An Introduction to Cyberbullying

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Outline: Methodological Issues in Researching Cyberbullying

- Part 1: Impact of cyberbullying on youth
- Part 2: Understanding why cyberbullying happens
- Part 3: Methods of assessing cyberbullying
  - Surveys and Scales
  - Vignettes
- Part 4: Focus on theory – why cyberbullying happens revisited?
  - The importance of theory
  - Possible theories
- Part 5: Cyberbullying and the law
Cyberbullying Research in Italy

http://cyberbullying.org/research/map/italy

Here is the research we've found on cyberbullying in Italy, with the most recent first. Please email us if you have any articles to add with the details ordered in the same format as the others.

Author(s): Palladino, B. E., Nocentini, A., & Menesini, E.

Year: 2016

Title: Evidence-based intervention against bullying and cyberbullying: Evaluation of the NoTrap! program in two independent trials.

Journal: Aggressive behavior

URL: http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26879897

Abstract: The NoTrap! (Noncadamointrappolal) program is a school-based intervention, which utilizes a peer-led approach to prevent and combat both traditional bullying and cyberbullying. The aim of the present study was to evaluate the efficacy of the third Edition of the program in accordance with the recent criteria for evidence-based interventions. Towards this aim, two quasi-experimental trials involving adolescents (age M = 14.91, SD = .98) attending their first year at different high schools were conducted. In Trial 1 (control group, n = 171; experimental group, n = 451), latent growth curve models for data from pre-, middle- and post-tests showed that intervention significantly predicted change over time in all the target variables (victimization, bullying, cybervictimization, and cyberbullying). Specifically, target variables were stable for the control group, whereas those in the intervention group showed significant decreases.
Impact of Cyberbullying on Youth

• The impact or consequences of cyberbullying on its victims are similar to those of traditional bullying (Li, Smith, & Cross, 2012; Tokunaga, 2010).

• Emotional consequences of cyberbullying include: anger, anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem, frustration, sadness, depression, low life satisfaction, embarrassment, and being scared (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Kowlaski et al., 2014).

• Behavioural consequences of cyberbullying include: reduced family relationship quality, school difficulties, absenteeism, lower academic performance, psychosocial difficulties, assaultive conduct, substance use, traditional bullying, and the potential for victims to bring weapons to school for protection (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010; Ybarra, Diener-West, & Leaf, 2007).
Cyberbullying has the potential to be more harmful than traditional bullying (Campbell, 2005; Dooley, Pyzalski, & Cross, 2009; Tokunaga, 2010)

- because it can be conducted quicker than traditional bullying due to the speed with which technology functions (Slonje & Smith, 2008);
- communication technologies increase a bully’s accessibility to victims and the ability to reach individuals outside of the traditional schoolyard (Lines, 2007);
- potentially harmful communications can easily be distributed to a large audience (Sticca & Perren, 2013) extending the victimization (more public);
- cyberbullies perceive their actions to be anonymous in nature (Tokunaga, 2010) and cyberbullying actions frequently lack the social cues or disinhibition that commonly occurs from the reactions of witnesses to traditional bullying (Mishna, Khoury-Kassabri, Gadalla, & Daciuk, 2012); and
- cyberbullying is more difficult for teachers and parents to control for, and supervise, than more traditional forms of bullying (Li, 2006; Patchin & Hinduja, 2006).
Reasons for Cyberbullying

- Anonymity
- Approval
- Boredom
- Humor
- Instigate jealousy
- Impulsivity
- Isolation
- Lack of education
- Lack of empathy
- Lack of information regarding web risks
- Moral disengagement
- Lack of parental/teacher/adult supervision
- No perceived consequences
- Protection
- Reinvention of self
- Reactive Behaviour
- Revenge
- Relationship problems (e.g., break-ups, envy, etc.)
- Co-occur with other externalizing behaviours (e.g., physical aggression, disobeying rules, cheating, stealing, etc.)
- Projection of feelings (e.g., envy, prejudice and intolerance for disability, religion, gender, shame, pride, guilt, and anger; Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Jones, Manstead & Livingstone, 2011)

Methodological Issues

1. Definitional discrepancies;
2. Inconsistencies in cyberbullying measurement;
3. Lack of psychometric evidence (i.e., evidence of reliability and validity) for existing cyberbullying surveys
4. Atheoretical inquiry;

There is a desperate need to advance an explanatory framework for cyberbullying without which targeted interventions cannot be developed.
Definitions - Revisited

• Several overlapping definitions of cyberbullying exist each consisting of some combination of the following seven criteria:
  1. Cyberbullying is bullying using an electronic device/media;
  2. Cyberbullying is a deliberate act intended to cause harm;
  3. Cyberbullying is a repetitive act;
  4. Cyberbullying involves a relationship characterized by an imbalance of power;
  5. Cyberbullying involves anonymity or the perception of anonymity;
  6. Cyberbullying is a public act in its 24/7 nature;
  7. Cyberbullying has an extensive audience.

• There is currently no common basis for comparing and integrating research or drawing meaningful cross-study comparisons.
Inconsistencies in Measuring

- Self-report surveys – social desirability
- Depends on cyberbullying definition
- Depends on how the question is asked – ever vs past year vs past month...
- Depends on the population asked – ages of students
- Depends on gender
- Depends on date of study – 2000 to now
Vignettes/Scenarios

• Vignettes or scenarios have ALSO been used to assess cyberbullying
• E.g., Aggressions repeated over time were rated as more negative than those that happened once (Hazler, Miller, Carney, & Green, 2001)
• Menesini et al. 2011 found that adolescents considered events involving graphic information (videos or pictures) displaying violent acts or private scenes as more severe those with no images.
• Lets try some examples...
John and Peter are on the school volleyball team. Although they are not the best players, both of them play every game and are respected by the rest of their team. John sends emails to the whole team about Peter saying that no one on the team wants Peter to play, because when he plays, they always lose. Peter and the volleyball team receive at least three posts a day from John with that message.

Was the action of the perpetrator good or bad?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Bad Very Good

Is this behaviour a case of cyberbullying? Yes or No (why/why not)

Modified from: Talwar Carlos Gomez-Garibello, & Shariff, 2014
Joanne is the cheerleader captain. She is very popular at school. Laura is very shy and does not have many friends. Laura really loves to observe animals, especially birds and some people call her “birdgirl”. Joanne thinks this is funny. Every day for two months, Joanne posts messages on Facebook about Laura, and calls them the “Chronicles of Birdgirl”.

Was the action of the perpetrator good or bad?

1 2 3 4 5
Very Bad Very Good

Is this behaviour a case of cyberbullying? Yes or No (why/why not)

Modified from: Talwar Carlos Gomez-Garibello, & Shariff, 2014
Lisa and Alex dated for 6 months. Sometimes they sent each other pictures like the time Lisa sent Alex a picture of herself in her bikini. Lisa broke up with Alex. Alex is angry at Lisa for breaking up with him. He creates a fake snapchat account and posts Lisa’s bikini picture on it and labels her ‘easy’ and calls her ‘ugly’. Soon everyone at school has seen the bikini picture and Lisa is very embarrassed.

Was the action of the perpetrator good or bad?

1 2 3 4 5

Very Bad Very Good

Is this behaviour a case of cyberbullying? Yes or No (why/why not)

Modified from: Talwar Carlos Gomez-Garibello, & Shariff, 2014
Lack of Psychometric Evidence (poor scales)

• In the absence of a comprehensive definition and an associated scale, researchers develop their own study-specific instruments.

• Berne et al. conducted a systematic review of existing cyberbullying instruments.
  • Found 44 instruments assessing cyberbullying or other behaviors (e.g. cyber abuse, cyber aggression, internet victimization, internet harassment), results identified significant concerns in that **no** instruments:
    • assessed the role of witness to cyberbully,
    • utilized a comprehensive definition,
    • assessed the anonymous nature, or
    • assessed the breadth of technological devices used for cyberbullying
Criteria intended to help readers to evaluate the psychometric properties of included instruments.

Reliability refers to how reproducible the results of the measures are under different settings or by different raters. Sound instruments primarily need to be reliable. Instruments have different degrees of reliability in different settings and populations.

External
- Interrater reliability: the degree of agreement between different observers.

Internal
- Internal consistency: variance–covariance matrices of all items on a scale are computed and expressed in reliability coefficients such as Cronbach's alpha or ordinal alpha (for categorical data).

The validity of an instrument is determined by the degree to which the instrument assesses what it is intended to assess.
- Convergent validity examines to which degree the instrument is correlated with or differentiated from other constructs that were assessed at the same measurement point and which are, based on theoretical assumptions, assumed to be related to the construct.
Reliable = Trustworthy = Affidabile

Not Reliable

Reliable
Validity PLUS Reliability

Reliable but not valid

Reliable and valid

Unreliable and hence not valid

Example: Ybarra, Diener-West, and Leaf (2007) used by Barlett et al 2017

Cyber BULLY
How often in the last year have you made rude comments or mean comments to anyone online?

Never to Everyday
1 2 3 4 5 6

Cyber Victim
How often in the last year has someone made rude or mean comments to you online?

Never to Everyday
1 2 3 4 5 6
Example Items: Menesini 2011

Cyber BULLY

How often in the past 2 months have you sent a nasty text message?

Never/Only once or twice/Two or three times a month/About once a week/Several times a week

0 1 2 3 4

How often in the past 2 months have you sent a nasty or rude email?

Never/Only once or twice/Two or three times a month/About once a week/Several times a week

0 1 2 3 4

How often in the past 2 months have you sent a photo/image/picture of an intimate scene?

Never/Only once or twice/Two or three times a month/About once a week/Several times a week

0 1 2 3 4
Cyber VICTIM

How often in the past 2 months have you received a nasty text message?

Never/Only once or twice/Two or three times a month/About once a week/Several times a week

0  1  2  3  4

How often in the past 2 months have you received a nasty or rude email?

Never/Only once or twice/Two or three times a month/About once a week/Several times a week

0  1  2  3  4

How often in the past 2 months have you received a photo/image/picture of an intimate scene?

Never/Only once or twice/Two or three times a month/About once a week/Several times a week

0  1  2  3  4
Reasons WHY Cyberbullying Occurs?

• Most cyberbullying research is conducted without paying attention to theory!

• Theories enable us to:
  • see things from new angles and perspectives,
  • understand more fully the relationship between constructs like cyberbullying, technology, and youth,
  • make informed decisions about how to prevent, intervene, and address cyberbullying.

• Need to examine cyberbullying using THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS to help us determine reasons and identify places and opportunities to intervene.

Possible Explanatory Theories

• Bullying Theories
  • Dual-Perspective Theory of Bullying
  • Peer Ecology Unifying Theory

• Criminology/Aggression Theories
  • General Strain Theory
  • Routine-Activities Victimization Theory
  • The intergenerational transmission of violence theory

• Communication Theories
  • Uses and Gratifications Theory

• Choice Theory (Glasser, 1985)

• Socio-Ecological Theories
  • Ecological Systems Theory
Possible Explanatory Theories

• Social Psychological Theories
  • Social Development Model
  • Social Cognitive Theory/ies
  • Empathy
  • Moral Disengagement

• Social Cognitions
  • Self-efficacy
  • Attitudes
  • Social Norms
  • Behavioural Intentions
  • E.g., Theory of Planned Behaviour
  • E.g., Buffering Hypothesis
Possible Explanatory Theories

• Unifying Theory
  • $I^3$ Theory/Model (Finkel, 2014)

• Cyberbullying Specific Theory
  • Barlett and Gentile Cyberbullying Model (BCGM) (Barlett & Gentile, 2012)
Possible Predictors of Cyberbullying

- Positive attitudes towards cyberbullying
- (Lack of) Empathy towards cyberbullying victims
- Injunctive norms (i.e., the perception of others’ approval/disapproval re cyberbullying)
- Descriptive norms (i.e., the perception that others actually cyberbully)
- Perceived anonymity
- Belief in the irrelevance of muscularity of online bullying (BI-MOB) (i.e., physical size difference between the victim and the bully is irrelevant in cyberbullying)
- Previous cyberbullying victimization
- Perceived online disinhibition (say things online you wouldn’t in person)
- Lack of consequences and ‘not getting caught’
I³ Theory (pronounced as I-cubed theory)

• Meta-theory developed by Finkel and colleagues (Finkel 2014; Slotter & Finkel 2011) provides a comprehensive framework for categorizing risk factors promoting, aggravating, or mitigating aggressive behaviors.

• Three major forces associated with aggressive behavior:
  • **Instigating Force**: The situational events or circumstances that may normatively incite or arouse individuals toward aggression
  • **Impelling Force**: The dispositional or situational factors that increase individuals’ likelihood to act aggressively
  • **Inhibiting Force**: The dispositional or situational factors that increase individuals’ likelihood to override their urge to aggress, which in turn attenuates their aggressive acts
Wong et al. (2015) Test of I³ Theory

• Wong et al. wanted to understand the factors instigating, impelling and inhibiting cyberbullying perpetration.
• Cyberbullying victimization (i.e., retaliation) as an instigating force of cyberbullying perpetration
• Perceived online disinhibition as an impelling force of cyberbullying perpetration
• Subjective norm as an inhibiting force that suppresses cyberbullying perpetration.
• Wanted to explore the moderating role of gender in the proposed research model.

Wong et al. (2015)

University students in Hong Kong

- Cyberbullying Victimization
- Perceived Online Disinhibition
- Subjective Norm

Factors influencing Cyberbullying Perpetration:
- Gender
- H1
- H2
- H3
- H4a
- H4b
- H4c
Wong et al. (2015): Results

• Both cyberbullying victimization and perceived online disinhibition can *increase* an individual’s tendency to cyberbully others.

• Subjective norm as an inhibiting force *decreases* the likelihood of cyberbullying.

• The power of the factors influencing cyberbullying perpetration is different between male and female students.
  • The effects of instigating and inhibiting forces are stronger for female students than for male students.
  • The effect of impelling force is stronger for male students than for female students.
Cyberbullying and the Law

- **Legal definitions of cyberbullying behaviors don’t match research** (e.g., stalking, harassment, child pornography...)

- Criminalizing children is not seen as the best solution
  - In *Italy*, the minimum age for criminal responsibility is 14;
  - The punishment imposed may be disproportionate to the child’s conduct;
  - There is danger in creating a situation of shame;
  - Risks of overlapping with existing criminal offences;
  - Cyberbullies are often seen as victims themselves

- **Restorative justice mechanisms are preferred** (e.g., counselling, community service, involvement in life skills programmes)

- Focus on prevention rather than punishment
In Italy...

- A new draft law defining cyberbullying as ‘any form of pressure, aggression, harassment, blackmail, insult, denigration, defamation, identity theft, alteration, illegitimate taking, manipulation, illegal processing of personal data to the detriment of child, made electronically’ was created...

- Criminal: Cyberbullying may be punished under the offence of instigation to discrimination (which punishes gestures, actions and slogans having the aim to incite violence and discrimination on the grounds of racial, ethnic, religious or national features)

- Civil: Victims may seek compensation for damages for illicit behaviour conducted by perpetrators as well as the redress of moral, biological and existential damages
Schools in *Italy*...

- Teachers and schools are required to ensure a safe environment for children, supervise and educate them. These responsibilities come into play when cyberbullying incidents occur. In particular, teachers can be held responsible for actions carried out by the children under their supervision.
- Guidelines for the prevention of bullying and cyberbullying were issued by the Ministry of Education & Research in 2015.
- Schools have specific responsibilities to prevent and tackle bullying including cyberbullying.
What is coming in *Italy*...

- A draft law foresees the introduction of a ‘red click’ (*bottone rosso*) which would provide the child with an opportunity to promptly report cyberbullying on an ad-hoc page.
- Following this report, the postal police would have to evaluate each situation on a case by case basis and, if necessary, intervene.
Italy gives go-ahead to cyber-bullying law

Cyber bullies and online stalkers could face between one and six years in prison, following the approval of a new anti-bullying law by Italy’s Chamber of Deputies.

Under the proposed law, owners of a website - including blogs and social media accounts - have 48 hours to remove offensive content before legal intervention from Italy’s Garante della privacy, the official institution in charge of protecting personal data.

Site moderators who fail to remove the offending content would face a fine, while those found guilty of cyber stalking or bullying, such as posting offensive content and circulating it extensively on social media, would receive a prison sentence.

The law is meant to tackle cyber-bullying, but critics say it amounts to censorship. Photo: Pexels
Questions?

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