

Title: An Insight into Cyberbullying within Sixth Form in England

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Measure: The Distress Scale

Participants: UK

1. Introduction

As young people increasingly use technology, cyber-bullying becomes more prevalent (Cheng, 2012), and expressed in various ways (see Synnott, Coulias & Ioannou, 2017). Cyber-bullying has been defined as “*wilful and repeated harm inflicted through the medium of electronic text*” (Patchin & Hinduja, 2006). This can include, threats, harassment or manipulation that can occur 24/7 (NSPCC, 2018).

Slonje and Smith (2008) supported that cyber-bullying within schools is relatively low (5.3%). However, not all cyber-bullying occurs at school, on the contrary many cyber-bullies find it easier to use technological means to express their opinions rather than face-to-face bullying (Bauman, 2014). Regardless, cyber-bullied victims suffer equal if not more severe consequences than school-bullied victims, such as low self-esteem, loneliness, anxiety, depression, poor academic achievement and development (Beran & Li, 2007; Weber & Pelfrey, 2014) that can follow victims into adulthood (Tzani-Pepelasi, 2018).

The severity of cyber-bullying consequences has been well established (Varghese & Carole Pistole, 2017) and research (Hinduja & Patchin, 2010) has indicated that some cyber-bullied victims attempt suicide, although other factors contribute to such decisions. Researchers have also been studying the risk factors for all forms of bullying and it appears that many of these factors are common amongst the forms, such as aggression and anger (Tzani-Pepelasi, Ioannou Synnott & Ashton, 2018). However, some risk factors, such as parental monitoring of Internet use relates only to cyber-bullying (Tzani-Pepelasi, Ioannou, Synnott & Fumagalli, 2017).

Aim

The present study aimed to investigate cyber-bullying rates in sixth form in the UK, explore how these victims had been cyber-bullied, and whether such experiences had an impact on victims' mental health.

2. Methodology

Students (N = 108) aged 16 to 19 ($M = 17.5$ years, $SD = .79$, 42 male, 65 female, 1 missing) were recruited from a Sixth Form school in England to complete a questionnaire that contained three sections: a) About-You – demographic information and students' perceptions of cyber-bullying definition; b) Cyber-bullying – participants' personal experiences of cyber-bullying; and c) The Self-Esteem section that measured self-esteem, emotional well-being, depression and anxiety with the Distress scale (see Weinberger & Schwartz, 1990). The scale's score ranges from seven to 35, with higher scores indicating higher distress levels.

3. Results

The majority of participants identified that cyber-bullying is bullying online (N=87) and some identified the use of social media (N=37). Nine definitions indicated that cyber-bullying was "repeated" or "constant" behaviour. More female students ($n = 11$) reported experiencing cyber-bullying compared to male students ($n = 1$). Most victims had experienced cyber-bullying through the Internet and social media, with Snapchat prevailing ($n = 62$), followed by Facebook ($n = 15$), Instagram ($n = 14$) and Twitter ($n = 12$).

Of the 12 participants who had been cyber-bullied, only six (50%) reported it, and that was to their friends ($n = 6$), parents/guardians ($n = 4$) and teachers ($n = 4$). The majority of participants reported knowing someone else who had been cyber-bullied compared to experiencing it themselves. Twenty-seven reported peer cyber-bullying and 16 (14.8%) reported their experience.

A multiple regression test was run and the Adjusted R Squared result was .142, clarifying the proportion of the total variability in the DV - *Have you ever been Cyber-*

bullied. The results state that 14% of the variance of cyber-bullying victimisation can be explained by low self-esteem, low emotional well-being, depression and anxiety.

Table 1. ANOVA for cyber-bullying occurring and low self-esteem, low emotional well-being, depression and anxiety

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	14.609	7	2.087	3.523	.002
Residual	59.243	100	.592		
Total	73.852	107			

Table 2 shows some of the victims’ beliefs and feelings resulting from their cyber-bullying victimisation.

Table 2. Posting victims’ private information online without their permission

<i>“Betrayed, embarrassed”</i>	<i>“Disrespected”</i>	<i>“Meh I didn’t care much”</i>	<i>“Mad”</i>	<i>“Shit”</i>
<i>“Uncomfortable, annoyed”</i>	<i>“Upset as to why I didn’t get asked”</i>	<i>“Fat and ugly”</i>	<i>“Makes you feel ashamed and low”</i>	<i>“Unsafe”</i>
<i>“Annoyed and angry”</i>	<i>“Insecure”</i>	<i>“It didn’t matter – only a joke”</i>	<i>“Irritated, angry”</i>	<i>“Didn’t care”</i>
<i>“Unhappy, I was super pissed off”</i>	<i>“...Betrayed of trust”</i>			

Following, an independent samples t-test was run to compare the gender the participants against cyber-bullying experience. In the Levine’s test for equality of variance, the Sig. value was .14, which is greater than .05, therefore, equal variances could be assumed (see table 3).

Table 3. Independent Samples t-test

	Male			Female			<i>T</i>	<i>Df</i>	Sig. (two-tailed)
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Have you ever been cyberbullied?	42	2.26	1.149	65	1.89	.504	2.281	105	.025

Results, showed that there was a significant difference between males ($M = 2.26$), ($SD = 1.149$) and females ($M = 1.89$), ($SD = .504$) in terms of cyber-bullying experiences ($t_{(105)} = 2.281$, $p = .025$), suggesting that females of sixth form are experiencing higher levels of cyber-bullying, compared to male students. Finally, results showed that female participants scored higher on the distress scale than male participants (see table 4).

Table 4. Crosstabulation showing the distress scores in male and female participants.

		Gender			Total
		Male	Females	Missing	
Grouped Distress Score	7-21	24	18	0	42
	22-35	18	47	1	66
	Total	42	65	1	108

4. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore cyber-bullying rates in sixth form schools in the UK using a sample of 105 students. The results fall in line with Slonje and Smith (2008) who had informed that the cyber-bullying rates are relatively low within the sixth form.

Furthermore, the majority of participants expressed that cyber-bullying is when an individual is bullied online, although, many were unaware that cyber-bullying can occur through other electronic devices as well, such as cell phones.

Moreover, the majority indicated cyber-bullying to be as affective as physical bullying, while 23 out of the 108 students supported that it is worse; an indication that had been firstly reported by Bauman in (2014). Results further supported that cyber-bullying had an effect on distress levels, such as the more the cyber-bullying experiences, the higher the distress level. In more detail, students who had been cyber-bullied scored higher on the distress scale, implying depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and low emotional well-being. Taking into account that such consequences could lead to suicide attempts (Bauman et al.,

2013), it is advised that cyber-bullied victims ask for advice and support, and are encouraged to report such events to adults or authorities.

In addition, Li (2006) had suggested that males are less likely to report cyber-bullying, and from this study it was shown that females are more likely to report cyber-bullying victimisation, consequently agreeing with Li (2006). This could suggest that either females may be more at more risk of cyber-bullying victimisation, or that males may find it more difficult to report such events.

Conclusion

Although the present study's results were limited due to the sample size, nonetheless, the findings support that female sixth form students might be at greater risk of cyber-bullying experiences. The presence of cyber-bullying requires implementation of policies, which clearly define cyberbullying and match that of physical bullying. Educational establishments should increase cyber-bullying awareness and provide emotional support.

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