Cyber-bullying and children's unmonitored media violence exposure

Calli Tzani-Pepelasi, Maria Ioannou, John Synnott & Anita Fumagalli

Introduction

WITH TECHNOLOGICAL EVOLUTION and interpersonal communication advancement comes the more frequent unregulated access of adolescents to cyber-space, exposure to media violence (DePaolis & Williford, 2015) and involvement in cyber-bullying (CB). CB is commonly defined as purposefully repetitively causing harm to others through electronic devices created for interpersonal communication (Rigby, 2002). The main difference from traditional bullying is the perpetrator's ability to anonymously and effortlessly harass multiple victims at any time and geographic location (Hemphill et al., 2015). Students consider some of the most common CB ways to be posting online victims' embarrassing/humiliating videos, creating social media profiles to humiliate victims, and posting/forwarding victims' private information/images without permission (NHS, 2015).

According to Rigby and Smith (2011) CB is a worldwide concern and on the rise. Researchers (Mishna et al., 2012; Bertolotti & Magnani, 2013) found that computer and social media daily use for many hours are risk factors for CB victimisation/perpetration. For example, Mark and Ratliffe (2011) reported that out of the 265 young participants, 96 per cent had access to computers and the internet at home; with 33 per cent accessing cyber-space daily, of whom 54 per cent were cyber-victimised. Moreover, with constantly

evolving technology a gap emerges between generations, leaving parents less experienced about the internet, compared with adolescents. Consequently, children's access to cyber-space is unregulated and they are exposed to media violence, resulting in increasing electronic aggression (David-Ferdon & Hertz, 2007).

Literature (Low & Espelage, 2013) indicated that parental monitoring could affect CB rates. In particular, Khurana et al. (2015) reported that parental monitoring through communication and regulating specific forms of internet use were associated with reduced rates of CB. Nonetheless, parental monitoring does not necessarily prevent cyber-perpetration (Floros et al., 2013). In this study we aimed to examine the relationship between CB and unmonitored media violence exposure.

Methodology

Participants (N = 238) were recruited through social media advertisement and completed a questionnaire electronically. The project complied with BPS ethical guidelines. Participants were mainly UK based, and a small percentage was continental EU based; CB was defined according to the 'cyber-bullying and online aggression survey' (see Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). This scale is a 52-item measure with two subscales measuring CB victimisation and perpetration. However, for this study we only used the two items that addressed cyber-victimisation and cyber-perpetration, and asked participants if they were ever cyber-victimised and if they ever cyber-bullied someone else.

Analysis

Out of the 238 participants 186 were female and 52 male. Participants' age ranged from 16 to 63 (M = 23.6, SD = 8.9), 99.6 per cent owned multiple electronic devices. Participants' online access varied from 24 to zero hours (M = 5.2, SD = 4.2); while 21.8 per cent reported exposure to media violence when accessing the internet, 8 per cent reported sort-of and 70 per cent no. The 29.8 per cent that were exposed to online violence reported visiting platforms that contained combat sports, horror films, violent movies, violent games, mortal combat, and YouTube videos containing violent attacks. Out of the 238 participants, 17.6 per cent engaged for the first time with social media at age 13, 16.4 per cent at age 12, 12.6 per cent at age 11, while 5.9 per cent had had online accounts since birth, and 12 per cent engaged in social media after the age of 20 (M = 14.3, SD = 7.1).

To the question if they ever harmed someone online, 92 per cent reported no, 3.4 per cent sort-of, and 4.2 per cent yes; however, cyber-perpetration through Facebook was higher (9 per cent a few times, 9.7 per cent once or twice); to the question if someone else ever hurt them online, 67.6 per cent reported no, 6.7 per cent sort of, and 25.6 per cent reported yes; likewise cyber-victimisation through Facebook appeared higher (32.8 per cent once or twice, 21.8 per cent a few times, 11.8 per cent many times).

In terms of internet monitoring if participants still lived with their parents at the time of questionnaire completion or when they had lived with their parents at an appropriate age for parental supervision, 74.8 per cent reported that their parents had not set rules about internet access duration, 15.1 per cent said sort of, and only 10.1 per cent reported yes. Likewise, 71.4 per cent reported that their parents did not set rules about restricting particular sites, 8.8 per cent reported sort of and 19.7 per cent reported yes, out of which 24.4 per cent didn't follow the rules.

The strongest positive correlations were shown between age now and age of onset of social media use (r_s (236) = .56, p < .01), parental monitoring regarding how many

Table 1: Correlations – Spearman's rho correlation coefficient.

	Internet access hours	Age	Onset media age	Cyber perpetration	Cyber perpetration Facebook	Cyber victimisation	Cyber victimisation Facebook	Online violence exposure	Parental monitoring internet use hours
Age	-.20**								
Onset media age	.09	.56**							
Cyber perpetration	-.09	.01	.11						
Cyber perpetration Facebook	.09	-.14*	-.16*	-.15*					
Cyber victimisation	-.09	.19**	.17**	.07	-.14*				
Cyber victimisation Facebook	.10	-.06	-.14*	-.07	.21**	-.42**			
Online violence exposure	-.05	.06	.18**	.27**	-.13*	.06	-.10		
Parental monitoring internet use hours	.00	-.00	.01	.01	.01	-.05	.03	.03	
Parental monitoring internet site access	-.06	.06	.05	-.01	-.09	.08	-.03	-.00	.49**

* p<0.05
** p<0.01

hours children are allowed online, and monitoring which sites they can use (r_s (236) = .49, $p < .01$); and cyber-perpetration with online violence exposure (r_s (236) = .27, $p < .01$). The strongest negative association appeared between cyber-victimisation and cyber-victimisation through Facebook (r_s (236) = – .42, $p < .01$). Weaker associations were found between other variables (see Table 1).

Discussion

In this study we aimed to examine relationships between CB and adolescents' unmonitored media violence exposure. Results indicate that only social media use is strongly associated

with parental monitoring, while a weak positive association was also found between cyber-perpetration and exposure to online violence. Our results confirm previous findings (Khurana, et al., 2015) that indicated exposure to online violence was a risk factor for involvement in CB. This, and the rates of unrestricted internet access duration (74.8 per cent) and site use (71.4 per cent), are the most important findings. The strongest negative association appeared between cyber-victimisation and Facebook cyber-victimisation. It is therefore suggested that Facebook is most likely one of the most common platforms for CB exposure/involvement; consequently, if CB victims escape Facebook victimisation they are likely to escape CB victimisation in general. Thus, we would advise parents to raise awareness through communication, guide adolescents to use Facebook responsibly, and promote reporting of cyber-victimisation incidents in Facebook.

In this study we did not look into changes in parenting style over recent decades; however, if we assume that in the past parenting style was more conservative and strict, then we could accept that perhaps parents have become more lenient and/or ignorant regarding regulation of adolescents' online behavior, which could be an outcome of the gap between the generations concerning technological knowledge and experience.

Although the current study found relatively low CB rates, we conclude that parents nonetheless should be aware that when children access the internet unmonitored they could be exposed to online dangers, such as involvement in cyber-aggression, cyber-victimisation and/or cyber-perpetration. It should also be noted that correlations do not signify causality. Future research should look into the possibility that cyber-bullies are individuals that for various reasons are aggressive, and may seek out to express their aggression in cyberspace.

About the authors

Calli Tzani-Pepelasi is a PhD researcher at the University of Huddersfield, specialising in research related to school-bullying, cyber-bullying and the associated factors, and is presently involved in other projects such as peer mentoring at schools, online fraud, and doorstep crime.

Dr Maria Ioannou, is a Reader in Investigative and Forensic Psychology at the University of Huddersfield, and Course Director for the MSc in Investigative Psychology.

Dr John Synnott is a Senior Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Huddersfield, Associate Director of the MSc in Investigative Psychology, and Deputy Director of the MSc in Security Science.

Anita Fumagalli is a PhD candidate at the University of Huddersfield and specialises in the use of the polygraph and the Guilty Knowledge Test. Anita has been involved in various other projects related to the polygraph, deception, and crime.

References

Bertolotti, T. & Magnani, L. (2013). A philosophical and evolutionary approach to cyber-bullying: Social networks and the disruption of sub-moralities. *Ethics and Information Technology, 15*(4), 285–299. doi:10.1007/s10676-013-9324-3.

David-Ferdon, C. & Hertz, M.F. (2007). Electronic media, violence, and adolescents: An emerging public health problem. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 41*(6), S1–S5. doi:10.1016/j.jadohealth.2007.08.020.

DePaolis, K. & Williford, A. (2015). The nature and prevalence of cyber victimization among elementary school children. *Child & Youth Care Forum, 44*(3), 377–393. doi:10.1007/s10566-014-9292-8.

Floros, G.D., Siomos, K.E., Fisoun, V., Dafouli, E. & Geroukalis, D. (2013). Adolescent online cyberbullying in greece: The impact of parental online security practices, bonding, and online impulsiveness. *Journal of School Health, 83*(6), 445–453. doi:10.1111/josh.12049.

Hemphill, S.A., Tollit, M., Kotevski, A. & Heerde, J.A. (2015). Predictors of traditional and cyber-bullying victimization: A longitudinal study of australian secondary school students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 30*(15), 2567–2590. doi:10.1177/0886260514553636.

Hinduja, S. & Patchin, J.W. (2009). Bullying beyond the schoolyard: Preventing and responding to cyberbullying. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Khurana, A., Bleakley, A., Jordan, A.B. & Romer, D. (2015). The protective effects of parental monitoring and internet restriction on adolescents' risk of online harassment. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 44*(5), 1039–1047. doi:10.1007/s10964-014-0242-4.

Low, S. & Espelage, D. (2013). Differentiating cyber bullying perpetration from non-physical bullying: Commonalities across race, individual, and family predictors. *Psychology of Violence, 3*(1), 39–52. doi:10.1037/a0030308.

Mark, L. & Ratliffe, K. (2011). Cyber worlds: New playgrounds for bullying. *Computers in the Schools, 28*(2), 92–116. doi:10.1080/07380569.2011.575753.

Mishna, F., Khoury-Kassabri, M., Gadalla, T. & Daciuk, J. (2012). Risk factors for involvement in cyber bullying: Victims, bullies and bully-victims. *Children and Youth Services Review, 34*(1), 63–70. doi:10.1016/j.childyouth.2011.08.032.

NHS. (2015). *Coping with cyberbullying*. Retrieved from http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Bullying/Pages/Cyberbullying.aspx.

Rigby, K. (2002). *New perspectives on bullying*. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley.

Rigby, K. & Smith, P.K. (2011). Is school bullying really on the rise? *Social Psychology of Education, 14*(4), 441–455. doi:10.1007/s11218-011-9158-y.