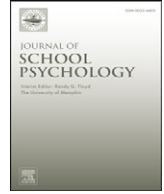




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Patterns of adolescent bullying behaviors: Physical, verbal, exclusion, rumor, and cyber

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ABSTRACT

Patterns of engagement in cyber bullying and four types of traditional bullying were examined using latent class analysis (LCA). Demographic differences and externalizing problems were evaluated across latent class membership. Data were obtained from the 2005–2006 Health Behavior in School-aged Survey and the analytic sample included 7,508 U.S. adolescents in grades 6 through 10. LCA models were tested on physical bullying, verbal bullying, social exclusion, spreading rumors, and cyber bullying behaviors. Three latent classes were identified for each gender: All-Types Bullies (10.5% for boys and 4.0% for girls), Verbal/Social Bullies (29.3% for boys and 29.4% for girls), and a Non-Involved class (60.2% for boys and 66.6% for girls). Boys were more likely to be All-Types Bullies than girls. The prevalence rates of All-Types and Verbal/Social Bullies peaked during grades 6 to 8 and grades 7 and 8, respectively. Pairwise comparisons across the three latent classes on externalizing problems were conducted. Overall, the All-Types Bullies were at highest risk of using substances and carrying weapons, the Non-Involved were at lowest risk, and the Verbal/Social Bullies were in the middle. Results also suggest that most cyber bullies belong to a group of highly aggressive adolescents who conduct all types of bullying. This finding does not only improve our understanding of the relation between cyber bullying and traditional bullying, but it also suggests that prevention and intervention efforts could target cyber bullies as a high-risk group for elevated externalizing problems.

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1. Introduction

Bullying can be defined as a type of aggressive behavior which is intentional, repeated, and usually involves imbalance of power between the bully and the victim (Olweus, 1993). It is a widespread school problem that is linked to various psychological adjustment and academic problems among school-aged children and adolescents (Gini, 2008; Nansel, Craig, Overpeck, Saluja, & Ruan, 2004; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005). In school, bullying behaviors may take various forms (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995; Olweus, 1993), including physical bullying (e.g., hitting, pushing, and kicking), verbal bullying (e.g., calling mean names in a hurtful way), social exclusion (e.g., ignoring or leaving out others on purpose), and spreading rumors (e.g., telling lies about others). Recently, cyber bullying has emerged as a new type of bullying which involves bullying others using electronic devices such as cell phones and computers (Li, 2007; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007; Slonje & Smith, 2008; Williams & Guerra, 2007). A recent national study showed that each of the above bullying subtypes is common among U.S. youth, ranging from 13.6% for cyber bullying to 53.6% for verbal bullying (Wang, Iannotti, & Nansel, 2009).

1.1. Traditional and cyber forms of bullying

As cyber bullying emerges as a new form of bullying, researchers have sought to understand the association between traditional bullying and cyber bullying. According to Juvonen and Gross (2008), cyber bullying is an extension of traditional bullying, with the location of bullying extended from school to the cyber space. Similarly, Raskauskas and Stoltz (2007) reported that students' roles in traditional bullying predicted the same role in cyber bullying. However, whereas the majority of studies generally suggest a positive correlation between traditional and cyber bullying (Gradinger, Strohmeier, & Spiel, 2009; Smith et al., 2008; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007), most prior studies did not differentiate between various subtypes of traditional bullying and have combined physical bullying, verbal bullying, social exclusion, and spreading rumors into a single traditional bullying construct (e.g., Li, 2007; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). As such, it remains unclear whether the relation between traditional bullying and cyber bullying is common to all subtypes of traditional bullying or is driven by certain subtypes of traditional bullying. For example, given that both cell phones and computers are often used as means of communication, it may be that the relation between traditional and cyber bullying is largely accounted for by verbal bullying, social exclusion, and spreading rumors but not physical bullying. Few previous studies, if any, have examined this question. This gap in the literature is an important one to address because understanding which subtypes of traditional bullying are linked to or co-occur with cyber bullying can help teachers, school counselors, psychologists, and parents evaluate the degree of seriousness of adolescents' bullying behaviors (e.g., how likely are they to also engage in physical bullying) when they observe the presence of cyber bullying. Accordingly, this information can inform prevention and intervention efforts targeting adolescent bullying.

To address this gap, the current study applies a latent class analysis (LCA) to examine how five subtypes of bullying, including cyber bullying, co-occur in the same person. LCA is a person-based latent variable approach in which latent classes or groups can be identified based on participants' observed response to multiple categorical variables (Andersen & McCutcheon, 2003; Magidson & Vermunt, 2004; Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007). As such, LCA is an appropriate method to examine patterns of involvement in multiple subtypes of bullying and identify groups of individuals who are likely to endorse a particular pattern of bullying involvement. Using an LCA model, Wang, Iannotti, Luk, and Nansel (2010) examined how different subtypes of victimization occurred in the same person and extracted three latent classes, including (a) a latent class of "all-types victims" who were victims of all types of bullying, (b) a latent class of "verbal/social victims" who were marked by victimization by verbal bullying, social exclusion, and spreading rumors, and (c) a latent class of "non-victims" who had minimal probabilities of being victimized by any bullying behavior. The all-types victims consisted of 9.7% of boys and 6.2% of girls, whereas the verbal/social victims consisted of 28.1% of boys and 35.1% of girls. Moreover, a graded relation was found between the three latent classes of victimization on their level of depression and frequency of medically attended injuries and medicine use. However, the prior study focused on the co-occurrence of subtypes of victimization (i.e., being targets of bullying behaviors) and did not consider the co-occurrence of subtypes of bullying (i.e., conducting bullying behaviors). As such, it remains unclear how various subtypes of bullying co-occur in the same student or whether such co-occurrence is linked to correlates of bullying. If a similar pattern can be found for bullying perpetration in which there is a

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