Children and Adolescence's Views of Cyber Bullying

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ABSTRACT: The use of online technology is exploding and is increasingly becoming a favored form of interaction. While most online experiences are neutral or optimistic, the Internet offers a new form of bullying children and young people. The goal of this approach to grounded theory was to discuss technology, virtual relationships and cyber bullying from student perspectives. With 38 students between fifth and eighth grades, seven focus groups were held. Due to the related anonymity, the participants found cyber bullying to be a serious problem and some described online bullying as more extreme than 'conventional' bullying. While the students presented anonymity as central to cyber bullying, the results indicate that most of the cyber bullying took place in their social groups and relationships. Five key themes were exposed in the findings: technology adopted at younger ages and being the dominant communication medium; cyber bullying concepts and views; cyber bullying factors; cyber bullying types; and informing adults. The results show the difficulty of the Internet's assumed anonymity and how this can affect cyber bullying. The research provides greater understanding for children and adolescents of the meanings of online relationships.

KEYWORDS: Electronic Communication Resources, Identity Discovery, Learning Methods, Social Support.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the rapid growth of electronic and computer-based communication and knowledge exchange has dramatically altered the social experiences, learning methods and entertainment choices of individuals [1]. In particular, the increasing access and usage of electronic communication resources such as e-mail, websites, instant messaging, webcams, chat rooms, social networking sites, blogs, and text messages is creating a rapid increase in social networking on the Internet. It has indeed been proposed that these electronic networking technologies are seen by the majority of young people as "critical tools for their social lives." The Internet offers countless opportunities for children and young people to grow, including benefits such as social support, identity discovery, and the development of interpersonal and critical thinking skills, as well as educational benefits created by widespread access to information, academic support, and cross-cultural connections around the world [2]. Although most experiences are considered positive or neutral, more recent attention has centered on identifying cyber hazards and the potential for violence as young people spend more time online than ever before.

While traditional bullying has long been considered a school based issue, electronic communication technologies are bringing the topic of bullying into the realm of the electronic information highway. Similar to conventional bullying, cyber bullying, also known as electronic bullying or online social cruelty, involves "willful and repeated harm inflicted" towards another. The use of electronic communication technologies as the tool through which to intimidate, annoy, shame, or socially exclude is what makes cyber bullying distinct [3]. Cyber bullying can encompass the use of an electronic medium to sexually harass, including distributing unsolicited text or images of a sexual nature or demanding sexual acts either online or offline.

There has been a recent increase in the academic literature devoted to this emerging type of bullying including broad studies to assess normative evidence on the incidence and character of cyber bullying [4].

We add to the body of literature in this paper by discussing the experiences of students in a major urban center in grades 5 through 8 (10-13 years) to include in-depth views of cyber bullying. Qualitative research offers a research design capable of revealing substantial cyber bullying discourses and complexities that may be less evident in large-scale studies. This is particularly important given that previous research has shown that it might be impossible that children will talk about sensitive topics such as abuse and bullying. Furthermore, Livingstone and Haddon argue that "less research is qualitative or multi-method in nature, so we have less understanding of the experiences or perceptions of children themselves or of the ways in which online activities are contextualized within their daily lives."

> ### ➢ *Cyber Bullying:*

Cyber bullying prevalence rates usually vary from approximately 10 to 35% across research, although others have found substantially higher rates. Research offers a description of cyber bullying's powerful psychosocial and academic consequences. Cyber-bullied students reported feelings of depression, anxiety, and fear, and an inability to focus that impacted their grades. It was more likely that young people who were harassed online missed school, had detentions or suspensions, or brought a gun to school. Depression, drug use and crime are substantially greater among young people who report cyber bullying. Evidence suggests that young people who perpetrate cyber bullying are more likely to participate in rule-breaking and violence issues at the same time [5][6].

A significant proportion of children and youth do not report their experiences of cyber bullying to their parents. This alarming finding coincides with the stable findings that a large number of children who are harassed by conventional approaches do not inform adults. The goal of this research was to gain an understanding of the views of cyber bullying by children and young people and of factors that either supported or prevented parents and other adults from informing them.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to elicit perspectives on cyber bullying from grade 5 through 8 students. Through analyzing the data, it became clear that cyber bullying can only really be understood and tackled in the light of the modern cyber space environment. While cyber bullying is an alternative form of bullying, it is not only in the sense of conventional bullying that cyber bullying must be investigated. Rather, the virtual world's meaning must be taken into account to grasp cyber bullying. Communication technology has become an important part of experiences and relationships between children. The participants identified themselves as highly dependent on communication technologies for interaction and reported spending a lot of time on their computers and mobile phones on a daily basis. These results are consistent with literature, which indicates that the use of the Internet by young people is now a favored pastime over watching television [7].

According to the findings, children not only use technology at increasingly rising rates, they also have access to this technology at younger ages, which is consistent with the results of recent studies. For example, according to an American study involving parents of children between the ages of six months and six years, 21 percent of children under the age of two were reported using a computer by their parents, while 14 percent of these very young children were reported using computers on a regular basis. It is important that parents, teachers, professionals, and researchers do not neglect or underestimate the knowledge of computers and the Internet among children. A technical disparity in knowledge across generations is created by

underestimating the level of computer use by children and the essential significance of communication technology for children and youth. Such a gap could contribute to the failure of adults to protect children and young people from the potential hazards of this technology [8].

Analysis of the focus groups suggested that the perceived anonymity of cyber bullying is unique to this form of bullying. Cyber bullying was generally characterized as anonymous by the participants, with associated profound effects. They said that the sense of anonymity encouraged kids and young people to behave in ways that they would not otherwise be able to bully others online and keep their identity secret when bullying others [9]. Anonymity sometimes increased the anxiety of abused students, according to the participants, and acted as a barrier to informing parents or teachers about online victimization, thinking that verifying the incident or naming the aggressor was impossible. The student accounts of the effects of this anonymity illustrate the literature in which online communication anonymity is defined as encouraging people to feel free to behave in the cyber world in violent and inappropriate ways, although they may not be in the "real" world. This perceived anonymity, in fact, has been identified as a major difference between online and conventional bullying [10].

Almost all of the participants claimed that children would not approach their parents about cyber bullying. This finding is in line with the disturbing finding that the issue is underestimated by recorded conventional bullying and with findings that cyber harassment is also not reported to parents or authorities. While some of the reasons for withholding cyber bullying disclosure were given by the participants parallel to those in conventional bullying literature, such as fear of retribution and escalating bullying or that informing adults would not help, some of their reasons for withholding disclosure were specific to the cyber environment. A primary obstacle to informing adults about cyber victimization experiences was concern that their parents would revoke Internet or mobile phone privileges to 'protect them' from online victimization, according to the participants. The participants were adamant that it felt like punishment to lose access to computers or mobile phones, since it reflects a loss of their relation with their social environment.

CONCLUSION

Adults are defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as responsible for protecting children from all types of physical and mental violence, injury or assault. The frequent and extreme presence of children and adolescents in the cyber world and the rapid growth of cyber bullying signals an urgent call to action for the prevention and safety of children and young people. In today's young wired generation, the Internet and other types of technology are increasingly used for entertainment, information, personal assistance and advice, and particularly for social connections and interactions. In order to provide the required guidance and security and to keep children safe, it is important that adults consider, appreciate and embrace the Internet and communication technologies as a viable and real means of interaction for children and young people.

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