The Internet as a means of bullying adolescents

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Abstract

The aim of the report is to introduce cyberbullying as socio-pathological phenomena realized in a virtual environment. It is focused on mapping cyberbullying with adolescents and on finding out differences in the extent of their social support. The results show a higher percentage of bullying being done on the internet mainly by the means of exclusion. Results also exhibit significant differences in the extent of social support by parents. In conclusion, there are recommendations proposed by the authors concerning the need for involvement of social workers in the higher education environment.

Key words: Cyberbullying, Socio-pathology, Social support, Students of higher education, Social workers.

Introduction

Dynamic development in the field of information-communication technologies brought the creation of the internet, social networks and other technologies, which make life in society easier and faster. These technologies also brought a chance for an anonymous appearance in a virtual environment and chance to contact basically anyone anywhere. The negative aspects of information-communication technologies are abused easily for bullying through the internet. Cyberbullying is regarded as negative socio-pathological phenomena, which expands through the absence of norms of behaviour in the online environment. Last but not least this phenomenon poses a burden, which is needed to be handled especially by the means of non-formal resources of social support.

Cyberbullying

There is no clear definition of cyberbullying and that is why we can see terms as electronic bullying, digital or online bullying, cybernetic aggression etc. being used. According to Olweus (1992, in: Hollá, 2016), the repeating of attack and deliberate aggression from one individual to another is typical for this phenomenon, while this act is perceived as meddlesome. The goal of behaviour like this,

is according to Belsey (2010, in: Tokunaga 2010), to harm the victim. A similar definition is stated by Smith (2008, in: Völlink, Dehue, Guckin 2016), according to whom cyberbullying is done either by an individual or by a group of participants but they use electronic media for their deliberate aggressive actions. These media include PCs, mobile phones, tablets and others, but also channels of electronic communication such as instant messages, text messages, emails etc. can be included. (Trolley 2009) The aforementioned media are, according to Vašutová (2010), used with the intention of intimidating, humiliating or persecuting the victim. Electronic bullying and other forms of aggressive behaviour show certain characteristics. Černá (2013) here classifies repetition of cyber-attack, power imbalance created by the inability to defend against e-aggressor, a deliberate act done by means of electronic media and perception of this act as annoying and unpleasant. Vašutová (2010) adds to characteristics with the opportunity of spreading into the whole world and anonymity of participants. Nocentini (2010) classified five criteria, on basis of which cyberbullying can be defined. These are repetition and deliberateness of the act, disturbance of balance, anonymity, and public versus private.

Digital bullying done through means of electronic media shows certain forms and uses various resources. To these forms of aggressive behaviour, Rogers (2011) classifies provoking (flaming), which is done in chat rooms, cyberharassment, denigration, but Willard (2007) uses term defamation; there is impersonation, outing, and trickery, but also exclusion, cyberstalking and happy slapping, which consists of posting video of the physical attack of the victim. To these forms of cyberbullying Vašutová (2010) classifies also cybergrooming, cyber threats, and spam messages. Sexting is also a form of cyberbullying and it comprises of publishing text messages but also video or photographs which have sexual content and which can be sent by private, public or semi-public communication (Hollá 2016). According to Černá (2013), forms of this new age aggression can be direct attacks of e-aggressor but also mediated, where e-aggressor for this so-called 'dirty work' uses someone else. According to Rogers (2011), the means used by e-aggressors are telephone communication, text messages, video and photographs, social networks and email. According to Willard (2007), the means of electronic bullying also include dating sites, websites with online games and other websites.
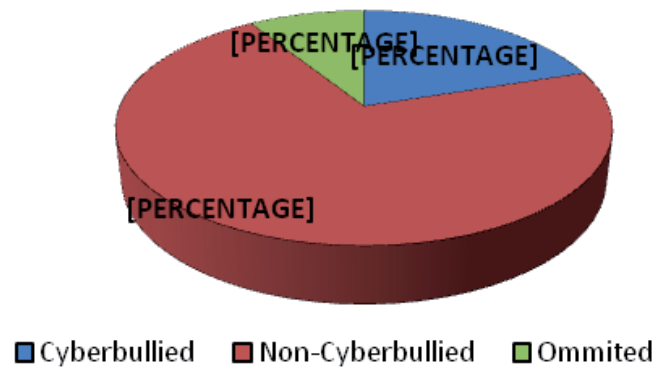
Social Support

Since adolescence is a vulnerable period when adolescents build their character and find their place in society or solve problems in social relationships (Končeková 2010), anticipated and perceived social support of cyberbullied from various sources is important. Most frequently from parents, peers or friends etc., from their natural environment. According to Krause (1990, in: Šolcová, & Kebza, 1997), the social support is the realization of an individual that others are willing to help and that creates a feeling of social security and also supports the individual to deal

with the situation on its own. In terms of social support, the macro level, which consists of form support on the level of the whole society, mezzo-level, help done by a group of individuals for a member of that group and micro level, which is help for an individual from their closest member or members (Křivohlavý, 2009). In this context House and Kahn (1985, in: Mareš, 2001) classify three dimensions relating to social support. It is the integration of an individual into the society through creating appropriate interactions, the existence of social networks and operational social support with instrumental, emotional, informational or evaluation aspects.

Social support is offered from various sources and thanks to them it allows adolescents easier coping with the stress situation such as cyberbullying. Levická (2005) classifies to sources of social support natural and community resources. The community resources are, according to the author, government but also non--governmental bodies that can help the individual and helping professionals can be included here. The natural resources of an individual are parents, siblings, partner and children, therefore, closest relatives. Parents are a most natural source of social support because they help coping with problems of an individual, pitfalls of life etc., through mobilizing their inner resources and consulting institutions or experts who are able to help (Mareš, 2001). Helsen, et al. (2000) based on their own research warn about the fact the stronger bond between adolescent and parents, the more capable they are of creating social networks with their peers. We can also consider peers with which adolescents meet and spend free time with as a source of social support. Wills and Vaugham (1989, in: Gecková, Pudelský 2000) warn in this regard that adolescents can be more likely to succumb to pressure from peers which they consider important with relation to social support. This social support from the peers does not have to be only provided in stress situations, but for adolescents is an important part of life (Krejčová, 2011). Besides the family environment, the adolescents are often in a school environment where the source of social support for an individual is their teacher, which should provide social support to the student, it is important that the specific relationship is created between them (Mareš, 2003).

Research

In 2014 there was an author's research conducted on the issue of cyberbullying, which focused on mapping cyberbullying and finding out differences in the extent of social support. 200 students (68 male) from University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik in Košice and Technical University in Košice took part in it. Because the research sample consisted of students of universities, the selection was done by deliberate non-random manner. On the basis of subjective designation of adolescents as cyberbullied the research sample was divided into cyberbullied and non-cyberbullied respondents. This division can be seen in Graph 1 (Plavnická, Halachová 2017).

Graph 1. Division of research sample on the basis of cyberbullying

In author's research, the Questionnaire of social support for kids and adolescents CASS was used, it was created by Malecki, Demaray, and Elliot (2000, in Mareš, & Ježek 2005) and translated and edited by Komárek, Ondřejová and Mareš (2002, in Mareš, & Ježek 2005). It studies the extent of social support specifically from parents, teachers, classmates, friends and other people in school but for the needs of the research, questions concerning cyberbullying and demographics were added. Questions focused on the frequency of cyberbullying and also on finding out forms and resources by which the respondents were cyberbullied. Reliability of the original questionnaire of authors CASS was 0.81 and in the questionnaire edited by Mareš, Komárek and Ondřejvá 0.95. In the author's questionnaire, the reliability was 0.96. The questionnaire was distrusted electronically through website docs.google.com. The accumulated data were evaluated in IBA Statistics 20 program using inductive and descriptive statistics.

Selected results of the research

With respondents which subjectively listed themselves as a victim of cyberbullying the exact forms, resources, and frequency of cyber-attacks were surveyed. The results are shown in Table 1.

Data from Table 1 show as the most common form of cyberbullying to be Exclusion, as 32.5% of respondents listed that they encounter this form regularly. It can be assumed that this result was influenced by membership of respondents in various social networks, to which e-aggressor has an easy access and which are easily misused. Also, respondents (5%) encounter spam messages daily, which bothers them. As the second most common form of cyberbullying we can denote answers in the column "It has happened to me few times" and these are cyber-harrassment and "I got messages with vulgar content" which were marked by 37.5% of respondents and flaming (32.5%). For the least common form of cyberbullying, as seen in the table, we can consider happy slapping (5%). Noting that the happy slapping is dangerous to do considering the fact that there are various witnesses which can identify the aggressor, it can be assumed this influenced the

result. Results can be compared with the research done by Hinduja and Patchin (2010), who on a sample of 2000 American adolescents were examining suicidal thoughts connected to cyberbullying. The research found out that most common form of cyberbullying was revealing of information that humiliated respondents. This was stated by 23.1% of respondents, and according to the author's research the most common form of cyberbullying was removing respondents from friends on Facebook, online games etc. Reasons for these differences can be attributed to national differences of respondents.

Table 1. *Description of forms and frequency of cyberbullying*

	No, did not happen yet		It has happened to me		It has happened to me few times		It happens to me regularly	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Denigration	18	45	9	22.5	13	32.5	0	0
Cyberharrassment	5	12.5	20	50	15	37.5	0	0
Spam messages	9	22.5	25	62.5	4	10	2	5
Cybergrooming	15	37.5	22	55	3	7.5	0	0
Cyberthreats	19	47.5	19	47.5	2	5	0	0
Exclusion	11	27.5	13	32.5	3	7.5	13	32.5
Cyberstalking	23	57.5	15	37.5	2	5	0	0
Happy slapping	37	92.5	2	5	1	2.5	0	0
Flaming	14	35	10	25	15	37.5	1	2.5
Sexual harrassment	28	70	10	25	2	5	0	0

The following findings were found examining resources of cyberbullying. As shown in Table 2, e-mails are the most common resource of cyberbullying, which cyberbullied encounter daily (22.5%). Taking into account that e-mail is a form of electronic communication used daily for work or private purposes, it can be assumed this influenced the result. The respondents were also cyberbullied with video (15%) and photographs (12.5%). Social networks are capable of sharing photographs and video, which can be of offensive or defamatory content and this is what perhaps influenced the result because social networks are used by respondents daily. This is supported by the fact that often respondents were bullied through social networks (55%), less frequently through chats and message boards (42.5%). Sometimes the respondents encountered cyberbullying through SMS and MMS (30%) and also through telephone calls (27.5%). Less than twice a month were respondents cyberbullied through blogs (2.5%). Noting that blogs are less used by adolescents compared to other resources, it can be said that this fact was the reason why they were the least used form of cyberbullying.

Table 2. *Description of resources and frequency of cyberbullying*

	Almost every day		Often (at least twice a week)		Sometimes (at least twice a month)		A little (Less than twice a month)		Not at all	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Telephone calls	2	5	0	0	11	27.5	11	27.5	16	40
SMS, MMS	1	2.5	1	2.5	12	30	16	40	10	25
Video	6	15	1	2.5	4	10	3	7.5	26	65
Photographs	5	12.5	15	37.5	7	17.5	9	22.5	4	10
E-mail	9	22.5	14	35	6	15	1	2.5	10	25
Social networks	2	5	22	55	11	27.5	2	5	3	7.5
Chat, message boards	1	2.5	17	42.5	8	20	2	5	12	30
Blogs	0	0	11	27.5	9	22.5	1	2.5	19	47.5
Other	2	5	1	2.5	5	12.5	10	25	21	52.5

Author's research was also focused on resources which e-aggressors use for purpose of cyberbullying. Table 3 shows that e-aggressors cyberbullied occasionally since daily they did not cyberbully by any resource and in the entry often the same number of respondents (7.7%) stated they cyberbullied through chat and message boards and other means. Chatting done on social networks is often used by adolescents for communication with friends of classmates and this fact was perhaps important for e-aggressor when choosing the resource for cyberbullying. Sometimes 46.2% of respondents cyberbullied through social networks and e-mail (23.1%). Least used resource by e-aggressors for cyberbullying were blogs (15.4%) and SMS and MMS messages (23.1%). A similar result was shown when examining resources of cyberbullying through the point of view of the victim. It can be assumed that the result was influenced by the low use of blogs.

Author's research aimed also at finding out differences of social support between cyberbullied and non-cyberbullied respondents from various sources. As the most important result, it can be considered that there are significant differences in the extent of social support from parents between cyberbullied and non-cyberbullied respondents. Results are shown in Table 4, which points out that non-cyberbullied adolescents have higher social support from parents than cyberbullied ones. It can be assumed that social support from parents with the cyberbullied respondents was lowered as a result of the fear of parent's reaction and radical solution of the problem. It is also possible that the social support of parents could be lowered thanks to the fact that adolescents did not get the expected extent of social support.

Table 3. *Description of resources and frequency of cyberbullying from the point of view of e-aggressor*

	Almost every day		Often (at least twice a week)		Sometimes (at least twice a month)		A little (Less than twice a month)		Not at all	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Telephone calls	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	5	38.5	6	46.2
SMS, MMS	0	0	0	0	2	15.4	3	23.1	7	53.8
Video	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	0	0	11	84.6
Photographs	0	0	0	0	1	7.7	4	30.8	7	53.8
E-mail	0	0	0	0	3	23.1	4	30.8	5	38.5
Social networks	0	0	0	0	6	46.2	5	38.5	1	7.7
Chat, message boards	0	0	1	7.7	6	46.2	6	46.2	0	0
Blogs	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	15.4	10	76.9
Other	0	0	1	7.7	1	7.7	2	15.4	8	61.5

Table 4. *T-Test for two independent choices – extent of social support from parents*

	n	X	S	t	p(α)	CI(95%)	
Cyberbullied	40	3.912	1.343				
Non-cyberbullied	160	4.426	1.049	-1.999	0.047*	-1.021	-0.006

Despite not proving significant differences in the extent of social support from parents, it can be said that the parents are for adolescents an important source of social support thanks to results shown in graph 2. When finding out who would respondents turn to in the event of any difficulties, most adolescents (27.5%) stated their parents. It is important to important to consider the fact that relationships with parents have particular importance during adolescence for adolescents; the social support from parents can be seen in this regard as protective. Important is also finding that 20% of respondents would turn to an expert in case of any difficulties, including cyberbullying. This underlines the importance of including helping professional into the higher education environment capable of helping adolescents in the case of any difficulties.
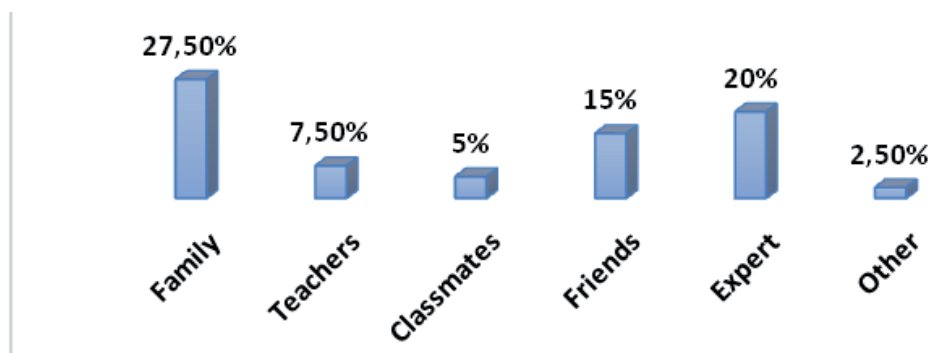
Graph 2. Division of cyberbullied respondents based on preferred help

With this issue, there is the importance of increasing protective factors as a prevention of cyberbullying, also increasing knowledge with adolescents about opportunities of solving it, implementation of prevention programs in every school and involving family and peers as sources of social support for easier coping with cyberbullying. It is important to focus on the distance intervention and operation of school social worker as an expert, which would serve as an available social advisor, the source of social support and which would have the competence of prevention and also intervention.

Conclusion

The introduced report presents research carried out by authors, which was carried out on finding the extent of social support for cyberbullied and non- -cyberbullied adolescents. The first part of the report characterized cyberbullying, also social support, its levels and sources of it. Second part introduced research done by authors focused on mapping cyberbullying and finding out the extent of social support between cyberbullied and non-cyberbullied adolescents. Results show that most frequent resource of cyberbullying is exclusion and also signifi- cant differences in the extent of social supports from parents were shown, which means that parents provide the different extent of social support to both groups of respondents.

Furthermore, there are proposed solutions for practice in three areas, prevention, and intervention. Firstly, an involvement of social worker in the environment of higher education as an expert competent to help adolescents with solving socio- -pathological phenomena, not just with cyberbullying is proposed. In the area of prevention, it is necessary to increase protective factors in this issue, raising the awareness through various programs and mobilization of parents and peers as an important source of social support. In the area of intervention distance guidance for victims and aggressors of cyberbullying is proposed, which is the possibility of anonymous, quickly accessible secure help. Guidance can be offered to the subjects of cyberbullying within the intervention, which thanks to the support and subse- quent application of their personal growth allows the most efficient embracing of the situation. The result of this process is dealing with cyberbullying and in a case of it happening again is the ability to cope with it on their own. Based on methods of social work, it is important to include parents, classmates, peers and partners in the methods of intervention of electronic bullying but also the cooperation of school social worker with experts from the field of psychology, law, police, school etc.

Because anyone can be cyberbullied, it is difficult to defend against it, espe- cially if the individuals do not have information about it. The importance of social support with cyberbullying is in the first place making it easier to cope with or cope with this unfavourable situation, also by providing moral support from sur- roundings, which for example means strengthening the sense of security, sharing problems with someone else etc. or in specific help. Providing of social support allows victims of cyberbullying keeps their own identity and regain their mental

balance. For social worker it is important to know what extent of social support is given to cyberbullied adolescents, to choose an effective strategy for solution, lowering effect of the negative stressor and strengthening self-respect of the victim of cyberbullying and help this way for better coping of the situation.

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