School Violence and Attitude Toward Authority of Students Perpetrators of Cyberbullying

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study is to analyze the differences among students involved in cyberbullying situations (not involved, occasional, and severe) in their attitudes toward institutional authority and their participation in direct and indirect violent school behavior, considering the interaction with gender. The sample is composed of 1062 secondary education students of both sexes between 12 and 18 years old. The results of the multivariate analysis show no interactions, but they do show main effects of the group and gender variables. Severe cyberbullies have greater rejection of institutional authority, transgression of norms, and direct and relational violent school behaviors toward peers. Boys have more favorable attitudes toward social norm transgression, and they participate more than girls in direct violent school behaviors involving direct confrontation with the victim. Regression analyses reveal that the study variables predict cyberbullying. These results and their implications are discussed.

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Introduction

The increase in the information and communication technologies (ICT) and their many uses have given rise in the 21st century to a new type of violence among adolescents over the Internet (Rice et al., 2015). This phenomenon is called cyberbullying, defined as the use of technological media, mainly the Internet and mobile phone, to harm, intimidate, and abuse peers (Giumetti & Kowalski, 2016). This relatively new problem has produced great concern in the educational and scientific community. Therefore, it is a growing topic of interest in the current research (Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Marín-López, 2016).

Various scientific studies suggest that cyberbullying shares various characteristics with traditional school bullying (Garaigordobil, 2011; Navarro, Yubero, & Larrañaga, 2015). In both types of peer abuse, there is an imbalance between the power of the victim and that of the aggressor, a repetition of the violent behavior, and the intention to cause harm. However, due to the use of electronic devic-
es to carry out the abuse, cyberbullying has other characteristics that cause greater harm to the victim (Sticca & Perren, 2013). In addition, the bully’s anonymity makes the victim feel more vulnerable due to the unknown identity of the aggressor (Durán-Segura & Martínez, 2015). Moreover, cyber-aggressions are public humiliations because in a matter of seconds they reach a large number of people, seriously affecting the victim’s social reputation and causing him/her great psychosocial harm (Mitchell & Jones, 2015; Ortega-Barón, Buelg, & Cava, 2016). Certainly, Internet is a space that is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, so that cyber-aggressions can appear at any time or place in the virtual space. Furthermore, cyber-aggressions can be resent over and over again, and the victim is unable to stop the cyber-intimidation because he/she does not have control over its diffusion (Garaigordobil & Martínez-Valderrey, 2014).

Recent studies show that cyberbullying has increased considerably in the past 10 years among adolescents from all the developed countries in the world (Buelega, Estévez, Ortega-Barón, & Abu-Elbar, 2016; Kowalski, Giunetti, Schroeder, & Lattanner, 2014). Compared to the large number of studies focused on the victim, there are still few scientific studies about the profile of the aggressor (Zych et al., 2016), making it necessary to examine this specific role involved in cyberbullying. Recent studies on the prevalence of this role indicate that a large percentage of adolescents are cyberbullies (Aboujaoude, Savage, Starcevic, & Salame, 2015; Rice et al., 2015). In Great Britain, Porrani and Wood (2010) find a prevalence of 31.5% of cyberbullies among adolescents. In Spain, Calvete, Orue, Estévez, Villardón, and Padilla (2010) show that 44% of adolescents are involved in some type of cyberbullying behavior. Moreover, Buelega, Iranzo, Cava, and Torralba (2015) establish that 50% of Spanish adolescents have bullied their peers through ICTs in the past year, although this bullying is incidental and has a brief duration.

In another vein, results of studies on the sex of cyberbullies are contradictory. Garmendia, Garitaonandía, Martínez-Fernández, and Casado (2011) find gender differences in the frequency and intensity of cyberbullying. Boys abuse the victim more frequently and intensely, whereas girls do so less often and in a more moderate way. Some studies state that boys are more involved than girls in both traditional bullying and cyberbullying (Durán-Segura & Martínez, 2015; Navarro, Larraña, & Yubero, 2016). However, other studies point to girls as the group most involved in both types of bullying (Holfeld & Grabe, 2012). There are also studies that find no gender differences in adolescents’ involvement in school bullying and cyberbullying (Katzer, Fetchenauer, & Belschack, 2009; Sentse, Kretschmer, & Salmivalli, 2013). Thus, the gender differences are related to the types of bullying carried out. Some studies show that girls bully in a more indirect and relational way in both the real environment and the virtual one (Mejia-Hernández & Weiss, 2011), whereas boys use more direct physical and verbal violence (Cava, Buelega, Musitu, & Murgui, 2010; Letamendia, 2002). In fact, many cyberbullying behaviors are characterized by being relational and indirect, such as spreading rumors, secrets, and lies about the victim, and his/her social exclusion from line activities and groups.

From this perspective, numerous studies examine the continuity between violent behaviors at school and violent behaviors in the virtual environment (Mitchell & Jones, 2015). Many aggressors involved in traditional bullying have the same role in the virtual space (Cuadrado-Gordillo & Fernández-Antelo, 2014). This role stability in both contexts is pointed out in recent studies by authors such as Giunetti and Kowalski (2016), Olweus (2013), and Riebel, Jaeger, and Fischer (2009). Furthermore, this group of adolescents is not only involved in these violent behaviors, but also in a constellation of other antisocial behaviors and deviant conducts (Garaigordobil, 2016; Hyunseok, Jyuong, & Ramhee, 2014). Thus, cyberbullies also present violent behaviors of a physical, psychological, and sexual nature with their partners (Zweig, Dank, Yahner, & Lachman, 2013). They also display vandalism and criminal behavior, and crimes against property, robbery, police arrests, illegal drug use, and school violence (Garaigordobil, 2011).

Thus, both the attitudes of rejection of institutional authority (teachers and police) and favorable attitudes toward the transgression of social norms predict the adolescent’s participation in this constellation of violent and deviant behaviors (Cava, Estévez, Buelega, & Musitu, 2013; Gómez-Ortiz, Romero, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2017). According to the study by Carrascosa, Cava, and Buelega (2015), boys have more favorable attitudes toward breaking rules than girls do, which is coherent with their greater participation in deviant behavior (Estévez & Jiménez, 2015).

Certainly, adolescents’ attitudes toward social order and norms influence their social behavior in the school context and in other social contexts where they participate (Buelega et al., 2015; Cava, Buelega, Herrero, & Musitu, 2011; Garaigordobil, 2016). The perception of school norms as unfair or confusing is associated with greater participation in peer intimidation behaviors (Kupchik & Farina, 2016). Inversely, the positive perception of social norms and institutional authority is related to less involvement in rule-breaking behaviors in the school setting (Álvarez-García, Dobarro, Rodríguez, Núñez, & Álvarez, 2013), and possibly in the virtual environment as well, although there are no studies on this topic to date.

Taking these antecedents into account, the main objective of the present study is to advance the knowledge about the role of the cyberbully by analyzing the influence of the attitude toward authority and direct and relational violent school behavior toward peers on the cyberbullying problem. Specifically, the objectives are: (a) to analyze the differences among the three groups of adolescents (occasional, severe, and non-cyberbullies) in their attitudes toward authority (positive attitude toward authority figures, and positive attitude toward breaking the rules) and in their violent school behavior (direct and relational), taking the interaction with gender into account, and (b) determine the predictive value of the variables attitude toward authority and direct and relational violent school behavior in the explanation of cyberbullying.

Method

Participants

The sample is composed of 1062 high school students, 547 boys (51.51%) and 515 girls (48.49%) between 12 and 18 years old (M = 14.51; SD = 1.62), who attended 4 public schools in the Valencian Community (Spain). Of these students, 10.3% were 12 years old, 22.6% were 13 years old, 18.6% were 14 years old, 19.5% were 15 years old, 15.9% were 16 years old, 9.5% were 17 years old, and 3.6% were 18 years old. Regarding the distribution by educational cycle, 44.73% of the participants were in the first cycle of Compulsory Secondary Education (Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria [ESO]) (grades 7 and 8) (n = 475), 39.55% were in the second cycle of ESO (n = 420) (grades 9 and 10), and 15.73% were in pre-university studies (Bachillerato) (grades 11 and 12) (n = 167). The participants were selected through stratified sampling by clusters. The sampling units were the public high schools in the Valencian Community. The strata were established according to the variable course (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year of ESO, and 1st and 2nd year of pre-university studies or Bachillerato).

Instruments

The Scale of Aggression through the Mobile Phone and Internet (Buelega & Pons, 2012) consists of 10 items with a response range from 1 to 5 (never, rarely, sometimes, frequently, quite often) to evaluate the frequency with which the person has participated in aggressive behaviors through new technologies in the past 12 months (e.g., “I pretended to be someone else to do bad things in Internet or by mobile phone”). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient is .81. To calculate
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