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Cyberbullying in adolescents: Modalities and aggressors' profile

Esther Calvete *, Izaskun Orue, Ana Estévez, Lourdes Villardón, Patricia Padilla

Department of Psychology, Universitty of Deusto, Bilbao, Spain

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ABSTRACT

In this study, a questionnaire (Cyberbullying Questionnaire, CBQ) was developed to assess the prevalence of numerous modalities of cyberbullying (CB) in adolescents. The association of CB with the use of other forms of violence, exposure to violence, acceptance and rejection by peers was also examined. In the study, participants were 1431 adolescents, aged between 12 and17 years (726 girls and 682 boys). The adolescents responded to the CBQ, measures of reactive and proactive aggression, exposure to violence, justification of the use of violence, and perceived social support of peers. Sociometric measures were also used to assess the use of direct and relational aggression and the degree of acceptance and rejection by peers. The results revealed excellent psychometric properties for the CBQ. Of the adolescents, 44.1% responded affirmatively to at least one act of CB. Boys used CB to greater extent than girls. Lastly, CB was significantly associated with the use of proactive aggression, justification of violence, exposure to violence, and less perceived social support of friends.

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1. Introduction

Violent behavior among adolescents and young people is a severe problem in many countries. In recent years, new forms of aggression based on information and communication technology (computers, cell phones, etc.) have been added to the traditional forms of violence. In this context, cyberbullying (CB) has been defined as an aggressive and deliberate behavior that is frequently repeated over time, carried out by a group or an individual using electronics and aimed at a victim who cannot defend him- or her-self easily (Smith, 2006). Patchin and Hinduja (2006) describe it as deliberate and repeated harm performed with some kind of electronic text. These violent behaviors can be carried out by means of a cell phone, electronic mail, Internet chats, and online spaces such as MySpace, Facebook, and personal blogs.

Although in many cases, CB implies acts of traditional aggression (for example, insulting, spreading rumors, or threatening), which are communicated electronically instead of face-to-face, CB can also include unique behaviors with no analogue in traditional bullying. For example, the phenomenon known as *bombing* occurs when the aggressor uses an automated program to collapse the victim's e-mail with thousands of simultaneous messages, causing failure and blocking of the victim's e-mail account (Burgess-Proctor, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2008).

As this phenomenon is new, there is as yet little agreement about the diverse categories of this form of violence, so that in the studies carried out, different classifications can be found (e.g., Burgess-Proctor et al., 2008; Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho, & Tippett, 2006; Willard, 2006, 2007). For example, according to Willard (2006, 2007), some of the modalities that CB can adopt are (1) online fights, known as *flaming*, which imply the use of electronic messages with hostile and vulgar language; (2) slandering, a modality that implies online disparagement, for example, sending cruel images or rumors about others to spoil their reputations or social relationships; (3) impersonation (hacking) by infiltration into someone's account in order to send messages that make the victim lose face, cause trouble for or endanger the victim, or harm the victim's reputation and friendships; (4) defamation by spreading secrets or embarrassing information about someone; (5) deliberate exclusion of someone from an online group; (6) cyber harassment or the repeated sending of messages that include threats of injury or that are very intimidating.

The phenomenon known as *happy slapping* consists of recording with cell phone cameras images in which a person, who is often in a minority situation, is attacked. The image or video is later shared with friends, posted online, or distributed electronically. This phenomenon has recently been the object of attention by the mass media in many European countries.

Diverse studies warn about the high occurrence of CB. Table 1 shows a sample of some representative studies. For example, in one of the first studies of CB, Ybarra and Mitchell (2004) surveyed 1501 children and adolescents between ages 10 and 17 years by phone and found that 12% had participated in cyberbullying. Li

* Corresponding author. Address: Esther Calvete, University of Deusto, Department of Psychology, Apdo. 1, 48080 Bilbao, Spain. Tel.: +34 94 4139000x2847; fax: +34 94 4139089.
E-mail address: esther.calvete@deusto.es (E. Calvete).

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Table 1
Representative studies of cyberbullying.

Authors	Measurement of CB	Sample	Prevalence rate
Aricak et al. (2008)	"Questionnaire of Cyberbullying" (QoCB)	269 students, aged between 12 and 19 years from Istanbul	35.7%
Beran and Li (2005)	Questionnaire of 15 items, based on a definition of harassment. They use open questions to specify types. Closed for frequency, being victim/aggressor, emotional and behavioral responses	432 students from 7th to 9th grade. Canada	22% once or twice; 4% several times. No gender differences
Dehue et al. (2008)	They created a questionnaire for students and one for parents. The questionnaire for students, among other things, asks about the prevalence and the methods used to carry out and/or be a victim of CB (SMS, e-mail, gossiping, ignoring, hacking, name-calling), the anonymity of the aggressor and the sex of the victim. The questionnaire is based on the based on "Olweus Bully/victim Questionnaire" and on the "Amsterdam Bullying Questionnaire for Children"	1211 participants from the last grade of primary education and the first of secondary education. Mean age: 12.7 Holland	16% significantly more boys (18.6%) in comparison with girls (13.4%)
Li (2006)	An anonymous survey that, among other aspects, asks whether the respondent had cyber-bullied others. If so, they should indicate the means (e-mail, chat room, cell phone, other) and the frequency	264 students from 7th to 9th grade. Canada	17% (22.3% boys and 11.6% girls)
Li (2007a)	The same questionnaire as in Li (2006)	177 Canadian students from 7th grade. Canada	14.5%
Li (2007b)	The same questionnaire as in Li (2006)	461 students from 7th grade. Canada and China	17.8% (21.9% boys and 13.4% girls)
Li (2008)	The same questionnaire as in Li (2006)	354 students between 11 and 15 years. Canada and China	Canada: 15% China: 7%
Ortega et al. (2008)	Cyberbullying Questionnaire (Ortega, Calmaestra, & Mora-Merchán, 2007). Includes questions about CB through cell phones and the Internet	830 Spanish students between 12 and 18 years	1.7% *severe cyberbullying*, 5.7% occasionally or moderate No gender differences
Hinduja and Patchin (2008)	Online. First, a description of CB. Includes two questions: Have you ever performed CB against others? and Have you ever threatened to physically harm someone or have you scared others this way online?	680 boys/698 girls 10–17 years	18% boys and 15.6% girls
Patchin and Hinduja (2006)	Online. First, a description of CB. Includes two questions: Have you ever performed CB? and, Have you ever threatened to physically harm or scared others this way online?	384 people less than 18 years of age	10.7%
Smith et al. (2008)	Questionnaire based on Olweus' Bully/Victim Questionnaire (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). The questionnaire includes a definition of bullying followed by a statement about cyberbullying as including the seven media: through text messaging, pictures/photos or video clips, phone calls, e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging, and websites. Next, it asks about the frequency of CB, for each of the seven media. Open-ended questions allowed pupils to give more detailed answers on examples of cyberbullying, reasons for perceived impact, and suggestions for stopping it. The time-frame was the "past couple of months"	Two surveys with pupils aged 11–16 years: (1) 92 pupils, supplemented by focus groups; (2) 533 pupils	6.6% often (2 or 3 times a month, once a week, or several times a week) and 15.6% once or twice No gender differences
Ybarra and Mitchell (2004)	"Youth Internet Safety Survey". By telephone. Included two questions for aggressors: (1) Have you ever made disagreeable or vulgar remarks about others on the Internet? (2) Have you used the Internet to harass or shame someone with whom you were angry?	1501 young people between 10 and 17 years USA	12%
Williams and Guerra (2007)	They use one item: I told lies about some students though e-mail or instant messaging	3339 youths in 5th , 8th, and 11th grades	9.4%

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