ANALYSING CYBERBULLYING AMONG STUDENTS IN THE REGION OF MURCIA (SPAIN): REASONS, EXCLUSION AND PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

Technologies belong to our daily life. However, sometimes children and adolescents use them improperly, taking advantage of a lack of parental supervision, anonymity and the impunity offered by cyberspace. In this context, cyberbullying (an intentional, aggressive act against and unprotected victims using mobile phones and/or Internet) takes place among students beyond the schoolyard.

In this piece of research we investigate the justifications and perceptions of bullies and victims relating to their involvement in cyberbullying. A sample of 783 students, aged 11 to 18 years old from public and private schools in the Region of Murcia (Spain) participated. A self-report questionnaire assessed the reason and media used in bullying online, targets' reactions after being cybervictimized and perceptions between bullying and cyberbullying. Results show that cyberbullies most often explained their actions by reporting victims provoked them previously while victims report the perpetrators enjoy ("have fun") to bully them. Beside, students perceived that cyberbullying is worse and dangerous than traditional bullying because is unnoticed and anonymous. These results show us the presence of cyberbullying among Murcia's students and the need to carry on studying these episodes in depth.

Keywords: Cyberbullying, cybervictimization, aggressiveness, primary and secondary education.

1 INTRODUCTION

School violence or "*bullying*" is an actual phenomenon presents present in the educative system in our country although it is not a recent problem. The rise in students involved in bullying dynamics has caused higher sensitivity and worry in social, educative and familiar contexts because of media impact [1]. On the other hand, this aspect has not been linked to prevention and educative approach, which sometimes has been focused on severe disciplinary actions or student school placements [2] for bullies and victims.

Our society has evolved due to abysmal use and unconscious inclusion of new technologies in student's daily life. This situation and constant changes have mixed up social, cultural and educative structures creating new requirements and prospects which technologies should settle. Current communications is not the same as communications years ago. Nowadays, we can talk, see and listen to people who is thousands of miles just picking up the phone or turn on the computer. Internet, the vas networks of networks, has develop a timeless space where is possible to talk, share, learn, create and edit information and knowledge.

However, Web 2.0 offers to students the possibility to make malicious use of technologies to assault and harass to peer without fear. As a result, a new phenomenon named *cyberbullying* appears like an interesting and educative field in which we should study in depth to establish proposal to prevent its spread between children and teenagers.

2 AGGRESSIVENESS AND BULLYING

Different forms of bullying are noted for its multicausality which suggests that aggressive behaviours can be a projection of violent previously gained or current values learnt. For that, the school becomes the place social values and discrimination is reproduced [3]. In this context, we wonder where aggressive behaviours arise from and cause children harass, ill-treat and humiliate others in and out of school.

Alonso & Navazo [4] think the human aggressiveness is due to interrelationship between organic and environmental factors. Some of organic factors are: sex [5], age, the spread of situation, anger, bad self-control, impulsiveness, low tolerance for frustration, few social skills, leadership, cognitive slant [6], cultural origin [7] or pshypathological disorders [8]. Environmental factors contain familiar, school and social variables. In familiar context, bullying could be caused for mistreatment experiences, difficult relationship, etc. [6, 9]. Moreno, Estévez, Murgui & Musitu [10] point out that there is a direct relation between quality of familiar relationships and people implication in violent behaviours. School factors could be the maladjustment, low performance or aversion to school. Social variables are media influence and friend group pressure who usually adopt risk behaviours like drink and drugs [11].

The leading studies around bullying were overcome in the 70's when Dan Olweus studied school violence, its prevention and treatment. In the 90's Rosario Ortega and María José Díaz-Aguado started to research bullying in Spain. Bullying is defined as aggression, manipulation, mistreatment and intimidation dynamics done by a person or group to other who is unprotected and weak, along time and without a justified reason [12]. Bullying is different from daily school conflicts which enrich the climate with a correct management of them. The principal bullying features are [13-17]: dominance-submission roles; power difference between bully (strength) and victim (weakness); multicausality; organized and hidden intimidation; previous purpose to damage (unfriendliness); time permanent; unnoticed by adults; 'Silence Law' between people involved; 'violence triangle' (bully-victim-witness); it happens in all schools regardless of their ownership; common behaviour in adolescence and negative short, medium and long term impact.

 "All of this leads to feel violence as a normal behaviour which, silenced by students and unnoticed by adults, diminishes the integrity and personality of people involved in these dynamics and cause serious social, psychological (like suicide attempt) and health disorders" [18]. The school becomes the perfect place to harass the victim in shared places like classroom, schoolyard, corridors, bathrooms and hidings places. The result of bullying in each role (bully, victim, aggressive victim, witness) is extremely destructive for all of them, having strong impact during the life. Garaigordobil & Oñederra [19] characterize those several effects as following:

- Bullies: school failure, antisocial behaviours and negative relationships, lack of empathy and guilt, anger, impulsiveness.

- Victims: low academic performance, school contempt, insecurity, loneliness, unhappiness, introversion, low self-esteem, somatisation, insomnia, depression, suicide attempt.

- Witness: fear, submission, loss of empathy, lack of awareness, bad behaviour internalization and unjustified use of violence.

Taking bullying wickedness into consideration is necessary more researchers and teachers involved in the detection and prevention of these behaviours between children and teenagers. Moreover, it is necessary a collaborative participation of the family and the school to avoid its spread and victimology.

2.1   Bullying in the digital age: Cyberbullying

Despite bullying knowledge progress, number of pupils involved in these episodes has not only increased but uncontrolled use of technologies by children and teenagers has set electronic bullying known as *cyberbullying.* In this sense, harassment has moved beyond school to develop in cyberspace through mobiles and Internet. Mora [20] understands that positive and negative student relationships inside school have moved to the net. According to that, cyberbullying is an extension of bullying and happens at any time in any place.

Responding the first question (*WHAT IS IT?*), the beginning of cyberbullying is located around 2000s in USA with Finkelhor, Mitchell & Wolak studies. Beran & Li [21] in Canada found high cyberbullying prevalence with 69% for cyberwitness, 21% for cybervictimization and 3% for cyberbullying. In UK, Smith, Mahdavi, Carvalho & Tippett [22] found 6.6% frequent cybervictimization.

Ortega, Elipe, Mora, Calmaestra & Vega [23], from Spain pointed out 4.2% for cybervictimization and 5.1% for cyberbullying through mobile phones. Cyberbullying could be defined as "*an aggressive, intentional act carried out by a group or individual, using electronic forms of contact, repeatedly and over time against a victim who cannot easily defend him or herself*" [22].

It shares three features with traditional bullying [24]: presence of aggressiveness, time permanent and power imbalance between bully-victim. Meanwhile, cyberbullying presents other features like [25-28]: more aggressive potentiality; aggressor impunity because of anonymity; greater invisibility; greater insecurity of victim; copycat roles from bullying; more audience and more time permanence. García, Joffre, Martínez & LLanes [29], set the differences between bullying and cyberbullying (Table 1):

Table 1: Differences between bullying and cyberbullying (own preparation)

Bullying	*Ciberbullying*
Face to face	Anonymous
Individual/Group	Individual
Physical, verbal, psychological and social violence	SMS, email, videos, photos, MMS
During school timetable	Any time and any place
Direct aggression	Unlimited
School audience	World audience
Roles: bully, victim, aggressive-victim, witness	Roles: Cyberbully, cybervictims, cyberwitness

According to second question, *HOW DOES CYBERBULLYING COME UP?* Willard [25] distinguishes the action done and technology used. The actions are: flaming, harassment, denigration, impersonation, outing and trickery, exclusion and cyberstalking. The technologies used are: instant messages, email, text message (SMS) and multimedia message (MMS), videos, social networks (SN), webs, blogs and Internet games.

Responding for the last question more related with one or our aims today, there is not know as much why cyberbullying happens. For that, revising some literature we have found few studies which explains the reasons and motives for why students are involved in bullying online. In Aviles & Monjas (2005) [30], bullies justify their aggressive behaviour because they feel "*provoked*" by victims and secondly "*for fun*"*.* However, victims and bystanders report the main reason in cyberbullying is *"to upset"* in first place. In the same context, Horna [31] found that victims feel they are cyberbullied *"to be upset"*. Valadez [32] describes too the motives in bullying online from 5 different perspectives. The main results found by him were:
- The main reason in bullies to hurt others is *"for fun"* and secondly because *"they are provoked"*.
- Victims say it is because bullies want *"to upset"* them, and *"for personal features"*.
- Bystanders report bullies want *"to upset"* victims and they're victimized because are *"weak"*.
- School & family point out it is because the bully is a *"problem child"* (personal disorders) and victims are targets because they are *"shy"* and *"don't how to defend themselves"*.

Finally, we understand that the nature of cyberbullying brings new challenges to educative and social researches that could allow us to know why it happens, who participates, which technologies are used and its prevalence by sex, age or level.

3   AIMS

Due to the lack of studies in our country and region, an urgent need comes up to start a pioneer research in order to know cyberbullying prevalence in last primary education levels (5th and 6th PE), compulsory education (1st-4th CE) and non-compulsory education (1st NCE) in Murcia. We have taken into account the following question: how cyberbullying appears among Murcia students? Considering this question some of the goals we have set are the following:
- To contrast bullies' and victim's justifications for why they cyberbully or are cyberbullied.
- To examine the differences between students' perceptions in bullying and cyberbullying by gender.

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4   METHOD

4.1   Design

This research is based on non-experimental quantitative design, specifically in the descriptive method which purpose is to analyse situations to get generalizations, in this case, about cyberbullying. Within descriptive designs, we have chosen a survey methodology using a questionnaire that we explain later.

4.2   Participants

The participant selection is a random sampling for conglomerates since students were chosen according to school ownership where they studied, avoiding any other discrimination. Total participants were 783 students from eight schools in Murcia: public schools (N=290), public private partnership schools (N=331) and private schools (N=162). Students have been divided up from last primary education levels to first non-compulsory education level[1] (5ᵗʰ PE, N= 117; 6ᵗʰ PE, N=119; 1ˢᵗ CE, N=118; 2ⁿᵈ CE, N=108; 3ʳᵈ CE, N=114; 4ᵗʰ CE, N=100; 1ˢᵗ NCE, N=107). The distribution percentage of participants by sex is 51% (N=400) boys and 49% (N=383) girls.

4.3   Research variables

The research variables can be divided in dependent and independent variables. The dependent variables are: reasons why bullies and victims justify their implication in cyberbullying (no cyberbullying/no cybervictimization, fun, provocation, discrimination, weakness and revenge); media used (no cyberbullying/no cybervictimization, SMS, MMS, videos, email, Messenger, social networks and YouTube); victims' reactions after cyberbullying (no cybervictimization, don't do anything, revenge, tell parents, tell teachers, tell friends); and differentiated perception between bullying and cyberbullying in which students decide if bullying is worse than cyberbullying and *vice versa* and why (bullying, cyberbullying, bullying because is direct and physical, bullying because of audience, cyberbullying because is indirect, cyberbullying because of audience and cyberbullying because of anonymous bully). The independent variables are: sex, age, nationality, level, school ownership; level of achievement and parental control.

4.4   Instrument

We have use a questionnaire called "CYBERBULL" to collect information which has been designed specifically for our research. It is composed by six questions after we revised previous longer questionnaire through Principal Component Analysis. The variables analysed are: reasons to participate in cyberbullying as bullies or victims; media used by bullies and victims; victims' reactions after cyberbullying; differentiated perception between bullying and cyberbullying, level, sex, anger, nationality, school ownership, level of achievement and parental control. We present here the results obtained by contingency among reasons and media depending of cyberbullies and cybervictims sex and victims' reactions after cyberbullying. We have obtained a 0.59 Cronbach's Alpha.

4.5   Procedure

We started to phone headships' schools to tell about aims and implications of our research after bullying and cyberbullying bibliography revision. According to school approvals, we applied the survey at schools depending on their timetables and availability.

Before that, we explained the research to students remaining their anonymity and the importance of their participation. We found some problems to access to public private ownership schools and private schools because they were not interested on it or they had no time. Maybe, one limitation was that we conducted the study during last term. Nowadays, we are writing the reports which we will send to headship's schools to let them know the results.

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[1] Spanish educative system is divided in: kindergarten (0-3 years old), primary education (1ˢᵗ-6ᵗʰ level, 3-12 years old), compulsory education (1ˢᵗ-4ᵗʰ level, 12-16 years old), non compulsory education (1ˢᵗ-2ⁿᵈ level, 17-18 years old).

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5   RESULTS

We present the results according to aims defined before.

Answering to the first aim about reasons to get involved in cyberbullying between bullies and victims, Fig. 1 shows that both sexes are active cyberbullies because of *provocation.* It means they understand the victim provokes them (girls=58.8%; boys=57.2%). Sometimes, it happens because cyberbullies present a perceptive distortion which leads to misunderstand context signals. The second important reason is *weakness'* victim with similar percentage in both sexes (boys=21.4%; girls=20.6%). This confirms the victim features (low social friendliness and feeling of inferiority). On the other hand, the cause under-represented is the *discrimination* which is only justified by girls (8.8%).
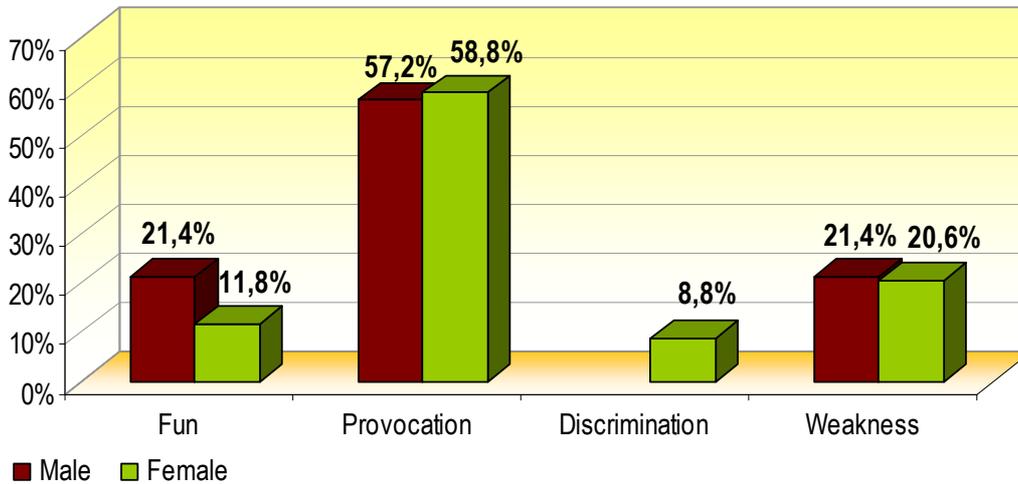

Fig. 1: Reasons in Cyberbullying

In Fig. 2 we can observe reasons in cybervictimization to compare with previous results. Now, a new reason named *revenge* appears in which cybervictims return aggression back cyberbullies becoming a provocative-victim or aggressive-victim (boys=15.2%; girls=8.5%). This suggests the presence of a new role in these kinds of dynamics who use violence to defend himself when he/she feels unprotected in familiar, social and school contexts. Then, we could think what does the school and families do to provide children assertive tools to prevent these situations. In this case, the most important cause is *fun* with similar percentages among sexes (boys=45.7%; girls=44.7%). However, boys point out *discrimination* as last reason to being cyberbullied (8.7%), while *provocation* and *revenge* is for girls victims.
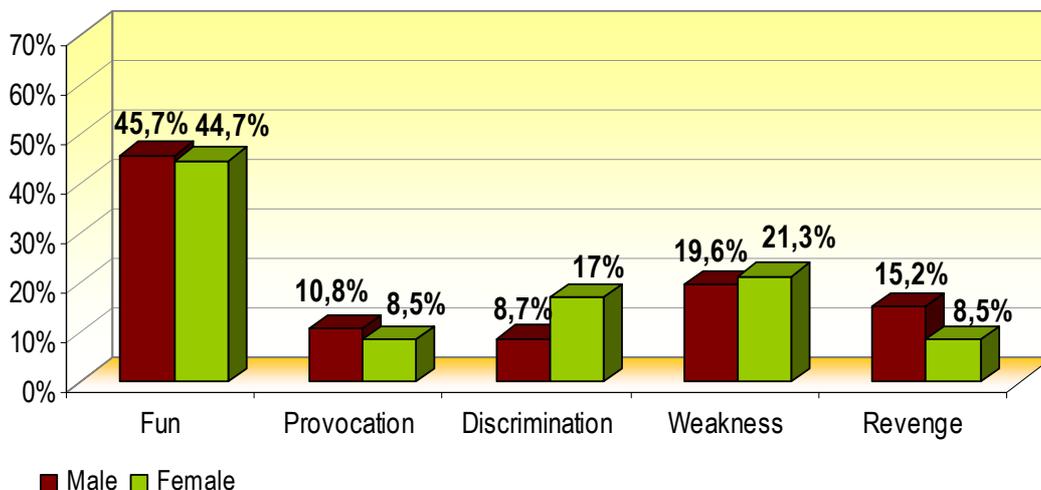

Fig. 2: Reasons of Cybervictimization

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Finally, we focus on pupils' perceptions in bullying and cyberbullying by gender, showing that most of our students think Cyberbullying is worse or more dangerous than traditional bullying (68.6% and 31.4%, respectively), contrary to we hypothesized (Table 2). Going deeply into reasons for that perception (Table 3), as male (62.9%) and female (61.4%) think cyberbullying is worse than bullying because is unnoticed (people sometimes don't realise it is happening) and secondly because of the anonymity (12.4%). On the other hand, traditional bullying is perceived so dangerous because it is physical and direct for males (15.3%) and female (16.6%) and finally because its audience (1.5%).

Table 2: Differences between students' perception in bullying and cyberbullying

	Bullying	Cyberbullying	Total
Male	118 (**31.1%**)	261 (**68.9%**)	379 (**100%**)
Female	115 (**31.7%**)	248 (**68.3%**)	363 (**100%**)
Total	233 (**31.4%**)	509 (**68.6%**)	742 (**100%**)

Table 3: Reasons to distinguish the riskiness between bullying and cyberbullying

	B. visible & physical	B audience	CB unnoticed	CB audience	CB anonymity	Total
Male	42 (**15.3%**)	6 (**2.2%**)	173 (**62.9%**)	25 (**9.1%**)	29 (**10.5%**)	275 (**100%**)
Female	43 (**16.6%**)	2 (**0.8%**)	159 (**61.4%**)	18 (6.9%)	37 (14.3%)	259 (**100%**)
Total	85 (**15.9%**)	8 (**1.5%**)	332 (**62.2%**)	43 (**8.1%**)	66 (**12.4%**)	534 (100%)

6   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We report here 10.1% for active cyberbullies and 12.1% for cybervictims. Considering the prevalence through media used, cyberbullying rates are 14.3% while 11.2% is for cybervictimization. Slonje & Smith's study [33] obtained prevalence differences between cyberbullying and cybervictimization depending on question answered by students.

From the first aim, we conclude that *provocation* is the main reason for which boys and girls are involved in cyberbullying as aggressors. Secondly, we have found *weakness'* victim with similar rates between sexes. However, the cybervictimization is primarily justified by *fun* that cyberbully feels opposite the victim. As pointed Varjas, Talley, Meyers, Parris & Cutts [34], the sense of joy to harass and humiliate others could be caused by boredom's bully.

The second aim related with students' perception about bullying and cyberbullying episodes show that cyberbullying is perceived more dangerous than traditional bullying above all is unnoticed and anonymous while bullying is chosen because its visible and physical nature. In a similar way, Slonje & Smith [33] found that picture/video bullying had a higher impact than school bullying because the large audience size. However, email or text messages were less harmful than bullying.

Our results show the prevalence of cyberbullying among students from last primary education levels to first non-compulsory education level in Murcia. This situation supports the need to carry on researching in cyberbullying. The impact arises from cyberbullying is even more devastating than bullying impact because of spreading in time and audience. This joins in personal, social and psychological debilitation in victims. In conclusion, we agree with García, Joffre, Martínez & LLanes [29] who say *"the cyberbullying practise represents, at homes and schools, a serious recent problem, which should be dealt comprehensively, trying to prevent and detect it through families, headships' schools and students' participation".*

7   ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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