



## Structural validation and cross-cultural robustness of the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire



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### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

#### Keywords:

Cyberbullying

Validation

Questionnaire

Confirmatory factor analysis

### ABSTRACT

During the last decade, cyberbullying has become an increasing concern which has been addressed by diverse theoretical and methodological approaches. As a result there is a debate about its nature and rigorously validated assessment instruments have not yet been validated. In this context, in the present study an instrument composed of 22 items representing the different types of behaviours and actions that define cyberbullying has been structurally validated and its cross-cultural robustness has been calculated for the two main dimensions: cyber-victimization and cyber-aggression. To this end, 5679 secondary school students from six European countries (Spain, Germany, Italy, Poland, United Kingdom, and Greece) were surveyed through this self-report questionnaire which was designed based on previously existing instruments and the most relevant conceptual elements. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses were conducted and the global internal consistency was computed for the instrument and its two dimensions. Identical factor structures were found across all of the six subsamples. The results contribute to existing research by providing an instrument, the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire, which has been structurally validated in a wide sample from six different countries and that is useful to evaluate psycho-educative interventions against cyberbullying.

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, society has shown a growing interest in the phenomenon named cyberbullying frequently appearing in the online social relationships among youngsters and adolescents (Fenaughty & Harré, 2013). Nowadays, we are immersed in the process of elaborating a solid theoretical approximation and an agreed definition of the phenomenon (Berne et al., 2013;

Tokunaga, 2010). Thus, one of the main guides to follow is the research developed around traditional bullying (Olweus, 2013) as cyberbullying is defined as bullying developed through electronic media (Vivolo-Kantor, Martell, Holland, & Westby, 2014). Traditional bullying has been defined as physical, verbal, social and/or psychological aggression by a pupil against another, whom is chosen to be a victim of repeated attacks (Olweus, 1993, 1999). Such a negative and intentioned action puts the victim in a situation that is difficult to get out of. Bullying is neither an isolated aggression nor a simple individual behaviour but an interactive phenomenon in which several subjects are involved in at least three roles: bully, victim and bully-victim. Its distinctive characteristics are: the intentionality to hurt someone else, the imbalance of

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power between the aggressor and the victim and the repetition of the aggressive conducts by the aggressors over their victims. Such scientific evidences have clarified the nature of the bullying phenomenon and determined its standardization, hence, the appearance of instruments to measure it (Greif & Furlong, 2006). However, the nature of the electronic means that characterizes cyberbullying has made it necessary to investigate not only its conceptualization but also in order to provide instruments suitable to its nature with the aim of showing the levels of prevalence among adolescent population (Vivolo-Kantor et al., 2014).

## 2. Cyberbullying: Definition and characteristics

Behaviours such as verbal attacks through digital devices, publication and exhibition of embarrassing pictures, and the exclusion from online communication are some examples of how traditional bullying brings to life cyberbullying. Other behaviours such as virtual identity theft (i.e. to impersonate someone else or to hack personal accounts with the aim of obtaining personal information) are not included in traditional forms of bullying but are considered as cyberbullying (Perren et al., 2012). Instead, virtual behaviours accompanied by certain nuances such as the presence of adults take advantage of minors, or the intentionality of sexual nature to obtain embarrassing pictures (Smith, Thompson, & Davidson, 2014), are linked to other phenomena different from cyberbullying such as grooming or sexting (Den Hamer & Konijn, 2015).

Cyberbullying, by mainly referring to traditional bullying researches (Slonje & Smith, 2008), is defined as a clearly intentional aggression or hostile or harmful act carried out through an electronic device repeatedly over time by setting up an imbalance of powers between the aggressor and the victim (Tokunaga, 2010). Accordingly, both the aggressor and the victim are, a priori, substantial characters of the phenomenon, but there are also those that are aggressors and victims at the same time, the bully-victims (Yang & Salmivalli, 2013). In addition, there are researches that identifies cyberbullying exclusively with cyber-aggression (Calvete, Orue, Estévez, Villardón, & Padilla, 2010) or with cyber-victimization (Müller, Pfetsch, & Ittel, 2014), leaving out the dynamic existing between the roles and how the criteria of intentionality, repetition and imbalance of powers takes place between them (Olweus, 2013). Criteria that otherwise are not as evident in cyberbullying as they are in traditional bullying (Dehue, 2013; Slonje, Smith, & Frisén, 2013; Smith, Del Barrio, & Tokunaga, 2013). In this respect, some authors suggest that a single image or any other humiliating audio-visual material can be comparable to the repetition of traditional bullying, since the content can be perpetual on the Internet and is available for any person seeking access to it, or may even be downloaded and stored on personal devices (Heirman & Walrave, 2008), this suggests that digital aggression is equally harmful. Concerning the imbalance of power, high levels of technological knowledge and the difficulties that the victims may have in identifying the aggressors, can be interpreted as inferiority before the aggressor (Menesini & Nocentini, 2009; Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

Despite these considerations, from our point of view, repetition shall be considered as a requirement for cyberbullying as for the victim or even for both the aggressor and the victim the experience is a repeated behaviour. In fact, certain existing qualitative studies have shown the need to maintain such a criterion (Nocentini et al., 2010). With regard to the imbalance of power, there is no doubt of its relevance in the dynamic of the phenomenon as the lack of competence for keeping personal data secure in digital scenarios imply or may imply that the victim faces inferiority with respect to the aggressor when communicating through digital devices (Vandebosch & Van Cleemput, 2008).

## 3. Prevalence of cyberbullying

There are currently more than 300 articles published about cyberbullying which offer figures about its prevalence (Arsène & Raynaud, 2014). However, there are differences in these results which make it difficult to know how many people are affected by this problem (Modecki, Minchin, Harbaugh, Guerra, & Runions, 2014). Thus, among the researches referring only to cyberaggression, figures range from 5.3% to 31.5% (Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009; Pornari & Wood, 2010). Among those referring only to cyber-victimization figures oscillate between 2.2% to 56.2% (Perren, Dooley, Shaw, & Cross, 2010). These differences are also present in researches that analyze both cyber-aggression and cyber-victimization. For instance, a Greek study found 28.3% of cyber-victims of cyberbullying and 14.6% of perpetrators (Floros, Siomos, Fisoun, Dafouli, & Geroukalis, 2013). However, another in Sweden found that 5% were cyber-victims and 4% were cyberbullies (Låftman, Modin, & Östberg, 2013). The differences can be found even in studies developed with a population of similar characteristics and in the same regions or countries (Baek & Bullock, 2014).

Such a diversity in the rates of prevalence may have its origin, among others, in the plethora of perspectives from which cyberbullying is analyzed (Sabella, Patchin, & Hinduja, 2013) and therefore, in the great differences existing between the instruments used (Modecki et al., 2014), this diversity is inherited from traditional bullying measurements (Greif & Furlong, 2006).

## 4. Measures of cyberbullying

As mentioned above, cyberbullying involves a diversity of elements and behaviours making research and the development of valid assessment instruments more complicated (Ybarra, Mitchell, & Korchmaros, 2011). This difficulty has been partially overcome in recent studies which focus on the development of measurement instruments, but have exclusively dealt with only one of the dimensions so far: cyber-aggression (Calvete et al., 2010; Law, Shapka, Hymel, Olson & Waterhouse, 2012) or cyber-victimization (Tynes, Rose, & Williams, 2010), separately. Although this is a great contribution to existing research, studying only part of the phenomenon omits the dynamic nature of cyberbullying, and means it is not sufficient to test its complexity with the respective instruments (Dempsey, Sulkowski, Nichols, & Storch, 2009).

In the latest systematic review of measurement instruments of cyberbullying, Berne et al. (2013) have found 44 different instruments (until October 2010) which have been used to evaluate, measure or analyse this phenomenon. The vast majority of these instruments are self-reports focussing on different aspects of cyberbullying, with 56% of them assessing cyber-aggression or cyber-victimization separately (Berne et al., 2013). These two aspects are addressed together only in the Italian studies of Menesini, Nocentini, and Calussi (2011). However, the whole model did not fit and, therefore, the validation of the instrument had to be made separately for cyber-aggression and cyber-victimization. The 40% of remaining instruments focus on other elements such as the type of devices that can carry out an attack or on cyber-abuse (Law, Shapka, Domene, & Gagné, 2012).

In regards to specific psychometric properties, only 22% ( $N = 10$ ) of all the instruments analysed used statistical methods to empirically examine the underlying theory, such as confirmatory factor analysis (Berne et al., 2013). In most cases, these structural validations have been performed with samples of approximately 500 participants, with the exception of the study by Ybarra and Mitchell (2008) which was carried out with 1700 people through an online survey about cyber-victimization.

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