Cyber Bullying Victimization Among University Students: An Empirical Exploration in Perspective of Gender

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Abstract

The current research was undertaken to explore gender differences regarding cyber bullying victimization among university students. To meet the research objective Cyber Bullying Victimization Questionnaire (CBVQ) previously developed by Campfield (2008) consisting of three response categories, intended to measure prevalence, cyber bullying victimization, and bothersomeness about cyber bullying is adapted. The instruments were administered to the sample of 386 students of the age ranging 18-30 years from public and private sector universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The sample was recruited through a convenient sampling technique. A reliability coefficient for CBVQ, was found as .95. Findings of *the chi*-square test in current research reveal that male university students tend to engage more in cyber bullying victimization as compared to female university students. Subsequently reflecting the alarming prevalence rate of cyber bullying victimization i.e., 88.6 % among university students regardless of gender. Last but not least, the study found that female university students scored high on bothersomeness about cyber bullying victimization as compared to male university students.

Keywords

Cyber Bullying Victimization, Cyber Bullying experiences, Cyber Bullying Prevalence, University Students, Gender perspective

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Introduction

Bullying remains a topic of interest for researchers since a long time. There is a bundle of research available on experiences of bullying among school-age children or adolescents. Considerable research enlightens that many students became victims of cyber bullying (Li, 2006; Willard, 2004). It was also stated that bullying through electronic media reflects a significant problem of high magnitude (Kowalski & Limber, 2007) and it was declared as a problem in societies (Li, 2008).

It was found that cyber bullying is an emerging issue in Asia as it is elsewhere (Merritt, 2013). In the context of Pakistan, cyber bullying research is in its infancy and only media reporting reveals the incidences (Imran, 2014). Cyber bullying is deeply rooted in traditional bullying because this type of bullying people's behaviour is intended to harm others through social media or electronic channels. After all, both types of bullying repeat the similar pattern and procedure (Li, 2005).

A survey was conducted with eleven and twelve years old students in Australia result of which have shown that almost 10% had sent hurtful messages on the internet with the figure being as high as 12.5% among girls (Cross, Monks, Campbell, Spears & Slee, 2011). In Asia, a study conducted by Zhu (2008) reported that both male and female respondents experience cyber bullying (49.1%) and cyber victimization (44.1%).

As far as the prevalence of the issue in Pakistan is concerned, it was revealed by One News Pakistan in 2012 that cyber bullying occurred through different media, and it mentioned Facebook specifically. It also pointed to text or video messaging in 14 cases. Besides this Imran (2014) reported different reasons for being engaged in experiences of cyber bullying explained by female students during interviews. Munawar, Inam-ul-haq, Ali, and Maqsood (2014) found that girls experience cyber bullying more than boys by using the internet. Whereas, boys are more involved in cyber bullying by posting humiliating posts online. Boys do cyber bullying with known persons which are mostly boys.

Traditional bullying provides a ground for cyber bullying so it is suitable to define bullying before defining cyber bullying. Olweus (1978) used the term bullying for the first time. 'Bullying' is being defined by

many scholars as an intentional and hostile act or behaviour against a victim that is carried out by an individual or a group again and again, at different times (Olweus, 1994; Olweus, Limber & Mihalic, 1999; Whitney & Smith, 1993).

Bullying is an abuse that is due to the imbalance of power (Rigby, 2002; Smith & Sharp, 1994). According to Besag (1989) the behaviour in which physical and verbal repeated attacks are made by a party who is in power on the party who is not in power (unable to resist the attacks) to inflict distress for the sake of gratification and gains is called bullying. Coloroso (2003) found the behaviour which is intended to terrorize and to harm others through conscious and deliberate effort in a hostile way to ensure others for further aggression is bullying. All these definitions have considerable overlapping elements; power imbalance, repetitiveness and the element of intentional harm.

It is just like a new bottle but old wine (Li, 2005). Cyber bullying is defined as the repeated and deliberate harm inflicted by the use of computers, mobile phones and such other electronic appliances (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009). In the light of above mentioned definitions of bullying Shariff and Gouin (2005) reported bullying as surreptitious, conveyed through the electronic mediums such as cell-phones, web-logs and web.

Cyber bullying can be defined as sending hateful emails, saying hurtful things in an instant message to someone or spreading nasty rumours about someone on the internet, ignoring someone in a chat room or while playing a game online, posting hurtful or embarrassing things on the website, tease or make fun of, make threats to physically hurt, take digital photos of someone without permission (Campfield, 2008). Similarly, these definitions reflect three peculiar criteria: (1) the intention to harm others; (2) frequency, and (3) the power difference between bullies and victims, (Olweus, 2003).

There is an argument that females were over-represented among cyber bullies, victims, and bully/victims (Campfield, 2008; Higgins & Marcum, 2012; Magsi, Agha & Magsi, 2017; Musharraf & Anis-ul-Haque, 2018; Saeed, Rizvi, Saleem, & Li, 2019). i.e., more girls than

boys engaged in cyber bullying practices (posting gossip online to hurt other than males).

Whereas, the contrary argument explained that boys engaged more in cyber bullying as compared to females (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Huang & Chou, 2010; Naveed, Waqas, Shah, Ahmad, Wasim, Rasheed, & Afzaal, 2020; Ojedokun & Idemudia, 2013; Smith, Thompson & Bhatti, 2012).

Students who found some form of cyber bullying, support and justify their behaviour with the reasons that person upset them; since their friends had bullied others online, so it was acceptable behaviour; they took it as 'fun' and did not like the victim; they bullied back because they were bullied first; and lastly, they were forced by friends or other students to cyber bully (Cassidy, Brown, & Jackson, 2012).

However there are studies explaining that no gender differences concerning cyber bullying experiences i.e., both genders equally experience cyber bullying incidences and tend to become victims equally (Li, 2005; Tokunaga, 2010). Many scholars perceive it as an existing problem in societies (Li, 2008; Ryan, Kariuki & Yilmaz, 2011; Rafi, 2019).

There are certain theories intended to explain the phenomenon. Sociocultural theory illustrates that people from different social groups (gender, ethnicity, race, social class) tend to experience bullying differently. The basis of these differences is historical and cultural. Throughout history, men have been considered the dominant gender. They exhibit their dominance by exerting power over others. Research has revealed that males are more likely to bully and have the propensity to bully girls (Rigby, 2002).

Another often-cited viewpoint to explain human behaviour is social learning by Bandura (1986). He explained that individuals learn by observing others. The importance of observing and modelling, attitudes, behaviours, and emotional reactions of others through the cognitive process is important. The theory emphasizes factors including observing others, the environment, and mass media, family-of-origin that improve learning (Bandura, 1977).

Last but not least explanation is provided by using the dominance theory. According to the dominance theory, a need for dominance and control is highly related to bullying behaviours. Olweus (1994) described the typical bully as having an "aggression reaction pattern combined, in the case of boys, with physical strength". However, he pointed out that dominance does not always involve physical strength; dominance or leadership status may also be established through verbal abuse, threats, and other intimidating behaviours that are motivated by the individual's need for power, control, and social status.

Therefore, for some individuals, the electronic medium may simply be another venue for dominating others. Bullies manage their dominance over victims by exerting power because they have power and they misuse their power. Dominants (bullies) recognize the legal right of dominants, whereas the subordinates (victims) receive little social recognition and are even stigmatized (Pratto & Stewart, 2011).

Bullying through electronic media has become a great alarm for students, teachers, parents, media, and the government. Recently scholars are paying attention to this issue around the globe (Antoniadou & Kokkinos, 2015). To address this alarm, on April 13, 2016 National Assembly of Pakistan approved a bill regarding the Prevention of Electronic Crimes in Pakistan to gauge harmful phenomena. However, there is a scarcity of empirical evidence to investigate this issue in Pakistan, specific institutions of higher education. But when we talk about the empirical evidence regarding the issue under consideration we came to know that in the Pakistani context, cyber bullying research is in its infancy. Only media reporting reveals the incidences (Imran, 2014) and only a small body of literature shows the negative consequences (like mental health and well-being) of cyber bullying victimization or cyber aggression (Musharraf & Anis-ul-Haque, 2018).

In the light of the aforementioned evidence, it is clear that the literature regarding cyber bullying, especially regarding gender differences, is inconsistent. Few pieces of the research reported that there are gender differences i.e., males tend to engage in cyber bullying more than girls, and few shreds of evidences contracted the evidence stated earlier, i.e., females tend to become cyber bullies more as compared to

males. Whereas, some scholars also view that there is no gender difference at all. Due to these inconsistencies and the availability of only a handful of data regarding cyber bullying victimization we conducted further research to explore the prevalence of cyber bullying victimization concerning gender differences among university students; because much research has been done on traditional forms of bullying among school-aged children at the school level. Most of the studies have been done with middle school or adolescents (Smith & Steffgen, 2013) reflecting the least number of studies with university students.

Objective

The study was carried out to achieve the following objective:

To study the differences across gender concerning cyber bullying victimization among university students.

Conceptual and Operational Definition of Study Variable

Cyber Bullying Victimization

Sending hateful emails, saying hurtful things through an instant message to someone or spreading nasty rumours on the internet about someone, ignoring someone in a chat room or while playing a game online, posting hurtful or embarrassing things on a website, or teasing or making fun of someone, making threats to physically hurt someone over the internet or cell phone and taking digital photos of someone without permission, is known as cyber bullying (Campfield, 2008). High scores on Cyber Bullying Victimization Questionnaire used in the present study reflect high prevalence, experiences, and bothersomeness of cyber bullying among university students.

Sample

To examine the present study objective, a sample of 386 university students (male, n=200; female, n=186) with an age range of 18-30 years (M= 22.23, SD=2.46) of public and private sector universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi were approached by using a convenient sampling technique. Only those participants who were taken to participate in the study who volunteered to participate.

Data was collected only from those who were users of electronic media like cellular users, Facebook, Yahoo mail, Orkut, Skype, etc.

Research Design

Cross sectional survey research design has been followed in current research.

Instrument

Cyber bullying victimization questionnaire developed by Campfield in 2008, is adapted in the present study. The survey is unifactorial, 48 items with three response categories, and Alpha reliability reported as .94. First response category measured the prevalence of cyber bullying with response options *Yes* (1) *No* (0). The second response category measures frequency or experiences of CB with response options ranging from *1-2 times* (1), *once a week* (2), *a few times a month* (3), *almost every day* (4), and *daily* (5). The third response category measured how the behaviour in question is bothersome for respondents, with response options *none* (0), *some* (1), *or very much* (2). A High score represents more prevalence; experiences and bothersomeness of Cyber Bullying Victimization.

Procedure

After finalizing the questionnaire booklet (informed consent, demographic sheet, survey) participants of the study were approached by the researcher from the public and private sector universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi cities. Permission was taken by the relevant authority from where the data was collected. Only volunteers were included in the sample by taking their signatures on Informed consent forms. Volunteer university students were briefed about the nature and purpose of the study. They were given instructions about the survey. It was made clear that all the information provided by the participants will be kept confidential and will be utilized for research purposes only and respondents were requested to give their honest responses. Out of 430 questionnaires, only 386 questionnaires were retained, and 44

questionnaires were discarded because these were not properly filled by respondents (half-filled, some missing data, zig-zag patterns). After taking the data, thanks were paid to them for their cooperation and support.

Results

To meet the study objective, frequencies were calculated, *and t*-test and chi-square tests were also conducted to find differences in groups.

Table 1) Frequencies and percentages showing prevalence of cyber bullying across gender (N=386).

	Yes		No	
	f	%	*f*	%
Male	185	92.5%	15	7.5%
Female	157	84.4%	29	15.6%
Total	342	88.6%	44	11.4%

Table 1 reflected the prevalence rate of cyber bullying through frequencies and percentages across gender. Results revealed that the prevalence of cyber bullying is higher among male university students (*f*=185, 92.5%) than female university students (*f*=157, 84.4%).

Table 2) Frequencies and percentages showing experiences of cyber bullying across gender (N=386).

	1-2 times		Once a week		Few times a month		Almost everyday		Daily	
	f	%	*f*	%	*f*	%	*f*	%age	*f*	%age
Male	163	81.5%	27	13.5%	9	4.5%	1	.5%	0	0%
Female	169	90.9%	13	7.0%	2	1.1%	2	1.1%	0	0%
Total	332	86.0%	40	10.4%	11	2.8%	3	.8%	0	0%

Table 2 revealed experiences of cyber bullying through frequencies and percentages across gender. Five-point ratings measured cyber bullying experiences. It was clear that males experience cyber bullying once a week and a few times a month; whereas, females experience cyber bullying 1-2 times.

Table 3) Frequencies and percentages showing bothersomeness of cyber bullying across gender (N=386).

	None		Some		Very much	
	f	%	*f*	%age	*f*	%
Male	7	3.5%	44	22.0%	149	74.5%
Female	6	3.2%	18	9.7%	162	87.1%
Total	13	3.4%	62	16.1%	311	80.6%

Table 3 reflected the bothersomeness of cyber bullying through frequencies and percentages across gender. Results revealed that bothersomeness of cyber bullying is higher among female university students (*f*=162, 87.1%) than male university students (*f*=149, 74.5%).

Table 4) Gender differences in Cyber bullying (N= 386).

Cyber bullying status	Male	Female
Cyber Bullies- Cyber Victim	54.1% (185)	45.9% (157)
Non Cyber Bullies-Cyber Victim	34.1% (15)	65.9% (29)
		χ^2 (1) = 6.24*

Note: ***p* < .01**,** ***p* < .05, *df*= 1, Percentages sum to 100% across rows; absolute frequencies are provided in parentheses.

A Pearson's chi-square analysis was performed and a significant likelihood for CBVs and non-CBVs based on gender exists, that is; χ^2 (1, *N* = 386) = 6.24, *P* < .001. Chi-square (χ^2) values reflected a significant difference between gender as CBVs and non-CBVs among university

students. It was found that between the genders males are more likely to become CBVs (92.5%) as compared to female university students. On the other side females are high on non-cyber bullying victimization status as compared to male university students.

Table 5) Mean, SD, and t-values for Cyber bullying Experiences, Perception of Cyber bullying, and Emotional Intelligence among male and female university students (N=386).

	Male (n=200)		Female (n=186)				95% CI		
Variables	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*p*	*LL*	*UL*	*Cohen's d*
CBE	30.23	31.19	18.65	25.22	3.97	.00	5.85	17.31	0.40
CBP	14.00	11.39	8.71	8.81	5.05	.00	3.22	7.33	0.51
CBB	114.33	27.37	123.11	26.87	-3.11	.00	-14.30	-3.23	-0.32

*Note: *p < .05, ** p < 0.01, ***p<.000;* CBE=Cyber Bullying Experiences, CBP= Cyber Bullying Prevalence, CBB= Bothersomeness of Cyber Bullying.

Table 5 shows experiences, prevalence and bothersomeness of cyber bullying among university students based on gender. Significant mean differences are found in experiences, prevalence, bothersomeness of cyber bullying and perception about reasons-remedies of cyber bullying for male university students (n =200) and female university students (n = 186). Cohens'd (0.40, 0.51, -0.32 and -0.42) indicate the strength of the relationship for university students either they are male or female with cyber bullying experiences, cyber bullying prevalence, cyber bullying bothersomeness.

Discussion

The present research was aimed to explore cyber bullying victimization from the perspective of gender among university students. Alpha reliability coefficient for the study instrument was computed. Instruments (cyber bullying victimization questionnaire) used in the present study has a reliability coefficient > .75, indicating satisfactory internal consistency (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Check for univariate normality of CBVQ is also calculated through examining skewness and kurtosis values. It ranged between -2 to +2 indicating that symmetry and pointiness were not problematic (Muthén & Kaplan, 1985) and the data was normally distributed.

To examine the prevalence of cyber bullying among university students, frequencies were calculated, before calculating frequencies two separate groups (non-overlapping) were made. These two groups were (1) cyber bullies-victims and (2) non- cyber bullies-victims. CBVQ has three response categories, the first category of response measures the prevalence of cyber bullying victimization. The criterion for assigning participants to a certain group was as follows: Participants who responded "yes" against the statements were coded as "1" and assigned to cyber bullies-victims groups. Those who responded "no" to all items were coded as "2" and placed in non -cyber bullies-victims groups.

Results revealed a high prevalence rate of cyber bullying victimization among university students. It needs special attention from the institutions. It is a growing and prevalent issue in the world, in a recent study there are 12% cyber bullies, 20% cyber victims, 37% cyber bullies-victims, and 31% of non-cyber bullies-victims (Campfield, 2008). The present study also reflects that there is a high ratio of cyber bullies-victim. Bully victims are observed to be the most troubled. They tend to exhibit more emotional issues like low impulse control and self-esteem as well as social issues (Wolke, Copeland, Angold, & Costello, 2013).

Results of Chi-square test expound that significant gender differences exist concerning cyber bullying victimization. It is seen that males significantly scored high for experiences of cyber bullying. There is a contradiction in the literature about the association of gender with

cyber bullying. For example; Hinduja and Patchin (2013) stated that gender is non-significantly associated with cyber bullying. On the other hand, it was seen that females are more likely to be associated with the group of cyber bullies-victims (Campfield, 2008; Wang, Iannotti, Luk, & Nansel, 2010). It is also found that males are more likely to be cyber bullies (Huang & Chou, 2010).

Hence there are mixed findings of gender differences in experiences of cyber bullying. In the present study, it was revealed that cyber bullying more prevails among males. Previous studies also suggested expounded gender difference exists for cyber bullying victimization reflecting that boys bullying others more than girls in cyberspace (Hinduja & Patchin, 2009; Huong & Chou, 2010; Ojedokun & Idemudia, 2013; Smith, Thompson & Bhatti, 2012). One possible justification for the current study may include the fact that males are more aggressive because they have a higher level of testosterone than females, subsequently leading to aggression, which in turn provides a reason for cyber bullying.

Conclusion

The present study, aimed to investigate the prevalence and experiences of cyber bullying, revealed in results that the prevalence rate of cyber bullying is high among university students i.e., it needs special attention to control the issue on the university campuses. It is also seen that gender differences exist for the prevalence, experiences, and bothersomeness of cyber bullying. It is observed that cyber bullying is more prevalent among male university students as compared to female university students, females are more likely to become bothersome about cyber bullying than male university students, that is, more females think cyber bullying is a problem than males.

Implications

In Pakistan, research on cyber bullying is in its infancy, and the prevalence of the issue has only been reported by media and news reporting. This research is an effort to do pioneer work because we had only a handful of researchers in this regard. There is a need to teach young people ethics and morality, to prevent cyber bullying. Among the

professors, there would be a discussion about teaching positive values and spirituality. There is also a need to educate about cyber bullying to others and parents, educators, and mental health professionals can develop appropriate intervention and prevention strategies and active policies.

Limitations

The present research has limitations as well, these are given in the following; as self-report measures were used in the present study so there may be a possibility that respondents could not reply honestly and their responses might not be fully genuine. Every aspect of cyber bullying could not be gauged; cyber bullying witness and instigator aspects have been ignored in the present study. Observational study especially archival observation could also be used to complement the present study or explain it further.

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