber bullying with older peers. The older students considered that they had a responsibility to younger peers, in advising them, discussing their cyber bullying experiences and helping them with strategies to deal with it (Stacey 2009).

Peer-intervention (i.e. peer support) can reduce cyberbullying in school by: creating bullying awareness in the school, developing leadership skills among students, developing intervention practices and team-building initiatives in the student community (DiBasilio 2008). After this type of intervention, the counselors needed to challenge the bully more often as a consequence of teachers reporting bullying more than before and because the number of teachers that advised students to work it out themselves decreased. More witnesses of bullying were committed to get someone to stop bullying or tell a teacher. The number of victims who reported joking about it also increased as did the number of those who said they retaliated (DiBasilio 2008).

Emotional coping

According to research (Campbell, Slee, Spears, Butler & Kift, 2012), the differences between the perceptions of harm caused by cyber bullying and actual reports of depression and emotional difficulties is real as there was a discrepancy in participant's reports of the two. Especially, those who had been bullied by traditional means reported that they believed their victimization caused more harm and negative impacts, while statistical analyses show that cyber victims showed higher levels of depression and anxiety and greater problems with social relationships. The reason that caused that is not fully understood, but it suggests that there may be at least some proportion of young people who are being cyber bullied who may not see their experiences as being of a serious enough nature to look for help in dealing with them.

Cyber bullied mental health is likely to be mediated by other factors that contribute towards the negative effects. For example, some studies showed that any type of bullying increases the risk of depression, but did not increase risk of suicide (e.g. Turner, Exum, Brame & Holt, 2013). Other studies have found that the relation between victimization and self-harm and suicide is mediated by existing levels of depression, so that those who already display mental health problems and are cyber bullied are at most risk of self-harm and suicide (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010). Furthermore, victimization may impact on self-esteem in young people and this in turn is likely to be linked to depressive symptoms in those who are victimized.

Cyber bullying victims dealt with an array of academic difficulties as a consequence of their cyber bullying experiences. Many of them think that school is an unsafe institution (Skryzpiec, Slee, Murray-Harvey & Pereira, 2011), which can result in reluctance to attend school, higher levels of truancy, and no concentration due to the anxiety caused by being cyber bullied, which may then lead to disciplinary actions from teachers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a lot of work to do to deal with cyber bullying both by practitioners and researchers alike. All the actors identified in this review need to cooperate with each other and pay close attention to the signs or complaints that children present. "Preventing, is better than curing", is the expression that is always used. Even in the case of cyber bulling, it is very important to undertake

awareness campaigns with respect to cyber bullying. Lastly, it is very important to create a warm climate from both parents and school to create trust so that people affected by cyber bullying can seek help. Above all, it is very important to undertake concrete steps.

About the author

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