

Chapter 10

Cyberbullying: A Form of Peer Violence in the Digital Era

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ABSTRACT

The development of new information technologies has led to new forms of violence between adolescents and young people, frequent users of social networks, chats, and e-messages. Thus, this chapter aims to clarify the concept of cyberbullying and characterize this problem by reflecting on similarities and differences of traditional bullying and its typologies and presenting some prevalence data in different countries, namely during pandemic situation. The authors intend to characterize the participants and roles played in this problem, also reflecting on the consequences for them in the short and long term with an emphasis in the consequences on mental health. The main risk and protection factors of a biopsychosocial nature will be explored considering that this phenomenon is complex and dynamic. Subsequently, preventive strategies will be presented at school and family levels to foster more proactive than reactive responses to the fight against cyberbullying. Finally, some empirically validated intervention strategies stand out.

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing use of technologies has been changing young people's relationships, offering them the opportunity to communicate with both known and unknown people (Sari & Camadan, 2016), which adds a different dimension to peer relationships between adolescents and young people. This factor allows for faster and anonymous communication, which can lead to less positive issues (Sari & Camadan, 2016) and negative behaviours such as cyberbullying (Huang & Chou, 2010). Also, Zhou et al. (2013) refer that with the increasing use of various electronic resources, a new form of bullying has been increasing and social phenomena that were only seen offline, also began to take place online, as is the case with the transfer of traditional bullying to the Internet – cyberbullying.

Cyberbullying is currently a global problem aggravated by the constraints generated by the pandemic COVID-19 pandemic. In this sense, leaders of international organizations (e.g., ONU, WHO, UNICEF - Board Chair, end Violence Against Children African Child Policy Forum), committed to the protection of children, they signed a document in which they share the concern about this type of violence, appealing for action and promising support to protect children from violence and reduce the impact of COVID-19 on children in all countries and communities.

This chapter intend to bring new information toward this phenomenon exploring definitions, prevalence, also during pandemic time, the different roles toward cyberbullying but also the warning signs of the presence of cyberbullying. Finally, the authors suggest future research and some recommendations toward intervention/ prevention strategies in both contexts (school and family).

BACKGROUD

Definition

Cyberbullying can be defined as a bullying behaviour practiced by one or more individuals using digital communication tools, requiring the presence of three main elements: intention, repetition, and power imbalance (Seixas, Fernandes, & Morais, 2016). The use of technology to harass, threaten, harm, humiliate and intimidate or socially exclude someone in a repetitive and intentional way (OPP, 2020). In turn, Del Rey et al. (2015) defines cyberbullying as an intentional, repeated, and harmful aggression perpetrated through electronic devices, with an imbalance of power between the aggressor and the victim persisting. Regarding the definition of cyberbullying, recent qualitative research (Jacobs, Goossens, Dehue, Völlink, & Lechner, 2015) using focus group realized with low-educated Dutch adolescents between 12 and 15 cyberbullying victims stressed the distinct perspective on perceiving certain behaviors as cyberbullying. For example, victims agreed as cyberbullying talking negatively about family as cyberbullying but not agreed about calling name, received mail bombs as cyberbullying.

At present, the debate about the differences and similarities between bullying and cyberbullying persists (Garaigordobil, 2018). Cyberbullying retains some of the characteristics of traditional bullying and can be considered a new form of bullying, but with unique features granted by technology. Cyberbullying is like bullying in that it represents premeditated and intentional stalking or violent behaviour; there is an asymmetrical relationship of control and power between the aggressor and the victim, and it occurs in a repetitive or continuous way (Garaigordobil, 2018). However, it is a more complex phenomenon and with more serious consequences for being practiced online or through any technological devices.

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